

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



**Rauschenberg's Delights**

An artist shows off his collection

By Melissa Stern



James Rosenquist, "Spaghetti" (1965), oil on linen, 30 x 30 inches Courtesy Gagolian Gallery. Photography by Robert McKeever.  
Andy Warhol, "Robert Rauschenberg" (1967), acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, 14 x 10 1/4 inches. Courtesy Gagolian Gallery.  
Photography by Robert McKeever.

One of the most fun things an art lover can experience is a glimpse into the private collection of a beloved artist. The current exhibition at Gagolian uptown featuring Robert Rauschenberg's private collection leaves one giddy with delight and reeling from the sheer volume and quality of collected work.

The show has 200 works in it—a mere sampling of Rauschenberg's 900-piece collection. Everything and the kitchen sink appears in this show, from a 3.5 x 2.5 inch portrait of Abraham Lincoln by Civil War photographer Matthew Brady to numerous and stunning paintings and drawings by Rauschenberg's close friend Cy Twombly. Trades, purchases or gifts from friends and lovers, the pieces take over three floors of

Gagosian's flagship Madison Avenue gallery, and each room brings new revelations into the life and mind of the man who collected it all.

Many of the works in the show are by Rauschenberg's contemporaries, and one can easily see the connection between their artistic sensibilities. Then there are the surprises: A small ink drawing, "Study of a Chicken," by Alexander Calder, is a delightful, almost throwaway "portrait" of said chicken. A wonderful collage from 1964 made by choreographer Steve Paxton, Rauschenberg's friend and collaborator, is a revelation into the nature of improvisation and artistic connection between men. A series of photographs by Grant Mudford of abstracted pieces of street paving relate directly to Rauschenberg's own fascination with the connections between seemingly disjointed images.

There is a particularly delightful painting by James Rosenquist entitled "Waiting For Bob." The story goes that it was to be a collaboration between the two artists. Rosenquist went first, painting a partial door and leaving a big empty space in the middle, presumably for Rauschenberg to do his thing. When the canvas arrived at his studio, however, he pronounced it "perfect" and refused to lift his own brush to it. The show abounds with such pleasures.

It takes time to walk through the collection, and there are certainly some misses; I did not feel passion for the musical scores of John Cage and Morton Feldman amassed here. But there are those for whom these works will be the best in the show. The diversity of vision is astounding. There is a wonderful mural-sized photograph on the fourth floor of the gallery showing Rauschenberg in his studio with many of the pieces in the show hanging behind him.

The opportunity to see these works brings us closer to this brilliant artist, whose restless energy and ever-evolving personal work brought him closer to the things he truly loved. It's inspiring.