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RAUSCHENBERG'S R.O.C.I. OPENS IN VENEZUELA

Caracas, Venezuela -- A traveling collection of works by world-famous artist Robert Rauschenberg will go on display this month in Venezuela, the third stop of its five-year global tour for peace. The Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (R.O.C.I.) opens at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo in Caracas, Venezuela on September 12. R.O.C.I. will visit a total of 22 countries before culminating five years later in the first one-man show of a living artist ever held at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

In every country on the R.O.C.I. tour, the artist will work with local painters, writers and artisans to create a series of pieces capturing the cultural character of the region and its people. When R.O.C.I. first opened in Mexico City at the Museo Rufino Tamayo in April, 1985, the exhibition was made up of 230 Rauschenberg works from the past decade. In July, 1985, the exhibition went on display at the Museo de Bellas Artes in Santiago, Chile. In both Mexico and Chile, the artist replaced a number of older works with new pieces completed during R.O.C.I.'s stay in each country. Gradually, the original exhibition of older works will be eclipsed completely by these and other new regional artworks. The final show at the National Gallery will be comprised of accumulated pieces representing all 22 countries. Among the other countries R.O.C.I. is scheduled to visit are China, Japan, Spain, Italy and Morocco.

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The U.S. public will be linked continuously to the course of the tour. A single work from the series of each country will be donated to the National Gallery of Art for display while the exhibition is in that country. In July, the National Gallery of Art established a new gallery within its Twentieth Century Collection dedicated to Rauschenberg's paintings and sculptures from 1949 to 1979. The new gallery will also include the works from the global tour as it progresses. The first of the donated works, produced as a part of the Mexican series, was presented to the National Gallery in May, 1985. The second work, inspired by Rauschenberg's visit to Chile, replaced the Mexican work in July, 1985. The artist will donate the Venezuela-inspired piece in Washington, D.C. later this month. These works and the 19 others will be incorporated into the National Gallery's permanent collection.

R.O.C.I.'s objective is to promote peace and understanding through the universal language of art. Describing one of the most ambitious exhibitions ever undertaken by an artist, Rauschenberg said, "Art stimulates, educates and illustrates, even though it is not totally understood at first glance. Creative energy alone provokes curiosity and curiosity is the first step to understanding and tolerance. A sharing of our intimate eccentricities brings us closer together."

Trying to bring art and different cultures c

By Isabel Cristina Calcano
Daily Journal Staff

Six years ago, while working in a mill in China, he had a dream, a dream which today is in the process of becoming a stunning artistic reality.

"It was one of the oldest paper mills there and one of the saddest things about it was that people would stay there and die without knowing what was going on in the rest of the world or the 45 kilometers around them."

He said he felt he had to do something about it, show other parts of the world to these Chinese and work as some kind of a delegate, using art to bring people and cultures closer together.

Today, North American painter Robert Rauschenberg has materialized his dream, by turning a handful of ideas and hopes into a collection of art works which are to travel the world for five years under the name "Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange" or R.O.C.I.

The project, which started to take form earlier this year, is really just an exhibition, a mobile collection that will grow as it travels, incorporating bits and pieces of the cultures of each country into new works of art, Rauschenberg said in a press conference Wednesday.

So far, R.O.C.I. has been in Mexico and Chile. Tonight, thanks to the joint efforts of Rauschenberg and the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Caracas, R.O.C.I. will make its Venezuelan debut.

The exhibition will be inaugurated by President Jaime Lusinchi at 7 p.m. today in the MACC's seat in Parque Central.

That the exhibit is opening today does not mean that Venezuela has just become part of the project. Venezuela joined R.O.C.I. months ago, when Rauschenberg paid the country a visit, spending 10 days investigating and learning from its culture.

"It was quite a surprise for me," Rauschenberg said. "I thought in (South) America I would find fights between the Spanish and the Indians and it was not like that at all."

Rauschenberg's exhibit 'is sort of an aggressive peace mission... with maybe a belief that if we understood each other more we would have to care for each other.'

Individual cultural differences also surprised the artist, who said he expected to find many similarities between Mexico, Chile and Venezuela, the only South American countries included in his project.

Rather, Rauschenberg found three very different countries, with people who have little more than a language in common. Of the three, Rauschenberg said, Venezuela has been the most surprising.

"The trip (through Venezuela) was arranged in such a way as to get the biggest sweep possible," he said. "We visited about six Indian tribes and I think I saw every water fall... you have no idea how many waterfalls you have here," he said in a cheerful manner that is typical of him.

Aside from the jungles, Rauschenberg also saw "the sophistication of Caracas, where I think we saw the most sophisticated people, and Maracaibo, a completely different society."

Rauschenberg would not describe his paintings, preferring instead to allow his art to describe itself. He did admit, however, that "Venezuela so far has been the richest inspirational country that I have been in." Rauschenberg's Venezuelan impressions are among the works to be exhibited at the MACC.

From Venezuela, R.O.C.I. will go to China, then to Tibet, then to Spain, Italy and some African and Asian countries. In all, Rauschenberg said, the exhibit will travel

through 22 countries, and will include examples from each of the five continents.

R.O.C.I. has been called by many artists and critics "one of the most ambitious projects in the world." What is special about this exhibition is not only the art, despite the fact that Rauschenberg's activities as a painter have given critics much to talk about over the years. It is the purpose behind it all that makes this project really special.

"R.O.C.I. is sort of an aggressive peace mission that uses art as communication — the way I tend to use it — with maybe a belief that if we understood each other more we would have to care for each other," Rauschenberg said. "I believe that art is one of the purest forms of communication."

That the purpose of a work is to communicate is, in a way, an explanation for Rauschenberg's artistic style.

Rauschenberg, born in 1925 in Port Arthur, Texas, did not gain interest in painting until 1942, when he joined the US Navy and worked as a neuropsychiatric technician in various hospitals of California.

"It was there that I learned the slight difference that separates sanity from craziness and I realized that we need a combination of both," he is quoted as having said in the past.

He then joined the Kansas City Art Institute and School of Design, and studied in the Academie Julian in Paris and Black Mountain College in North Carolina.

Just like the incident in the Chinese paper mill, aspects of daily life are what motivate Rauschenberg's artistic tendencies. "Inspiration for me comes from the streets," he said.

Rauschenberg's art is generally called "pop art"

'I studied with probably the greatest disciplinarian in art, Joseph Albers... I was his enigma, I couldn't do anything right. I finally figured out that in water color class what he wanted was Cezanne and in drawing class what he wanted was Matisse and I started doing much better.'

— Robert Rauschenberg



DREAMS COMING TRUE — North American painter Robert Rauschenberg has materialized his dream, by turning a handful of ideas and hopes into a collection of art works which are to travel the world for five years under the name "Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange" or R.O.C.I. So far, R.O.C.I. has been in Mexico and Chile. Tonight, thanks to the joint efforts of Rauschenberg and the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Caracas, R.O.C.I. will make its Venezuelan debut. The artworks at the exhibit.

and his work is compared to that of Lichtenstein or Warhol, mainly because it incorporates elements of all kinds to paintings. Rauschenberg uses shoes, socks, telephone books, traffic signs, tires, pillows and other things as much as he uses wood, paper, oil, canvas and other traditional artistic materials.

But Rauschenberg, unlike his colleagues, does not try to justify his works or collages as art to the eyes of others, only to his. He said he does, however, work to produce something that lasts and that has artistic meaning.

Like his work of the '50s, when he was known as the "enfant terrible" of contemporary art, his current ideas — like R.O.C.I. — continue to be innovative. This, he said, is his personality.

"I know my own habits and I apologize for them, but it's hard not to be yourself," Rauschenberg said referring to the use of shoes and similar objects as artistic material.

What some people call "normal" art — painting in the purest sense — is not unfamiliar to Rauschenberg, though. "I studied with probably the greatest disciplinarian in art, Joseph Albers... I was his enigma, I couldn't do anything right," Rauschenberg said.

"I finally figured out that in water color class what he

wanted was Cezanne and in drawing class what he wanted was Matisse and I started doing much better," he added.

But Rauschenberg's "normal" paintings, he said, are very, very few. His best-known works, those which at first made him an artistic troublemaker and later a renowned artist, are the unusual, "pop art" ones.

When Rauschenberg first appeared on the artistic scene, some art lovers and even connoisseurs, were very surprised.

In 1955, for example, Rauschenberg took the pillow and the blankets from his own bed and pasted them inside a frame decorated with an expressionist background. When this work was presented in the Spoleto Festival of Italy in 1958, the organizers of the event sent the work to the warehouse.

When Rauschenberg returned to Italy in 1964 for the Venice Biennial, "Bed" and his new work "Monogram" (painting of a goat surrounded by a tire, seated on a collage, were still considered a little "strong." Still, Rauschenberg became the third North American (after Whistler and Tobey) to win the Biennial's main painting prize.

Today, "Bed" and "Monogram" are not only well accepted, but also con-

sidered two of the most illustrative works of the post-war period. Other popular Rauschenberg works are the "Hoarfrost" series, "Cardboards," and "Hog Heaven."

According to critics, Rauschenberg's style has evolved somewhat "as the artist becomes part of the establishment." But Rauschenberg is still somewhat out of the ordinary.

"I congratulate anybody who is doing art, because art these days is a rarity. But I can't look for my ideas and inspirations in art," he said. "This is not out of disrespect, it's out of priorities. I would rather go see the Indians in the interior than go to have coffee with another artist."

He has said he also prefers walking around the block looking for material than going to art shops and that he likes to paint in a way people can't really remember. According to him, if one can easily remember what a work of art looks like, it dies too soon.

These days, Rauschenberg looks for material not around his house in New York, but in the deepest corners of Venezuela, Chile, Tibet, Spain or Africa, for his main concern at the moment is being able to complete R.O.C.I..

"I am 59 now, and when I was younger I thought my curiosity would diminish," he



For research purposes only. RRFA10 Robert Rauschenberg

es closer



materialized his dream of turning a handful of five years under the name "Rauschenberg Chile. Tonight, thanks to the joint efforts make its Venezuelan debut. Above is one of (DJ photos by Felipe Ojeda)

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said. "But I find myself wanting to do more now that I have less time," he said.

At the moment, Rauschenberg — a funny, open, easy-going man — looks as if he could do far more than finish R.O.C.I. His hair is only now beginning to turn white and he acts and speaks as a young man who has a tremendous amount of experience. In the press conference he was wearing gray jeans, a shirt that looked like one of his paintings done in various shades of gray, bright orange socks and a sophisticated version of a pair of leather sneakers.

As he spoke, he made it clear that R.O.C.I. is also in the "baby" stage now and that there's still much to be done. But when the project is over, a dream that belongs not only to Rauschenberg, but to many, that of seeing the world come together into one big project, will have come true.

"I said in the '50s that if I were successful in painting my point of view, there would be no need for me to be an artist any more."

The Rauschenberg Overseas Cultural Interchange will be inaugurated at 7 p.m. today in the MACC at Parque Central and will be on view to the public in all of the museum's halls, including the Ipostel and Cadafe extensions.

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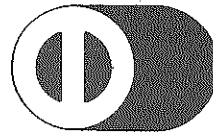
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