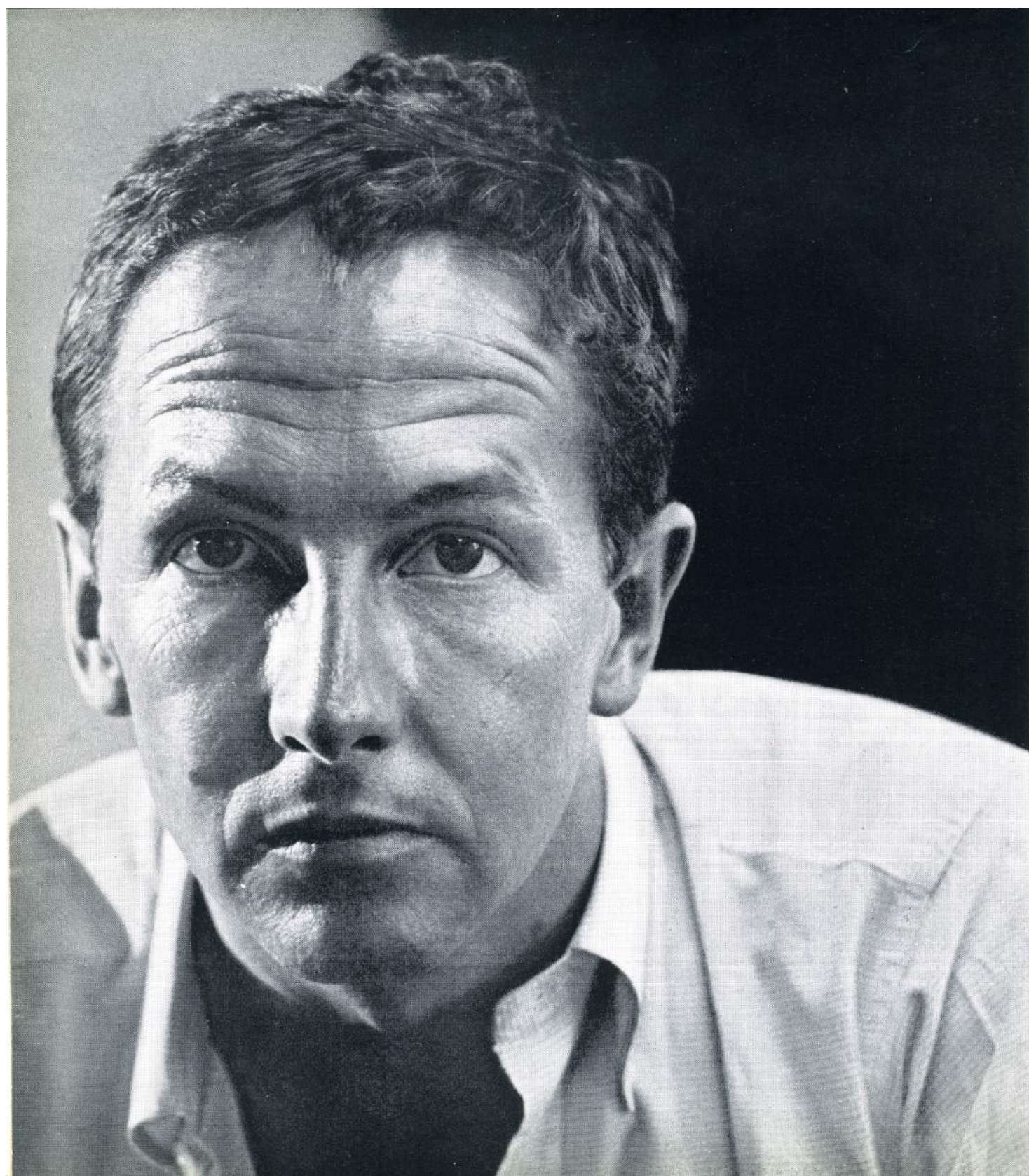




overleaf
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
photograph: Hans Namuth, New York

cat. II cover
GLORIA 1956
combine painting on canvas $66\frac{1}{2} \times 63\frac{1}{2}$ "
collection: Dotremont,
Uccle: Brussels



Robert Rauschenberg

paintings, drawings and combines

1949-1964

February - March 1964

Whitechapel Gallery: London

Acknowledgements

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Whitechapel Gallery

High Street, London E.1

Chairman of Trustees: The Viscount Bearsted, D.L., T.D.

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Preface

Robert Rauschenberg's work has been of key significance for young artists in Europe and America during the past decade. For young artists especially, because they are on his wave-length, they speak his language, and although they do not always share his American experience they understand his references. And the point of view which animates and gives fresh meaning to this experience is universal. Rauschenberg has in fact, evolved a new vocabulary, a new sentence construction even, that has permanently enriched our language. But it is probably only now, in the early sixties, that the general public is beginning to appreciate his contribution to recent art. And to see that when one has looked beyond the stuffed goat and the tyre, the winking light bulbs and the built-in radio sets, Rauschenberg is in fact, a classical artist with a fastidious sense of structure and a hypersensitive understanding of space.

His combines and paintings are part of a tradition accelerated and expanded by Cubism, and his object-sculptures and collages continue a path set by the early sculptures and constructions of Picasso and the work of the Dadaists, Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters. But what Rauschenberg has made is very much his own. In painting, he also has affinities with de Kooning, but here again Rauschenberg has imposed his own vision.

Considering the details, the constituent parts, of a Rauschenberg painting or the hallucinatory antics, personages, motifs and emblems in the great Dante drawings – a supreme achievement in art during the past decade – it is also clear that he has shown us how to look with fresh eyes at commonplace objects and fragments of visual information which form part of our day-to-day experience; and he has enveloped these subjects with a new eloquence and poignancy. With all his humour, Rauschenberg also reflects, most accurately and beautifully, the tragic and elegiac spirit of his time – whilst maintaining a quintessential lightness, sharpness and delicacy of touch. And he has been absolutely truthful to the inner light and imaginative energy of a young intellectual living in New York in the middle of the twentieth century. Rauschenberg is a true artist, and not merely a compiler of documentaries, but he is leaving us some formidable records for the future.

His work as a designer of sets, costumes, lighting and occasionally choreography, for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company cannot be recorded in this exhibition. Otherwise, the assembly of work is reasonably comprehensive. Rauschenberg is of course much younger than the other American artists seen at Whitechapel in recent years, Pollock, Rothko, Tobey and Guston, for example, and it is hoped that the present exhibition devoted to one of the leaders of the younger generation will give some indication of its continuing vitality and resourcefulness.

Bryan Robertson

Robert Rauschenberg

Henry Geldzahler

The Robert Rauschenberg retrospective exhibition at the Jewish Museum in the Spring of 1963 was the most impressive one-man show of the year in a New York gallery or museum. It is, in fact, impossible to conceive of a stronger, more consistently inventive and searching exhibition by any artist of his generation. The eighty-seven works in the show, paintings that surprise by the absolute rightness of apparently arbitrary elements, confirm both the historical position and the contemporary vitality of Rauschenberg, who, at thirty-eight, continues with each new work to meet the challenge he himself has set.

His use of disparate elements within a composition stuns us not because everything is unquestionably where it belongs, which is so, but because each element retains exactly its uniqueness and qualities as object and yet combines to form a painting; the goat remains a goat and the coke bottles are allowed to remain aggressively that, without diminishing the possibilities and complexities of their relationships within the painting (or combine). Whatever Rauschenberg uses brings to its new context the fullness of the context from which it has been ripped, enriching the associative value of his work without devitalizing it by an overly specific content.

The breadth of possibilities, subject matter and materials, within which Rauschenberg moves is the widest and freest ranging of any artist now working. His latitude in working is restricted only by what he has already applied to the canvas. The question is never whether or not something is suitable; only whether it is usable. The separable elements in his work are direct quotations from his experience, which must be very like our experience, for they have a logic and inner consistency which we cannot quite grasp but which echo a sense of the organization of life and the relationship between things which we, too, feel. The shock is that of recognition but *what's* been said is embedded only in the work and cannot be translated out of it. A clock, large and solid and square, is fixed to a painting, just below it a shirt with its arms spread out; or four coke bottles stand side by side in an opening at the top right of a painting, below it an exultant bull. There is no doubt that little stories and meanings, connections, can be made between these objects, but they will serve only to deaden the work, to cut off its possibilities. It is vain to attempt a literary equivalence of any work by Rauschenberg because far from exhausting its meaning, the story will not bear comparison with the painting. In a painting all the elements are visual and visible at once; in literature they, necessarily, follow one another in time. Thus the openness of painting is not the openness of literature. We can relate each object in a Rauschenberg in several combinations and directions *at the same time*, leaving room to breathe and to move in more than one direction. In Gorky the organization is fluid, each form exists in many possible combinations and

relations and all is one unending continuum; the elements in a Rauschenberg suggest as many and more possible relations and combinations, but instead of merging into fluidity, they remain discrete and themselves. The difference is largely the difference between Surrealism (Gorky) and Cubism (Rauschenberg). Rauschenberg posits the plane of the canvas, most often breaking it down into subsidiary planes, all more or less rectangles and all lying on the surface, or forcefully projecting from it. The space is not the dream space of Surrealism, floating and endlessly continuous; it is the concrete space of the picture which is undeniably a two-dimensional painting and works its variations within those limitations.

Rauschenberg has said, and it has become famous, that "Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in the gap between the two.)" Artists' statements are dangerous, for in our eagerness to simplify their work, to write away their complexities, we quote them and think we've said something. They are repeated ("I see in nature the cube, the cylinder and the cone.") until they become equivalents to the work itself, and are easier to think and lecture about than the densities of the paintings in question. Rauschenberg's statement is particularly revealing; he does work in the gap between art and life. He appropriates rude blocks of life and uses them in his art. He presents us not with the interpretation of an experience (a ladder, umbrella, tire, glass or chair), but with the experience itself. The tragedy, or rather the reality that so often looks like tragedy, is how rapidly we come to accept what Rauschenberg has given us; his best work is always fresh and mind-twisting on first confrontation; we turn it rapidly into art, into something we can deal with. We do not allow a work of art to throw us very often; we tame it and domesticate it. We do not allow it to put us at a permanent disadvantage. Rauschenberg's triumph is that his work continues to function as art even after we have drained its life as rapidly as we possibly can. The shock of life it first presents us pales, and we are left with a work that has lost its brutality but retains its challenge and gains, increasingly, elegance. Rauschenberg works in the gap between life and art, but his work, as the work of all artists, moves always toward art and away from life.

The problem of focus in Rauschenberg's work is a crucial one. We can take in an entire painting or combine at one glance, see the over-all pattern, the composition and organization, but the richness of incident and detail demand a different kind of looking. Within one picture, *Rebus*, painted in 1955 and in the artist's collection, we find what is close to an anthology of the techniques of contemporary painting, dripped paint, hard rectangles of primary color, collage cloth, torn poster, comic strip, news

photo, children's drawing, graffiti, mass reproduction of art (Botticelli); and this anthology is organized with an uncanny aptness and discretion into an harmonious composition that, in spite of its complexities, remains somehow spare. In one year Rauschenberg moved from the densities and happy excesses of *Charlene* to the sparseness of *Rebus*; as if he had to put down everything in 1954 in order to know what he could safely leave out in 1955. Both are great pictures, but the ellision of *Rebus* makes it the greater.

In order to take in the richness of these pictures, and this is true also of the latest black and white silk screen paintings, we must be willing to examine them more carefully than the abstract aspect of their nature would make it seem necessary. The incidents and details that go to make up the whole differ greatly in size, in compositional prominence, in color and, in the earlier pictures, in medium; their choice is never a casual one; yet the juxtapositions are never obvious. We must, as it were, stand different distances from the picture to focus clearly on its parts; or, rather than move forward and back, we must re-focus our vision, for the minutely detailed photograph three inches square affixed to a painting twelve feet long demands, certainly, another kind of attention than the entire painting. In Flemish art of the fifteenth century we see the foreground, the middle ground and the background as separable but continuous planes, each viewed with remarkably sharp focus and clarity. The result is an enhanced vision, the ability to see details in the background with clarity and without changing focus. Rauschenberg fragments this across his work; that which is smallest lies directly next to the largest element in the work; color lies next to black and white; a loose, abstract handling of the paint is directly juxtaposed to an aggressively presented three-dimensional object – a wheel, or an electric fan, a chair or an umbrella. What we are presented with is not the ordered reality of Flemish art, with everything at a pre-arranged distance from everything else; that is the art of a society assured of its hierarchies and its values. Rather Rauschenberg produces all the confusions of focus and relation that Joyce and Pound have expressed and educated us to in literature, and like them through his art, he raises the apparent disorganization of his material to a level of intuitive comprehensibility.

The relationships of photography to the painting of the past hundred and twenty years are meaningful in the context of Rauschenberg's work. The early photographs, as we know, had compositional influence on the work of Ingres and Degas; we are also told, and it seems sensible, that the photograph took certain of art's functions away from art; especially the idea of art as a record of appearances, portrait, landscape, historical event. Thus much of the impetus to abstraction in art is laid to the move away from the function of photography. It is curious that with Schwitters and the Surrealists, and now with Rauschenberg and Warhol, the photograph has re-entered art; not as a compositional influence, or as something to be copied and altered (as in Cézanne) but as exactly itself. So much of our awareness and our information comes to us through newspapers and magazines, through movies and television, that the appropriation of the photograph into contemporary art does not surprise. In

the Rauschenbergs of the mid-fifties photographs and reproductions act as short-hand indications of both their subjects and the context from which they have been drawn.

With the White Paintings of 1951 Rauschenberg apparently wiped out the history of painting; after that he was free to invent art all over again; that his work has continued to reflect a wide knowledge and use of the history of art does not negate the purity of the gesture. It merely makes it more ironic. With the black and red paintings of 1952 and 1953 he rediscovered texture, brushstroke, value, color and collage. Then came the tremendously rich and varied period of *Charlene*, *Rebus*, *Hymnal*, *Odalisk*, *Curfew*, *Monogram*, *Trophy I*, *Winter Pool* and *Pilgrim* (1954-1960); through these years the collage elements became bolder and more spare, the abstractly brushed areas larger and more beautiful. In 1961 and 1962 it seemed as if the combines were becoming increasingly aggressive toward the viewer and his space; the tension and balance of paint and collage on the surface of the painting was broken in piece after piece (*First Landing Jump*, *Coexistence*, *Third Time Painting*, *Pantomime*) by the physical presence of the three-dimensional object.

The Mona Lisa drawing (and others) of 1958 pointed the way to a break in style, although it was impossible to know it at the time. These rubbings with abstractly configured hatching are of course based on familiar photographic material juxtaposed, as in all of Rauschenberg's work, according to his own non-literal logic. They led to his ambitious and successful major work, the drawings illustrating Dante's *Inferno* (1959-60). It is curious that at just the moment the combines were becoming so sculptural, Rauschenberg's greatest energy was directed toward these highly original two-dimensional works, works which combined through the frottage technique Rauschenberg's characteristic specificity of image with the abstractness of meaning, organization and overall handling.

Rauschenberg had been talking and thinking about the possibility of translating photographic material directly onto canvas for some time. In 1961 Andy Warhol began using the silk screen to reproduce the popular image exactly on canvas. This technical possibility, indicated by Warhol, made it clear to Rauschenberg that he could translate the specificities and ambiguities of the drawings onto canvas. He ordered many screens made, some from photographs he had taken himself. It is obvious that Rauschenberg's use of the silk screen for his own purposes differs tremendously from Andy Warhol's. Warhol lays the screens down in repeated series, emphasizing the reiteration of our popular images. Rauschenberg uses the screens exactly as he used the rubbed newspaper photograph in his drawings of 1958, to produce his floating, yet anchored images.

The black and white character of the silk screen paintings is a happy reduction of means. The effect of the very large (thirty-three foot long) *Barge* is very much like sitting in the first row of a black and white, large screen movie. The images flash by and we make connections; we end up without a story, but with something much richer – the associative and imaginative leaps that Rauschenberg's works open up for us.

On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and his work

Conversation was difficult and correspondence virtually ceased. (Not because of the mails, which continued.) People spoke of messages, perhaps because they'd not heard from one another for a long time. Art flourished.

The goat. No weeds. Virtuosity with ease. Does his head have a bed in it? Beauty. His hands and his feet, fingers and toes long-jointed, are astonishing. They certify his work. And the signature is nowhere to be seen. The paintings were thrown into the river after the exhibition. What is the nature of Art when it reaches the Sea?

Beauty is now underfoot wherever we take the trouble to look. (This is an American discovery.) Is when Rauschenberg looks an idea? Rather it is an entertainment in which to celebrate unfixity. Why did he make black paintings, then white ones (coming up out of the South), red, gold ones (the gold ones were Christmas presents), ones of many colors, ones with objects attached? Why did he make sculptures with rocks suspended? Talented?

I know he put the paint on the tires. And he unrolled the paper on the city street. But which one of us drove the car?

As the paintings changed the printed material became as much of a subject as the paint (I began using newsprint in my work) causing changes of focus: A third palette. There is no poor subject (Any incentive to paint is as good as any other.). Dante is an incentive, providing multiplicity, as useful as a chicken or an old shirt. The atmosphere is such that everything is seen clearly, even in the dark night or when thumbing through an out-of-date newspaper or poem. This subject is unavoidable (A canvas is never empty.); it fills an empty canvas. And if, to continue history, newspapers are pasted onto the canvas and on one another and black paints are applied, the subject looms up in several different places at once like magic to produce the painting. If you don't see it, you probably need a pair of glasses. But

there is a vast difference between one oculist and another, and when it is a question of losing eyesight the best thing to do is to go to the best oculist (i.e., the best painter: he'll fix you up). Ideas are not necessary. It is more useful to avoid having one, certainly avoid having several (leads to inactivity). Is Gloria V. a subject or an idea? Then, tell us: How many times was she married and what do you do when she divorces you?

There are three panels taller than they are wide fixed together to make a single rectangle wider than it is tall. Across the whole thing is a series of colored photos, some wider than tall, some taller than wide, fragments of posters, some of them obscured by paint. Underneath these, cutting the total in half, is a series of rectangular color swatches, all taller than wide. Above, bridging two of the panels, is a dark blue rectangle. Below and slightly out of line with the blue one, since it is on one panel only, is a gray rectangle with a drawing on it about halfway up. There are other things, but mostly attached to these two "roads" which cross: off to the left and below the swatches is a drawing on a rectangle on a rectangle (its situation is that of a farm on the outskirts of a mainstreet town). This is not a composition. It is a place where things are, as on a table or on a town seen from the air: any one of them could be removed and another come into its place through circumstances analogous to birth and death, travel, housecleaning, or cluttering. He is not saying; he is painting. (What is Rauschenberg saying?) The message is conveyed by dirt which, mixed with an adhesive, sticks to itself and to the canvas upon which he places it. Crumbling and responding to changes in weather, the dirt unceasingly does my thinking. He regrets we do not see the paint while it's dripping.

Rauschenberg is continually being offered scraps of this and that, odds and ends his friends run across, since it strikes them: This is something he could use in a painting. Nine times out of ten it turns out he has no use for it. Say it's something close to something he once found useful, and so

could be recognized as his. Well, then, as a matter of course, his poetry has moved without one's knowing where it's gone to. He changes what goes on, on a canvas, but he does not change how canvas is used for paintings – that is, stretched flat to make rectangular surfaces which may be hung on a wall. These he uses singly, joined together, or placed in a symmetry so obvious as not to attract interest (nothing special). We know two ways to unfocus attention: symmetry is one of them; the other is the over-all where each small part is a sample of what you find elsewhere. In either case, there is at least the possibility of looking anywhere, not just where someone arranged you should. You are then free to deal with your freedom just as the artist dealt with his, not in the same way but, nevertheless, originally. This thing, he says, *duplication of images*, that is symmetry. All it means is that, looking closely, we see as it was everything is in chaos still.

To change the subject: "Art is the imitation of nature in her manner of operation." Or a net.

So somebody has talent? So what? Dime a dozen. And we're overpopulated. Actually we have more food than we have people and more art. We've gotten to the point of burning food. When will we begin to burn our art? The door is never locked. Rauschenberg walks in. No one home. He paints a new painting over the old one. Is there a talent then to keep the two, the one above, the one below? What a plight (it's no more serious than that) we're in! It's a joy in fact to begin over again. In preparation he erases the De Kooning.

Is the door locked? No, it's open as usual. Certainly Rauschenberg has techniques. But the ones he has he disuses, using those he hasn't. I must say he never forces a situation. He is like that butcher whose knife never became dull simply because he cut with it in such a way that it never encountered an obstacle. Modern art has no need for technique. (We are in the glory of not knowing what we're doing.) So technique, not having to do with the painting, has to do with who's looking and who painted. People. Technique is: how are the people? Not how well did they do it, but, as they were saying, frailty. (He says – and is he speaking of technique? – "What do you want, a declaration of love? I take responsibility for competence and hope to have made something hazardous with which we may try ourselves.") It is a question, then, of seeing in the dark, not slipping over things visually. Now that Rauschenberg has made a painting with radios in it, does that mean that even without radios, I must go on listening even while I'm looking, everything at once, in order not to be run over?

Would we have preferred a pig with an apple in its mouth? That too, on occasion, is a message and requires a blessing. These are the feelings Rauschenberg gives us: love, wonder, laughter, heroism (I accept), fear, sorrow, anger, disgust, tranquillity.

There is no more subject in a *combine* than there is in a page from a newspaper. Each thing that is there is a subject. It is a situation involving multiplicity. (It is no reflection on the weather that such-and-such a government sent a note to another.) (And the three radios of the radio combine, turned on, which provides the subject?) Say there was a message. How would it be received? And what if it wasn't? Over and over again I've found it impossible to memorize Rauschenberg's paintings. I keep asking, "Have you changed it?" And then noticing while I'm looking it changes. I look out the window and see the icicles. There, dripping water is frozen into object. The icicles all go down. Winter more than the others is the season of quiescence. There is no dripping when the paint is squeezed from a tube. But there is the same acceptance of what happens and no tendency towards gesture or arrangement. This changes the notion of what is beautiful. By fixing papers to canvas and then painting with black paint, black became infinite and previously unnoticed.

Hallelujah! The blind can see again. Blind to what he has seen so that seeing this time is as though first seeing. How is it that one experiences this, for example, with the two Eisenhower pictures which for all intents and purposes are the same? (A duplication containing duplications.) Everything is so much the same, one becomes acutely aware of the differences, and quickly. And where, as here, the intention is unchanging, it is clear that the differences are unintentional, as unintended as they were in the white paintings where nothing was done. Out of seeing, do I move into poetry? And is this a poetry in which Eisenhower could have disappeared and the Mona Lisa taken his place? I think so but I do not see so. There is no doubt about which way is up. In any case our feet are on the ground. Painting's place is on the wall – painting's place, that is, in process. When I showed him a photograph of one of Rauschenberg's paintings, he said, "If I had a painting, I'd want to be sure it would stay the way it is; this one is a collage and would change." But Rauschenberg is practical. He goes along with things just as they are. Just as he knows it goes on a wall and not any which way, but right side up, so he knows, as he is, it is changing (which one more quickly? and the pyramids change). When possible, and by various means, he gives it a push: holes through which one sees behind the canvas the wall to which it is committed; the reflective surfaces changing what is seen by means of what is happening; lights going on and off; and the radios. The white paintings were airports for the lights, shadows, and particles. Now in a metal box attached by a rope, the history kept by means of drawings of what was taken away and put in its place, of a painting constantly changing.

There is in Rauschenberg, between him and what he picks up to use, the quality of encounter. For the first time. If, as happens, there is a series of paintings containing such and such a material, it is as though the encounter was extended into a visit on the part of the stranger (who is divine). (In this way societies uninformed by artists coagulate their experiences into modes of communication in order to make mistakes.) Shortly the stranger leaves, leaving the door open.

Having made the empty canvases (*A canvas is never empty.*), Rauschenberg became the giver of gifts. Gifts, unexpected and unnecessary, are ways of saying Yes to how it is, a holiday. The gifts he gives are not picked up in distant lands but are things we already have (with exceptions, of course: I needed a goat and the other stuffed birds, since I don't have any, and I needed an attic in order to go through the family things [since we moved away, the relatives write to say: Do you still want them?]), and so we are converted to the enjoyment of our possessions. Converted from what? From wanting what we don't have, art as pained struggle. Setting out one day for a birthday party, I noticed the streets were full of presents. Were he saying something in particular, he would have to focus the painting; as it is he simply focuses himself, and everything, *a pair of socks*, is appropriate, appropriate to poetry, a poetry of *infinite possibilities*. It did not occur to me to ask him why he chose Dante as a project for illustration. Perhaps it is because we've had it around so long so close to us without bothering to put it to use, which becomes its meaning. It involved a stay in Florida and at night, looking for help, a walk through land infested with rattlesnakes. Also slipping on a pier, gashing his shin, hanging, his foot caught, not calling for help. The technique consists in having a *plan*: *Lay out stretcher on floor match markings and join*. Three stretchers with the canvas on them no doubt already stretched. Fulfilling this plan put the canvas in direct contact with the floor, the ground thereby activated. This is pure conjecture on my part but would work. More important is to know exactly the size of the door and techniques for getting a canvas out of the studio. (*Combines* don't roll up.) Anything beyond that size must be suitably segmented.

I remember the show of the black paintings in North Carolina. Quickly! They have become masterpieces.

Is it true that anything can be changed, seen in any light, and is not destroyed by the action of shadows? Then you won't mind when I interrupt you while you're working?

The message changes in the *combine-drawings*, made with pencil, water color, and photographic transfer: (a) the work is done on a table, not on a wall; (b) there is no oil paint; (c) because of a + b, no dripping holds the surface in one plane; (d) there is not always the joining of rectangles since when there is, it acts as reminiscence of stretchers; (e) the outlines appear vague as in water or air (our feet are off the ground); (f) I imagine being upside down; (g) the pencil lines scan the images transferred from photographs; (h) it seems like many television sets working simultaneously all tuned differently. How to respond to this message? (And I remember the one in *Dante* with the outline of the toes of his foot above, the changed position and another message, the paper absorbing the color and spreading it through its wet tissues.) He has removed the why of asking why and you can read it at home or in a library. (These others are poems too.) Perhaps because of the change in gravity (*Monument 1958*), the project arose of illustrating a book. (A book can be read at a table; did it fall on the floor?) As for me, I'm not so inclined to read poetry as I am one way or another to get myself a television set, sitting up nights looking.

Perhaps after all there is no message. In that case one is saved the trouble of having to reply. As the lady said, "Well, if it isn't art, then I like it." Some (a) were made to hang on a wall, others (b) to be in a room, still others (a + b).

John Cage

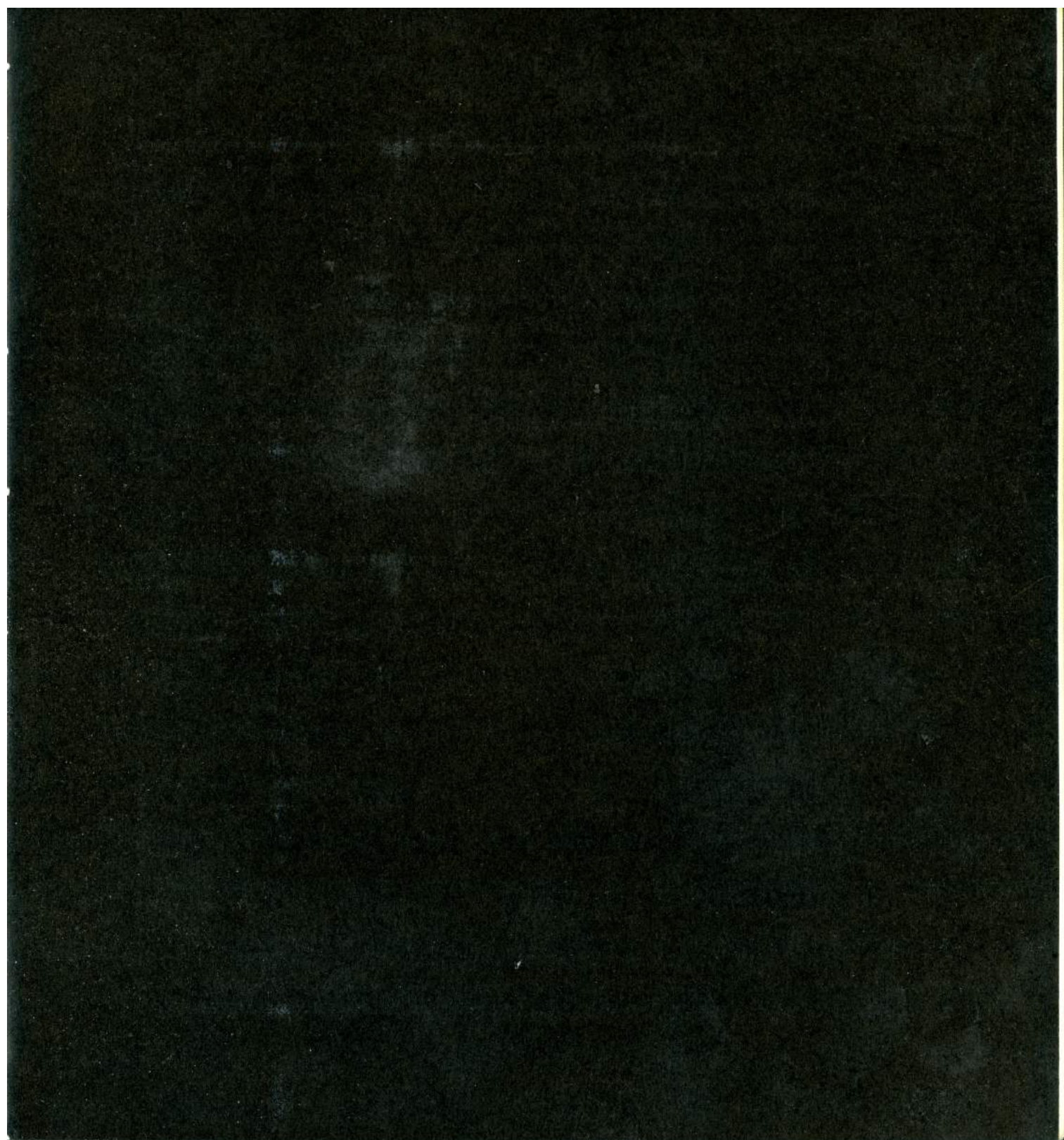
By now we must have gotten the message. It couldn't have been more explicit. Do you understand this idea?: *Painting relates to both art and life. Neither can be made. (I try to act in that gap between the two.)* The nothingness in between is where for no reason at all every practical thing that one actually takes the time to do so stirs up the dregs that they're no longer sitting as we thought on the bottom. All you need do is stretch canvas, make markings, and join. You have then turned on the switch that distinguishes man, his ability to change his mind: *If you do not change your mind about something when you confront a picture you have not seen before, you are either a stubborn fool or the painting is not very good.* Is there any need before we go to bed to recite the history of the changes and will we in that bed be murdered? And how will our dreams, if we manage to go to sleep, suggest the next practical step? Which would you say it was: wild, or elegant, and why? Now as I come to the end of my rope, I noticed the color is incredibly beautiful. And that embossed box.

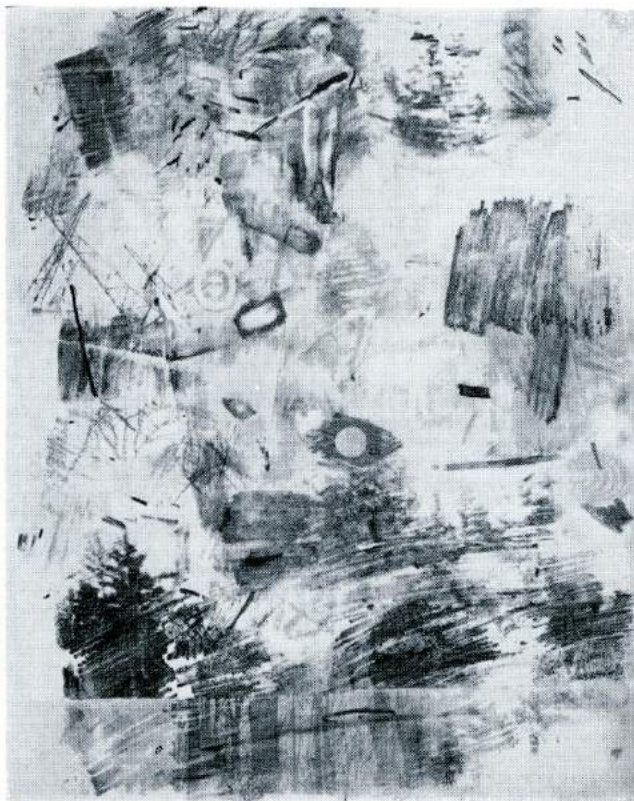
I am trying to check my habits of seeing, to counter them for the sake of greater freshness. I am trying to be unfamiliar with what I'm doing.

(I cannot remember the name of the device made of glass which has inside it a delicately balanced mechanism which revolves in response to infrared rays.) Rauschenberg made a painting combining in it two of these devices. The painting was excited when anybody came near it. Belonging to friends in the country, it was destroyed by a cat. If he takes a subject, what does he take? And what does he combine with it, once he's put it in place? It's like looking out a window. (But our windows have become electronic: everything moves through the point where our vision is focused; wait long enough and you'll get the Asiatic panoply.) Poetry is free-wheeling. You get its impact by thumbing through any of the mass media. The last time I saw him, Rauschenberg showed me a *combine-drawing*, and while I was looking he was speaking and instead of hearing (I was looking) I just got the general idea that this was an autobiographical drawing. A self-portrait with multiplicity and the largest unobstructed area given to the white painting, the one made of four stretchers, two above, two below, all four of equal size. Into this, structure and all, anything goes. The structure was not the point. But it was practical: you could actually see that everything was happening without anything's being done. Before such emptiness, you just wait to see what you will see. Is Rauschenberg's mind then empty, the way the white canvases are? Does that mean whatever enters it has room? (In, of course, the gap between art and life.) And since his eyes are connected to his mind, he can see what he looks at because his head is clear, uncluttered? That must be the case, for only in a mind (twentieth) that had room for it could Dante (thirteenth-fourteenth) have come in and gone out. What next? The one with the box changed by the people who look at it.

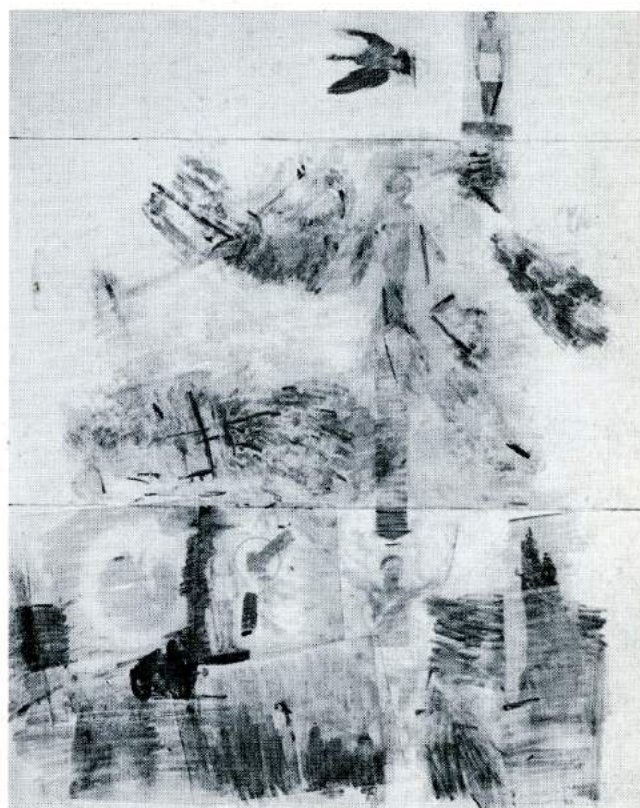
What do images do? Do they illustrate? (It was a New Year's Eve party in the country and one of them had written a philosophical book and was searching for a picture that would illustrate a particular point but was having difficulty. Another was knitting, following the rules from a book she had in front of her. The rest were talking, trying to be helpful. The suggestion was made that the picture in the knitting book would illustrate the point. On examination it was found that everything on the page was relevant, including the number.) But do we not already have too much to look at? (Generosity.) Left to myself, I would be perfectly contented with black pictures, providing Rauschenberg had painted them. (I had one, but unfortunately the new room has a slanting ceiling and besides the wall isn't long enough for it. These are the problems that have no solution, such as the suit wearing out.) But going along, I see, I'm changing: color's not so bad after all. (I must have been annoyed by the games of balance and what-not they played with it.) One of the simplest ideas we get is the one we get when someone is weeping. Duchamp was in a rocking chair. I was weeping. Years later but in the same part of town and for more or less the same reason, Rauschenberg was weeping.

John Cage





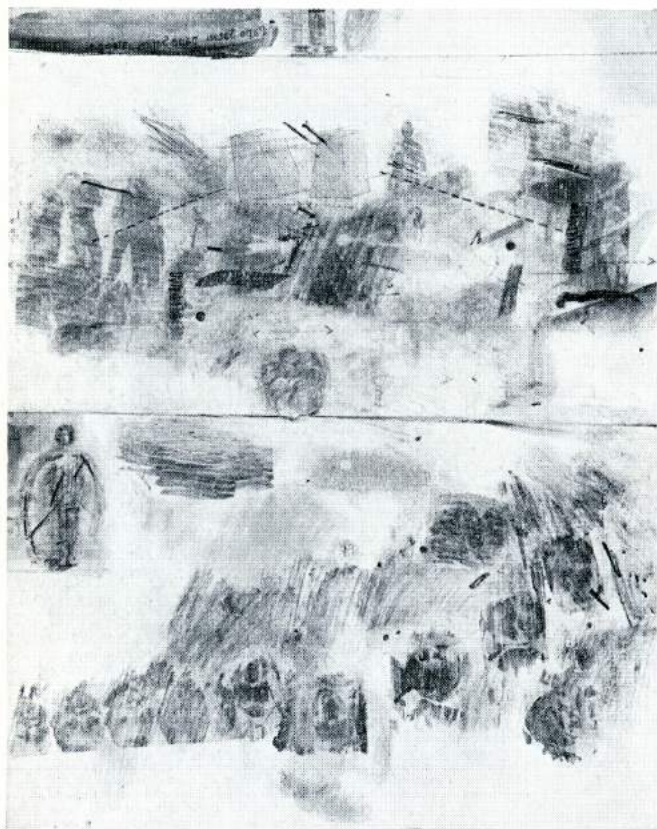
canto I



canto II

*thirty-four combine drawings, each 14½ × 11", for the thirty-four Cantos of Dante's Inferno, made in 1959-60, in watercolour, pencil, chalk, and transferred photographs.
Lent by the Museum of Modern Art, New York*

THE DANTE DRAWINGS



canto VII



canto VIII



canto IX



canto X

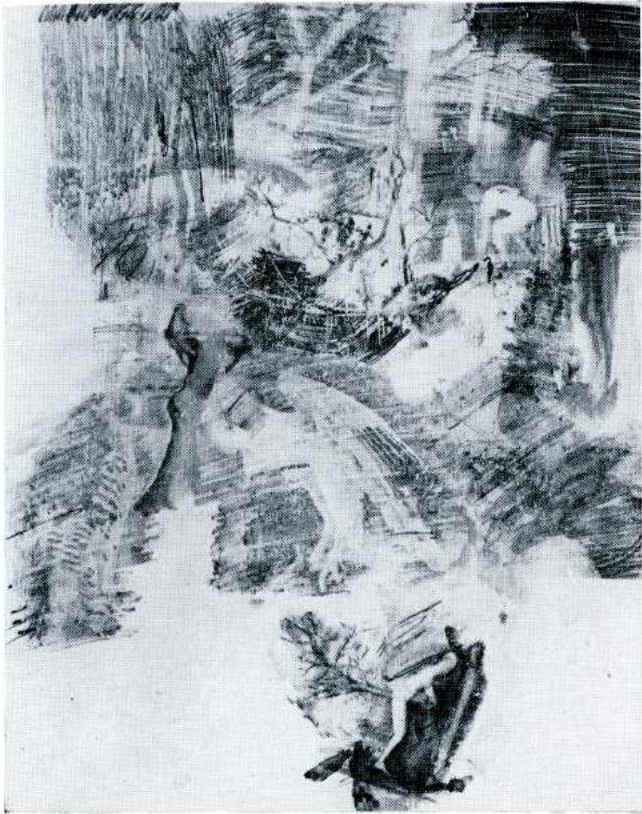
THE DANTE DRAWINGS



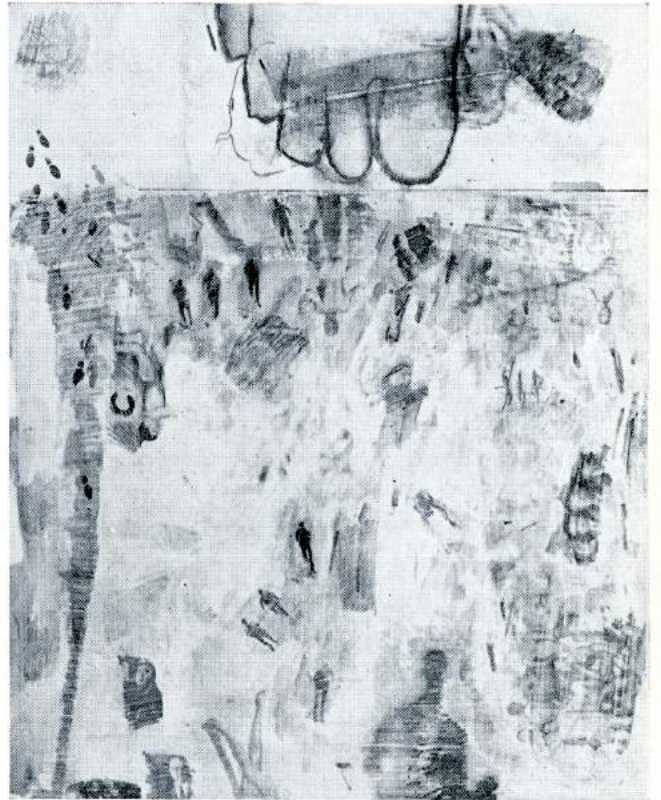
canto XI



canto XII

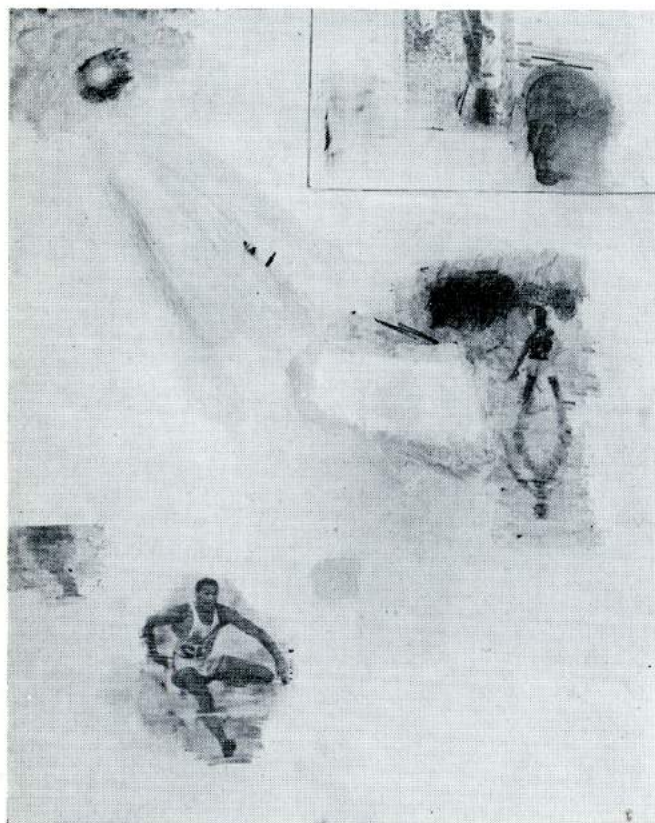


canto XIII

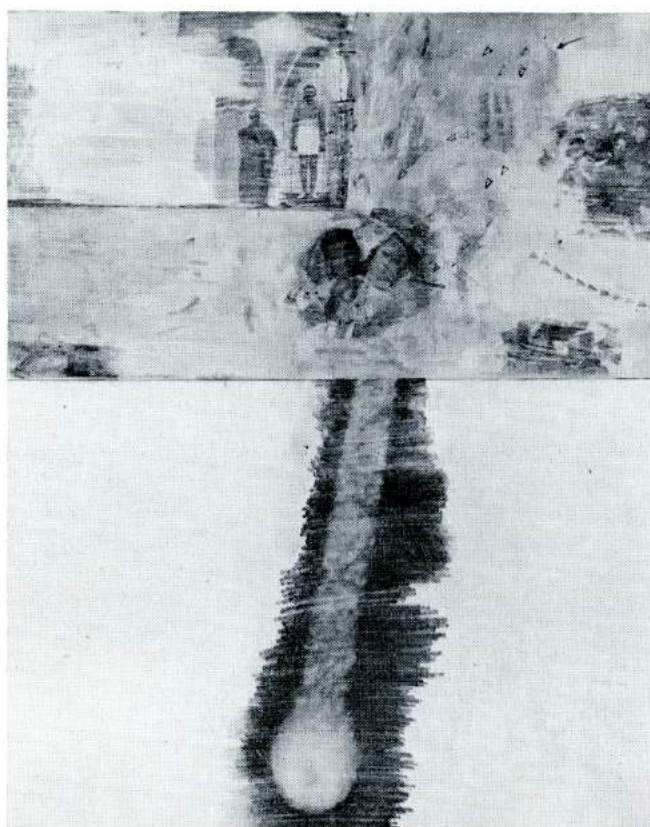


canto XIV

THE DANTE DRAWINGS



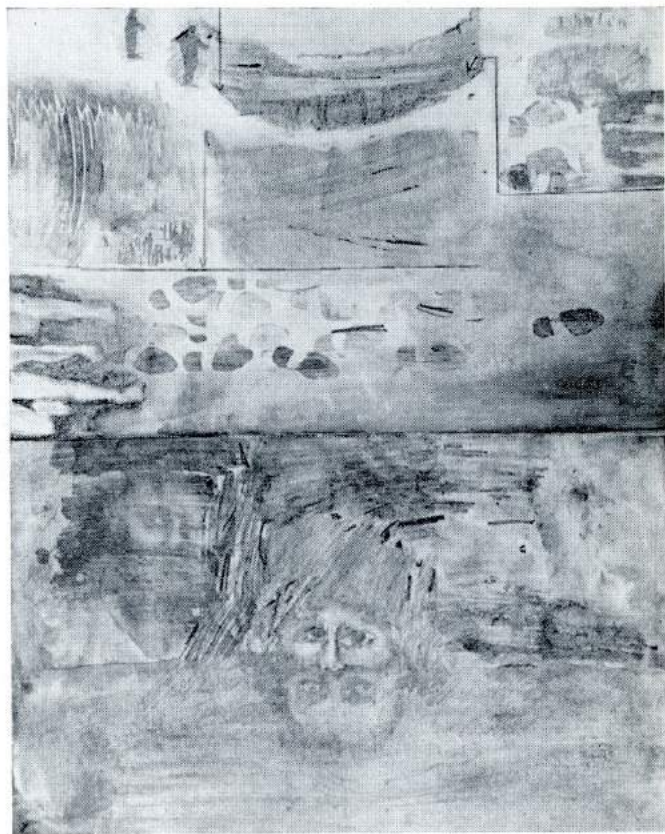
canto XV



canto XVI



canto XVII

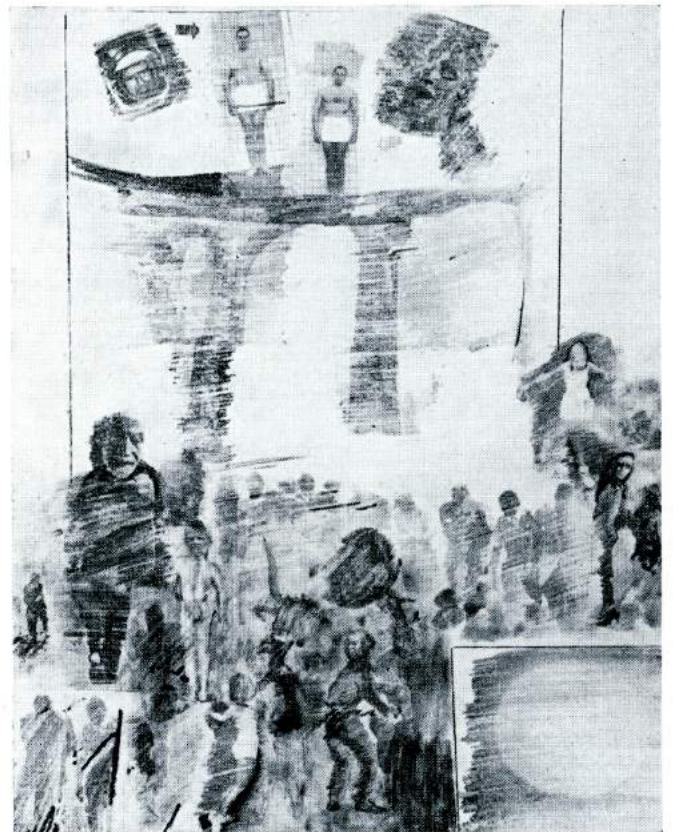


canto XVIII

THE DANTE DRAWINGS



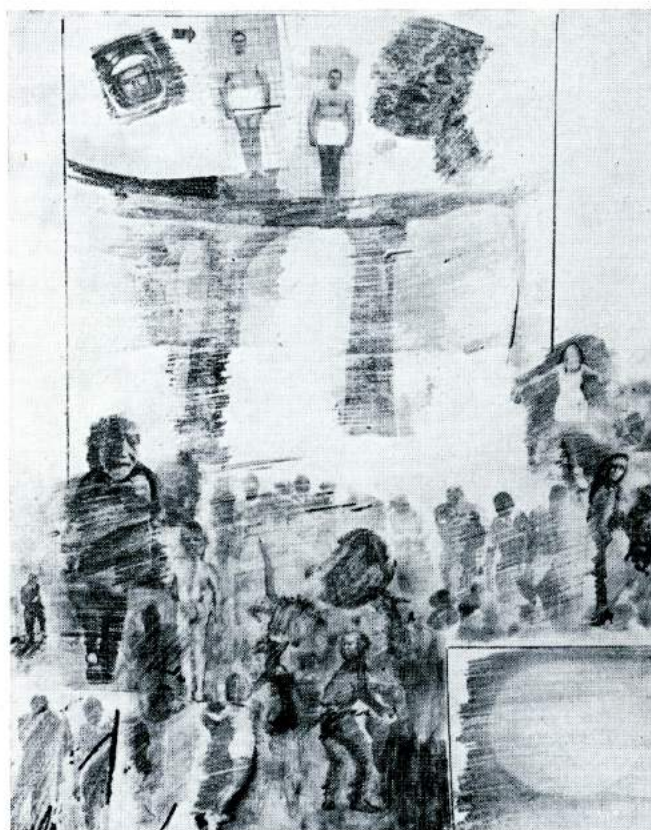
canto XIX



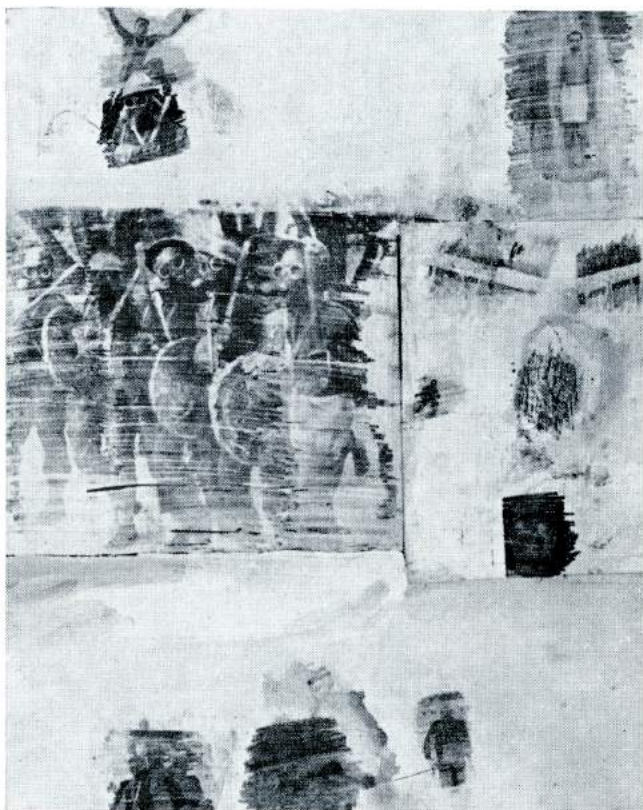
canto XX



canto XIX



canto XX

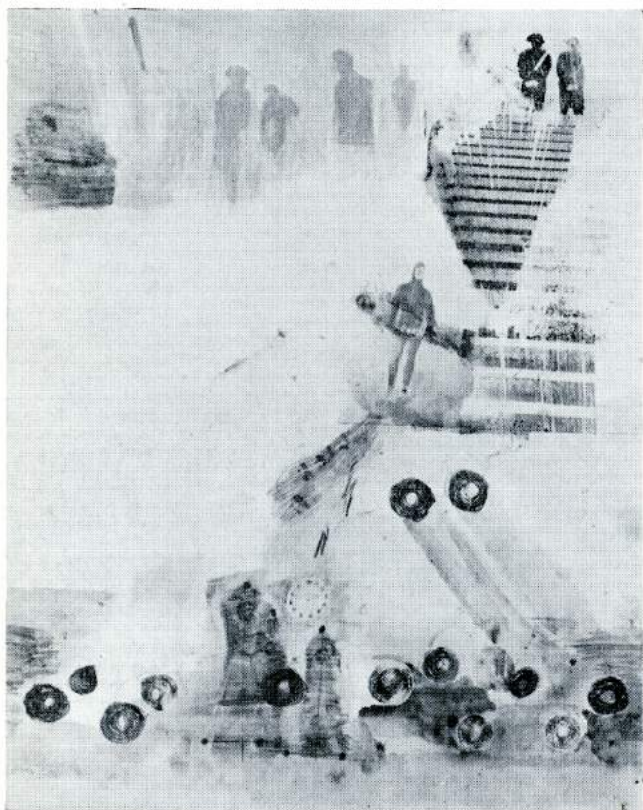


canto XXI



canto XXII

THE DANTE DRAWINGS



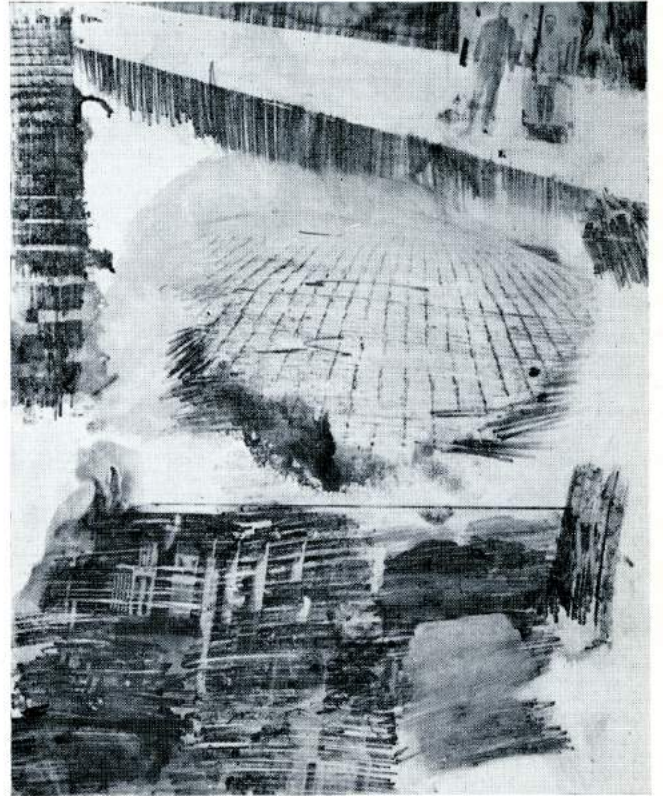
canto XXIII



canto XXIV



canto XXV



canto XXVI

THE DANTE DRAWINGS



canto XXVII



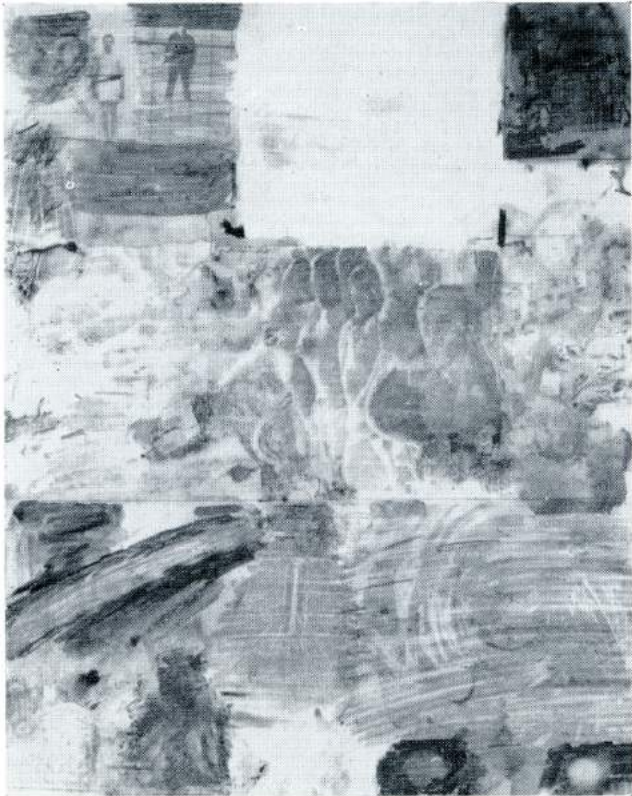
canto XXVIII



canto XXVII



canto XXVIII

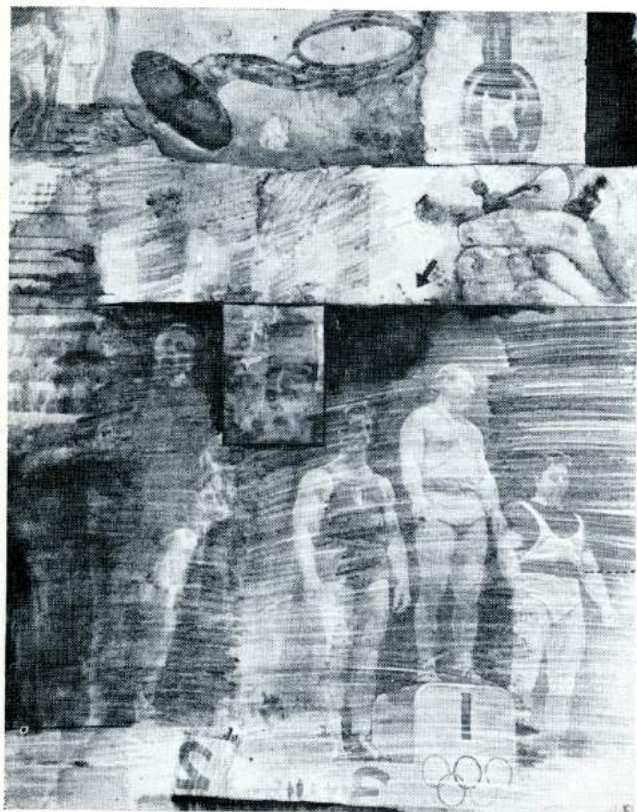


canto XXIX

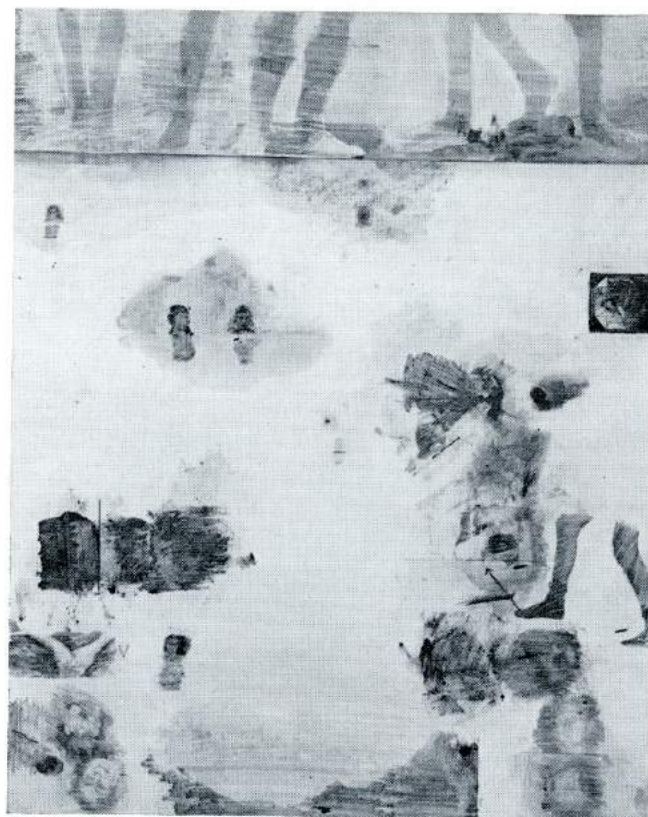


canto XXX

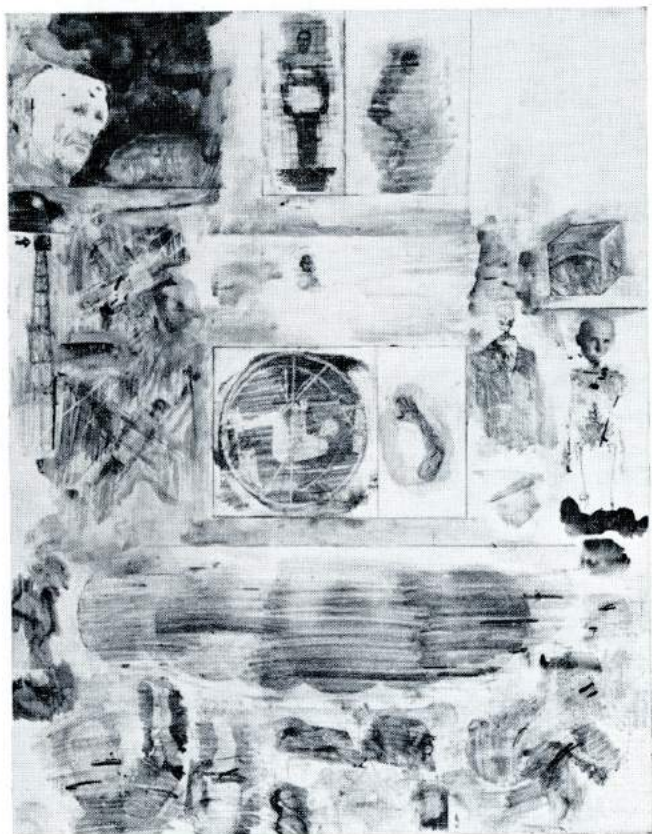
THE DANTE DRAWINGS



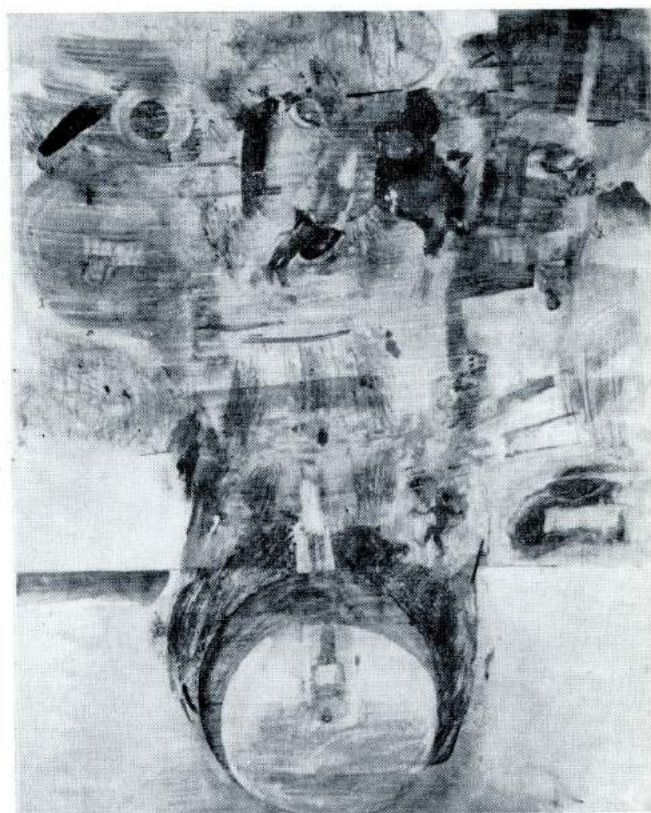
canto XXXI



canto XXXII



canto XXXIII



canto XXXIV

THE DANTE DRAWINGS

1 WHITE PAINTING WITH NUMBERS 1949

oil on canvas $39\frac{1}{2} \times 23\frac{1}{2}$ "

Lent by the artist

2 UNTITLED WITH LIGHT BULB 1954

combine painting on canvas $27\frac{1}{2} \times 21$ "

Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris

3 CHARLENE 1954

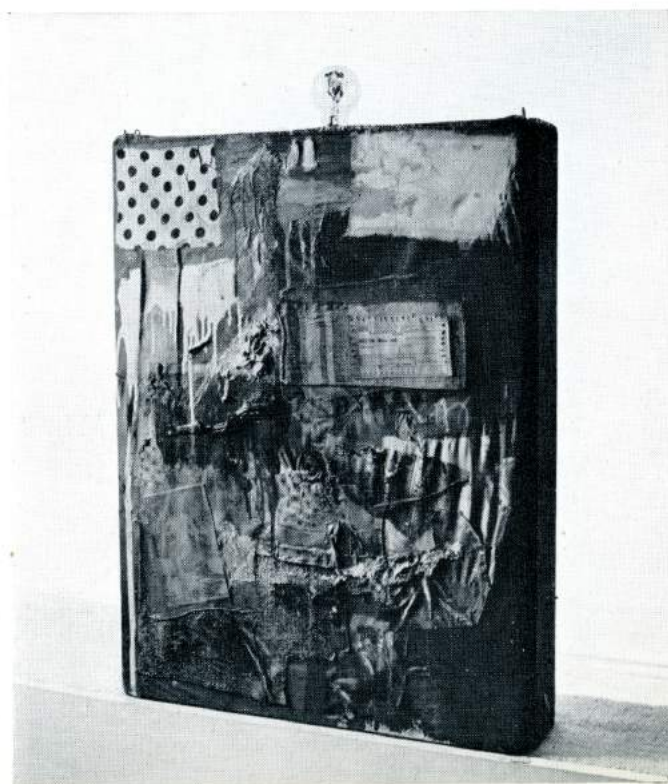
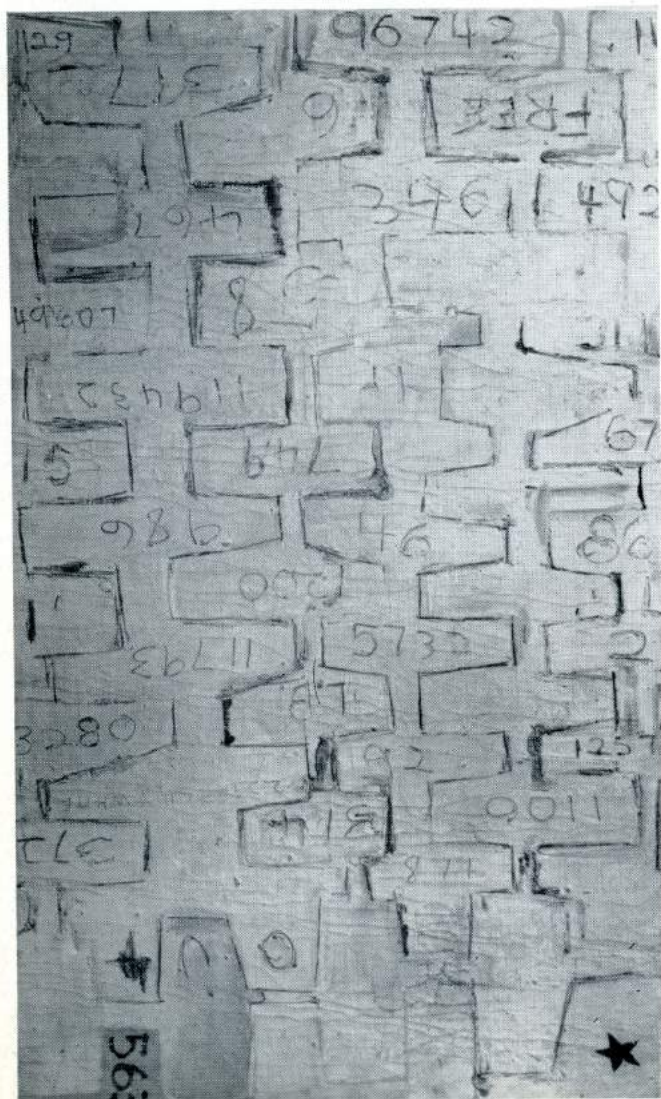
combine painting on canvas 89×112 "

Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris

4 REBUS 1955

combine painting on canvas 96×144 "

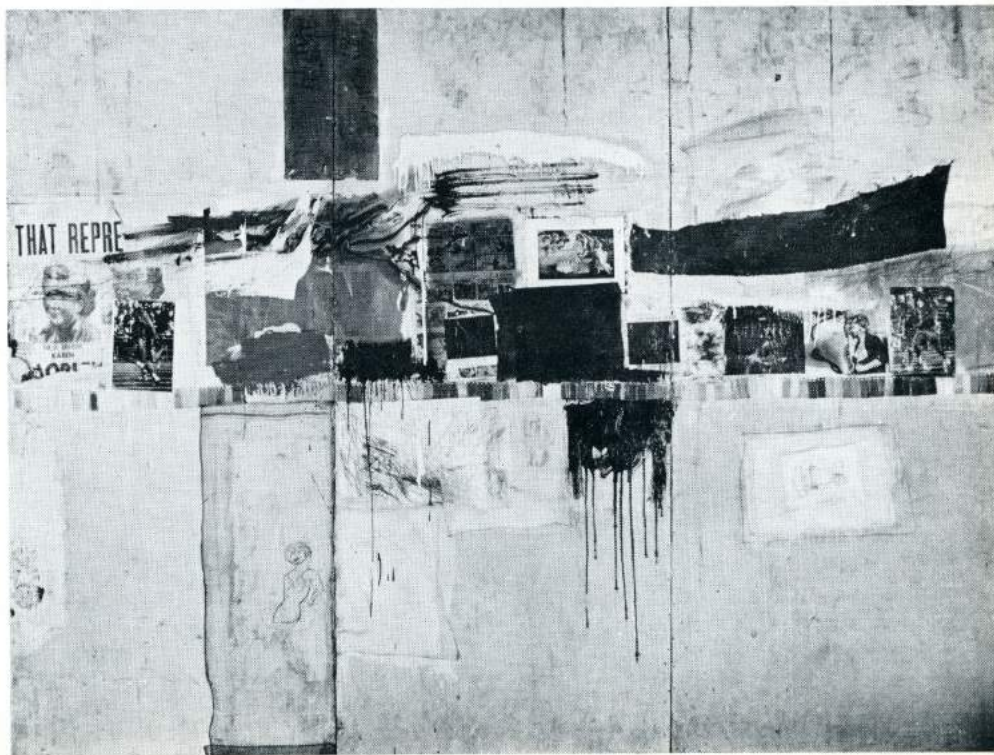
Lent by the artist



3



4



5 INTERVIEW 1955

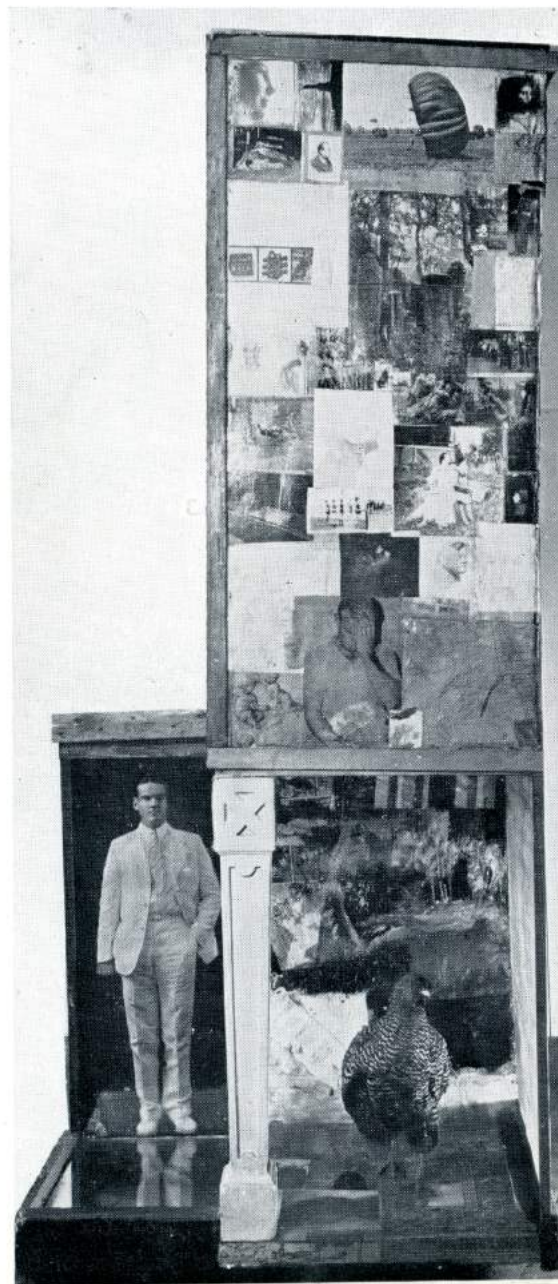
combine painting 66 × 49 × 12"
Lent by Count Panza di Biumo: Milan

6 UNTITLED 1955

combine painting 86 × 38 × 26½"
Collection: Count Panza di Biumo: Milan
(Not exhibited)



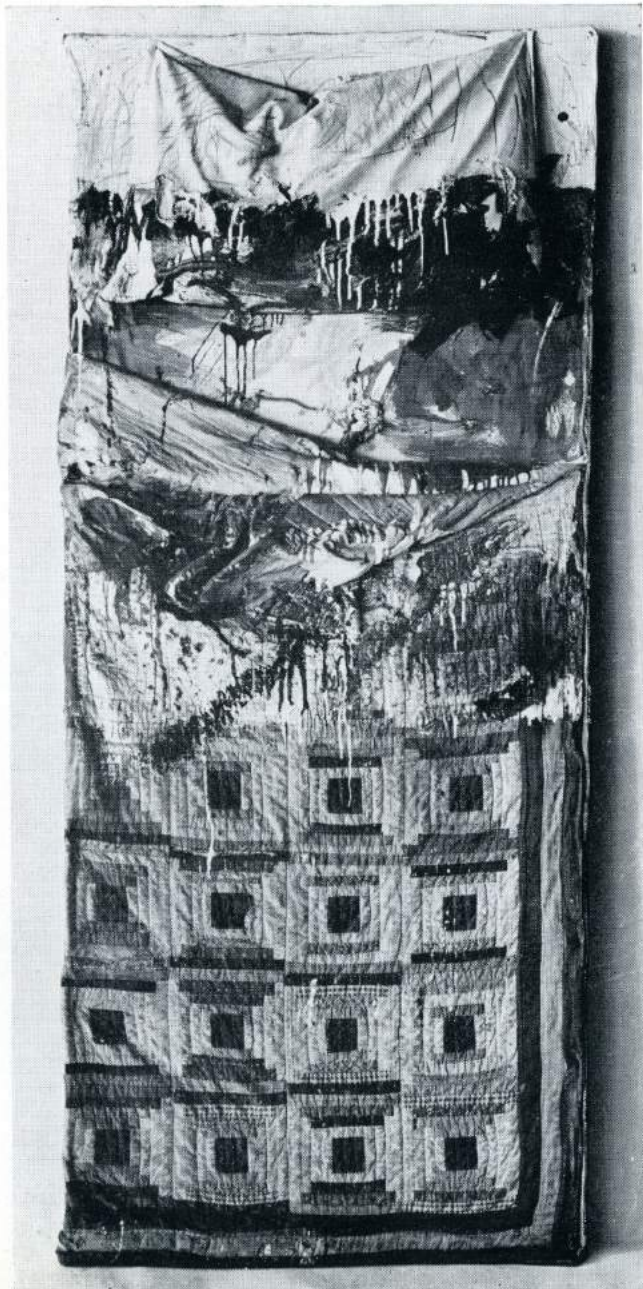
5



6

7 BED 1955

combine painting 74 × 31"
Lent by Leo Castelli: New York



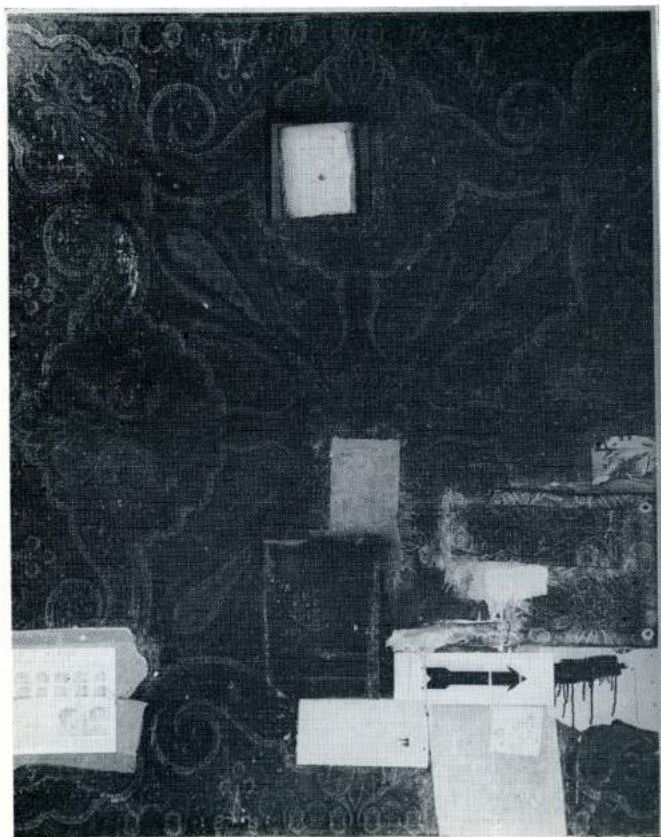
8 ODALISK 1955-58

combine painting 81 × 25 × 25"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris



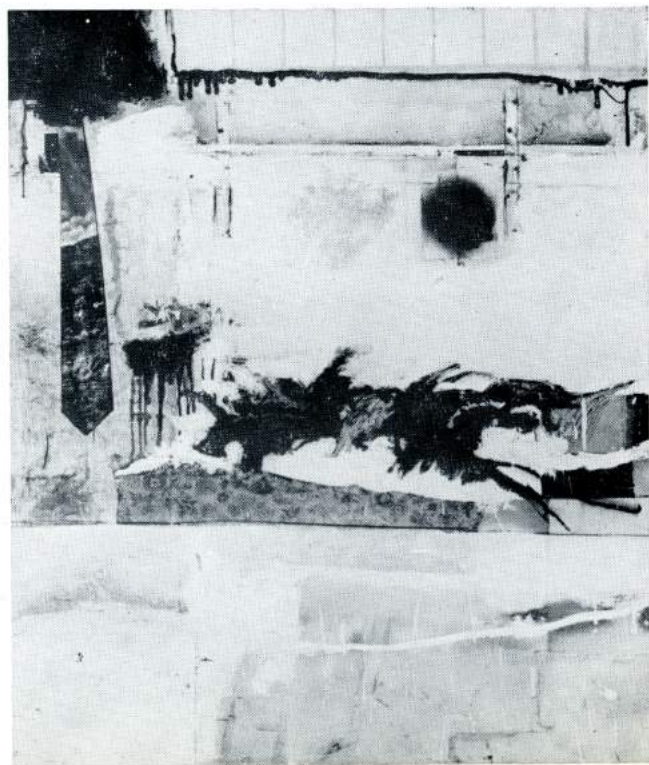
9 HYMNAL 1955

combine painting on canvas 65 × 60"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris



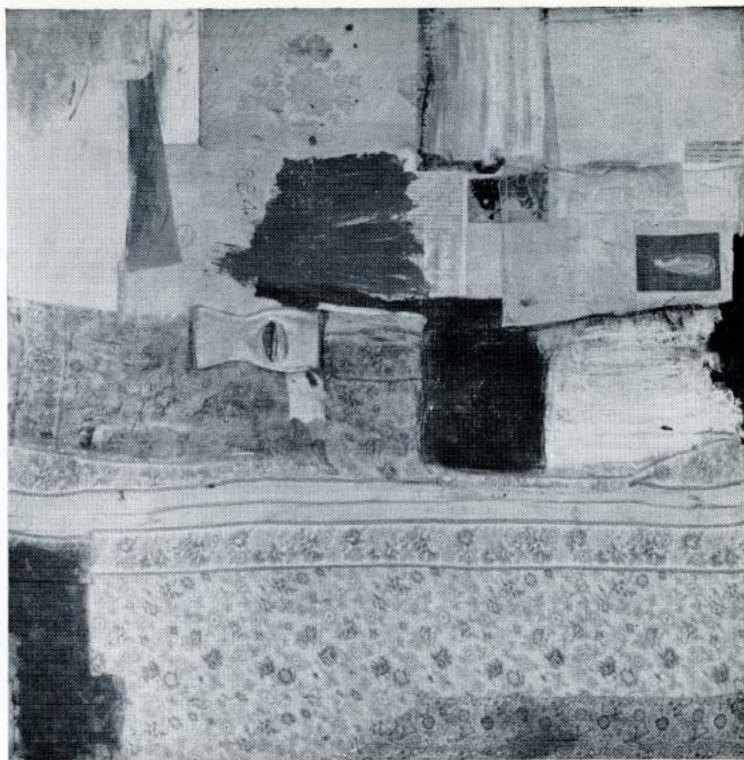
10 RHYME 1956

combine painting on canvas 46 × 41"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris

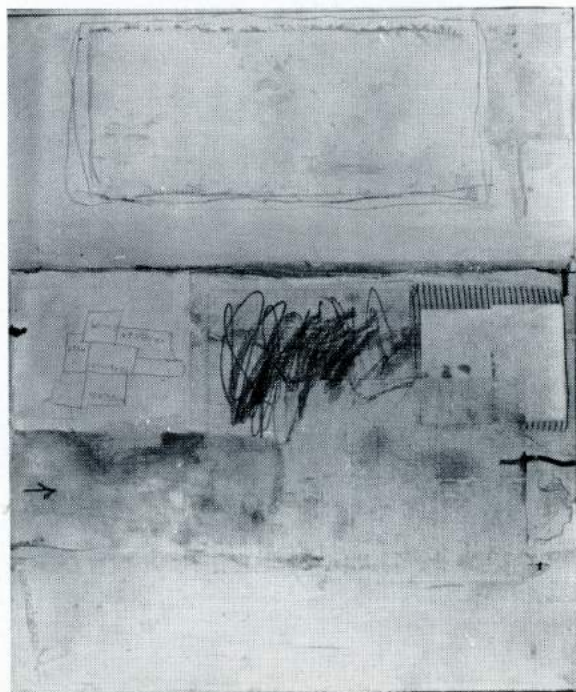


12 KNEEPAD 1956

combine painting on canvas 48 × 48"
Collection by Jasper Johns: New York
(Not exhibited)

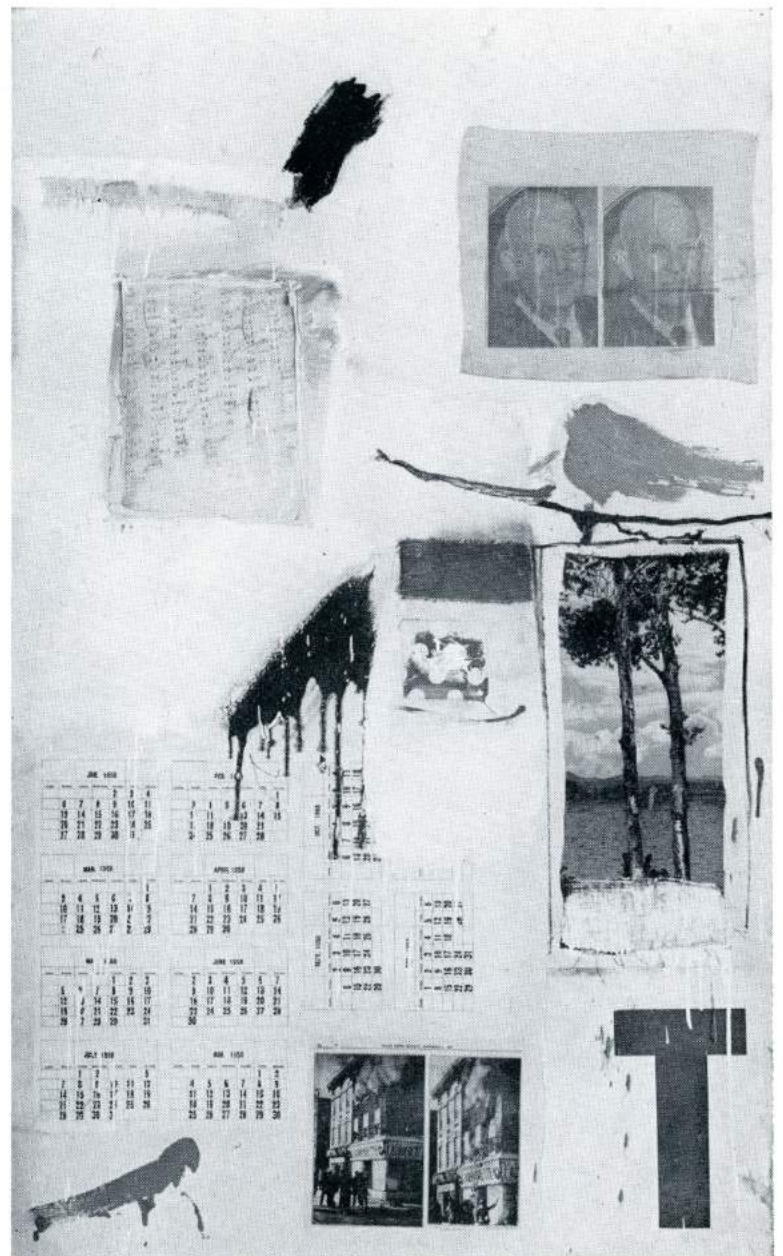


13 WHITE COLLAGE 1956
collage and oil paint on canvas 25 × 19"
Private Collection: Brussels



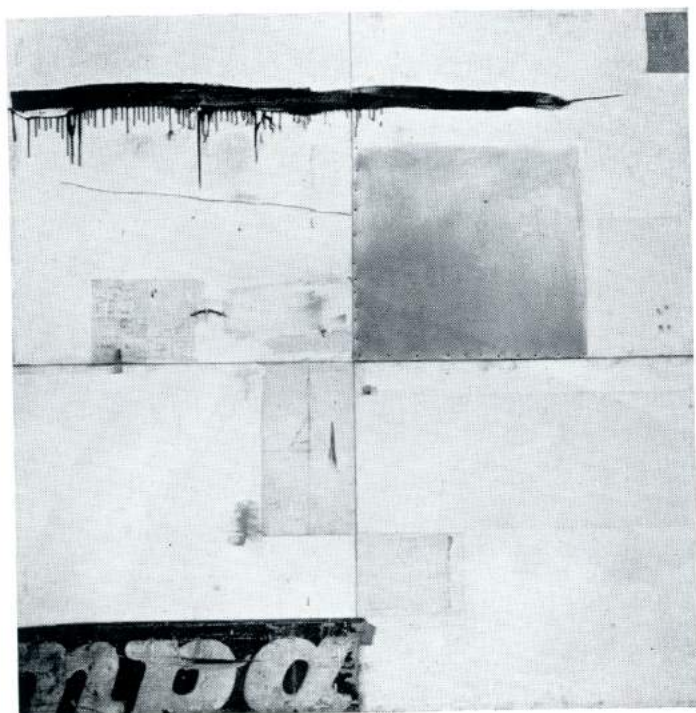


14



15

16



14 HAZARD 1957
 combine painting on canvas 85 × 37½"
 Lent by the Leo Castelli Gallery; New York

15 FACTUM I 1957
 collage and oil paint on canvas 62 × 32½"
 Lent by Count Panza di Biumo; Milan

17

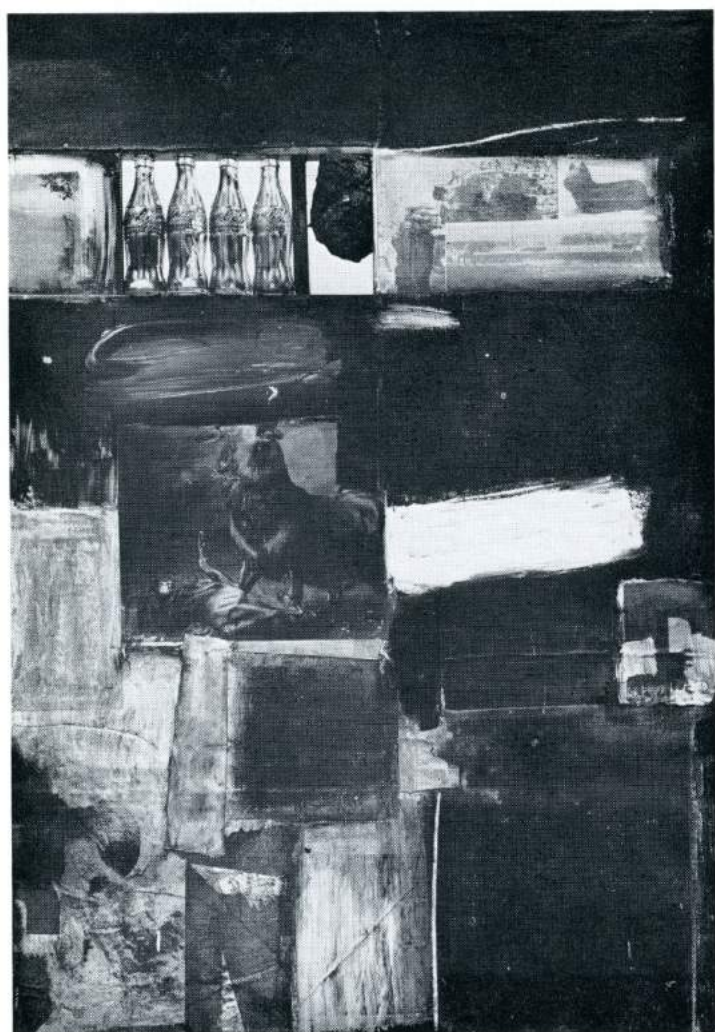


16 K24976S 1957
 combine painting with metal 72 × 72"
 Lent by Richard Miller; Philadelphia

17 MEMORANDUM OF BIDS 1957
 collage and oil paint on canvas 59 × 45"
 Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery; Paris

18 CURFEW 1958

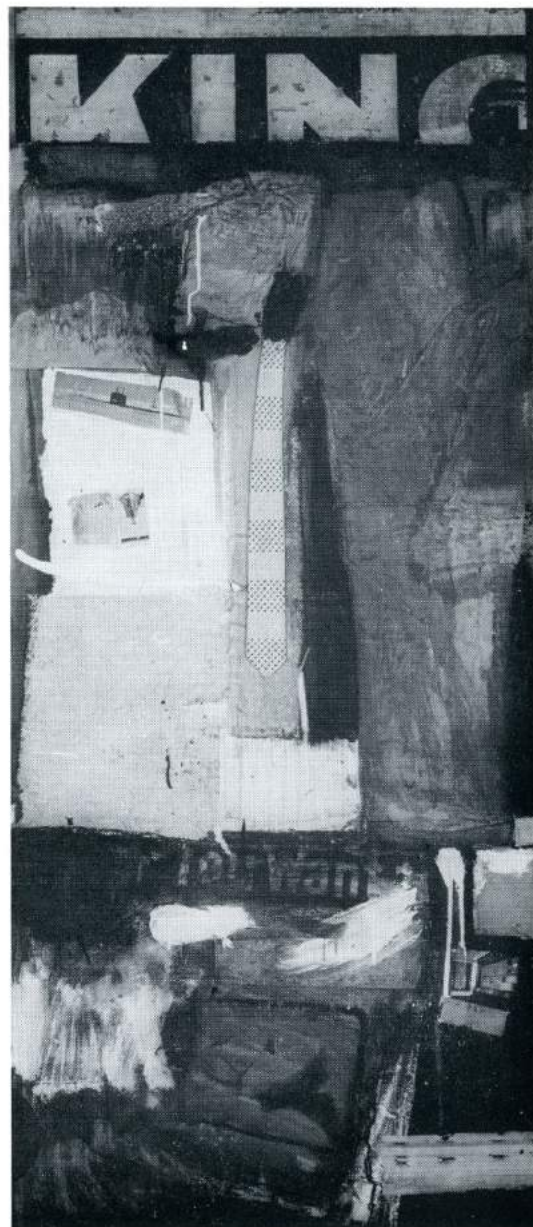
combine painting on canvas 57 × 39"
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Ben Heller; New York



18

19 KICKBACK 1959

combine painting 75 × 32"
Lent by Count Panza di Biumo; Milan



19



20

21



20 FORGE 1959

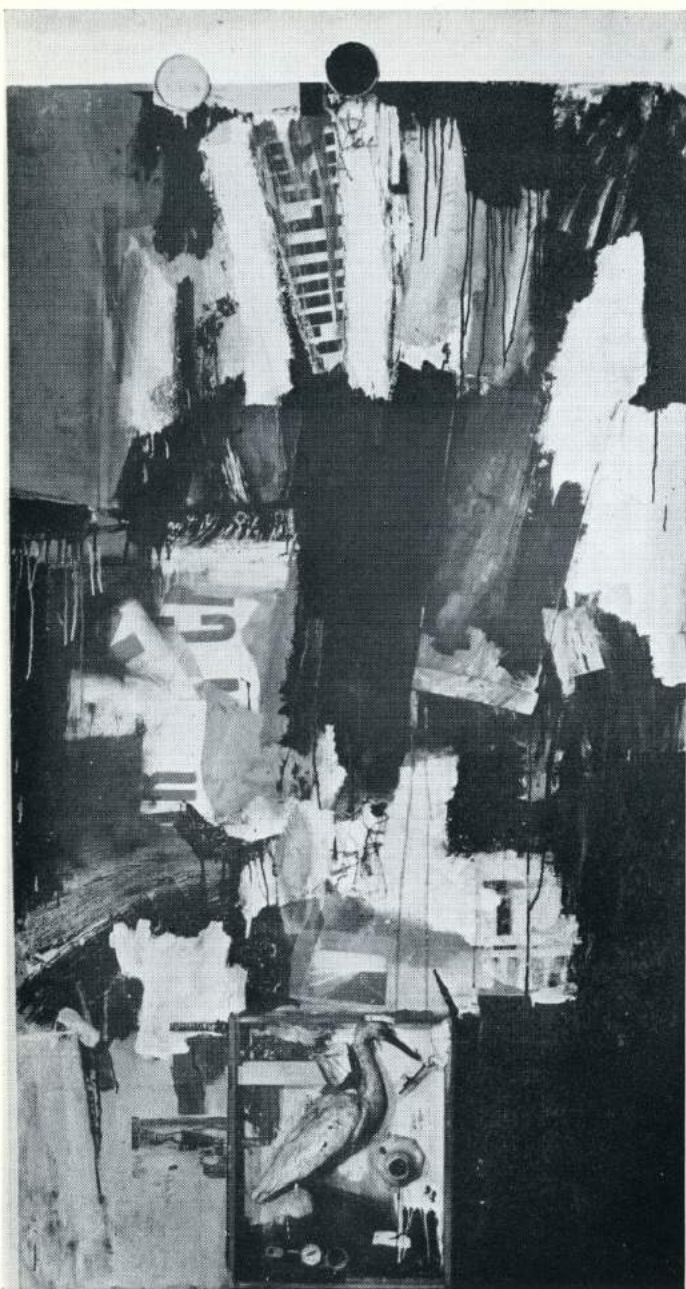
combine painting on canvas 73 × 31"

Lent by Achille Cavellini: Brescia

21 TROPHY I (for Merce Cunningham) 1959

combine painting on canvas 66 × 41"

Lent by Mrs. William T. Sisler: New York



22



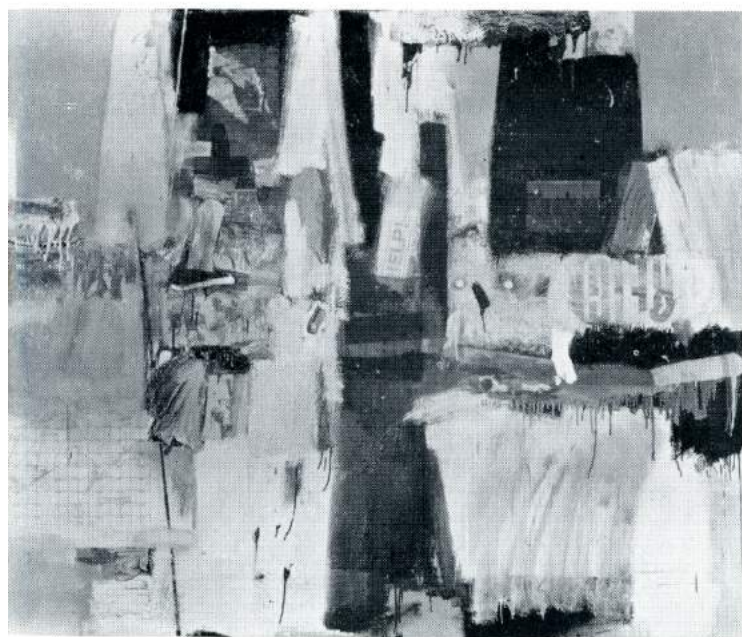
23

22 INLET 1959

combine painting on canvas 84 × 48"
Lent by Count Panza di Biumo: Milan

23 BYPASS 1959

collage and oil paint on canvas 59 × 53"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris



24

24 BROADCAST 1959

combine painting 62 × 76"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris

25 PILGRIM 1960

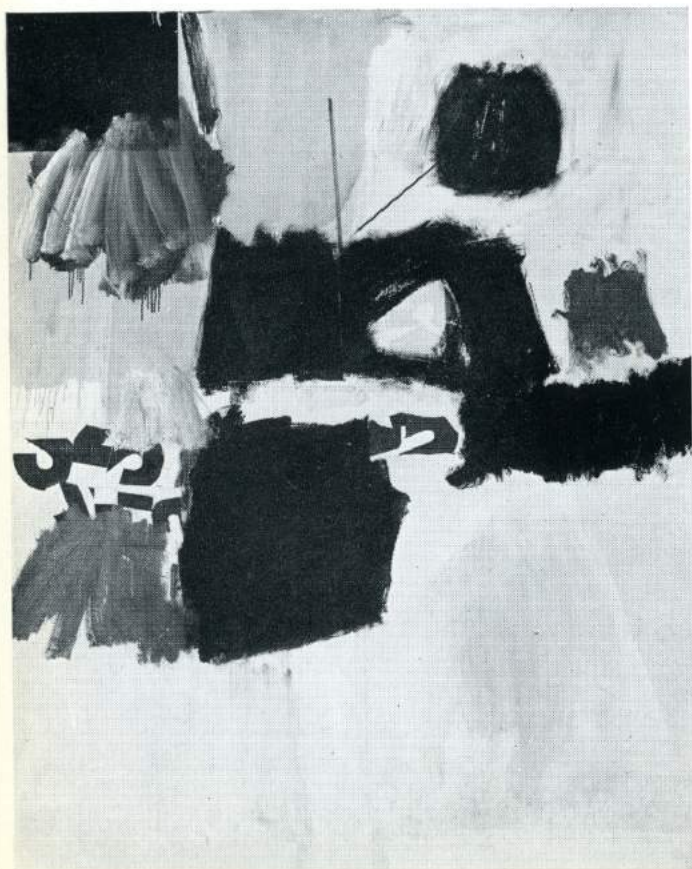
combine painting 80 × 54"
Lent by the Leo Castelli Gallery: New York



25

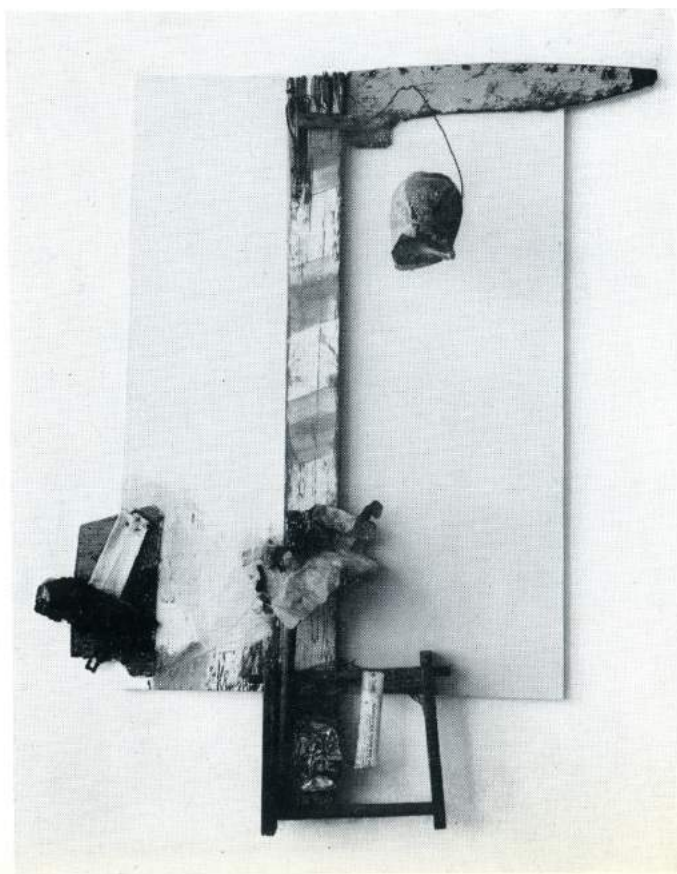
26 SUMMER RENTAL 1960

collage and oil paint on canvas 70 × 54"
Lent by Sir Robert Adeane: London



27 AENFLOGA 1961

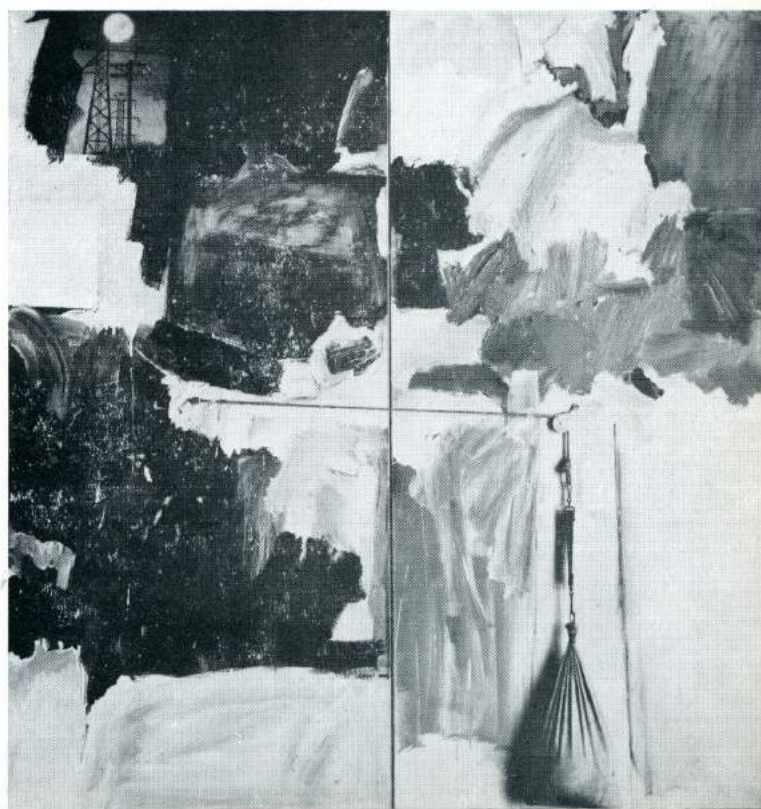
combine painting 60 × 42"
Lent by Count Panza di Biumo: Milan

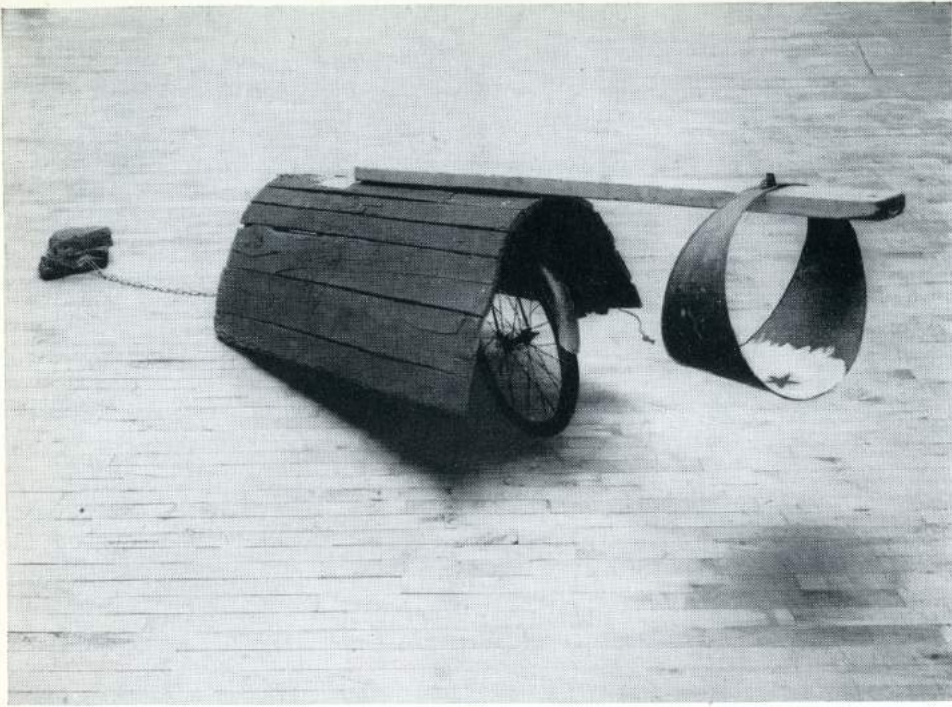




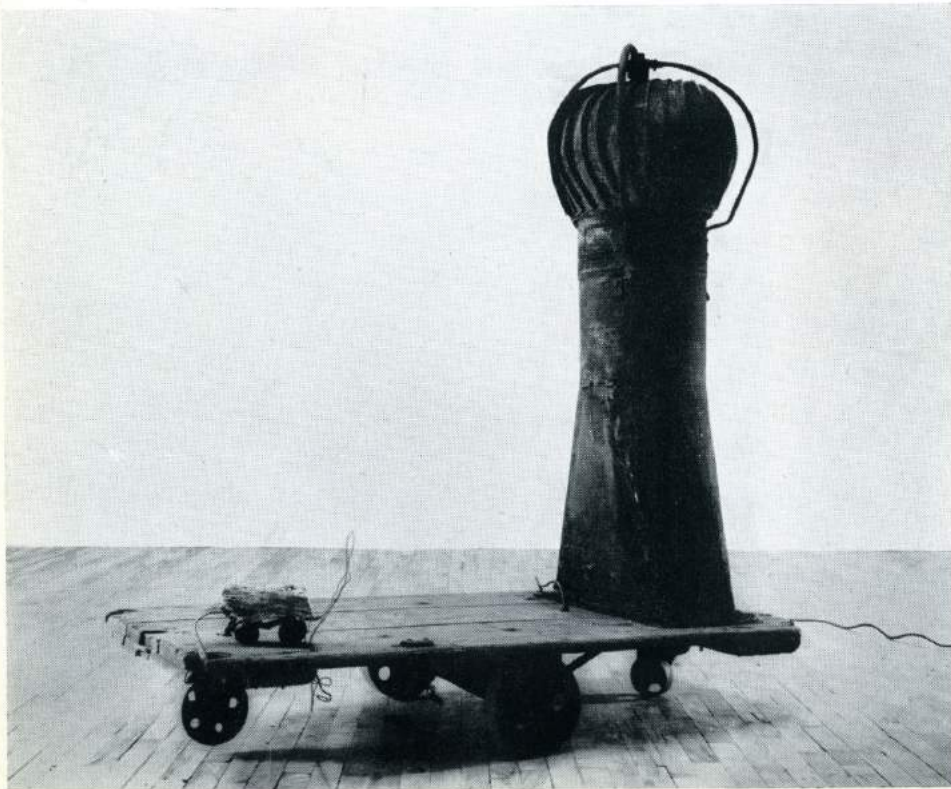
28 ACE 1962
combine painting on canvas 108 × 240"
Lent by the Albright-Knox Gallery; Buffalo

29 STUDIO PAINTING 1961
combine painting on canvas 72½ × 68½"
two panels each 72½ × 34"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery; Paris





30

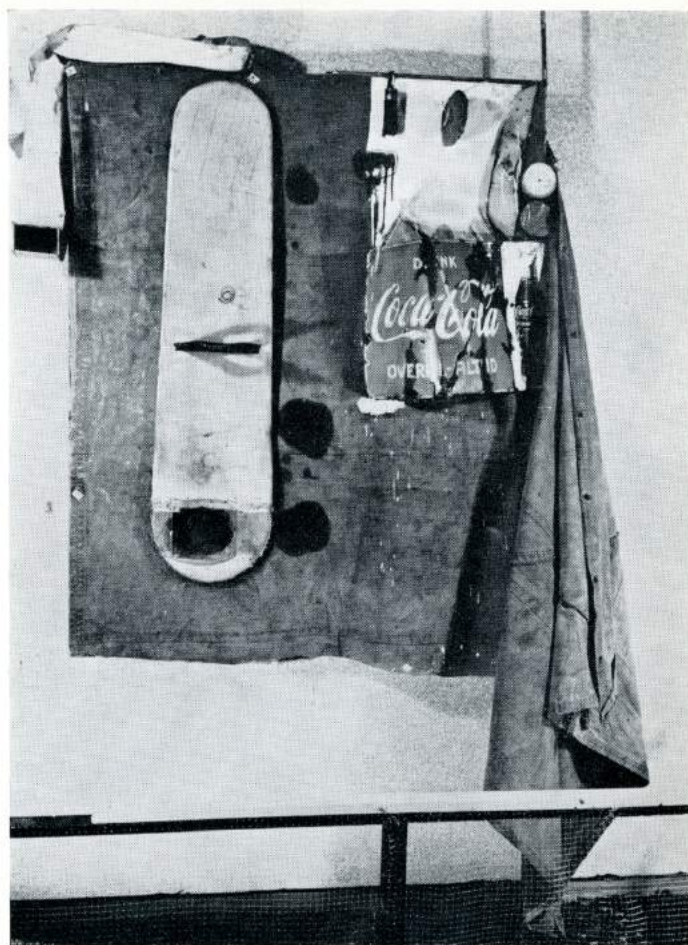
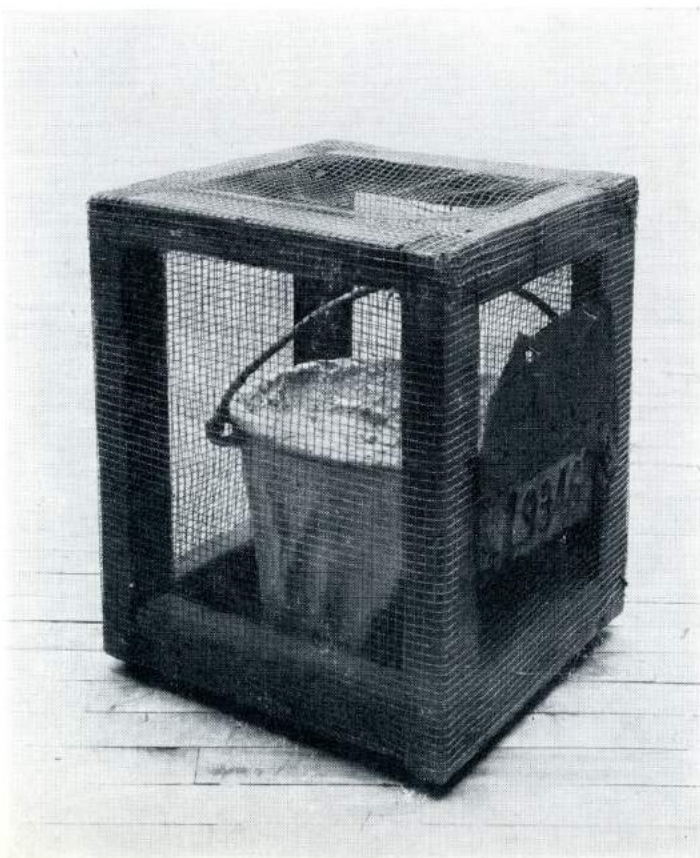


31

30 EMPIRE I 1961
construction 38 × 28 × 82"
Lent by the artist

31 EMPIRE II 1961
construction 61 × 29 × 58"
Lent by the artist

33



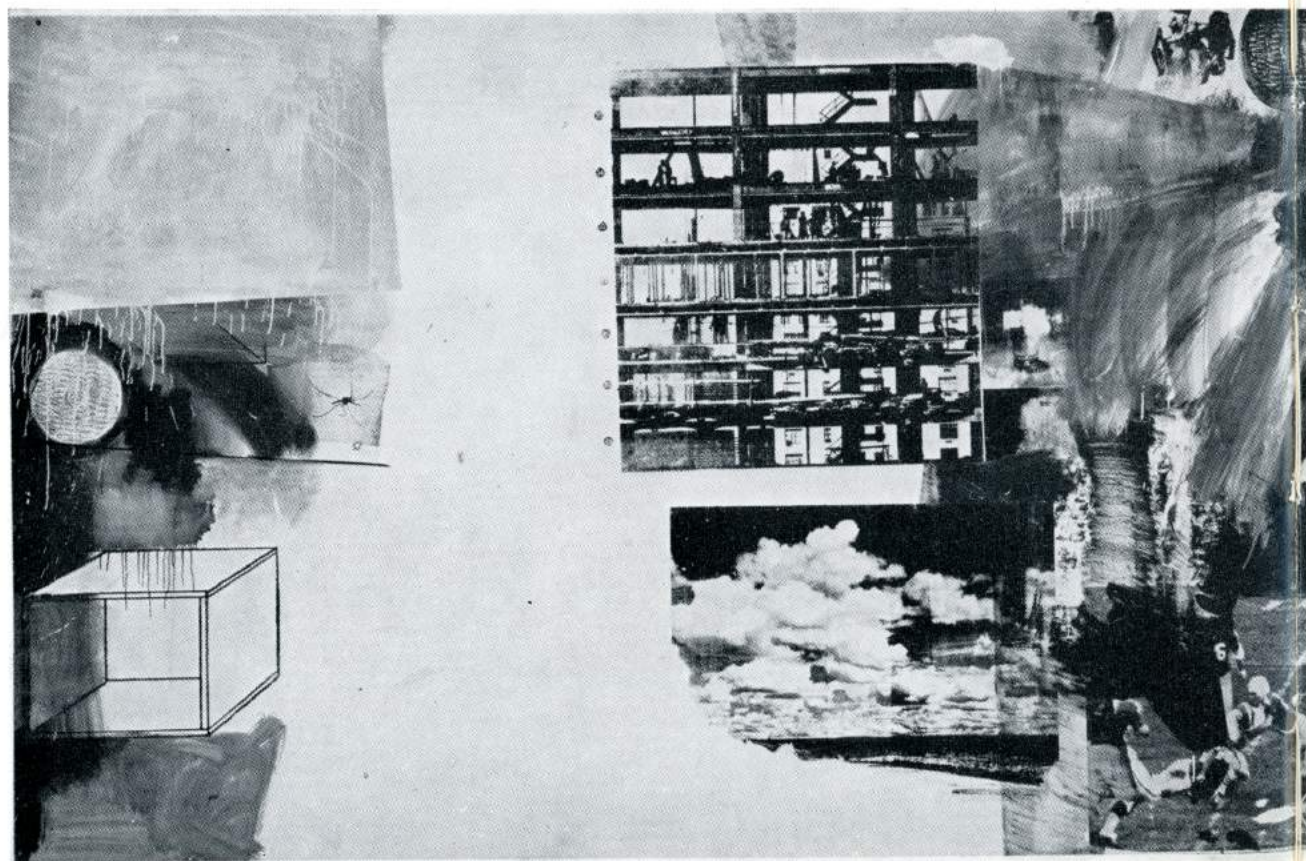
32

32 DYLABY II 1962
combine painting on canvas 109½ × 87 × 15"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris

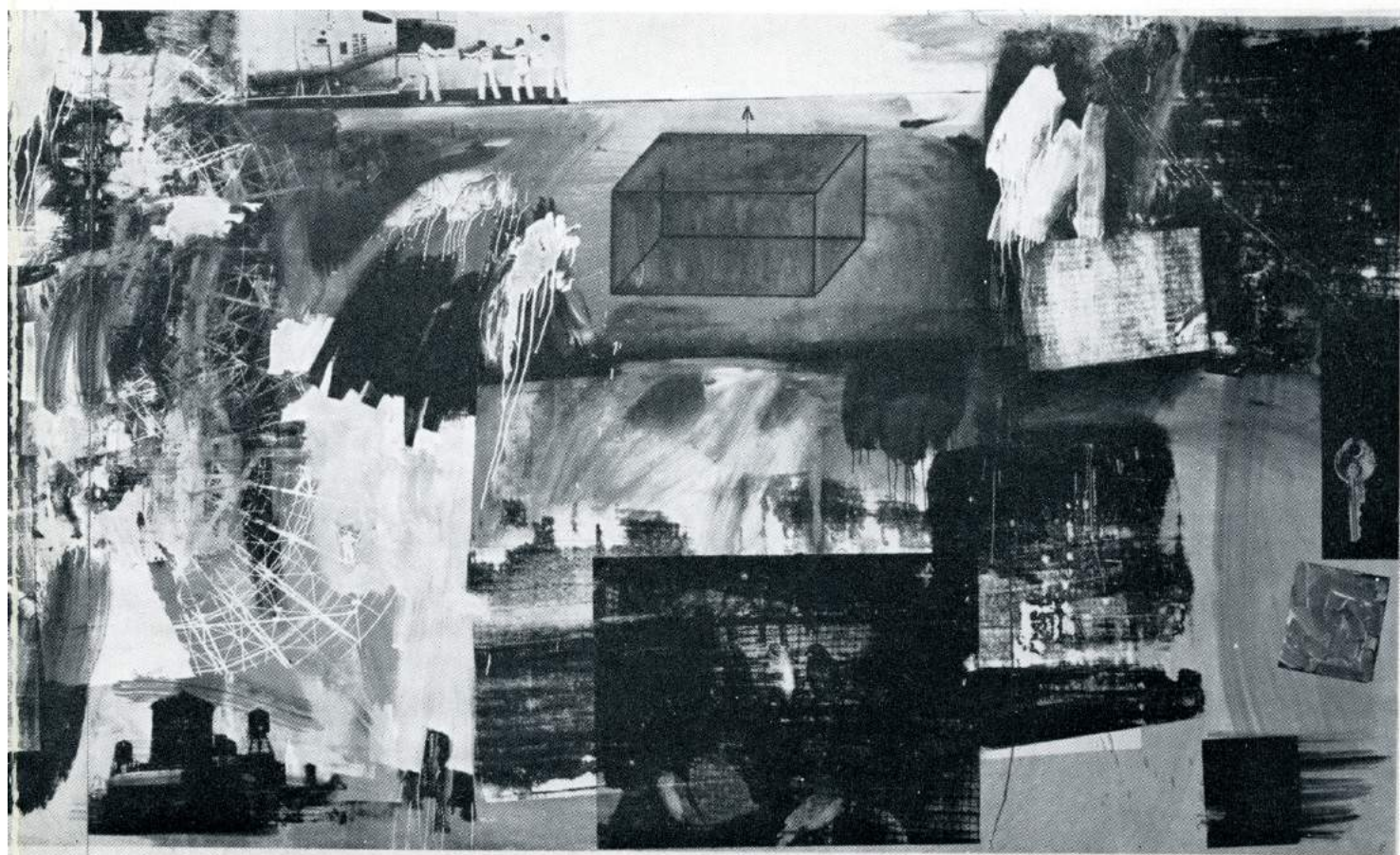
33 193466 1961
construction 19¼ × 15 × 15"
Lent by the artist

34 BARGE 1963

silk screen and oil paint on canvas 80 × 389"
Lent by the Leo Castelli Gallery: New York

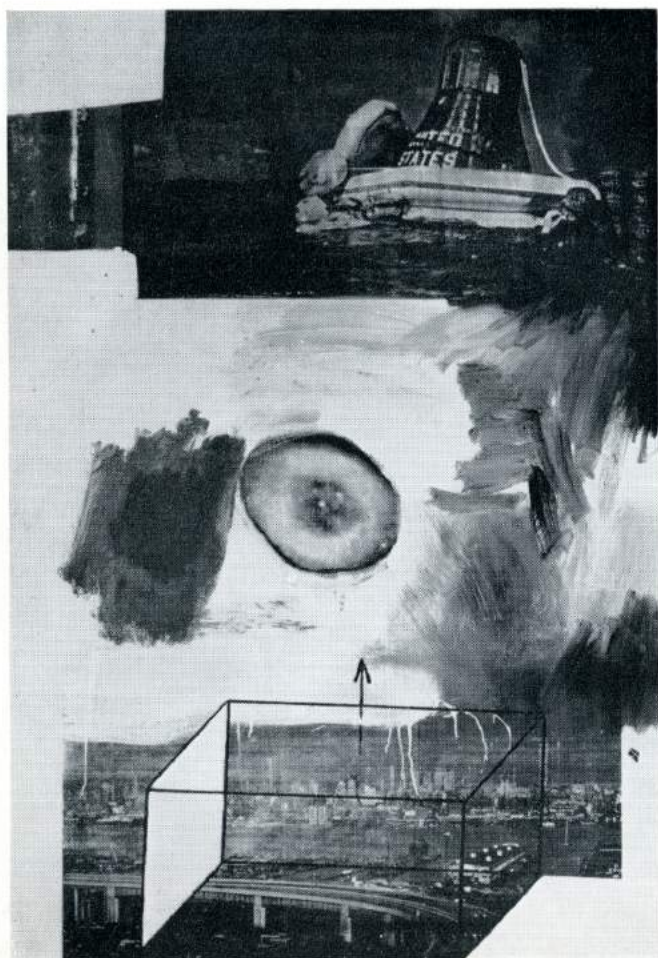






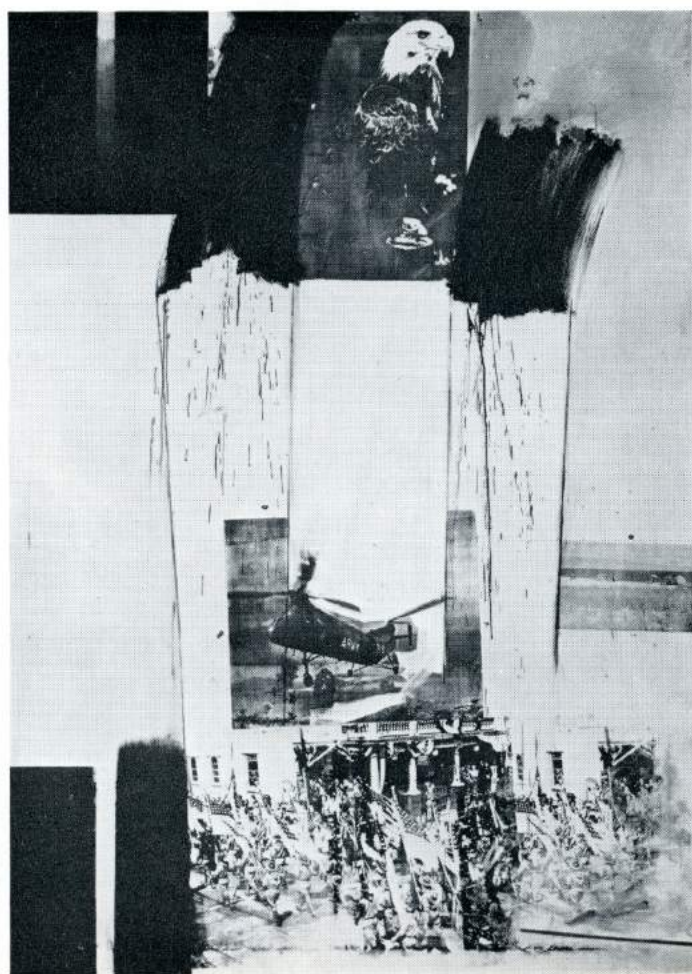
35 STOPGAP 1963

silk screen and oil paint on canvas 58 × 40"
Private Collection: New York
(Not exhibited)



36 KITE 1963

silk screen and oil paint on canvas 84 × 60"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris



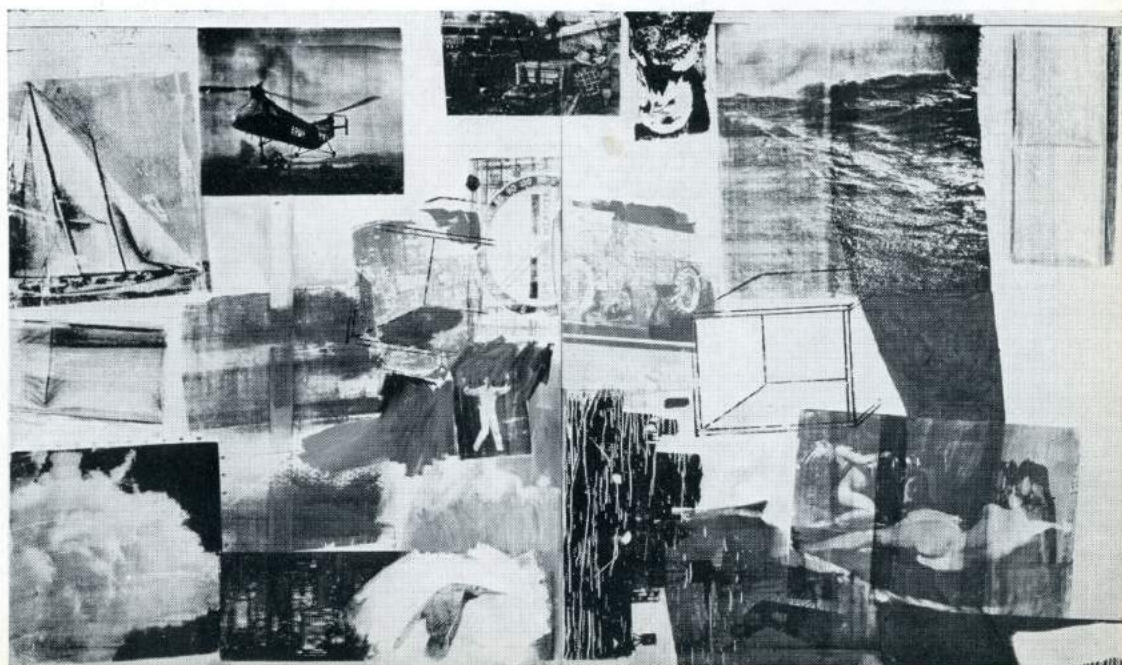
37 PAYLOAD 1962

silk screen and oil paint on canvas 60 × 36"
Lent by the Ileana Sonnabend Gallery: Paris



38 BICYCLE 1963

silk screen and oil paint on canvas 72 × 120"
two panels each 72 × 60"
Lent by the Leo Castelli Gallery: New York



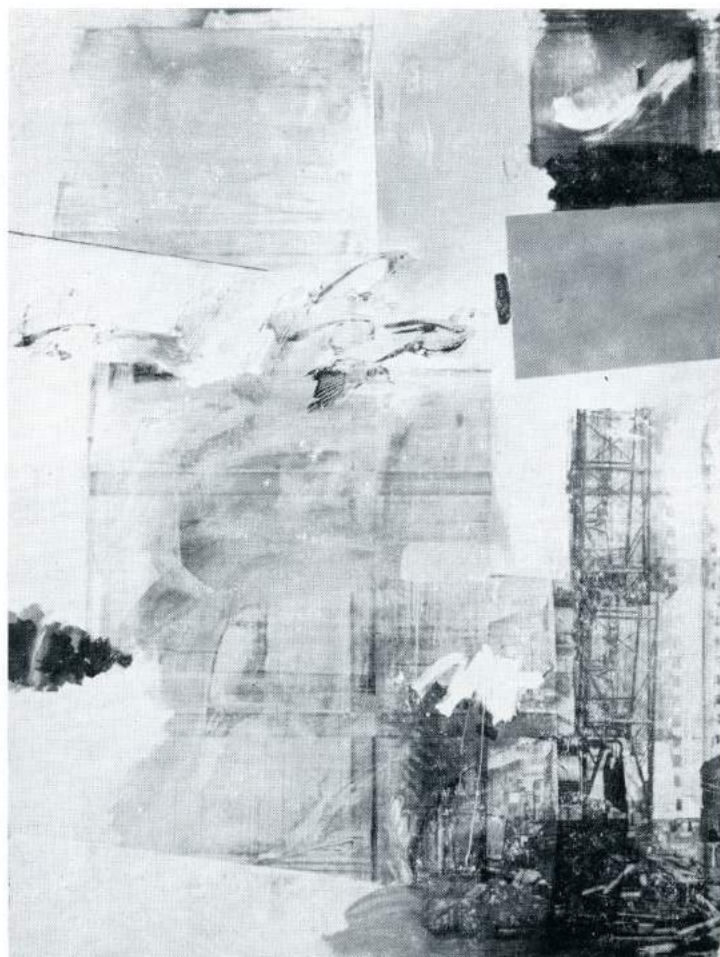
39 TRACER 1964

silk screen and oil paint on canvas 84 × 60"
Lent by the artist



40 FLUSH 1964

silk screen and oil paint on canvas 96 × 72"
Lent by the artist



Rauschenberg's Recent Works

Max Kozloff

Robert Rauschenberg will continue to be dismissed by many as a belated Abstract Expressionist, one whose dribbles and splatters of paint have merely thinned and shrunk to give way to objects or reproduced images of daily life. Others consider him to be a decorative practitioner of the collage technique originated earlier in the century in the *Merzbilder* of Kurt Schwitters. Perceiving that he is neither the one nor the other, a third group – one could already have guessed – makes him out to be a compromised talent who vitiates none too original ideas by sheer facility. This, however, still leaves those spectators, among them myself, who find something far more poetic than additive in Rauschenberg's sensibility, and who are kindled by an inventive genius they would never confuse with mere slickness. I am convinced that his is the most significant art now being produced in the United States by anyone of the younger generation.

It has only recently become evident that Rauschenberg is using his famed concept of "combine painting" (in which there had been a dialogue between actual objects – coke bottles or pillows, and the easel picture) as a point of departure for a whole new field of inquiry. Or rather, it is a frame of reference for an imagery that now recedes into the fibers of the canvas, from which it once had protruded. This is accomplished by the silk-screen transfer to the canvas of photographs, originally black and white, and now filtered by as many as four colors. That the new presences do not have the immediate, yet enigmatic, impact of real things is as obvious as that their range in time, space and memory is infinitely greater. Even while surrendering a good deal of physical substance, the artist remains faithful to his original premise that formal relationships alone are an insufficient reflection of reality; at the same time, he refines his intuition that raw artifacts need some further projection into the pictorial life of the work of art.

The difference between what Rauschenberg now does (which was anticipated by his rubbings, "frottages", illustrating Dante's *Inferno*, 1959-60) and his earlier bipartite constructions, is like the difference between the cinema and the theatre. Only two years ago, in *Pantomime*, two opposed fans, plugged into the picture, blew up gusts of paint between them. But in his recent silk screen paintings, the air currents have been cut off, the sound of the motors has ceased, and there is only a flickering, grainy, shadowy ballet of newsprint ephemera, colliding bodilessly with one another on a surface whose continuity their disruptions refuse to acknowledge. Compared to the behavior of these vicariously perceived figurations (which are the traces of things rather than the things themselves – not even such things as pasted photographs would be), the once complex tactics of collage seem primitive and simple-minded indeed.

Initially, one is aware not so much of the contained, visually recorded, objects as of their baffling removal by reproductive means from the sensing eye. The echoing series of negative, print, plate and re-photograph almost duplicate the infinity effect of anything caught between faced mirrors, and there are at least seven (and conceivably ten) stages between Rauschenberg's image and the object "out there". It is doubtless as a comment on the way we receive news of the outer world, on how we have automated all communications as mechanized afterimages – the kinescope, the delayed broadcast – that Rauschenberg presents these works which are neither graphics, paintings, nor collages, but a piquant metaphor of all three.

And yet his statement is not unfriendly toward our technological packaging of sensations, but rather welcomes the inherent language possibilities of the mass media. He wants to make one aware of interference, of visual static for its own sake (just as in *Broadcast*, with its two radios concealed behind the surface, he once did the same with aural static). But now the effect is not cacophonous because the spectator has long been inured to the conventions of photography in tabloids, films and television, and has come to accept them as adequate substitutes for reality. Rauschenberg takes advantage of this comfort, but refreshes and vivifies it by coarsening the visualization and changing its context. If our vision is attuned to photography, even to the extent of expecting to experience paintings in that medium, then, by reconstituting the photograph within his opened-up perimeters Rauschenberg ironically arrives at a new work of art. What was once the echo has become the substance – but a substance exquisite because and yet despite the fact that it is fossilized.

More than in any of his previous paintings, reality fades from sight, literally and figuratively. But it is the great paradox of the latest work that its physical energy is kept whole. Each of these tableaux is part of a continuing badinage between the assertion of paint and the claims of the outside world, now carried on through the mediation of reproductive processes. Thus, in *Windward* there is the following, rather breath-taking archetypal sequence: among color-photographed oranges, the sudden appearance of a painted orange circle; beneath are black and white transferred photographs of oranges, the same orange circle, and then a painted black and white orange, modeled in gray. Furthermore, all this is done in extremely close values, so that one is forced to discriminate hues optically with great finesse, as well as identify the actual level of existence among the competing artifacts. In assimilating the re-created matter, therefore, one is compelled to absorb the paintings both visually and logically, processes which physically go at two different speeds in the mind, but are there astonishingly differentiated.

Far more dramatic are the analogies, say, between drips and the feathers of a photographed eagle (which recalls the real, stuffed one, in *22 Canyon*, 1959), or between frequent rainbows and the four-color separation process. Like an oblique reference to Abstract Expressionism, these analyses and syntheses reveal how a "painting" is made. But even further, they go back, past Schwitters, to the

discipline of Cubism, and Futurism, with their suggestion of multiple points of view and rapid motion. Finally, a black and white orange is inconceivable without Surrealism and, behind it, Dada. Hence this Rauschenberg exhibition is a tribute to the insights of all the great movements of twentieth-century art, but it is also a remarkable extension of them.

Within this general framework, whose implications are inexhaustible, Rauschenberg elicits some very particular associations of his own. Scenes of flag-waving patriotism, the Statue of Liberty, vignettes of sports events, the roof tops and water tanks of New York, aircraft instrument panels, capsules and nose cones, and interspersions of fluttering birds, evoke the excitability of a mind agog with a welter of current events, and vulnerable to the relentless pressure of the urban environment. But it is no inchoate mentality that presents us, in a daring stroke, with a clocklike electrical diagram superimposed upon Michelangelo's Sistine *Last Judgment*. This is, after all, the artist who has illustrated Dante, who punctuates his imagery with stop signs, and who shows the light going out in a series of four photographs of a glass of water (almost like a lamp dimming behind a film strip). It may be too vulgar to think of the overall *mélange* as hellish, but bright hints of disaster and dissolution are certainly not excluded from Rauschenberg's iconography.

Even the format he chooses – fragments, bleed outs, separations, repeats, superimpositions – mocks the integrity of any object that is caught within the field of attention. One has glimpses of the same image, in different sizes and colors, scattered over the surface, in a Marienbad simile of *déjà vu*. In fact, the whole procedure is reminiscent of the flash-backs, subliminal blips, filters, cut ins, pan shots and dissolves of the modern film, so that the spectator is forced to "read" the picture as if it were on a screen, its narrative consistency perhaps shattered, but its nostalgic poignance thereby heightened.

Other than Rauschenberg, no artist I know (even including Jasper Johns) takes such a polyvalent and imaginative inventory of modern life. It is this fullness of response which gains respect, and which is deeply moving. He stands ultimately aside from the pop art which owes so much to him, not by his methodology – the interjection of a banal motif into a new context – but by his ambition to derive as much sensuous profit from it as he can. One never feels in his work the complacent sentimental attachment to a subject, however evocative, which so easily degenerates into the frequent sado-masochism of what one apologist has recently called "anti-sensibility" painting. Such are the beauties of Rauschenberg's new colors, eliciting a chromatic transparency midway in effect between Titian and color television – that it would take another article merely to do justice to them. He satisfies an appetite for the contemporaneous, for an explicit crystallization of what art must respond to at this moment, which few can claim even to excite. But he does so in a way that is not only far from self-defeating, but gives every evidence of becoming a classic of our time.

Chronology

Born: Port Arthur, Texas, 1925

Studied: Kansas City Art Institute, 1946-47; Academie Julien, Paris, 1947; Black Mountain College, North Carolina, with Josef Albers, 1948-49; Art Students League, New York, with Vytlačil and Kantor, 1949-50. Travelled in Italy and North Africa in 1952-53.

Since 1955 he has designed and executed stage sets and costumes for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company.

One-man Shows: Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, 1951; Stable Gallery, New York, 1953; Galleria d'Arte Contemporanea, Florence, 1953; Galleria del Obelisco, Rome, 1953; Egan Gallery, New York, 1955; Galleria La Tartaruga (combine-drawings), Rome, 1959; Galerie Daniel Cordier, Paris, 1961; Galleria dell'Ariete, Milan, 1961; Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, exhibitions of combine-paintings, 1958, 1959, 1961, "34 Illustrations for 'Dante's Inferno'", Dec., 1960; Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles, 1962; Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, Jan., 1963; Jewish Museum, New York, April, 1963.

