

Robert Rauschenberg Called His Work _____ Paintings, Or Assemblage, Because They Used Oil, Cloth,

Robert Rauschenberg Called His Work _____ Paintings, Or Assemblage, Because They Used Oil, Cloth, and other everyday materials to challenge traditional notions of art. As a pioneering figure in the postwar American art scene, Rauschenberg revolutionized the way artists approached creation, blending painting and sculpture into a new, dynamic form known as "Combines." His innovative techniques and fearless use of mixed media have left an indelible mark on contemporary art, inspiring generations of artists to push boundaries and redefine what art can be.

Introduction to Robert Rauschenberg and His Artistic Philosophy

Who Was Robert Rauschenberg?

Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) was an influential American artist whose work bridged the gap between painting and sculpture. His career spanned over six decades, during which he constantly evolved his style and materials. Rauschenberg was known for his experimental approach, often incorporating non-traditional materials such as cloth, paper, metal, and found objects into his artwork.

The Concept Behind His "Combines"

Rauschenberg's "Combines" are a series of artworks that combine painting, sculpture, and collage into a single piece. The term "Combine" reflects his desire to merge different artistic disciplines and materials into a cohesive whole. Unlike traditional paintings, which focus solely on two-dimensional surfaces, Rauschenberg's Combines are three-dimensional and interactive, inviting viewers to experience art from multiple perspectives.

The Meaning Behind the Name: "Paintings" or "Assemblage"

Why Did Rauschenberg Call His Work "Paintings"?

Despite their mixed-media nature, Rauschenberg often referred to his works as "paintings." This choice underscores his belief that the act of painting was central to his artistic process, even when incorporating unconventional materials. The term also challenges viewers to reconsider the boundaries of painting as a medium.

Why "Assemblage"?

The term "assemblage" is used to describe art created by assembling disparate objects into a unified artwork. Rauschenberg's use of assemblage techniques involved combining oil paints, cloth, newspaper clippings, and found objects into complex compositions. His assemblages blurred the lines between painting and sculpture, emphasizing the physicality and materiality of his work.

The Significance of Using Oil, Cloth, and Other Materials

Rauschenberg's deliberate choice of materials played a crucial role in conveying his artistic message:

- Oil Paint: Provided traditional coloring and texture.
- Cloth: Added tactile qualities and a sense of the handmade.
- Newspaper Clippings: Introduced elements of contemporary culture and commentary.
- Found Objects: Brought an element of realism and everyday life into the artwork.

This combination created layered narratives and emotional resonance, making each piece a complex dialogue between art and life.

The Evolution of Rauschenberg's Artistic Style

From Abstract Expressionism to Mixed Media

Initially influenced by Abstract Expressionism, Rauschenberg soon diverged by incorporating real-world objects into his paintings. His work moved away from pure abstraction, favoring a more tangible, accessible approach. The use of oil and cloth became essential tools in this transition.

The Birth of the "Combine" Technique

The mid-1950s marked the emergence of Rauschenberg's Combine paintings. These works integrated painted surfaces with collaged and assembled objects, breaking the conventional boundaries of art. Notable examples include:

- Erased de Kooning Drawing (1953)
- Bed (1955)
- Monogram (1955-1959)

Each piece exemplifies his innovative use of oil, cloth, and found materials.

The Impact of His Techniques

Rauschenberg's techniques challenged the art community to rethink what constitutes art. His blending of mediums and materials:

- Broke traditional genre boundaries
- Emphasized the physicality of the artwork
- Created interactive and multi-layered pieces
- Reflected the complexity of contemporary life

Notable Works and Their Material Composition

Key Works Using Oil, Cloth, and Assemblage Materials

Below are some of Rauschenberg's most significant works, demonstrating his mastery of mixed media:

1. "Erased de Kooning Drawing" (1953):
 - Conceptually unique, involving erasing a de Kooning drawing
 - Materially minimal but conceptually profound
2. "Bed" (1955):
 - Features a real bed, pillow, and blanket
 - Combines painting with actual fabric and bedding materials
3. "Monogram" (1955-1959):
 - Incorporates a stuffed goat, rubber tire, and collaged papers
 - A quintessential example of assemblage using oil paint and found objects
4. "Retroactive I" (1964):
 - Mixes painted canvas, newspaper clippings, and objects
 - Illustrates his continued experimentation with layered materials

Materials in These Works

Most of Rauschenberg's Combines feature:

- Oil paint on canvas or other surfaces

- Cloth elements such as fabric, textiles, or clothing
- Found objects, including hardware, paper, or everyday items
- Collaged materials like newspaper or photographs

The Artistic Significance of Rauschenberg's Materials

Challenging Traditional Art Forms

By using oil, cloth, and assemblage techniques, Rauschenberg challenged the exclusivity of traditional painting. His works demonstrated that art could incorporate elements of daily life, making it more relatable and immediate.

Creating a Dialogue with the Audience

The physicality and material diversity in his works invite viewers to engage more actively. The tactile qualities and diverse textures evoke emotional responses and encourage viewers to interpret the layered meanings.

Influence on Contemporary Art

Rauschenberg's innovative use of materials paved the way for later movements such as Pop Art, Fluxus, and installation art. His willingness to experiment with oil, cloth, and assemblage expanded the vocabulary of artistic expression.

Legacy and Continuing Influence

Impact on Modern Artists

Many contemporary artists cite Rauschenberg as a major influence, especially in their use of mixed media and assemblage techniques. His work demonstrated that art could be a reflection of the chaos and complexity of modern life.

Preservation and Exhibitions

Major museums worldwide host collections of Rauschenberg's Combines, showcasing the innovative use of oil, cloth, and assemblage. Exhibitions continue to highlight his role in

transforming art practices.

Conclusion

Robert Rauschenberg's decision to call his work "paintings" or "assemblage" underscores his revolutionary approach to art. By integrating oil, cloth, and found objects, he challenged conventional boundaries and opened new avenues for creative expression. His legacy endures in the ongoing evolution of mixed-media art, inspiring artists to explore beyond traditional mediums and embrace the richness of materials available in everyday life.

Meta Description:

Discover how Robert Rauschenberg called his work "paintings" or "assemblage" because they used oil, cloth, and found objects. Explore his innovative techniques, iconic works, and lasting influence on contemporary art.

Frequently Asked Questions

What term did Robert Rauschenberg use to describe his work that incorporated oil and cloth?

Robert Rauschenberg called his work 'Combines' because they used oil, cloth, and other mixed media elements.

Why did Robert Rauschenberg refer to his artworks as 'Assemblage'?

He referred to them as 'Assemblage' because they were created by assembling various objects like oil paintings, cloth, and found materials into a unified piece.

How did Robert Rauschenberg's use of oil and cloth influence the classification of his art?

His incorporation of oil and cloth led him to classify his work as 'Combines' or 'Assemblage,' blending painting and sculpture techniques into a mixed-media form.

In what way did Robert Rauschenberg's 'Combines' challenge traditional art categories?

They challenged traditional categories by combining painting, sculpture, and collage elements—using oil, cloth, and found objects—creating a hybrid art form.

What is the significance of the term 'Combines' in relation to Robert Rauschenberg's artworks?

The term 'Combines' signifies the integration of multiple mediums—such as oil paint and cloth—into a single artwork, emphasizing their mixed-media, assemblage nature.

Additional Resources

Robert Rauschenberg called his work _____ paintings, or assemblage, because they used oil, cloth, and various found objects to challenge traditional artistic boundaries and redefine the possibilities of visual art. Rauschenberg's innovative approach blurred the lines between painting and sculpture, between fine art and everyday life, ultimately transforming the landscape of 20th-century art. His pioneering techniques and conceptual depth earned him a reputation as one of the most influential artists of his generation. This article offers a comprehensive exploration of Rauschenberg's work, dissecting his methods, influences, and legacy within the broader context of modern art.

Introduction: The Context of Rauschenberg's Artistic Philosophy

Before diving into the specifics of his work, it's essential to understand the environment in which Robert Rauschenberg operated. Emerging in the post-World War II era, Rauschenberg's art was shaped by a desire to break free from traditional constraints. The dominant art movements of the time—Abstract Expressionism, for example—emphasized emotion, individualism, and spontaneity. Rauschenberg, however, sought to incorporate elements of daily life, material culture, and the mundane into his practice, thereby democratizing art and expanding its scope.

His work was characterized by an openness to experimentation, a refusal to categorize himself strictly as a painter or sculptor, and a belief in the power of art to reflect and engage with contemporary society. This ethos is encapsulated in his own words: he called his creations "combines," a term that underscores their hybrid, assemblage nature.

The Term and Its Significance: 'Combines' and 'Assemblage'

Defining Rauschenberg's 'Combines'

Rauschenberg's term "Combines" is central to understanding his artistic identity. Unlike traditional paintings that focus solely on painted surfaces, Combines integrate a variety of materials and objects—oil paint, fabric, newspaper clippings, wood, metal, and everyday detritus—into a single work. These assemblaged pieces often feature painted elements juxtaposed with three-dimensional objects, creating a layered, textured surface that invites tactile and visual exploration.

Key Characteristics of Rauschenberg's Combines:

- Hybrid Nature: They blend painting, sculpture, collage, and installation.
- Use of Found Objects: Incorporating items from daily life, such as clothing, hardware, or printed material.
- Layered Composition: Multiple materials overlapping, creating complex visual narratives.
- Integration of Text: Often featuring words or printed snippets that add contextual layers.

Why 'Assemblage' Matters

The term 'assemblage' originated in the early 20th century, describing artworks assembled from disparate objects. Rauschenberg's work exemplifies this concept but elevates it by emphasizing the artistic process and conceptual underpinnings. His approach was revolutionary because it challenged the notion of art as a pristine, carefully crafted object, instead celebrating imperfection, randomness, and the intrinsic value of found materials.

Rauschenberg's assemblages serve as a bridge between fine art and everyday life, encouraging viewers to reconsider the boundaries of artistic creation and the potential meanings embedded in ordinary objects.

Materials and Techniques: An Artistic Palimpsest

Oil and Acrylic Paints

Although many of Rauschenberg's works incorporate traditional oil paints, he also employed acrylics, which allowed for greater experimentation with texture and layering. His painterly elements often serve as backgrounds or accents to the assemblaged objects, creating a dialogue between painted surface and three-dimensional material.

Cloth and Textile Elements

Textile components—such as fabric scraps, clothing, or upholstery—are frequently embedded within his works. These elements introduce a tactile dimension, evoke personal or cultural narratives, and contribute to the physicality of the pieces. For instance, Rauschenberg's use of a worn-out shirt or a piece of curtain fabric can evoke themes of identity, memory, or societal commentary.

Found Objects and Ephemera

Rauschenberg's assemblages are notable for their inclusion of objects like newspapers, playing cards, hardware, or discarded items. These materials often carry cultural or historical significance, adding layers of meaning:

- Newspaper clippings: Commentaries on current events or societal issues.
- Cards and game pieces: Symbolic of chance, fate, or play.
- Hardware and tools: Represent industrialization or manual labor.

Techniques of Assembly and Composition

Rauschenberg employed a range of techniques to fuse these diverse elements seamlessly:

- Adhesion and Mounting: Using glue, nails, or staples to secure objects.
- Layering and Overlapping: Creating depth through successive additions.
- Painting Over or Around Objects: Integrating painted elements to unify disparate materials.
- Incorporation of Text: Applying stencils or handwritten words for emphasis or narrative.

Major Works and Their Analyses

E.g., 'Bed' (1955)

One of Rauschenberg's most iconic works, *Bed*, exemplifies his 'combine' methodology. It features a real quilt, pillow, and blanket, combined with painted elements. This piece blurs the boundary between the functional object and fine art, transforming the domestic into a symbol of intimacy and vulnerability.

Analysis:

- The use of actual bedding introduces tactile and emotional resonance.

- The painted elements overlay the textile, suggesting layers of memory and identity.
- The work challenges viewers to reconsider the commonplace object as art.

'Canyon' (1959)

Perhaps Rauschenberg's most ambitious combine, Canyon includes a stuffed eagle, a mirror, a wooden box, and various painted and collaged elements.

Analysis:

- The stuffed eagle symbolizes freedom, power, or perhaps chaos.
- The mirror invites introspection, reflecting the viewer's gaze.
- The assemblage's complexity creates a narrative tension between nature, technology, and human experience.

Other Notable Works

- 'Monogram' (1955-1959): Features a stuffed goat encircled by a tire, painted, and collaged, exemplifying humor, satire, and critique of consumer culture.
- 'Retroactive I' (1964): Combines photographs, painted passages, and found objects, emphasizing memory and history.

Influences and Inspirations

Rauschenberg's eclectic influences contributed to the development of his innovative style:

- Abstract Expressionism: His early engagement with spontaneous painting laid the groundwork for expressive layering.
- Dada and Surrealism: His use of chance operations and found objects echoes Dada's anti-art stance and surrealist techniques.
- Japonisme and Asian Art: Rauschenberg was inspired by Japanese calligraphy and ink paintings, influencing his gestural brushwork.
- Pop Art: His incorporation of popular culture and mass media prefigured themes central to Pop Art.

Furthermore, his relationships with contemporaries like Jasper Johns and Cy Twombly fostered collaborative experimentation and shared ideas about symbolism and materiality.

Philosophy and Conceptual Underpinnings

Rauschenberg's work is undergirded by a philosophy that celebrates process, chance, and the integration of life into art:

- Art as a Reflection of Reality: His assemblages serve as visual diaries, capturing moments, objects, and memories.
- Rejecting Art Hierarchies: By elevating everyday objects to artwork status, he challenged traditional notions of craftsmanship and aesthetics.
- Interactivity and Engagement: His works often invite viewers to interpret, question, or even touch, fostering a participatory experience.

His famous phrase, "The only thing I can't use is a dead cat," humorously underscores his openness to incorporating any material that adds meaning or context.

Legacy and Impact on Contemporary Art

Rauschenberg's hybrid works laid the groundwork for numerous movements and practices:

- Mixed Media and Installation Art: His fusion of disparate materials became a precursor for contemporary installation and multimedia art.
- Conceptual Art: His emphasis on ideas over form influenced artists who prioritize concept over aesthetics.
- Appropriation and Found Object Art: His use of everyday items opened pathways for later artists to explore identity, culture, and consumerism.

His influence extends beyond visual arts into performance, design, and digital media, emphasizing the fluidity and interconnectedness of modern creative practices.

Conclusion: Rauschenberg's Enduring Influence

Robert Rauschenberg's work, characterized by its innovative use of oil, cloth, and found objects, redefined what art could be. Calling his works "Combines" or assemblages, he challenged artistic conventions, blending painting and sculpture into dynamic, layered works that reflect the complexity of contemporary life. His fearless experimentation, conceptual depth, and embrace of everyday materials continue to inspire artists and reshape artistic paradigms today.

Through his pioneering techniques and philosophical outlook, Rauschenberg demonstrated that art is not just a product of craft but a reflection of life itself—an

ongoing assemblage of experience, material, and idea. His legacy endures as a testament to the transformative power of embracing the unconventional and celebrating the ordinary within the realm of fine art.

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