



Born in Port Arthur, Texas, in 1925, **Robert Rauschenberg** imagined himself first as a minister and later as a pharmacist. It wasn't until 1947, while in the U.S. Marines that he discovered his aptitude for drawing and his interest in the artistic representation of everyday objects and people. After leaving the Marines he studied art in Paris on the G.I. Bill, but quickly became disenchanted with the European art scene. After less than a year he moved to North Carolina, where the country's most visionary artists and thinkers, such as Joseph Albers and Buckminster Fuller, were teaching at Black Mountain College. There, with artists such as dancer Merce Cunningham and musician John Cage, Rauschenberg began what was to be an artistic revolution. Soon, North Carolina country life began to seem small and he left for New York to make it as a painter. There, amidst the chaos and excitement of city life Rauschenberg realized the full extent of what he could bring to painting.

Rauschenberg's enthusiasm for popular culture and his rejection of the angst and seriousness of the Abstract Expressionists led him to search for a new way of painting. He found his signature mode by embracing materials traditionally outside of the artist's reach. He would cover a canvas with house paint, or ink the wheel of a car and run it over paper to create a drawing, while demonstrating rigor and concern for formal painting. By 1958, at the time of his first solo exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery, his work had moved from abstract painting to drawings to what he termed "combines." These combines (meant to express both the finding and forming of combinations in three-dimensional collage) cemented his place in art history.

Throughout the '80s and '90s Rauschenberg continued his experimentation, concentrating primarily on collage and new ways to transfer photographs. In 1998 The Guggenheim Museum put on its largest exhibition ever with four hundred works by Rauschenberg, showcasing the breadth and beauty of his work and its influence over the second half of the century.