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Robert Rauschenberg: 'The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece'
A Career Encapsulated

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How to picture 1/4 mile? Exactly how far is it? A 1/4 mile is one lap around a track. Imagine artworks placed side by side along that perimeter...it is quite a distance to cover. And yet **Robert Rauschenberg** did just that. He created an artwork comprised of 190 panels, working on it for over 17 years (1981-1998), that represents the distance between his studio and home in **Captiva Island in Florida**. Presented in its entirety for the first time, ***The 1/4 Mile or 2 Furlong Piece***, fills the walls and much of the floor of **LACMA's BCAM**, Level 3. In many ways, this work encapsulates Rauschenberg's career as it illustrates the trajectory of his methods and materials, ranging from abstraction to representation, using mediums as diverse as paint, silkscreen, collage and assemblage.

While the large panels are presented chronologically, it is not necessary to view them in order, but best to wander to and fro while observing the different styles and media. The array of artworks is breathtaking and a bit overwhelming. One way to contextualize Rauschenberg's achievement is to think of it as a parallel to what was happening personally and globally during the time of its creation. As Rauschenberg was a prolific artist and this was not the only piece he worked on over the seventeen years, it can also be seen as snapshots of the different stages of his career. Rauschenberg is well known for his experimentation with non-traditional materials and in this very personal, quasi-narrative work, some of everything is included.

Panel 1, created in 1981, is a mixed media work on plywood juxtaposing fabric, found objects and photo transfers. In many ways, it is quintessential Rauschenberg, as it typifies his process of combining objects and images that resonate together. Rauschenberg borrowed freely from the media and art history, as well as from his previous artworks. Appropriation was one of the tools of his trade. Many of the panels in *The 1/4 Mile* incorporate fragments from news imagery or found photographs, as well as Rauschenberg's own pictures, often cropped and collaged together.

Traversing *The 1/4 Mile* is like going on a journey to visit different styles of painting and sculpture. The earliest panels are collages full of repeated photographs and snippets of text from newspaper advertisements attached to the painted plywood at all angles. The sequence suddenly transforms into larger areas of color, then gets minimal before transitioning into multiple segments of cut cardboard that segues into a flutter of patterned clothing. At times, the panels are filled with intricate fabrics that form quilt-like patterns with no imagery. In others, Rauschenberg traced the silhouettes of friends and family members onto bright orange fabric, surrounding their outlines with images of objects that were specific to that individual.

Panel 59, 1983 is a self-portrait within this sequence. Here, Rauschenberg presents a trace of his body surrounded by images that include his dog, as well as motifs that recur in many of his other artworks. In place of a painted panel, for **Panel 69**, Rauschenberg has created columns of hardback books that stand far from the wall. Many of the later panels are reminiscent of his two and three-dimensional collages where large blocks of color were overlaid with single toned silkscreened images. A section of panels is comprised of loose black brush strokes atop silver screened images that range from the banal to the iconic.

Among the last few panels are free standing sculptures. **Panel 185** has a circular base to which are bolted large-scale metal numbers and letters. Its center is a crumpled yellow road sign with arrows leading in both directions. **Panel 186** is also a found sculpture: three choreographed blinking traffic lights.

Rauschenberg did not conceive of *The 1/4 Mile* as a straight line with a fixed linear progression — the artwork meanders. While the majority of the panels are vertical, some are sculptural, some are shaped, others are multi-dimensional, hang horizontally or are suspended across the space. In **Panel 1**, there are two collaged photographs of pointing fingers going in opposite directions, perhaps suggesting viewers go both forward and back in viewing, and in time. It seems that this is Rauschenberg's directive — look both ways, look all ways and travel the immersive installation of *The 1/4 Mile* at a leisurely pace.

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