

Yankee Go Home

VITORIA HADBA

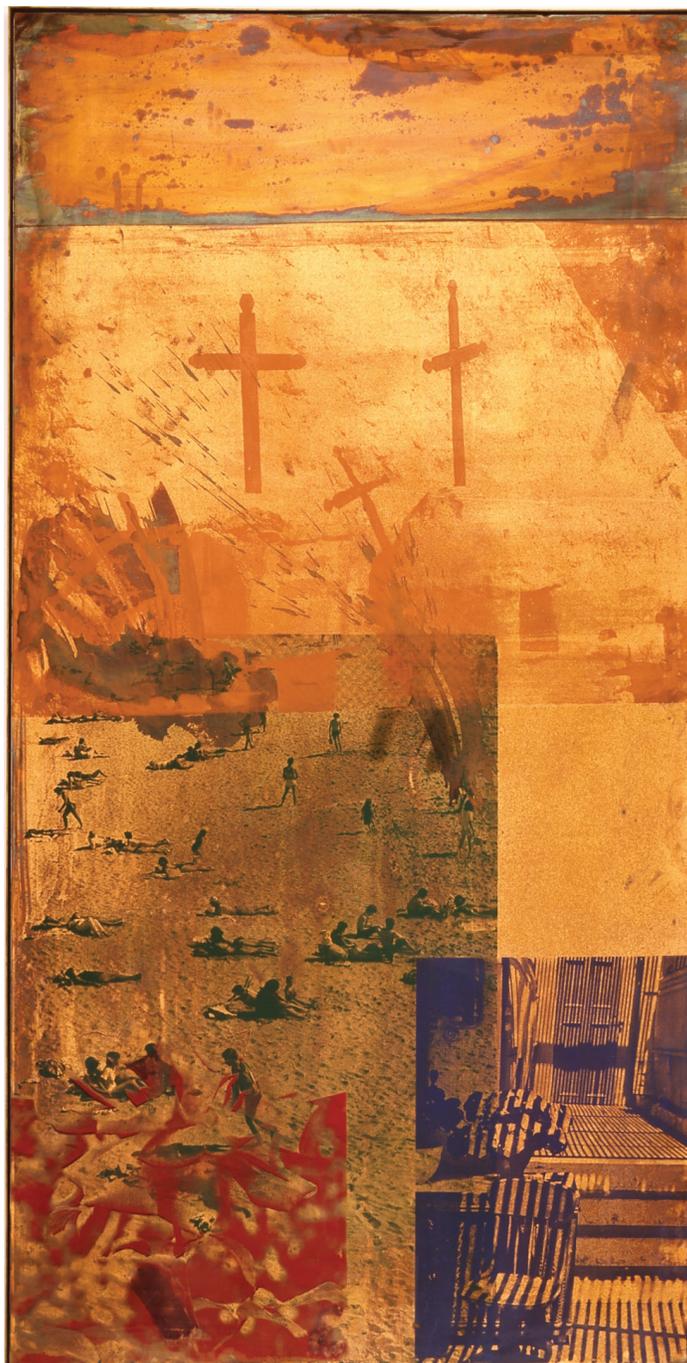


fig. 1

Robert Rauschenberg, *Copperhead-Bite VII / ROCI CHILE*, 1985
Silkscreen ink and tarnish on copper, 96 1/8 x 48 1/8 inches (244 x 122.2 cm)
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

Yankee Go Home

I never experienced as much anger about any artist's project ... as about ROCI CHILE. The reactions from friends, fellow artists, and others was absolute outrage ... Personally, I would have counted myself among the critics, but Rauschenberg saw his Chilean exhibit as a radical gesture that would eventually help to open the path to democracy.¹

Donald Saff

By the 1980s, Robert Rauschenberg was enjoying the fame and fortune that came with a long and respected career. Yet in 1984, he announced his most ambitious and polemical project to date, the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange or ROCI.² Using his art as the vehicle, he aimed to bring peace and understanding to what he considered "sensitive areas," where there was little freedom and often endemic poverty.³ His trip to Chile (October–November, 1984) was his second stop in a longer journey that ultimately included eleven countries. The Andean nation was arguably the most volatile, violent, and politically unstable place he visited. The 1985 *ROCI CHILE* exhibition was, and still is, received negatively by most of the public, critics, and revisionist art historians in South and North America. In retrospect, he referred to his experience there as "a real drag."⁴

One of the works produced for the exhibition, *Copperhead-Bite VII / ROCI CHILE* (1985; fig. 1), brings the contradictions of this altruistic project to the fore. Consisting of silkscreened imagery on a copper plate, it belongs to the *Copperhead-Bite* series consisting of twelve "metal paintings" produced in Rauschenberg's Captiva studio, but based on his trip to Chile the year before.⁵ *El viajero mundo de Rauschenberg (Rauschenberg's Traveled World)* was hosted by the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Santiago, from July to August, 1985, and included *Copperhead-Bite VII*.

The work consists of a large copper plate (246.1 × 130.2 cm) with four different scenes silkscreened in acrylic paint five times: a makeshift cemetery, a bird's-eye view of a beach scene with bathers, a close-up view of a flower (likely a rose), and an interior courtyard with a chair placed in front of a doorway. In the upper-middle section of the work, the cemetery is screened in a copper-colored acrylic paint, mimicking the effect of acids on metal. This lack of contrast between the surface and the paint, together with the visual confusion caused by the green

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beach scene, which was partially printed underneath the cemetery, compromises the clarity of the images. A murky gray, painterly splatter and a few gestural brushstrokes blur the division between the bathers and the cemetery, reminding the viewer of Rauschenberg's connection with Abstract Expressionism and his interest in the medium of paint. To the bottom left, overlapping with the bathers, the rose was printed twice (in white and magenta). The courtyard, screened in blue, also visually impinges on the beach scene.

By employing such layering, Rauschenberg choreographed the scenes in a dance of concealing and revealing. All of the source images came from photographs taken by the artist during his first visit to Chile, situating the viewer in its specific geography and culture. Additionally, the large, vertical format of *Copperhead-Bite VII* evokes the idea of a door or portal to Rauschenberg's Chile. Yet, doors, chairs, and beach scenes were already part of the artist's iconography, which raises the question as to what extent the motifs of *Copperhead-Bite VII* were based on his pre-conceived visual tropes and how much the country itself inspired them.

Unlike the majority of scholarly texts about *ROCI CHILE*, which are either angry or laudatory, the goal of this paper is to consolidate these opposing perspectives and establish a more nuanced understanding of Rauschenberg's problematic attempt at cultural diplomacy in a country under a brutal military dictatorship. The artist's liberal political views did not always translate into effective action outside the United States; moreover, Rauschenberg always refrained from overt ideological commentary or didactic messaging in his art. Arguably his view of the inherent openness of his art did not play well in Chile. As *ROCI* Artistic Director Donald Saff put it, the artist was profoundly naïve to perceive "the Chilean exhibit as a radical gesture that would eventually help to open the path to democracy."⁶

To begin with, Rauschenberg's identity as an American artist, and one who positioned himself as a cultural ambassador, was politically fraught. According to art historian Christin J. Mamiya, the *ROCI* project on the whole "reveals the degree to which Rauschenberg had become identified with an American vision."⁷ In Chile, the artist fit the derogatory *gringo* stereotype—a white tourist infatuated by otherness.⁸ Moreover, at this time, the United States was directly and deeply involved in the rise to power of Augusto Pinochet—a military officer who was appointed the Chilean army commander in chief in 1973. Pinochet ultimately seized control in a violent coup d'état shortly after his appointment, which deposed democratically elected Marxist president Salvador Allende.⁹ As the United States dreaded the rise of Communism in Latin America during the Cold War period, the coup received financial and military assistance from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).¹⁰

Pinochet's regime was marked by fear and systematic suppression of political parties. Not only Marxists were seen as members of the opposition, but also centrists together with anyone who was not outspokenly pro-Pinochet were at risk.¹¹ Human rights violations included burning teenagers alive, beheading people believed to be Communist, and dragging journalists out of their beds in the middle of the night to shoot them.¹² Others simply "disappeared." The "disappeared" were the thousands who opposed, and were executed by, the government and whose whereabouts were unknown.¹³ And, though the first six years of the dictator's government were considered the most violent (e.g. more than 1,260 Chileans were killed between September and December of 1973), in 1984 he instituted a state of siege after months of political unrest.¹⁴

Media channels that opposed the dictatorship were censored and shut down, among them the radio stations Cooperativa, Santiago, and Chilena.¹⁵ According to American journalist Pamela Constable and Chilean political scholar Arturo Valenzuela, until 1977, the only critical journalism came from small, private, and obscure publications.¹⁶ In the same year, a government decree forced media channels to send the material they intended to publish or broadcast to Dirección Nacional de Comunicación Social (DINACOS)—a government censorship bureau—for approval.¹⁷ In his quest for legitimacy, Pinochet held two plebiscites during his time in office.¹⁸ The first, in 1980, approved a new constitution—but the electoral procedure was likely corrupted.¹⁹ Then, in 1988, following democratic trends in other Latin American countries, a second plebiscite held in 1988 removed Pinochet from power.²⁰ Although by 1990 he no longer held office, he continued to work for the Chilean military until 1998.²¹

Despite the government brutality, Pinochet achieved great economic success until the early 1980s.²² Rauschenberg's visit in 1984, and his return for the exhibition in 1985, coincided with the recession and some of the most repressive phases of the dictatorship. Given the direct involvement of the United States in toppling Allende, Rauschenberg's Chilean venture was understandably tainted from the start. The artist must also be held responsible for not being sufficiently informed about Chile's past and present. The briefing papers he received were produced by his staff, and contained an overview of the country's history and culture that was inadequate, reduced to tourist information and stereotypes.²³ For example, while eating habits and preferences were discussed in detail throughout three paragraphs, the complexities of the multifaceted political situation were explained in no more than a few sentences.²⁴ The damage was done: mocking the artist's superficial understanding of Chile, a 1985 newspaper cartoon showed him depicting a bottle of wine and a lotto poster as symbols of the country (fig. 2). The image in question parodies *Copperhead Grande* (1985), a *ROCI CHILE* work (fig. 3).²⁵

fig. 2
Newspaper clipping,
including a cartoon about
Robert Rauschenberg, from
El Mercurio, 1985. Robert
Rauschenberg Foundation.

EL MERCURIO — Jueves 11 de Julio de 1985

A 3

EL MERCURIO

FUNDADO POR AGUSTIN EDWARDS

El Problema de la Inflación

Las alzas de precios de junio deben calificarse como altas, independientemente de que se use el Índice de Precios al Consumidor o el Índice de Precios al Por Mayor.

No es del caso repetir aquí las tasas de inflación que se han estado entregando, pero conviene recordar que tanto las correspondientes al último mes como las acumuladas en el año o los pertinentes para los últimos 12 meses son de magnitudes desacostumbradas en los últimos cinco o seis años.

La inflación se ha situado a tasas que eran habituales en las décadas de 1950 y 1960, aunque son significativamente inferiores a las que nuestro país experimentó en los años de mayor inestabilidad de precios. Es, además, evidente que en la economía chilena no existen desequilibrios de fondo que justifiquen la persistencia de una inflación elevada, por lo que es razonable esperar una reducción de la misma más adelante.

El origen de la alta inflación que vivimos no está, indudablemente, en desajustes monetarios o crediticios de significación, como tampoco en problemas fiscales profundos. Si bien durante el año pasado se tendió a una política demasiado expansiva, ella afectó poco los equilibrios básicos de la economía, al menos en lo referente al déficit fiscal y al desequilibrio de la balanza de pagos o, si se prefiere, no condujo a un exceso de gasto interno desproporcionado en relación con la disponibilidad de recursos del país.

Las elevadas alzas de precios experimentadas en los últimos meses tienen su origen en el aumento persistente de los aranceles, en el recrudescimiento de algunas prácticas proteccionistas y, sobre todo, en las devaluaciones del peso que se ha llevado a cabo, ya sea mediante saltos bruscos en el tipo de cambio, o bien mediante el aumento persistente del dólar de acuerdo con la inflación del país.

La mayoría de los precios internos está indexada con los cambios en la paridad de la moneda chilena respecto del dólar, por lo que las constantes devaluaciones tienen un efecto menor en la variación de los precios relativos, y uno muy importante en la determinación de las alzas de los precios internos.

La autoridad económica comparte, con seguridad, este diagnóstico, y por ello la última devaluación la compensó con una reducción de los aranceles. Más aún, diseñó una tabla especial de alza del dólar que es evidentemente inferior al aumento de los precios internos y amplió la banda de fluctuación del valor de la moneda extranjera, posiblemente con el propósito de tener más libertad para determinar la paridad en el futuro.

Es posible que en julio la inflación continúe elevada, pero debería luego reducirse en la medida en que la política cambiaria contemple ajustes prudentes y se mantenga una estricta política monetaria y crediticia.

Cabe, sin embargo, avanzar más en el proceso de reducción de la inflación por la vía de explicarle a la opinión pública y a los agentes económicos el verdadero origen de la actual inflación. Esto podría permitir tomar medidas adicionales que se traduzcan en una vuelta rápida a la estabilidad de precios.

El tipo de cambio es también un instrumento de estabilización de precios, y si bien está aproximación al problema se encuentra un tanto desprestigiada, no se debe descartar en el próximo futuro. En realidad, los grandes problemas que la economía chilena experimentó en los años pasados tuvieron su origen en una recesión mundial que es la más intensa desde 1929, con el consiguiente exceso de gasto que se generó respecto del ingreso disminuido por la situación internacional adversa. No debe olvidarse este hecho, como tampoco que si se tienen en equilibrio las cuentas, como en la actualidad, no hay razón para sufrir una elevada inflación.



Venta de Acciones

El Ministro vicepresidente de la COBPO acaba de declarar que en septiembre próximo ofrecerá a la venta acciones de las empresas filiales de la entidad. Exproso que espera ad-

berse valorizado en términos mejores a las que pueda ofrecer cualquier instrumento de ahorro. Por eso los trabajadores tendrán el mayor interés por invertir en aquella empre-



fig. 3

Robert Rauschenberg,
*Copperhead Grande / ROCI
 CHILE*, 1985. Silkscreen ink
 and tarnish on copper,
 91 7/8 × 144 3/4 inches (233.4 ×
 367.7 cm). National Gallery
 of Art, Washington, D.C. Gift
 of the Robert Rauschenberg
 Foundation.

The series's punning title, *Copperhead-Bite*, has also allowed for disparate interpretations of just how political—or evasive—Rauschenberg intended to be. The wording alludes to a snake's poisonous bite, while also commenting on the material and production process of the works. It should be noted that the copperhead snake is native to North America and is not found in the southern hemisphere; but the significance of "copper" and "bite" may well move beyond Rauschenberg's evident fondness for wordplay. Several art historians have recently argued that the artist intended the snake's venom to be a symbol of Pinochet's poisonous government, yet the artist clearly stated that the title had no underlying political meaning.²⁶

"Bite" is also a common technical term in printmaking used to describe the corrosion caused by the application of acids on a metal plate, or in the case of Rauschenberg's methods, the oxidizing effect of chemicals on metal.²⁷ The "bite" effect is present in the upper section of *Copperhead-Bite VII*, creating a strong horizontal line while also evoking a sense of decay and despair, as the metal appears old, dirty, and neglected as if the work is perishing in front of the viewer. The words "copperhead" and "bite" thus draw attention to the literal process and materials of their making.

According to the artist, he employed a copper plate as a support material for the silkscreened images because he wanted to show "solidarity with the Chilean people."²⁸ As in every other aspect of the *ROCI CHILE* project, there is more to this statement than meets the eye. Despite the prevailing consensus amongst scholars, it is unlikely that the copper plates came from Chile.²⁹ According to research conducted by conservator Natalya Swanson, Rauschenberg acquired the plates from a company called American Architectural Metals in Mineola, New

York.³⁰ The copper's connection to Chile is symbolic and not literal. The copper industry still supports the country's economy today, which is one of the world's leading producers of the mineral, but at a cost to workers and the environment. Copper had been simultaneously a symbol of hope and inequality as stated in the following Communist Party slogan from 1970: "By nationalizing copper/ We shall cease to be poor."³¹ Although the copper mines were eventually nationalized in the early 1970s, poverty rates did not change in Chile as a consequence. While Rauschenberg had the financial resources to work with the metal, the same could not be said about most Chilean artists and art students. As an unknown art student remarked to Rauschenberg: "We are poor. We don't have any copper."³² Benito Rojo, a Chilean artist who had contact with Rauschenberg during his visits, believed that the American artist "knew ... the enormous nobility of copper as a support material in pre-Columbian art. When he was in Chile, he understood the enormous socio-political value of the metal and how it was deeply rooted in our identity."³³ This stark contrast between wealth and poverty, venerable ancient traditions and the current exploitative mining industry, may well have prompted a sincere concern with Chile's citizens on Rauschenberg's part.

The artist's attraction to copper was also related to the material's inherent formal qualities, specifically its warm and shiny surface. According to Lawrence Voytek, Rauschenberg's assistant in the production of the "metal paintings," the artist compared these surfaces to human skin, attesting to the sensuality of the material.³⁴ Scholar Eileen R. Doyle adds that, "the reflective quality of all of these works not only unfixes their surfaces and thus the meanings of the images, but it also visually implicates the viewer in that interpretation through her reflection."³⁵ Corroborating his intent to insert the Chilean viewer "into" the *Copperheads*, Rauschenberg stated during a Q&A session with artists and students, "If you can't find the warm answers in your question which exist in the reflections of the coppers ... then you don't need me, you need your eyes."³⁶ Yet this idea of reflection is problematic. In *Copperhead-Bite VII*, and the other works in the series, Chilean viewers did not see their own national image, but their national image interpreted by an American, inevitably raising questions in their mind of an imperialist gaze.

The ambiguity of the imagery in *Copperhead-Bite VII* derives from the layering of the silkscreens, a lack of clarity resulting from the low contrast colors, and the various areas of its reflective surface. As in the case of Rauschenberg's work on the whole, it is hazardous to attempt a single reading, or one-to-one correlation of image and message; the collage-like composition provokes multiple associations, as was the artist's intention. The most striking image consists of a graveyard in the Atacama desert with three thin crosses, two of them standing vertically on domed structures, while a smaller (actually the shadow of a cross) leans diagonally. It is difficult to reconcile this scene with others on the copper plate.

Art historian Robert S. Mattison, the only scholar thus far to discuss this work in detail, identifies the domed structures as country ovens and states that they are a different screened image layered on top of the photograph of the cemetery.³⁷ He uses this observation to support his argument that Rauschenberg was indeed worried about the violence during Pinochet's dictatorship, as many believed that the bodies of the "disappeared" were burned to destroy any incriminating evidence.³⁸ Mattison then associates the blue image of a "courtyard whose dominant feature is a striped pattern formed by light shining through an exterior grill" with a

figs. 4 and 5

Left and right: Black-and-white contact sheet, Chile, November 1984 (detail). Photo: Robert Rauschenberg. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation.



jail cell. He sees the close-up image of a rose (fig. 4) in the lower left corner as a “red abstract pattern similar to bloodshed.”³⁹ My archival research allows for different readings. The original contact sheets reveal that there is no juxtaposition of oven and graveyard (fig. 5). The former shape is, in fact, a common type of grave marker with a niche that holds an offering or a saint figurine, and the perceived bloodshed, as noted earlier, is a rose.⁴⁰ Was Rauschenberg wholly oblivious to the circumstances of the Chilean people?

As underscored by the artist himself, all interpretations are somewhat valid. He notes, “I’ve never explained the imagery, like the iconography of my work, in any country.”⁴¹ That being said, one can read *Copperhead-Bite VII*’s layering of people sunbathing at the beach with a graveyard as a form of ironic commentary on the fragility of life, of pleasure one moment and pain the next. Moreover, the starkness and stillness of the courtyard image emphasizes the emptiness of the chair, perhaps a symbol of the “disappeared.” The red flower, which unless one has knowledge of the source photograph, appears quite abstract, can be perceived as funerary flowers—a symbol later used to protest the deaths caused by the government. The image can also be linked to the Socialist International and therefore to Allende, and interpreted as a covert sign of protest against Pinochet.⁴² Or it could evoke the bloodshed that Mattison sees, or conversely, and despite the horrors, the beauty Rauschenberg still found in the country. In *Copperhead-Bite VII*, the artist leaves meaning open for the viewer. Indeed, what appears to have been his final intervention—the visceral splatter and quick gestural brushstroke—can be read as either an act of aggressive violence or his longstanding signature reference to Abstract Expressionism.

To complicate things further, the site of Rauschenberg’s exhibition, the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, belonged to the Chilean government—in other words, *ROCI CHILE* was hosted by the dictatorial regime, underscoring that Pinochet never saw Rauschenberg’s visit as a threat. Thus, if Rauschenberg’s message was in favor of democracy, it was undermined by the

regime's ability to make itself look "open" by welcoming, even co-opting, the artist. The prominent dissident writer José Donoso pleaded with the artist to change venues, but to no avail.⁴³ Donoso, who was Rauschenberg's cicerone during his stay in Chile, and later wrote the text in the *ROCI CHILE* catalogue, published a disclaimer in the pro-democracy Spanish newspaper *El País* just after the artist's first visit.⁴⁴ In this article, Donoso noted that he had suggested to the artist different places for the exhibition and presented his reasoning behind them. As options, Donoso proposed an abandoned factory (a symbol of Chile's failed economic boom) or a Catholic church (an institution that always fought for human rights and for the return of political exiles).⁴⁵ One may ask why Donoso wrote for the catalogue even though he disagreed with the artist's position. Although there are no clear answers, in his text the poet acknowledged Rauschenberg's importance as an artist who could bring a new form of "contemplation."⁴⁶ Thus, he was critical of the project but not of Rauschenberg's work and intentions. Rauschenberg had, in fact, rejected Donoso's suggestions, replying, "there was no way a church needed that much art."⁴⁷ Nonetheless, Catholic iconography—and the imagery of death—cannot be missed in *Copperhead-Bite VII*, as it contains the striking photograph of the crosses. Religious iconography also permeates many other *ROCI CHILE* works, such as the sculpture *Altar Peace Chile* (1985), *Copperhead-Bite IV* (1985), and *Copperhead-Bite X* (1985), suggesting that the conversation with Donoso had in fact affected the artist.⁴⁸

The layering of different images and the use of industrial printing methods in *Copperhead-Bite VII* testify to the artist's career-long relationship with the popular press; the accumulation of varied information on the surface of his works has been compared to the front page of a newspaper.⁴⁹ The work's documentary-style photography also emulates photojournalism. Besides using the popular press as source material for his Dante drawings (1958–60) and silkscreen paintings (1962–64), among other works, he also designed several covers for *Time* magazine between 1967 and 2002, and planned the first *ROCI* catalogues to resemble that publication.⁵⁰ The artist and media outlets both used and featured each other. Mattison argues that it was fitting that some of the most familiar images in Rauschenberg's Chilean works were of newspaper or newsstands, as in *Copperhead-Bite IV*, *Copperhead-Bite X*, and *Copperhead-Bite XI* (1985).⁵¹ He presents this as evidence of a commentary on Chile's political situation; this idea is complicated, however, by the fact that the media sponsor for *ROCI CHILE* was the controversial newspaper *El Mercurio*.⁵²

El Mercurio supported both Pinochet's dictatorship and Rauschenberg's *ROCI CHILE*, adding to the project's negative reception in the South American country. The tabloid was an elitist and conservative newspaper that lacked credibility for constantly adulterating the facts.⁵³ Indeed, Donald Saff, *ROCI*'s artistic director, asked the artist to consider being interviewed by another newspaper "to balance the unending barrage of *El Mercurio*."⁵⁴ One must take into account that there was no freedom of the press during the Chilean dictatorship, and by partnering with Pinochet-friendly *El Mercurio* the artist could avoid censorship. Nonetheless, there were still a few media outlets, such as the centrist newsweekly *Hoy*, that were not as compromised.⁵⁵ Highlighting these contradictions, Chilean art historian Josefina de la Maza Chevesich notes, "if Rauschenberg's aim was to 'open access to information' through his art ... through his actions he was doing precisely the opposite."⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, *El Mercurio* and other mainstream

newspapers such as *La Nación* covered his visit and artwork positively, while more obscure publications such as *APECH 2* (the magazine from the Asociación de Pintores y Escultores de Chile) were not as supportive.⁵⁷

Opponents of Pinochet's government saw the *Copperhead* series as a symbol of American imperialism.⁵⁸ Some associated the shiny surfaces of the artworks and the mechanistic-looking silkscreened images with a detrimental commodification of art.⁵⁹ Likewise, ROCI's production model was read by Chilean artists opposed to the dictatorship as a demonstration of a perceived American superiority.⁶⁰ Thus, it is not surprising that during one of the few opportunities Rauschenberg had to talk directly to Chilean artists and art students, he was harshly disparaged.⁶¹ Likewise, when he visited the University of Santiago, he was received with suspicion. As noted by Rojo, "it was thought that his visit was a maneuver of the CIA in support of the dictatorship of Pinochet. Those were very difficult times and culture took care of it."⁶²

While there is no doubt that Rauschenberg was received with distrust by Chileans opposed to their government, the same cannot be said about the reception in other countries in the ROCI tour. In the USSR and China, his presence seemed to have fulfilled a need for artistic innovation. Artists from these nations had exhausted the artistic possibilities of Socialist Realism, and, as art historian Pamela Kachurin remarks, Soviet artists were in the midst of a creative crisis.⁶³ Hiroko Ikegami has underscored that ROCI "coincided with the breakdown of the cultural blockade between East and West. Indeed, the dismantling of the Berlin Wall contributed to the speedy realization of the *ROCI Berlin* exhibition in 1990, and that same year, following the success of *ROCI USSR*, Rauschenberg was even included in the USSR Pavilion at the Venice Biennale."⁶⁴

Unlike China and countries behind the Iron Curtain, however, Chile had significant traffic with American and European art, a fact that contradicted the artist's statement of "collaboration with countries which have had little or no contact with contemporary work to enjoy an artistic spectacle."⁶⁵ Artist Enrique Zamudio, who met Rauschenberg during *ROCI*, admitted that Rauschenberg had influenced him long before the exhibit.⁶⁶ Chile also had a lively avant-garde that managed to create and exhibit in alternative spaces, despite widespread censorship. As noted by Chilean writer Marjorie Agosin, "Poets and painters invented new signs and spaces in the most marginal areas of the cities, thus altering the so-called privileged and official space assigned to art by the government and announcing their alliance with marginality."⁶⁷ Indeed, while some of the work was fiercely political—such as Cecilia Vicuña's *Vaso de leche* (1979), Lotty Rosenfeld's *Una milla de cruces sobre el pavimento* (1979), and Catalina Parra's *Diario de vida* (1977)—any criticism of the regime was indirect or coded to escape censorship.⁶⁸ The *Copperhead* series was actually criticized by many Chileans for not taking a clear anti-Pinochet stance, whereas the political neutrality of Rauschenberg's works for the *ROCI USSR* and *CHINA* abetted his successful reception there.

Although Rauschenberg stressed his apolitical status time and again, his statements should be questioned. As art historian Roni Feinstein maintains in her discussion of Rauschenberg's early 1960s silkscreen paintings (the ancestors of *Copperhead-Bite VII*), many of them "seemed to have indeed been inspired by political events about which Rauschenberg felt strongly."⁶⁹ During this period, he was sourcing his imagery from mass media. He was inescapably

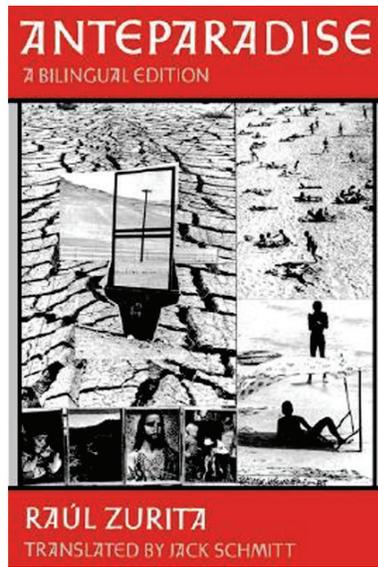


fig. 6

Robert Rauschenberg,
cover design for Raúl
Zurita, *Anteparadise*, trans.
Jack Schmitt (Los Angeles:
University of California, 1986).

immersed in the current news, and he did voice his concerns regarding "race issues" and "atrocities of all sorts" in a 1965 interview.⁷⁰ It is true that Feinstein was discussing a different period in the artist's career, and *ROCI* was a much later endeavor, but the larger point is that Rauschenberg often made his political opinions clear, even if he chose a less obvious route in his art.⁷¹

Other evidence shows that Rauschenberg was not indifferent to the American government's intervention in foreign affairs or to certain social issues that linked politics and culture. In 1965, for example, Rauschenberg financed much of the *Artists' Tower of Protest* against the Vietnam War.⁷² In 1969, he produced a number of works for NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). Working for this government agency meant that he was somewhat involved in the space race, which was a significant aspect

of the Cold War. As an artist, he supported his government's advertised technological superiority. Then, during the *ROCI* years, he lobbied with Senator Ted Kennedy to pass a bill regarding artist rights and international taxation of artworks, and donated a painting to an *Art Against AIDS* benefit.⁷³ The Webster dictionary defines the word "political" as "engaged in or taking sides in politics," and based on the examples above, Rauschenberg fit this description.⁷⁴

One last piece of evidence may reveal the artist's true understanding of Pinochet's brutal regime, and even recognition of the flaws inherent in *ROCI CHILE*, despite his best intentions. In 1986, shortly after the project ended, Rauschenberg collaborated with the Chilean poet Raúl Zurita, providing the cover for his book, *Anteparadise* (fig. 6). Zurita's anti-Pinochet, activist stance cannot be in doubt, as he was even tortured for his views, and his poems were mainly about violence to the body. Curiously, literary critics describe *Anteparadise* as Dantean—referring to late medieval poet Dante Alighieri whose *Inferno* also inspired Rauschenberg. That Rauschenberg used the exact same beach scene in *Copperhead-Bite VII* for the cover of *Anteparadise* is telling. It favors the reading of *Copperhead-Bite VII*'s imagery as commentary on the conflict in Chile, or, conversely, that the cover collaboration served as a kind of acknowledgement of, and a redemption for, *ROCI CHILE*'s missteps.

Copperhead-Bite VII, with its open-ended title, indecipherable iconography, and charged materiality is ambiguous—a reminder of the artist's complexity, if not his outright refusal to be didactic in any messaging. Rauschenberg was simultaneously generous and egotistical, political while defining himself as apolitical, a humble Floridian and a glamorous globetrotter, a painter, a sculptor, and a photographer. *ROCI CHILE* was a project that audaciously existed in a gray area, and remains as contestable today as it was in 1985. The artist believed that it would take twenty-five years for people to understand *ROCI*; however, a quarter of a century has passed, and questions still persist. *ROCI CHILE* did not foster worldwide peace and understanding, but its legacy continues to be relevant, especially in reminding audiences of American involvement in Pinochet's regime.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Donald Saff in Josefina de la Maza Chevesich, "Introducing the World to Himself: Robert Rauschenberg and ROCI CHILE," *Art Criticism* (Stony Brook University, N.Y.) 25, nos. 1–2 (2010): p. 45.
- 2 Hiroko Ikegami, "ROCI East: Rauschenberg's Encounters in China," in *East-West Interchanges in American Art: A Long and Tumultuous Relationship*, ed. Lee Glazer, Amelia A. Goerlitz, and Cynthia Mill (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2012), p. 176.
- 3 Mary Lynn Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), p. 20.
- 4 Barbara Rose and Robert Rauschenberg, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg by Barbara Rose* (New York: Vintage Books, 1987), p. 106. When mentioning that Chile "was a real drag," Rauschenberg was referring to the mutual hatred amongst different parts of the population. He also noted the criticism he encountered by exhibiting at a state-owned museum and the political unrest in the country during that time.
- 5 Besides the twelve *Copperhead-Bite* works, Rauschenberg also created *Caryatid Cavalcade I and II*, *Altar Peace Chile*, *Araucan Mastaba*, *Copperhead Chica*, and *Copperhead Grande* as part of *ROCI CHILE*.
- 6 Saff in de la Maza Chevesich, "Introducing the World to Himself," p. 45.
- 7 Christin J. Mamiya, "We the People: The Art of Robert Rauschenberg and the Construction of American National Identity," *American Art* 7, no. 3 (Summer 1993): p. 56.
- 8 *Gringo* is defined as: "In Latin America, a foreigner, esp. an American or Englishman: usually a dismissive or disparaging term." *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018), p. 639.
- 9 Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1991), p. 16.
- 10 Leslie Bethell, ed., *Chile Since Independence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 167. For a detailed discussion on the North American interference in Chile see Samuel Chavkin, "The Coup and the CIA Involvement," in *Storm Over Chile: The Junta Under Siege* (Westport, Conn.: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1985); Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2013); and Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, *Story of a Death Foretold: Pinochet, the Cia and the Coup against Salvador Allende, 11 September 1973* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014). During the mid-1980s there was also a well-reported polemic regarding a U.S. plan to build an emergency runway for space shuttle landing in Easter Island. Chileans saw this as a disguised military base.
- 11 Constable and Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies*, pp. 146–47.
- 12 Patricia Politzer, *Fear in Chile: Lives Under Pinochet* (New York: Patheon Books, 1989), p. XV.
- 13 In February 1991, the Chilean National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation released a report detailing human rights abuses resulting in deaths and disappearances during the years of military rule. According to the report, 2,296 people were murdered during the seventeen-year period. Subsequent estimates have put the number of missing as high as 3,400. Addressing the issue of the missing has been recognized as a key element in the process of social reconciliation following the return to democracy. "Chile," International Commission of Missing Persons, accessed November 25, 2018.
- 14 Mark Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet: Recovering the Truth* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 36, 137.
- 15 Constable and Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies*, p. 157.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Darren G. Hawkins, *International Human Rights and Authoritarian Rule in Chile* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), p. 13.
- 19 "Of course, the 1980 constitutional plebiscite was denounced as fraudulent by the political opposition to Pinochet and its legitimacy was severely questioned by all impartial international observers." Harry L. Simón Salazar, *Television, Democracy, and the Mediatization of Chilean Politics* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2018), p. 11.

- 20 Ensalaco, *Chile Under Pinochet: Recovering the Truth*, p. 156.
- 21 Mary H. Spooner, *The General's Slow Retreat: Chile After Pinochet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 266.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 193–94. The so-called "Chilean miracle" was a consequence of the country's liberalism (following the model of the Chicago School), yet it was partially an illusion "built on unrealistic economic assumptions and a fragile edifice of debt, high interest rates and speculation." Therefore, in 1982 the country was hit with a recession. By the late 1980s Chile's economy had recovered.
- 23 "ROCI CHILE briefing papers," in Donald Saff records on Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI), RRFA 10, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.
- 24 "The briefing paper went on to note that significant human rights abuse had occurred during Pinochet's years in power, but that the situation had improved over the last several years and the United States was working toward a condition of normalcy in Chile. The briefing paper's summary report of Pinochet's time in power and its mild ending left Rauschenberg unsuspecting of how devastating Chile's recent history had been and largely ignorant of how volatile was its current situation." Robert S. Mattison, "ROCI in Chile," in *Robert Rauschenberg: Breaking Boundaries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 242.
- Years after the fact, Thomas Buehler, his principal assistant throughout the project, still mistakenly called the South American nation "socialist." "It was sad in a way. The way socialist countries are set. They are very happy people, Chileans." The Reminiscences of Thomas Buehler, April 2, 2015. *Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project*. Conducted in collaboration with INCITE/Columbia Center for Oral History Research. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives.
- 25 Lukas, "Rauschenberg (cartoon)," *El Mercurio* (Santiago), July 11, 1985.
- 26 Kotz, *Rauschenberg: Art and Life*, p. 27; Claire Bergeal, "An Alchemical Era: Materiality and Technology in Robert Rauschenberg's Paintings on Metal, 1986-1996," (Master thesis, Hunter College, New York, 2014), p. 19; and Mattison, "ROCI in Chile," p. 248. These texts also exaggerate the dangers of these copper-colored snakes. Although they bite frequently, they have mild venom. For Rauschenberg's statement, see Jack Cowart, ed., *ROCI Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange*, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), p. 167.
- 27 Rauschenberg learned the technique with Benito Rojo, an artist and art professor who specialized in the handling of metals and chemicals. See de la Maza Chevesich, "Introducing the World to Himself," p. 47. Rojo was one of the few visual artists with whom Rauschenberg had contact during his first trip to Chile.
- 28 "Copperheads," Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, accessed November 29, 2018.
- 29 Mattison, "ROCI in Chile," p. 251.
- 30 Swanson found an invoice from American Architectural Metals Incorporated dated February 1985 listing twenty-three copper plates measuring approximately the same size as the works from the *Copperhead-Bite* series. She generously shared this documentation with me. Natalya Swanson, email exchange with the author, August 28, 2019. Invoice, February 1985. Robert Rauschenberg papers. RRFA 01. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.
- 31 Simon Collier and William F. Sater, *A History of Chile, 1808-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 334.
- 32 Robert Rauschenberg, "A Discussion with Students, Artists, and Writers (July 13, 1985)," p. 6, in Saff, records on ROCI, Rauschenberg Foundation Archives.
- 33 Benito Rojo, interview with the author, e-mail, December 17, 2018. "Rauschenberg conocía la enorme nobleza de cobre como material soporte de arte en el mundo precolombino. Cuando estuvo en Chile comprendió el enorme valor socio político del metal y como éste estaba profundamente arraigado en nuestra identidad." Translated from Spanish by the author.
- 34 Bergeal, "An Alchemical Era," p. 68.
- 35 Eileen R. Doyle, "Art in the Mirror: Reflection in the Work of Rauschenberg, Richter, Graham and Smithson," (PhD diss., Ohio State University, Columbus, 2004), p. 27.

- 36 Rauschenberg, "A Discussion with Students, Artists, and Writers (July 13, 1985)," p. 5.
- 37 Mattison, "ROCI in Chile," p. 255.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Robert Rauschenberg, black-and-white contact sheet 84-11-EE, Chile (November 1984), in ACC 6, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.
- 41 Rauschenberg, "A Discussion with Students, Artists, and Writers (July 13, 1985)," p. 5.
- 42 Since the late nineteenth century, red roses or carnations have been worn on lapel buttonholes as a way to discretely state one's socialist affiliations. The red flower later became the symbol for the Socialist International, and was also used as the logo of several left-leaning parties around the world. As a Socialist Democrat, Allende is inescapably linked to the red flower icon. For an interesting article on the use of red roses and carnations see "Our Imitation Bismarcks," *Metropolitan* (New York) 38, May 1913, p. 63.
- 43 Rauschenberg was proud to exhibit at the Chilean museum, as he also participated in the production of a medallion with his own face on it, which was placed in the neoclassical building side-by-side with other medallions depicting old masters such as Leonardo da Vinci. The museum's caryatids were also crucial for Rauschenberg, who included them in many of his works such as *Caryatid Cavalcade I and II* (1985).
- 44 José Donoso, "Visita de Rauschenberg," *El País* (Spain), November 23, 1984.
- 45 Ibid. It is important to note that when Donoso suggested a church, he was thinking of progressive sectors of the Catholic Church such as the *Vicaría de la Solidaridad*. During Pinochet's regime, the Catholic Church in Chile was divided. More traditional sectors defended the government, while others rejected, and many preferred to avoid political matters. For more on the Catholic Church in Chile, see Michael Fleet and Brian H. Smith, *The Catholic Church and Democracy in Chile and Peru* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 35–76.
- 46 Cowart, *ROCI*, p. 125.
- 47 Mattison, "ROCI in Chile," p. 233; Cowart, *ROCI*, p. 166.
- 48 Although at this point it is mere speculation, I do suspect that it is possible that Rauschenberg might not have had a choice in where to exhibit, and was forced to show his works in the state-sponsored museum.
- 49 John Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and his Work," *Metro* 2, May 1961, p. 37.
- 50 Letters exchanged between Donald Saff's assistant Brenda Woodard and *Time's* Marian Powers (March 21, 1984), in Saff, records on ROCI, Rauschenberg Foundation Archives..
- 51 Mattison, "ROCI in Chile," p. 245.
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 For this reason, the expression *El Mercurio miente* (*El Mercurio* lies) became a part of Chilean vernacular. See de la Maza Chevesich, "Introducing the World to Himself," p. 45.
- According to Kristen Sorensen: "*El Mercurio*, which belongs to the powerful, ideologically conservative Edwards family of Chile, has had a special relationship with the U.S. It is cited in the Church Report: Covert Action in Chile 1963–1973 as a crucial tool, which the CIA funded generously, in U.S. attempts to prevent Socialist President Salvador Allende from being elected in 1970 and then as a tool to destabilize his government after he came to power." Kristin Sorensen, "Chilean Print Media and Human Rights: Mainstream Silence Versus Satirical Subversion," *Peace & Change* 36, no. 3 (2011): p. 423.
- 54 "Do you want to consider an individual interview with the reporter Jorge Pappia from '*La Nación*?' He has called many times. I am going to get in contact with him to see if he can attend the press conference. Just thought it might be a good idea to balance the unending barrage of '*El Mercurio*' with someone else." Donald Saff, "Questions to Robert Rauschenberg (July 17, 1985)," in Saff, records on ROCI, Rauschenberg Foundation Archives.
- 55 Constable and Valenzuela, *A Nation of Enemies: Chile Under Pinochet*, p. 146.

- 56 de la Maza Chevesich, "Introducing the World to Himself," p. 50.
- 57 Patricio Rueda and Patricia Saavedra, "Rauschenberg em el Bellas Artes," *APECH*, July 1986, pp. 14–16.
- 58 de la Maza Chevesich, "Introducing the World to Himself," p. 45.
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Ibid.
- 61 Rauschenberg, "A Discussion with Students, Artists and Writers (July 13, 1985)," pp. 1–7.
- 62 Benito Rojo, interview with the author, e-mail, December 17, 2018.
- 63 Pamela Kachurin, "The ROCI Road to Peace: Robert Rauschenberg, Perestroika, and the End of the Cold War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* (Cambridge, MA) 4, no. 1 (Winter 2002): p. 37.
- 64 Ikegami, "ROCI East: Rauschenberg's Encounters in China," pp. 176–89.
- 65 Robert Rauschenberg, "Artist Statement (draft) (August 1, 1984)," in Saff, records on ROCI, Rauschenberg Foundation Archives.
- 66 Enrique Zamudio, "Testimonios," R.O.C.I.: Derivaciones de la visita de Robert Rauschenberg en Chile.
- 67 Marjorie Agosin, "Art Under Dictatorship," *Agni*, no. 31/32 (1990): p. 34.
- 68 "Most art in Chile during those 16 years of dictatorship required the active collaboration of the viewer to complement utterances or to implement meaning; and because of this cooperation throughout different strata of Chilean society, it worked." See Agosin, "Art Under Dictatorship," p. 36. "Nonliteral languages managed to give shape to communities capable of decoding dissident meanings in texts and representations that, to the unknowing public said or showed next to nothing. Indeed, this strategy was used in artistic expression produced under dictatorship not only in Chile but also in Argentina and Uruguay." Andrea Giunta, "Poetics of Resistance," in *Radical Women: Latin American Art, 1960–1985*, ed. Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Andrea Giunta, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Hammer Museum, University of California; Munich, New York: DelMonico Books/Prestel, 2017), p. 253.
- 69 Roni Feinstein, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Silkscreen Paintings, 1962–64*, exh. cat. (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 1990).
- 70 "I do take a stance in questions like race issues and atrocities of all sorts ... If you feel strongly [about political issues], it's going to show there. I mean, that's the only way it can come into my work. And I believe it's there ... I think cultivated protest is just as dreamlike as idealism." Oral history interview with Robert Rauschenberg, December 21, 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
- 71 Interestingly, scholars have also been revisiting Andy Warhol's silkscreens as political. See Thomas E. Crow, "Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," *Art in America*, May 1987, pp. 128–36.
- 72 Feinstein, *Robert Rauschenberg*, p. 81. The *Artists' Tower of Protest* was a collective artwork spearheaded by Irving Petlin and Mark di Suvero to protest the Vietnam War. The work was installed in Los Angeles in 1966.
- 73 Anne-Marie Schiro, "Artists Rally to Fight AIDS," *New York Times*, June 5, 1987.
- 74 *Webster's New World College Dictionary*, p. 1129.