



ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Samarkand Stitches V, 1988
Screenprint and fabric collage

The late works of artists hardly arouse the same attention as the early productions. This is a tendency but not a fact. By concentrating on the late period within the oeuvre of Robert Rauschenberg, the viewer can discover the different levels of meanings and layers of materials he collaged onto the canvas. The American artist, who was born in 1925 and died in 2008, was inspired by the thought that art needs to be included in all kinds of living areas and always looked for new possibilities and ways of working with everyday objects. Robert Rauschenberg was worried about society and wanted to draw attention to his various creative periods to induce a general rethinking. His intention came to fruition and concluded in his humanitarian projects and international support for other artists.

The artist's deep involvement on different cultural and social levels around the world culminated in his ambitious project, the *Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange (ROCI)*. Between 1984 and 1991 eleven countries distributed across four continents had been visited by Rauschenberg and his assistants, one of them Darryl Pottorf. The main goal was a mutual exchange of domestic traditions and artistic production.¹ Moreover he was especially interested in traveling to countries where governments tightly controlled and restricted individual freedom. Rauschenberg investigated and incorporated several long-standing domestic techniques and new materials in his art. The created works were mostly paintings that include photographic images and textiles assembled in grid-based compositions.² The screen print on silk fabric *Samarkand Stitches V* created in 1988 was an acquisition in the Nicola Erni Collection showing this exact but loose format and materiality accurately. The unique work consists of photographic memories printed on local fabrics from the artist's travels through Uzbekistan as well as traditional colored Ikat silk fabrics imported from Samarkand.³ These two different artistic products of different origins were sewed together to create a large unified whole. Rauschenberg successfully reduced and converted the different origins of the content used and pared it down to similar materials.

On the other hand, through these connections the artist sets a political statement avowing a cross-cultural and independent world. Within one large and transparent fabric Rauschenberg not only captured his own memories but created a visual symbol, his own non-patriotic flag, for his ongoing commitment to traditional artistic production and free expression.

For Robert Rauschenberg, materiality was also strongly connected to the experimentation with different kinds of surfaces, pigments, and new techniques. The series "Anagram (A Pun)" which the artist made from 1997 until 2002 is a perfect example of this visual diversity and complexity in respect of Rauschenberg's attention to physicality. In the Nicola Erni Collection one can observe the rough and porous surface of the work *Wallflower*, executed in 1999, covered with several images in large format, apparently arranged randomly. Between the separate fragments of images one can see the blank surface making the blurred outlines more visible and evident. The floating, colored objects are connectionless except for their same washy and indistinct visual appearance. Through the uncertainty, the images seem to move back and forth like in a slow motion film trying to be connected to each other in another sphere. The series was made from digital color transfers using ink-jet dyes or pigment. The photographs were transferred to paper using water. Rauschenberg overcame the rigid two-dimensional surface in a simple way that gave him more flexibility in terms of scale and effect. The most important intention though was to emphasize the spontaneous act of creation by leaving traces of water to reveal the process and render it comprehensible.

The eagerness of experiment can also be seen in the title of his late series to which the artist paid particular attention. Between 2000 and 2001, Robert Rauschenberg created works that he titled according to random pages and paragraph numbers—for example the painting *Page 72, Paragraph 2* (2000) held in the Nicola Erni Collection. The viewer is suddenly trapped in the middle of a visualized story created by Rauschenberg's own fantasy and historiography. A thick gray stripe divides different images, including people sitting in a boat, a window with half broken horizontal slats or a pile of boxes in the right corner. "In this group of works there are no mistakes nor right, nor wrong," was the artist's statement about this series, emphasizing that each human being with his own past experience and opinion can interpret and imagine the story as he likes.⁴ The work animates the viewer to explore questions like the reason for this story, how it started and the direction it takes. Through the large vertical scale of the painting, the short or long story receives a certain monumentality, charged as a historical monument teasing out the viewer's next fictional story.

The late works of Robert Rauschenberg are a visual and compact diary of his artistic life in numerous countries where he was influenced by different personalities and experiences during his stays. This great accumulation and variety is seen within these works in the collection and can be further explored in connection with the paintings of his long-term assistant Darryl Pottorf. The mutual influences are striking and result in not only two individual productions but in a coherent and combined presentation within the current exhibition.

¹ Cf. Catherine Craft, *Robert Rauschenberg*, London 2013, p. 136.

² Ibid., p. 136.

³ Cf. online catalogue raisonné, Gemini G.E.L.

⁴ Pace Wildenstein, *Short Stories by Robert Rauschenberg*, exh. cat., New York 2003.

Robert Rauschenberg's assistant was at the same time an independent artist who developed his own eye-catching style. Compositional plans within artworks are no premises for the artist Darryl Pottorf. Without fixed end results in his mind, he takes photographs of the outside world, then prints, arranges, rearranges, and combines them with painted brush strokes on large-scale panels. On top of this, the artist enriches the works with new working techniques to receive a totally unique result. From the 1980s onward, Pottorf intensely accompanied Robert Rauschenberg through his productions, projects, and travels as well as working together on the very same canvas.⁵ They were not only artistic partners but also—and more importantly—friends for life, ignoring their age difference of more than 25 years.

One collaborative work entitled *Winter* from 1996 of Robert Rauschenberg and Darryl Pottorf is held in the Nicola Erni Collection, giving the viewer the opportunity to discover and compare not only the individual works of both artists. This work was one of the first acquisitions for the collection, initializing a passion for the works of both artists. The collaboration belongs to the series “Quattro Mani IV,” indicating and emphasizing in addition to both signatures how many hands worked on the canvas. They composed a collage of all kinds of images of objects in different sizes: a large hand coming from the top right corner of the panel is juxtaposed with an industrial wheel and flanked by the back of a car, and toward the edge, a basket full of labeled soft drinks. The viewer becomes overwhelmed by the conglomeration of well-known products and materials in our daily life. Rauschenberg was responsible for including the colored images taken during his trip to Venice whereas the black-and-white photographs are Pottorf's works. “Life is a grand possibility—Art should reflect it.” was Darryl Pottorf's maxim and best describes the artist's interest in his immediate vicinity.⁶

The nine works of Darryl Pottorf within the Nicola Erni Collection demonstrate the artistic facets in the artist's own works as the single author. Particularly significant in all of the exhibited works is the constellation of overlapping prints based on photographs and their intentionally desired vintage look. One print covers another one, sometimes almost completely except for one small corner visible to the viewer. Pottorf plays with the audience in a subtle and clever way by providing a limited view of the content on the canvas. At the same time though he unveils a new, composed perception, built up and refined over time, by arranging his prints as hidden mind-maps and finally exposing a story composed through the viewers' own understanding. An Italian relief with two female statues is included on the same large plane as the front page of *The New York Times*, playing with the work's title *The Times* from 200. Here the ephemeral and fast moving news distribution contrasts with the identity-establishing monument created hundreds of years ago.

Frequently the viewer comes across big brush strokes, circular formations or small splashes of paint when looking at the works of Darryl Pottorf. The painterly manner is an indicator of the artist's demand in seeing no strict border between different mediums—whether prints, objects or paint, all of them can exist on the very same panel. Within all nine works in the Nicola Erni Collection, marks of paint in different forms can be found. These are

integral components of each work and cannot be taken as spontaneous acts by the artist. One important proof of Pottorf's need for paint can be seen in the circles which are often included in the artist's large works. In both the works *Speculation* (1999) and *Evening Lux* (1999) circles in different colors and sizes are found. Frequently Pottorf used the bottom of a wine glass, dipping it into paint and then printing it onto the surface. Like a seal or an addition to his signature on the bottom of the works, the circle functions as a characteristic attribute. The combinational experimentations are distinctive of Darryl Pottorf's and Robert Rauschenberg's work, not only in terms of material combinations but also regarding working techniques.

Not only the formal artistic level in Darryl Pottorf's oeuvre changes from work to work. He is a real innovator in terms of investigating new techniques and materials. However, what remains constant is his palette based on photographs. From there, he plays with unconventional materials such as Lexan, known as one production component of CDs, that gives the work a delicate crystalline polish like in the collaborative work *Winter*. Often he poly-laminates the paper and treats it with a coating that filters ultraviolet light.⁷ One very important advantage of printing images is the fact that Pottorf can repeat the process again and again. Printing is an immortal duplicating medium that allows the artist to use his beloved photographs several times in his works.

Darryl Pottorf's mentor Robert Rauschenberg provided him with the essential know-how and paved the way for a great artistic period. He became an independent and innovative individual artist. Pottorf gained experience with different procedures not only through his developed techniques, but also and more importantly through the collaged elements of his final works that gave him fresh ideas for future ensembles. In Darryl Pottorf two artistic personalities are successfully unified—a full-blooded printmaker who gave his works the physical attributes of oil paintings and a passionate painter, reacting and finalizing with the right brush stroke. An artist and oeuvre to be discovered!

Valentina Frutig

⁵ Homepage, Darryl Pottorf.

⁶ Homepage, Darryl Pottorf.

⁷ Cf. Homepage, International Fine Print Dealers Association (ifpda).



ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG & DARRYL POTTORF

Winter (Quattro Mani IV), 1996

Vegetable dye transfer on paper, toner and patina etching on Lexan



ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Page 72, Paragraph 2, 2000
Vegetable dye transfer and acrylic on
polylamine

OPPOSITE

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG

Wallflower (Anagrams (A Pun)), 1999
Vegetable dye transfer on polylamine



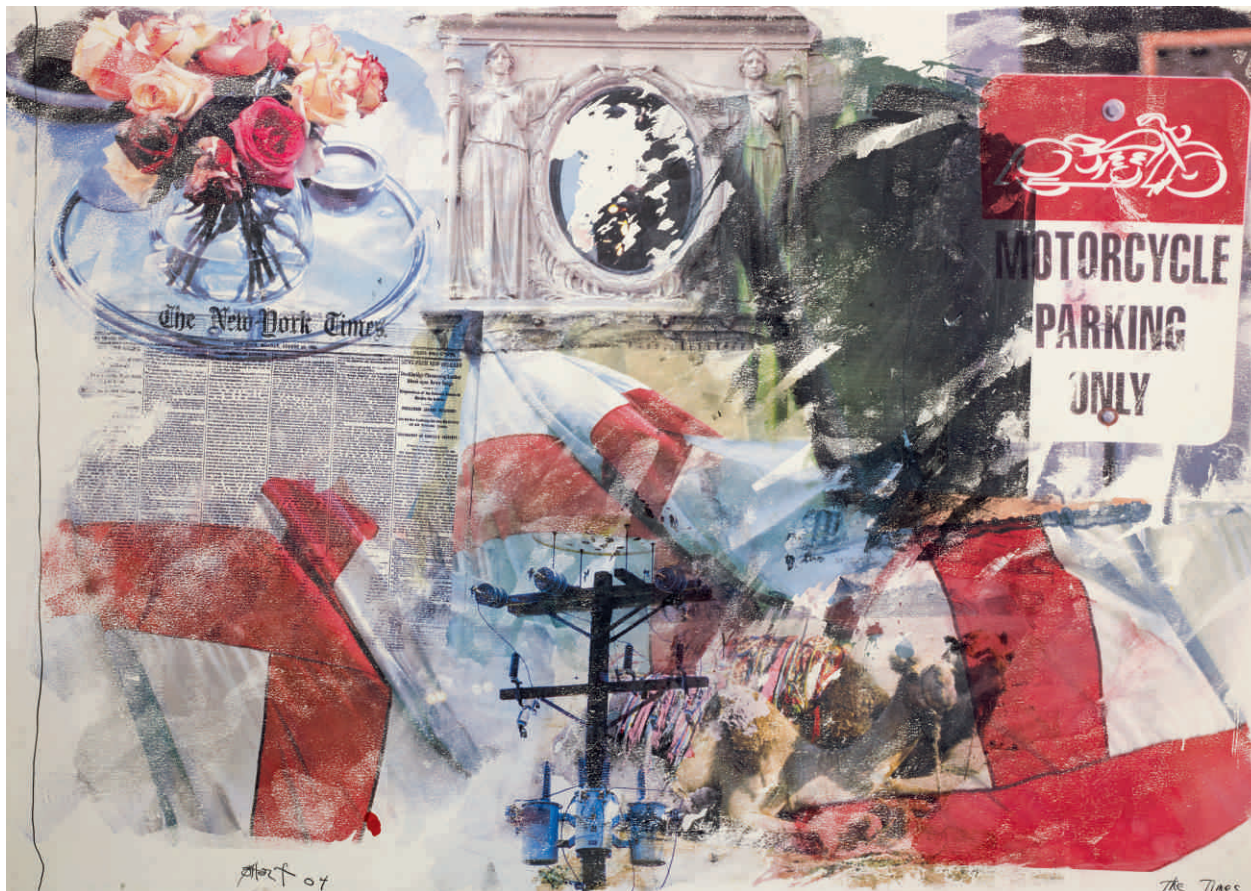




DARRYL POTTORF

See Sea, 2001

UV-coated watercolor on poly laminate



DARRYL POTTORF

The Times, 2004

UV-coated transfer on poly laminate



DARRYL POTTORF

Unlikely, 2002

UV-coated transfer on polylamine

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT

DARRYL POTTORF

Window Box, 2001

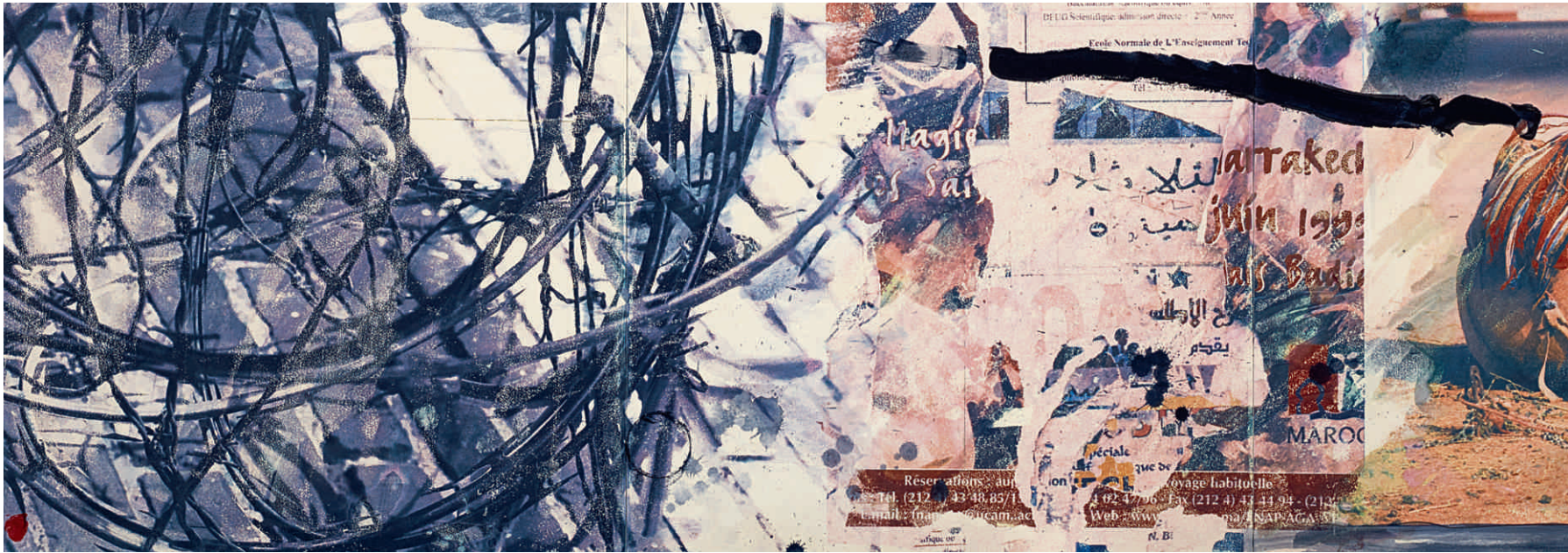
Champagne Stick, 2001

Train Sit, 2001

Watercolor on polylaminate







DARRYL POTTORF

Linear Transport Clause, 2000 (8 panels)
Watercolor on polylaminate





DARRYL POTTORF

Evening Lux, 1999

Toner and acrylic pigment on polylamine