

OBSERVER

Why 2025 Is Going to Be the Year of Robert Rauschenberg

Seven institutional shows are planned for the artist's centennial next year, accompanied by the first volume of a catalogue raisonné, gallery exhibitions and even an art fair themed around his unique approach.

By [Elisa Carollo](#) • 12/09/24 4:53pm

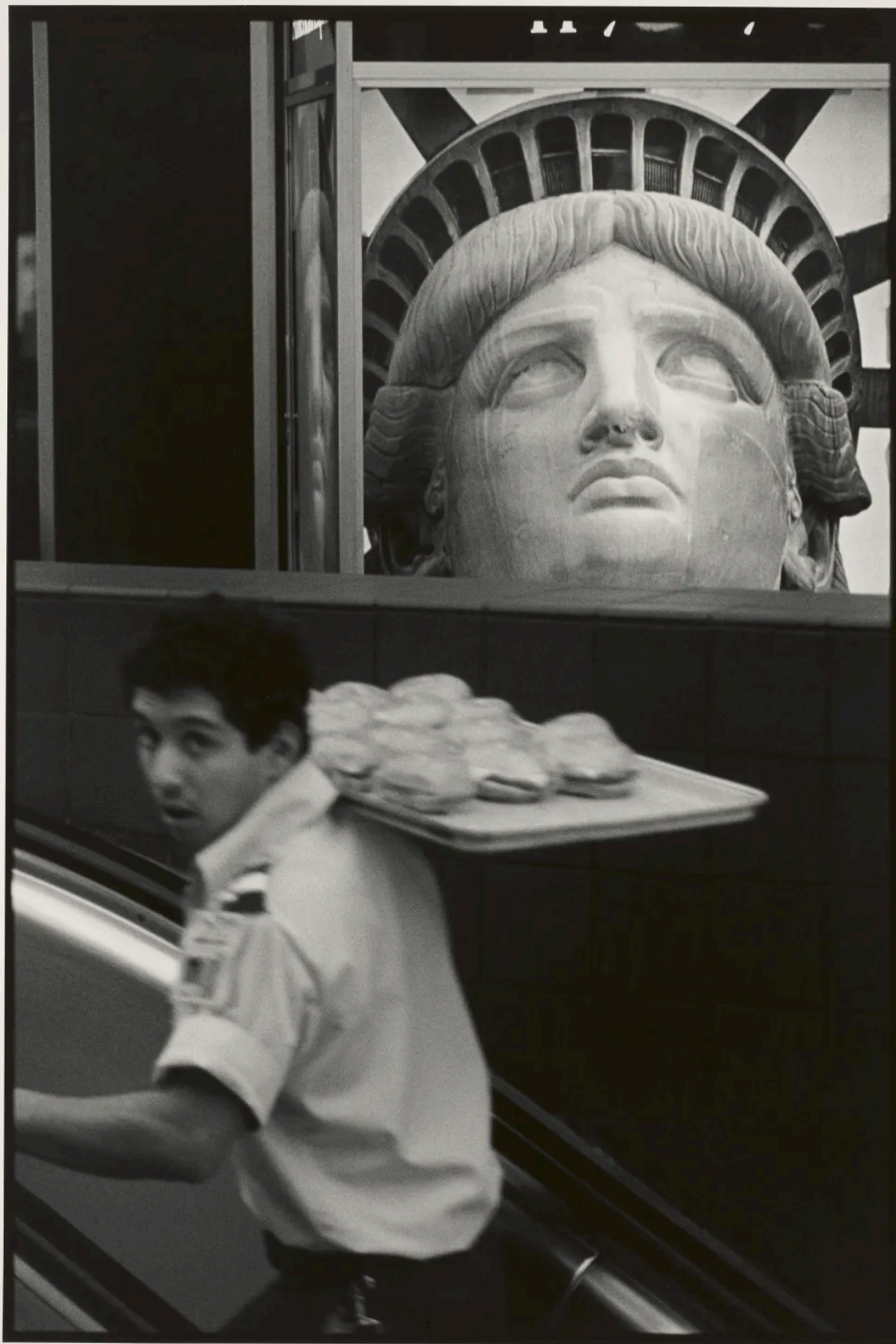


In 2025, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation will commemorate the artist's 100th birthday with an international celebration of his expansive creativity and spirit of curiosity. Courtesy of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Building on Duchamp's groundbreaking approach of transforming everyday objects through painting and formalist elements, the artist Robert Rauschenberg expanded the expressive possibilities of traditional art and pop culture. His experimental multimedia works serve as timeless testaments to the relationship between humans and material culture, all while threading them into the continuum of art history. Faced with the need to describe his innovative method of blending mundane materials and traditional techniques, Rauschenberg coined the term "Combines." These pieces, which merge painting and sculpture into an entirely new category, seamlessly integrate the everyday with artistic creation, playfully redefining meaning and challenging conventional aesthetics. One of his most provocative works, *Monogram* (1955-59), exemplifies this: a stuffed Angora goat, bought for \$15 at a secondhand office furniture store on Seventh Avenue, is fused with a tire and a painting assemblage. The bizarre combination defied traditional notions of beauty and taste, creating an iconic image that presciently reflects the paradoxical accumulation of consumerist excess, often destined to become formless waste.

As the 100th anniversary of Rauschenberg's birth approaches, the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation has announced an ambitious Centennial celebration set to spotlight the artist's legacy through 2025 and into 2026. Seven major institutional presentations across continents are already planned, alongside an art fair with a curatorial theme dedicated to Rauschenberg and a series of events activating the Foundation's New York headquarters and archive. These initiatives aim to bring curators, scholars and enthusiasts into dialogue with Rauschenberg's pioneering practice and philosophy. Museum exhibitions will range from comprehensive surveys of his oeuvre to more focused explorations of specific elements of his multifaceted, ever-evolving body of work, which spans decades of artistic innovation.

"Rauschenberg's centennial is a once-in-a-century opportunity to celebrate not only the breadth and depth of his artistic legacy but also the enduring power of his ideas to inspire," Courtney J. Martin, executive director of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, told Observer. "This milestone allows us to reengage with his vision through fresh perspectives, reaffirming his role as a catalyst for innovation and a beacon for social progress with expansive plans for international exhibitions, grants, publications, and other initiatives with national and international partners. As we look ahead, the centennial invites global audiences to honor his contributions and to imagine new possibilities shaped by his creativity and generosity."



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Robert Rauschenberg, *New York City*, 1983; Gelatin silver print, 19 x 13 in. (48.3 x 33 cm). Courtesy of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Starting in the city where the Texan-born artist found his footing and fame, the Museum of the City of New York will open its doors in September 2025 to “Robert Rauschenberg’s New York: Pictures from the Real World.” This curated survey will explore how Rauschenberg drew visual material from the “real world,” with a spotlight on his relationship with the city through photography. Divided into three sections—“Early Photographs,” “In + Out City Limits / New York” and “Photography in Painting”—the exhibition will also feature an interactive collage component that invites visitors to engage with Rauschenberg’s distinctive approach to image-making and reinterpret it in a personal way.

Next, the Fundación Juan March in Madrid will host “Robert Rauschenberg: The Use of Images,” marking the first exhibition of the artist’s work in Spain since 1985. Running from October 2025 to March 2026, the show will delve into Rauschenberg’s groundbreaking exploration of semiotics, tracing the relationship between visual codes and photographic documentation. The exhibition will span his early experiments with photography during his time at Black Mountain College, his incorporation of photographs into the “Combines” (1954-1964), and his later works from the 1970s, where photographic transfers onto canvas added another layer of complexity. Together, these works offer a meditation on the overwhelming saturation of images in contemporary culture and their implications.

Meanwhile, the Museum Brandhorst in Munich will kick off a traveling exhibition titled “Five Friends: John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly,” celebrating the collaborative spirit of Black Mountain College. Opening on April 10, 2025, and running through August 17, the exhibition will then travel to the Museum Ludwig in Cologne from October 3, 2025, to January 11, 2026. This homage to the legendary cross-disciplinary exchange among these five figures highlights how their embrace of randomness, indeterminacy, and a breakdown of boundaries between high and low art reshaped music, dance, theater, and visual art. Their work collectively challenged materialism, offering a vision of art that elevated free individual expression in a world increasingly dominated by homogenization and consumerism.



Robert Rauschenberg, *Sybil (Hoarfrost)*, 1974; Solvent transfer and paper bags on fabric, with plastic and rope, 80 x 78 in. (203.2 x 198.1 cm).

Courtesy of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

In Spring 2026, Kunsthalle Krems in Austria will present “Image and Gesture,” an exhibition exploring the interplay between images and gestures of self-affirmation at the heart of Rauschenberg’s practice. Running from April to October, the show will examine the artist’s physical engagement with visual traces and his transformative gestures on the canvas. By combining elements of daily life with painterly strokes and material compositions, Rauschenberg elevated transient, everyday visuals into enduring cultural and artistic statements that reflect the society of their time.

Opening in September 2025 and running through March 1, 2026, the Menil Collection in Houston will highlight Rauschenberg's fabric works in "Robert Rauschenberg: Fabric Works of the 1970s." Often more lyrical, nostalgic and introspective, these fabric-based works represent a deep exploration of texture and form, extending the artist's practice into more tactile and dimensional realms. While Rauschenberg began integrating fabric into his works as early as the 1950s with pieces like *Bed*, his use of textiles evolved in the 1970s into multilayered, structured assemblages. These works explore domesticity and personal experience, bridging the personal and collective cultural memory. Featuring over forty-five sculptural works, including significant loans from U.S. collections, the exhibition will be the first museum survey to focus on Rauschenberg's innovative use of cloth, with sail-like fabric assemblages that redefined his artistic language.

Meanwhile, 2025 will also mark a surge of renewed attention to Rauschenberg's work across Asia with a major show at the M+ Museum in Hong Kong, often referred to as the region's MoMA. Running from November 2025 to April 2026, the exhibition will highlight Rauschenberg's connections to Asia and the artworks inspired by his experiences there. His engagement with Asian culture began in the mid-1960s while on trips to Japan, deepened during a 1975 residency in India that influenced his use of materials and color, and culminated in his groundbreaking visit to China in 1982. This trip led to the creation of the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI), a global program of exhibitions and cultural dialogues.



Rauschenberg working on the *7 Characters* series at Xuan Paper Mill in Jingxian, China, in 1982. Courtesy of the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

In addition to the institutional presentations, Gladstone Gallery in New York and Thaddaeus Ropac in Paris, the two galleries representing the Rauschenberg estate, will honor the artist's legacy with solo exhibitions in May and October. Notably, the 2025 edition of miart, Milan's international art fair (April 4-6), will adopt Rauschenberg's life and work as its curatorial theme. The fair will celebrate his philosophy of bridging the "gap" between art and life and highlight his emphasis on chance and interdisciplinary collaboration.

Next year will also mark the publication of the first volume of Rauschenberg's catalogue raisonné, covering works from 1948-1953. This long-term project, undertaken by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, aims to document the artist's extensive oeuvre of approximately 3,000 artworks created over six decades of relentless experimentation. The complete catalogue is expected to take at least twenty years to finalize, making the inaugural volume's release during the Centennial a significant milestone.

Additional publications celebrating the artist include a new monograph by Yale University Press, *I Don't Think About Being Great: Select Statements and Writings*, featuring 100 passages from Rauschenberg's lesser-known written works. This collection will include correspondence, artist notes, testimony and speeches, revealing the centrality of writing in his creative process and its connection to his embrace of chance, intellectual lyricism, and artistic freedom. Each institutional exhibition during the Centennial will also be accompanied by a catalogue, ensuring a robust scholarly legacy. Moreover, the Foundation will issue an open call for researchers, offering one- to three-week residencies at its archives in New York City, home to the most comprehensive collection of materials on Rauschenberg's life and career.

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