



Robert Rauschenberg, Titan of American Art, Is Dead at 82

More Articles in Arts »



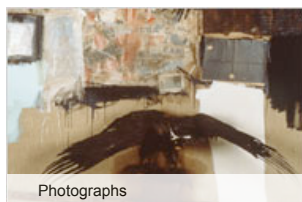
Tony Cenicola/The New York Times

Robert Rauschenberg at his home and studio in Captiva, Fla. in 2005. More Photos >

By MICHAEL KIMMELMAN Published: May 14, 2008

Robert Rauschenberg, the irrepressibly prolific American artist who time and again reshaped art in the 20th century, died Monday night. He was 82.

Multimedia



Photographs

Rauschenberg: Art and Photos

Related

Times Topics: Robert Rauschenberg

He died of heart failure, said Arne Glimcher, chairman of PaceWildenstein, the artist's gallery in Manhattan.

Mr. Rauschenberg's work gave new meaning to sculpture. "Canyon," for instance, consisted of a stuffed bald eagle attached to a canvas. "Monogram" was a stuffed Angora goat girdled by a tire atop a painted panel. "Bed" entailed a quilt, sheet and pillow, slathered with paint, as if soaked in blood, framed on the wall. They all became icons of postwar modernism.

A painter, photographer, printmaker, choreographer, onstage performer, set designer and, in later years, even a

TicketWatch - Theater Offers by E-Mail

Sign up for ticket offers from Broadway shows and other advertisers. See Sample | Privacy Policy



MOST POPULAR

E-MAILED BLOGGED SEARCHED

- 1. David Brooks: The Neural Buddhists
2. Thomas L. Friedman: Call Your Mother
3. Op-Ed Contributor: President Apostate?
4. Two New Ways to Explore the Virtual Universe, in Vivid 3-D
5. Bob Herbert: Here Come the Millennials
6. Well: A Guided Tour of Your Body
7. Generation Faithful: Love on Girls' Side of the Saudi Divide
8. That Must Be Bob. I Hear His New Hip Squeaking.
9. Rough Transition to a New Asthma Inhaler
10. The Uneven Playing Field

Go to Complete List »

The New York Times BUSINESS nytimes.com/business

Post a Comment

[Enlarge This Image](#)



©Robert Rauschenberg/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

"Retroactive I," 1963. [More Photos »](#)

composer, Mr. Rauschenberg defied the traditional idea that an artist stick to one medium or style. He pushed, prodded and sometimes reconceived all the mediums in which he worked.

Building on the legacies of [Marcel Duchamp](#), Kurt Schwitters, [Joseph Cornell](#) and others, he thereby helped to obscure the lines between painting and sculpture, painting and photography, photography and printmaking, sculpture and photography, sculpture and dance, sculpture and technology, technology and performance art — not to mention between art and life.

Mr. Rauschenberg was also instrumental in pushing American art onward from Abstract Expressionism, the dominant movement when he emerged during the early 1950s. He became a transformative link between artists like [Jackson Pollock](#) and [Willem de Kooning](#) and those

who came next, artists identified with Pop, Conceptualism, Happenings, Process Art and other new kinds of art in which he played a signal role.

No American artist, [Jasper Johns](#) once said, invented more than Mr. Rauschenberg. Mr. Johns, [John Cage](#), [Merce Cunningham](#) and Mr. Rauschenberg, without sharing exactly the same point of view, collectively defined this new era of experimentation in American culture. Apropos of Mr. Rauschenberg, Cage once said, "Beauty is now underfoot wherever we take the trouble to look."

Cage meant that people had come to see, through Mr. Rauschenberg's efforts, not just that anything, including junk on the street, could be the stuff of art (this wasn't itself new), but that it could be the stuff of an art aspiring to be beautiful — that there was a potential poetics even in consumer glut, which Mr. Rauschenberg celebrated. "I really feel sorry for people who think things like soap dishes or mirrors or Coke bottles are ugly," he once said, "because they're surrounded by things like that all day long, and it must make them miserable."

The remark reflected the optimism and generosity of spirit that Mr. Rauschenberg became known for. His work was likened to a Saint Bernard: uninhibited and mostly good-natured. He could be the same way in person. When he became rich, he gave millions of dollars to charities for women, children, medical research, other artists and Democratic politicians.

A brash, garrulous, hard-drinking, open-faced Southerner, he had a charm and peculiar Delphic felicity with language that nevertheless masked a complex personality and an equally multilayered emotional approach to art, which evolved as his stature did. Having begun by making quirky small-scale assemblages out of junk he found on the street in downtown Manhattan, he spent increasing time in his later years, after he had become successful and famous, on vast international, ambassadorial-like projects and collaborations.

Conceived in his immense studio on the island of Captiva, Fla., these projects were of enormous size and ambition; for many years he worked on a project that grew literally to exceed the length of its title, "The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece." They generally did not live up to his earlier achievements. Even so, he maintained an equanimity toward the results. Protean productivity went along with risk, he believed, and risk sometimes meant failure.

Charge Your Brain

- THE CAFFEINE BOOST
- THE EXERCISE LINK
- THE GENIUS GYM
- THE MEMORY FIX
- THE DOPPLER EFFECT
- HOW TO BE A GENIUS LIKE ME BY STEVE CARROLL

PEAK WATER
THE NEXT FLAVOR CHANGES EVERYTHING

ROBOT THIEF
WHO STOLE THE PERFORMER'S BOTTLE ROBE?

PLANET

How to be smarter

Also in Business:

- [Don't be afraid to delegate](#)
- [The new workplace flirtation](#)
- [Why leisure matters in a busy world](#)

ADVERTISEMENTS

In a world of second opinions, get the facts first.



Arts & more.

50% off Times delivery.

Complete coverage of Awards season

All the news that's fit to personalize.

The New York Times
nytimes.com/health
ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO CLICK

The process — an improvisatory, counterintuitive way of doing things — was always what mattered most to him. “Screwing things up is a virtue,” he said when he was 74. “Being correct is never the point. I have an almost fanatically correct assistant, and by the time she re-spells my words and corrects my punctuation, I can’t read what I wrote. Being right can stop all the momentum of a very interesting idea.”

This attitude also inclined him, as the painter Jack Tworckov once said, “to see beyond what others have decided should be the limits of art.”

1 | [2](#) | [3](#) | [4](#) | [NEXT PAGE »](#)

[More Articles in Arts »](#)

[Get Times Reader Free. A Digital Newspaper That Reads Like The Real Thing.](#)

Ads by Google what's this?

[Art Galleries Vancouver](#)
Visit beautiful art galleries. Complete directory. Search now!
www.ZipLocal.com/ArtGallery

[Art Gallery Patagonia, AZ](#)
Painting, photography, sculpture & much more from regional artists.
www.metamorphosisaz.com/

[Fine Prints and Paintings](#)
Original fine prints & paintings From Dürer to Picasso
www.clarkfineart.com

Tips
To find reference information about the words used in this article, double-click on any word, phrase or name. A new window will open with a dictionary definition or encyclopedia entry.

Past Coverage
[ART REVIEW; A Life Made Out of Wood, Metal and Determination \(May 9, 2007\)](#)
[ART REVIEW; A Rarely Seen Side of a Rauschenberg Shift \(March 8, 2007\)](#)
[ART REVIEW; To Be Is to Undo \(March 4, 2007\)](#)
[ART REVIEW; Even in the Digital Age, a Strong Case for Printmaking \(February 12, 2007\)](#)

Related Searches
[Rauschenberg, Robert](#) [Add Alert](#)
[Art](#) [Add Alert](#)
[Deaths \(Obituaries\)](#) [Add Alert](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM ◀ ▶

<p>HEALTH »</p>  <p>In Delusions of Romance, Genuine Comfort</p>	<p>OPINION »</p>  <p>The Class Isn't Always Greener (But It Could Be)</p>	<p>THEATER »</p>  <p>A Season With an Unpredictable Plot</p>	<p>OPINION »</p> <p>Video: Clinton's Persistence Bloggingheads participants wonder why Senator Clinton remains in the race.</p>	<p>WORLD »</p>  <p>Ways of Ancient Mexico Reviving Barren Lands</p>	<p>SCIENCE »</p>  <p>Two New Ways to Explore the Virtual Universe</p>
--	--	---	--	--	--