

## Rauschenberg: China/America Mix comes to Bob Rauschenberg Gallery October 22

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In celebration of the 10-year anniversary of the renaming of the Gallery of Fine Art at Florida SouthWestern State College (formerly Edison State College), the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery's Fall programming will focus exclusively on the enduring legacy and profound global impact of its namesake artist Bob Rauschenberg. From October 22 through December 17, the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery will premiere *RAUSCHENBERG: China/America Mix* – the first solo exhibition of the artist's work at the Gallery since his death in 2008.

In 1982, Robert Rauschenberg visited Jing Xian, China. While there, he spent a substantial portion of his time working at the ancient Xuan Paper Mill and taking photographs documenting his trip. The resulting prints and images prompted Rauschenberg to take his R.O.C.I. exhibition to China three years later in 1985.

In so doing, Rauschenberg became the first Western contemporary artist to personally exhibit in the People's Republic of China. The act of showcasing the Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Initiative there truly marked a turning point in the evolution of modern Chinese art from Soviet-inspired socialist realism to more avant-garde modes of expression. While the scope and magnitude of the influence the 1985 exhibition had on the Chinese avant-garde, most art historians agree that without this prominent show some of China's most dynamic works of contemporary art would never have been created.

The ROCI exhibition at the China Art Gallery was only open from November 18 to December 8, 1985. More than 30,000 attended that first day, with in excess of 300,000 individuals, including artists from around the nation, turning out for the show during its three-week run. After the 1985 exhibition, Rauschenberg delivered a well-received lecture at the Central Academy of Graphic Art in Beijing and met with artists from Wuming huahui, the enigmatic, radical Anonymous Painting Group.

"The exhibition halls were crowded with people who felt refreshed by a totally new form of art that they did not quite yet understand," author Zhang Zhaohui later recalled. "It served to excite young Chinese artists' enthusiasm to learn from him, and the show proved a stimulant to the nascent avant-garde movement. Overnight, a number of Chinese artists began producing 'ready-mades' and installations, and hundreds of avant-garde art groups and experimental art exhibitions appeared."

Rauschenberg's use of borrowed imagery and objects in his mixed media compositions and combines was a natural fit for the Chinese, who have a long history of venerating appropriation in their works of art. "After the rapid economic growth and sudden influx of Western consumer products into China during the early 1990s, the appropriation of everyday consumer goods for artistic purposes became a particularly relevant way for many Chinese artists to express themselves as seen in works of Political Pop and Cynical Realism," notes author Mary Lynn Kotz in her tome *Rauschenberg Himself* (Harry N. Abrams, publisher, May 3, 1987). "Artists such as Wang Guangyi, Li Bangyao, Yang Guoxin, Fang Shaohua, Yuan Xiaofang, Li Shan, Yu Youhan, and Liu Dahong began using formal vocabularies influenced by American Pop artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol. However, allusions to works of Social Realism, relevant to Chinese society during and after the Cultural Revolution, were also referenced in both these movements."

The Bob Rauschenberg Gallery was founded as The Gallery of Fine Art in 1979 on the Lee County campus of Florida SouthWestern State College/FSW (then Edison Community College). On June 4, 2004, the Gallery of Fine Art was renamed the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery, to honor and commemorate our long time association and friendship with the artist. Over more than three decades until his death, the Gallery worked closely with Rauschenberg to present world premiere exhibitions including multiple installations of the *¼ Mile or Two Furlong Piece*. The artist insisted on naming the space the Bob Rauschenberg Gallery (versus the "Robert Rauschenberg Gallery") as it was consistent with the intimate, informal relationship he maintained with both our local Southwest Florida community and FSW. *RAUSCHENBERG: China/America Mix* opens October 22. ■