

For Immediate Release

NYU's Grey Art Museum Joins an International Roster of Institutions Commemorating Robert Rauschenberg's 100th Birthday

Handle with Care: Robert Rauschenberg's Ecological Conscience

On view September 9, 2025–April 11, 2026

Drawn from the NYU Art Collection, works in the exhibition highlight Rauschenberg's concern for vulnerable people, animals, and habitats.



Robert Rauschenberg, *General Delivery*, 1971. Screen print with printed reproductions on paper, 49 x 34 in. Grey Art Museum, New York University Art Collection. Abby Weed Grey Bequest, G1983.10 © 2025 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

(NEW YORK, NY, August 11, 2025)— In celebration of Robert Rauschenberg's (1925–2008) centennial, New York University's Grey Art Museum presents an exhibition of works from the NYU Art Collection. *Handle with Care: Robert Rauschenberg's Ecological Conscience*—on view from September 9, 2025, through April 11, 2026, at the Grey Art Museum at 18 Cooper Square—explores Rauschenberg's sense of environmental crisis through eight of his editioned works on paper made from 1970 to 1982. These works address environmental and ecological issues, variously reproducing news articles about oil spills, endangered wildlife, and consumer

packaging, and often include hand-rendered and collaged elements. Three are special edition prints commissioned to fundraise for environmental and humanitarian causes.

Rauschenberg's ecological conscience was shaped by his upbringing in Port Arthur, Texas, where oil refineries and pelicans were familiar sights. In 1970, after achieving prominence as a major American artist in New York City, he relocated to Captiva, a small island off the Gulf Coast of Florida. Witnessing oil spills and dwindling bird populations, he approached his artmaking with a new sense of urgency and quickly began to integrate these motifs into his work. Also drawing inspiration from the detritus of daily life, his prints reproduce materials such as newspaper clippings, agricultural feed bags, photographs, postcards, and cardboard.



Robert Rauschenberg, *Mink Chow*, from *Chow Bags* portfolio, 1977. Screen print with paper, graphite, and plastic twine on paper, 48 x 36 1/4 in. Grey Art Museum, New York University Art Collection. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Cohen, 1978.34b © 2025 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Highlights from the exhibition include *General Delivery* (1971), primarily a screen-printed image of torn and flattened cardboard boxes. Postcard images of the Floridian surf and brown pelicans appear in the print itself and as collaged elements that the artist affixed to the print's surface. Native to both Captiva Island and the artist's hometown, brown pelicans were endangered due to pesticide use and were a common feature in his prints. With its environmental focus and use of cardboard, this work marked a pivotal turn for the artist and spurred his *Cardbirds* (1971) and *Cardboards* (1971–72) series. Another work, *Mink Chow* (1977) is one of two prints on display from Rauschenberg's *Chow Bag* (1976–77) series, which reproduces imagery from Purina's animal feed packaging. Prompting questions about animal care ethics at the outskirts of the agricultural industry and demonstrating his increasing ecological awareness, this print includes the manufacturer's charismatic rendering of a mink, an animal bred for its pelt.

A boom in the American print market in the 1970s allowed Rauschenberg to fundraise for environmental and humanitarian causes by creating special edition prints for a range of sponsors. Commissioned by the Academic and Professional Action Committee for a Responsible Congress for their *Peace Portfolio I*, Rauschenberg's *Untitled* (1970) is composed of newspaper clippings with headlines about oil and gas spills in the Gulf Coast. These headlines are juxtaposed with an article describing the U.S. Senate's refusal to pass legislation banning military use of chemical defoliants in Vietnam. This was one of several works the artist created to call attention to oil and its mismanagement.

Organized by the Grey Art Museum with support from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, *Handle with Care* contributes to a global slate of 2025–26 centennial initiatives reexamining Rauschenberg’s legacy, honoring his expansive creativity, spirit of curiosity, and commitment to change. The exhibition is curated by Phoebe Herland, Rauschenberg Curatorial Intern, Grey Art Museum, and doctoral candidate at NYU’s Institute of Fine Arts.

“The Grey Art Museum is extremely proud to organize and present *Handle with Care*, joining an international roster of institutions commemorating the artist’s 100th birthday. Museum and University leaders, past and present, have long dreamed of a moment when the Grey could provide resources—space, funds, and time—to NYU students to organize exhibitions from our permanent collection,” says Michèle Wong, Interim Director. “This exhibition is a testament to our collective dedication to realizing this goal,” Wong adds.



Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled*, from *Peace Portfolio I*, 1970. Color offset lithograph on paper, 26 x 21 in. Grey Art Museum, New York University Art Collection. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Percival Goodman, 1971.69a © 2025 Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

“In considering the Grey’s collection of works by Robert Rauschenberg, a subtle theme surfaced without my looking for it,” says curator Phoebe Herland, “and I imagine the artist could say the same. Rauschenberg was, by nature, a socially engaged artist who paid keen attention to the world around him. The works on view reflect a unique moment when the environmental movement and the print market emerged and strengthened in stride, offering a possible model for future activists.”

A brochure featuring an essay by Herland accompanies the exhibition.

Through this focused presentation of impactful prints and editions, *Handle with Care* offers a timely examination of Rauschenberg’s engagement with environmental issues, inviting contemporary audiences to reflect on art’s role in fostering responsible global stewardship.

Sponsorship

Handle with Care: Robert Rauschenberg’s Ecological Conscience is organized by the Grey Art Museum, New York University, and curated by Phoebe Herland, Rauschenberg Curatorial Intern, Grey Art Museum. With support from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, the Grey Art Museum joins an international roster of institutions commemorating the artist’s 100th birthday.

Rauschenberg’s conviction that engagement with art can nurture people’s sensibilities as individuals, community members, and citizens was key to his ethos. The Centennial celebrations seek to allow audiences familiar with him and those encountering the artist for the first time to form fresh perspectives about his artwork.

A year of global activities and exhibitions in honor of Rauschenberg's Centennial reexamines the artist through a contemporary lens, highlighting his enduring influence on generations of artists and advocates for social progress. The Centennial's activation of the artist's legacy promotes cross-disciplinary explorations and creates opportunities for critical dialogue. Learn more by visiting rauschenbergfoundation.org.



About the artist and the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation builds on the legacy of artist Robert Rauschenberg, emphasizing his belief that artists can drive social change. Rauschenberg sought to act in the “gap” between art and life, valuing chance and collaboration across disciplines. As such, the Foundation celebrates new and even untested ways of thinking.

Robert Rauschenberg's (b. 1925, Port Arthur, Texas; d. 2008, Captiva Island, Florida) six-decade career was defined by boundless experimentation, the unconventional use of materials, and a lifelong commitment to collaboration. Rauschenberg studied at several art institutions including Black Mountain College, where he was taught by former Bauhaus instructor Josef Albers and collaborated with influential creatives including Annie Albers, Hazel Larsen Archer, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Cy Twombly, and Susan Weil. As his career began to gain momentum in New York in the mid-1950s, he also began collaborating with Jasper Johns, and the two artists pushed each other toward new modes of practice that integrated the signs, images, and materials of the everyday world. In 1962, Rauschenberg began utilizing silkscreen techniques in his paintings, reflecting a growing interest in mass media and reproduction. By the late 1960s, he increasingly focused on interdisciplinary work, particularly printmaking and technologically driven projects, which expanded the possibilities of postwar art. He achieved international acclaim, notably winning the Grand Prize for painting at the Venice Biennale in 1964. In 1970, after some 25 years in New York, Rauschenberg returned to the Gulf Coast, settling on the remote Floridian island of Captiva. This return to a more natural environment deepened his ecological conscience and influenced his art. Rauschenberg's expansive artistic philosophy and innovative engagement with the world's materials continue to influence art to the present day.

About the Grey Art Museum

Over the last five decades, the Grey Art Museum at New York University has organized exhibitions that have encompassed all the visual arts: painting, sculpture, drawing and printmaking, photography, architecture and decorative arts, video, film, and performance. In addition to producing its own exhibitions, which often travel to other venues in the United States and abroad, the museum hosts traveling shows that might otherwise not be seen in New York. In conjunction with its exhibitions, the Grey produces scholarly publications that are distributed

worldwide and sponsors public programs, including lectures, symposia, panel discussions, and films.

General Information

Grey Art Museum, New York University

18 Cooper Square, New York, NY 10003

(Mailing address: 20 Cooper Square, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003)

Tel: 212-998-6780, Fax: 212-995-4024

E-mail: greyartmuseum@nyu.edu Website: greyartmuseum.nyu.edu

Hours

Tuesday: 11 am–6 pm

Wednesday: 11 am–8 pm

Thursday: 11 am–6 pm

Friday: 11 am–6 pm

Saturday: 11 am–5 pm

Closed Sunday, Monday, and major holidays

Admission

Suggested donation: \$5; free of charge to NYU students, faculty, and staff

Press Contact

Sofeia Eddy | sofeia.eddy@nyu.edu | 212-998-6782