"Kathimerini", 23rd August 1981

Rauschenberg: The Artist with Infinite Possibilities

Whatever he sows bears fruit by inspiring his contemporaries and the younger generations.

To talk to Rauschenberg for five whole hours was a privilege; he is a many-sided, dynamic artist, and at the same time a very charming man with a magnetic personality. His work, that extends to many fields, his presence, the way he is inspired, the way he functions by instinct alone, the energetic way he moves the inexhaustible possibilities for renewal he seems to possess, the orbit he runs in a giddy pace, always on the bastions, continuously creating new goals, all of these have made him for the last thirty years, not only the foremost artist of the American School (which replaced Paris after the second world war) but also an internationally recognised symbol for experiment and innovation in art.

His innovations, made with the intention of renewing artistic expression and changing the viewpoint in art today, differ from other contemporary experimentations and it is this fact that established this artist's authority.

The seeds Rauschenberg sows have born have inspired both artists of his own age and of the younger generations. His importance was first internationally recognised by the award he received in the Vénice Biennale of 1964, the Grand Prix in Painting. It was the first time an American artist was honoured there, something that surprised the Europeans. Rauschenberg has, since that managed to keep up his prolific, instinctive and always creative inventiveness in all sectors: painting, environments, constructions, happenings, music, choreography, dance (in 1958 he founded together with John Cage and Merce Cunningham the Cunningham Dance Company) the theatre, the cinema etc.

Rauschenberg impresses one with his spontaneity and his simplicity, despite his great success, his great number of one-man shows and his participation in important museums and other exhibitions as well as the existence of an extremely significant bibliography on his oeuvre.
These are qualities of genuine talent and of a real person that does not pretend to be something else, but manages to be always himself.

The discussion with him was extremely interesting.
- I know that you hate to give interviews.
- It depends... if they ask me such things as "where were you born?", I get discouraged.
- I believe that you're in this country for the first time. What are your first impressions? What did you see, hear, taste or feel in Athens?
- When I saw the city from high up from the plane, I was surprised by its size. I did not think it would extend so far. I arrived frustrated from the travel itself the strikes, delays, obstacles of all sorts, lost luggage the general anxiety travelling entails. The first time I relayed was when I found myself at the National Archaeological Museum.
- What did you particularly like there?
- The Mycanaen finds. The cups from Vafi for example, do not represent themselves, they are themselves. Integral in their authority. The archaic Kouroi - even their stereotype smile has a charm - provoke connotations with Apollo. The Hellenistic sculpture.
- You do not mention the classical period.
- I do not like the way that logic rules in the classical Logic is a limitation, a trap.

Communication in depth
- I suppose you prefer the Hellenistic period, because the sentiment is obvious.
- Exactly. I like that you can see a clean effort to achieve communication in depth, which has nothing to do with the conventional communication that is governed by logic.
- What are your plans for the future?
- I have many plans and most of these plans coincide. I cannot function in any other way. I believe firmly in exhausting work. The kind of work that happens in many fields simultaneously and all with great energy.
I suppose the tension from this many-sided activity multiplies the possibilities of inspiration and expression.

Yes. This is the reason why I dislike holidays. Travelling is for me working. I try to visit new places all the time so as to rejuvenate my inspiration with new impressions. This kind of renewal manifests itself instinctively later in my work.

Holidays for you must mean some special moments - perhaps rare - which you live with a particular intensity, without any preparation or planning.

That is what happens. When I cook something I like well or when I enjoy a nice bath. When I get excited about something I happen to see in the street - and then I really feel rested.

Is it true that you're planning an exhibition which will travel round the world?

Yes. It will be a show that will start its world tour in January 1982 and will travel for four years. It will be organized by Pontus Hulten, the exdirector of the Centre Pompidou, who is now director of the Los Angeles Museum of Modern Art, which will open in 1984. Russia, China and Greece will be among the countries where this exhibition will to be place. For its presentation in Athens I found the Bernier "Technohoros" particularly appropriate. This show will represent my work of the last two years.

I prefer the cyclons

How are your latest works related to your previous creations? Have you adopted a "thrifty line", as in "Jammers", 1975-1976, or some more intricate form, as in "Combine Paintings", 1974?

My new work, created in the last four months - constructions, almost every one on wheels, provided with their own source of light - has a strong psychological base. A special type of a romantic, grotesque mood evolves. Made with collage, photographs, colour i.e. painting, these constructions have titles such as "ancient incident" a piece which is as strong as my "monogram" from 1955-1957, or "suicide of two foreign agents or movable fever", which reflect the nightmares I have been having lately or vice versa. It could be both together. Before leaving for Greece, I sent my work to New York for
fear of new cyclones. (Hurricanes)
- They must be a terrible experience.
- To tell you the truth I much prefer to die at home from a cyclon than to die from gas from a government experiment. I trust nature much more than I trust the State.
- You said once that the artist should be only another ingredient of the finished work and should work together with the rest of the materials. What did you mean? Are you summarising a basic concept in your artistic expression?
- Each material is subject to natural limitations, yet the possibilities of its being handled according to the psychological relations developed with it, are inexhaustible. Personally, I never try to achieve what I want when creating a work; by which I mean I don't strive to get at something I have concocted in my mind beforehand. I create while being in "another state" - not really knowing the outcome - instinctively. I function unconsciously via my experience and my impressions. And this because I don't possess, nor would I wish to possess, a trained mind subordinate to a logic that makes one live in the past, never in the present nor in the future. Here there lies the difficulty in devoting yourself entirely to the thing you're doing and avoiding repetitions and easy solutions. You really become invulnerable, if you live through a fresh adventure every time. I believe that in this way you give a lot, but, of course, it is never enough.

Beware of stability
- In most of your pieces there is a constant charge in the focal point of the composition. It is something suggesting a sense of rhythm. As in the case of music one bears through time, so does one see your compositions in the prism of time, a characteristic that reveals the link between your work on the one hand and music and dance on the other.
- I believe in an instinctive, potential development, the kind that has the power to curb the great danger we are faced with, both in life and in art: stability. The heterogeneity, the multiplicity of handling, the variety of tensions and con-
ditions that a work suggests, the fact that it is open to everything that surrounds the artists - this in the only sense in which I see a social message in my work - are the blood count of the dynamism of the instinct that goes into the making of a piece. It is only guarantee of its authority, i.e., its true existence. And this because you have the impression that you will be discovering something new all the time, it doesn't matter how many times you look at it. In other words, the work is always alive, you cannot take in all at once and finish with it. Therefore, when a work of art is remembered perfectly, it ceases to exist.

- It is due to this uninhibited manifestation of the instinct of the artist that the spectator's imagination and creative sense are stimulated; a function in which art finds its supreme justification.

- Yes, instinct, imagination and experience as they co-exist, with all their interactions, are the only possible guarantee that the artistic product has a meaning, i.e. that it establishes a profound communication between artist and spectator. A deep contact which is a significant offering to life in general, free as it is from the trap of logic. A logic that functions through the extremely dull concepts of right and wrong, while there exist something much more real: ourselves. Because this is exactly what above all demands and justifies hard work, those who spend life trying in vain to discover what to do with it, they would better give up and die. I may be wrong, of course. Yet it would be the first time - at least up to now - that I shall be wrong about this...

An interview with D.Eliopoulou-Rogan

Caption of a photo showing Rauschenberg:

The famous artist R. Rauschenberg was in Athens for a few days.
Dear Bob,

I'm sure you wondered at some point what happened to the translation of the article by Dora Rogan in "Kathimerini," which I promised to send you.

The person I wanted to have make the translation was unavailable, and I finally asked someone we used to use. It’s not a happy translation, but I made enough corrections to make it readable, and at least it’s accurate.

Anyway, here it is enclosed, together with many, many thanks for having accorded the interview to my friend, Dora.

I also wish to tell you how much I enjoyed being with you this summer. Meeting you would have been a gratifying event; it was special for me this summer in particular.

Please know that Marina, Jean Bernier, and I are very eager that a show of yours take place in Athens. "Technohoros" (our factory space) is entirely at your disposition. If the exhibition Pontus Hultén is organizing does take place here, we would very likely ask you if we could make a show in the gallery simultaneously, if that were possible.

I hope to see you again soon.

Yours Truly,

Karen Bernier
Ρασούμπερκ: Ο καλλιτέχνης με τις ανεξάντλητες δυνατότητες
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Η ΥΠΟΛΗΞΙΗ ΤΗΣ ΜΠΕΡΛΙΝΑΣ

Κάπου μπήκα, κάτι έγινε, όπως είχε βλέπει, κάτι έγινε.

Και ο Άνδρος έδιψε κάτι νέο, το οποίο έφτασε μέχρι τον άνθρωπο που έδιψε, έφτασε μέχρι τον ελεύθερο άνθρωπο που είχε μια νέα ιδέα.

Ο Άνδρος έκανε μία σημαντική κίνηση. Τον είχε ρίξει μέσα στον καφέ, τον είχε ρίξει στον ελεύθερο άνθρωπο που έδιψε, τον είχε ρίξει στον ελεύθερο άνθρωπο που είχε μια νέα ιδέα.

Τότε η Σπάνγκολ Πλάντ έβγαλε τον έλεγχο της θέσης, όπως είχε την πρύτανη στην ζώνη της θέσης. Ο Άνδρος έκανε μία σημαντική κίνηση. Τον είχε ρίξει μέσα στον καφέ, τον είχε ρίξει στον ελεύθερο άνθρωπο που έδιψε, τον είχε ρίξει στον ελεύθερο άνθρωπο που είχε μια νέα ιδέα.

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