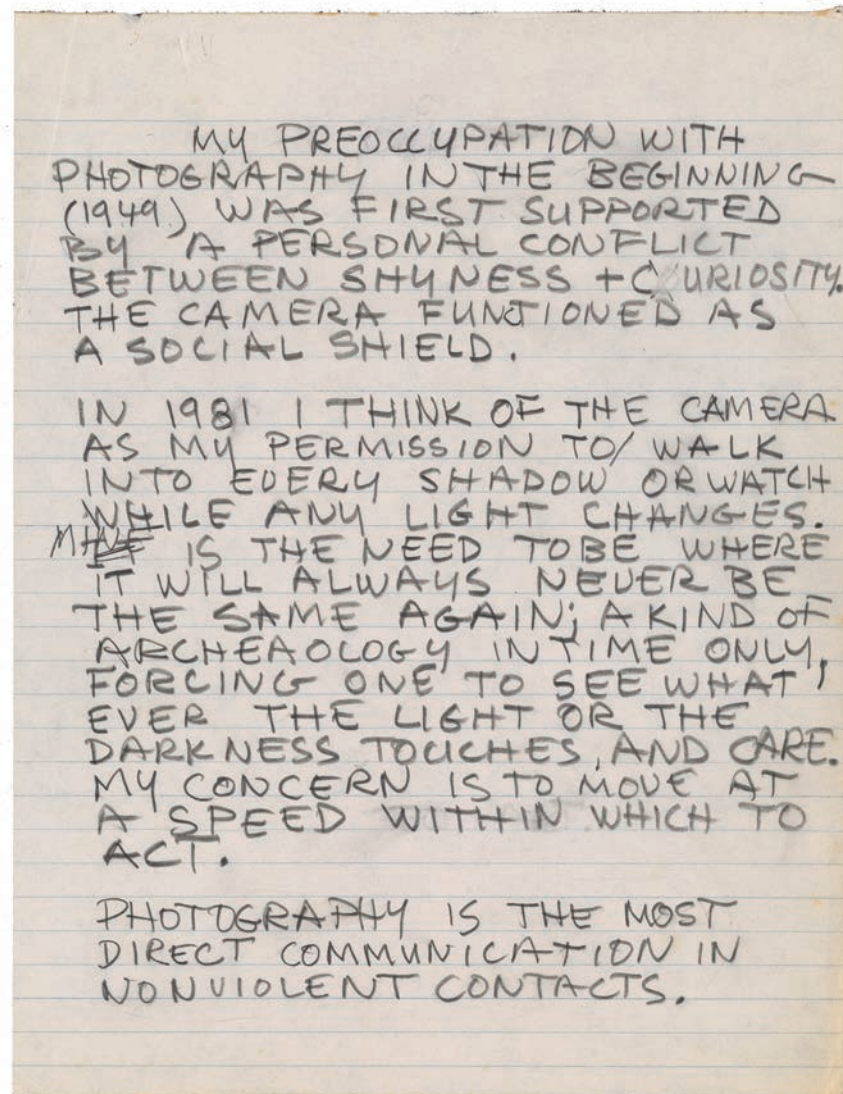


An Archaeology in Time  
*Robert Rauschenberg's Early Photography*

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The Robert Rauschenberg Foundation was delighted to collaborate with the MA Program in the History of Art at Hunter College, City University of New York, on a seminar focused on Rauschenberg’s early photography (1950–53) and later related artworks. As part of a curatorial practicum course led by Maria Antonella Pelizzari, Professor of Art History at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, CUNY, Hunter MA and MFA students curated the installation *An Archaeology in Time* at the Foundation’s New York headquarters—Rauschenberg’s previous home and studio—and contributed to this digital brochure.

Curated by  
Professor Maria Antonella Pelizzari  
and students  
Sophia DeLoatche  
Alicia Ehni  
Elisa Gutiérrez Eriksen  
Yuya Kawata  
Madison Lee  
Antonia Machado Oliver  
Katie Raudenbush  
Elisa Russell  
Devin Shaffer  
Allie Taylor  
Anika Zempleni  
Jani Zubkovs



Robert Rauschenberg's handwritten draft of a statement on photography, January 1981. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York  
All works by Robert Rauschenberg and from the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, unless otherwise noted

*Mine is the need to be where it will always never be the same again; a kind of archaeology [sic] in time only forcing one to see what ever [sic] the light or the darkness touches, and care. My concern is to move at a speed within which to act.*

Robert Rauschenberg, January 1981

## An Archaeology in Time

### Robert Rauschenberg's Early Photography

Robert Rauschenberg's early photography represents the seedbed for his artwork, akin to a generative archive where his study of shapes and textures begins to emerge. "I have never stopped being a photographer," he said in 1987, acknowledging the primacy of the camera vision in his art.<sup>1</sup> This installation draws visual connections between early photographs and later works in which Rauschenberg repurposed his images. Across the span of four decades, retracing his steps, he modified the meaning and surface of his impressions, clinging to photography as an indelible trace of this aesthetic passage.

Rauschenberg's approach to photography as a process of transformation harkens back to his education at Black Mountain College, North Carolina. In the fall 1951, he enrolled in Hazel Larsen Archer's photography course. Archer, a Black Mountain alumna, was influenced by the artist and former instructor Josef Albers (also Rauschenberg's teacher in the fall of 1948 through the spring of 1949), who explored how the camera translated the tactile perception of *matière* into a language of light and shadow. Working with a Rolleicord double-lens camera and favoring the clarity of details, Rauschenberg operated like an archaeologist of sorts, with a precise awareness of light moving through time. Whether he focused on the translucency of glass, the coarseness of a wall, or the progressive motion of a body in space, he was keen on bringing the physical experience of the world into the flat photographic print.

The camera accompanied Rauschenberg on travels to Italy and Morocco, and functioned like "an economical instant studio" where ideas were generated from his collection of perceptions, rather than of actual objects.<sup>2</sup> These moments were revisited in larger ensembles in which the individual photograph became part of a new and unexpected visual flow. Two of the series, *Photem* (1981) and *Bleacher* (1988–91), stand out in the gallery, resembling ritualistic and ghostly mementos of Rauschenberg's instantaneous vision.

—Maria Antonella Pelizzari

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Barbara Rose, *An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Vintage, 1987), p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Rauschenberg's handwritten statement in response to questions from Deirdra Hana of *NOW Magazine*, September 24, 2001, Robert Rauschenberg papers, A182, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

This photographic composition from the *Bleacher* series exemplifies Rauschenberg's interest in fragmentation by revisiting a variant frame of *Untitled [Spanish Morocco]*—a photograph captured by the artist circa 1952, nearly four decades prior to the creation of the *Bleacher*—and presenting its bottom left corner in negative form. Rauschenberg first worked with a 20- $\times$ -24-inch camera in 1987, when Polaroid employee John Reuter met him in Miami to shoot with Polacolor film. Driven by a desire for greater experimentation with the format, Rauschenberg visited Polaroid's New York City studio in 1988. Returning to the black-and-white film reminiscent of his first forays into photography, Rauschenberg curated a selection of photographs from his earliest images for reshooting. Using a Sinar 4- $\times$ -5-inch format camera with an enlarging lens attached and Plexiglas surface for the image to be projected onto, the 20- $\times$ -24 Polaroid captured sections of the artist's enlarged negatives, producing cropped renditions of the original image. Rauschenberg then painted the surface of the image with a chemical coater, selectively halting development in certain areas while retaining gestural brushstrokes—a process that recalled both his paintings and earlier conceptual works like *Erased de Kooning Drawing* (1953). In a final act of transformation, he brought the images back to his Captiva Island, Florida studio and subjected them to sunlight, bleach, and high-pressure water. It is from these experiments that the *Bleacher* series emerged, exhibited here in two formats: this single Polaroid image, and a montage of four images (also from 1990 and also titled *From the Bleacher Series: Madrid, 1952\**) that together constitute the whole photograph from Spanish Morocco.

—Antonia Machado Oliver



*From the Bleacher Series: Madrid, 1952, 1990\**  
 Manipulated black-and-white Polaroid on aluminum  
 27  $\frac{1}{4}$   $\times$  23  $\frac{1}{2}$  inches (69.2  $\times$  59.7 cm)

\*The subject of this photograph was previously misidentified. Rauschenberg photographed the image in Spanish Morocco, ca. 1952.

In the summer of 1952, Rauschenberg traveled to Italy with Cy Twombly spending most of September in Rome. While he shared Twombly's interest in Classical Antiquity, he was equally drawn to the quotidian and the derelict, photographing, for instance, the motley assortment of objects at a Roman flea market. His fascination with the flea market, which facilitates the repurposing of unwanted or discarded items, reflects the “making do” attitude of Rauschenberg's upbringing in the Depression-era American South, as chronicled by art historian James Boaden.<sup>3</sup> This recontextualization of so-called junk is a running theme throughout Rauschenberg's oeuvre, such as in his *Glut* series (1986–89/1991–94), in which he transformed discarded pieces of scrap metal into sculpture, reflecting the frugal environment of his childhood.

Rauschenberg's interest in the weather-beaten tarp that conceals the car reflects the influence of the master photographer Aaron Siskind, who briefly taught at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1951. Similarly, Siskind's abstract photography frequently focuses on the textures and fragments of decay—such as chipping paint or shredded advertisements—within his environment. The vehicle, once described by Rauschenberg as something that “broadside[s] our culture,” here lies forgotten beneath a deteriorating tarp.<sup>4</sup> What was once a powerful symbol of modernity is now obsolete—a disposable end-product of a consumer culture in the rapidly modernizing post-war world.

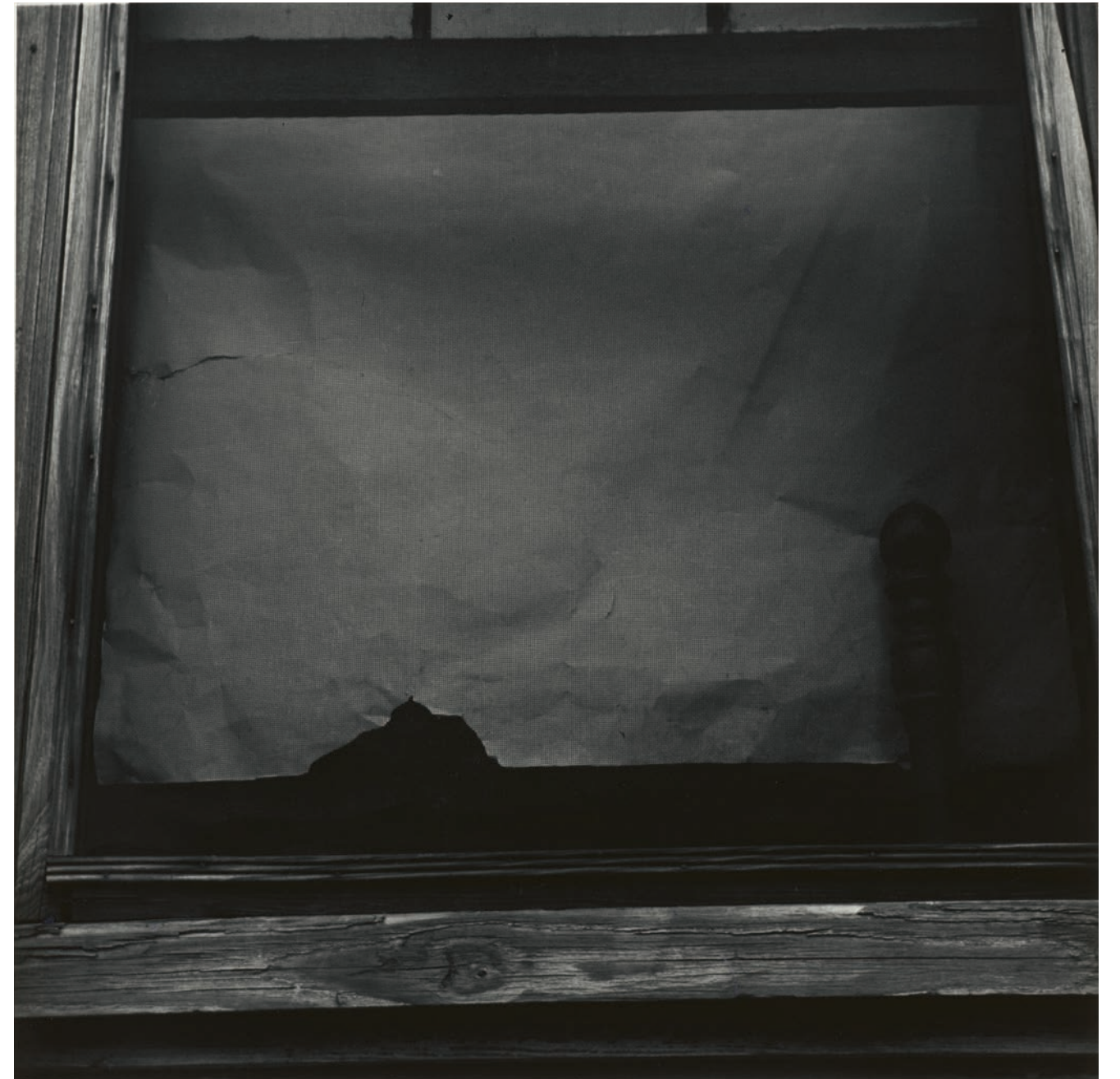
—Madison Lee

3 James Boaden, “Black Painting (with Asheville Citizen),” *Art History* 34, no. 1 (Feb. 2011), pp. 166–91.

4 Robert Rauschenberg, “Random Order,” *Location* (New York) 1, no. 1 (Spring 1963), p. 28.



*Rome Flea Market (III)*, ca. 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)



*Charleston Window (I)*, 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)

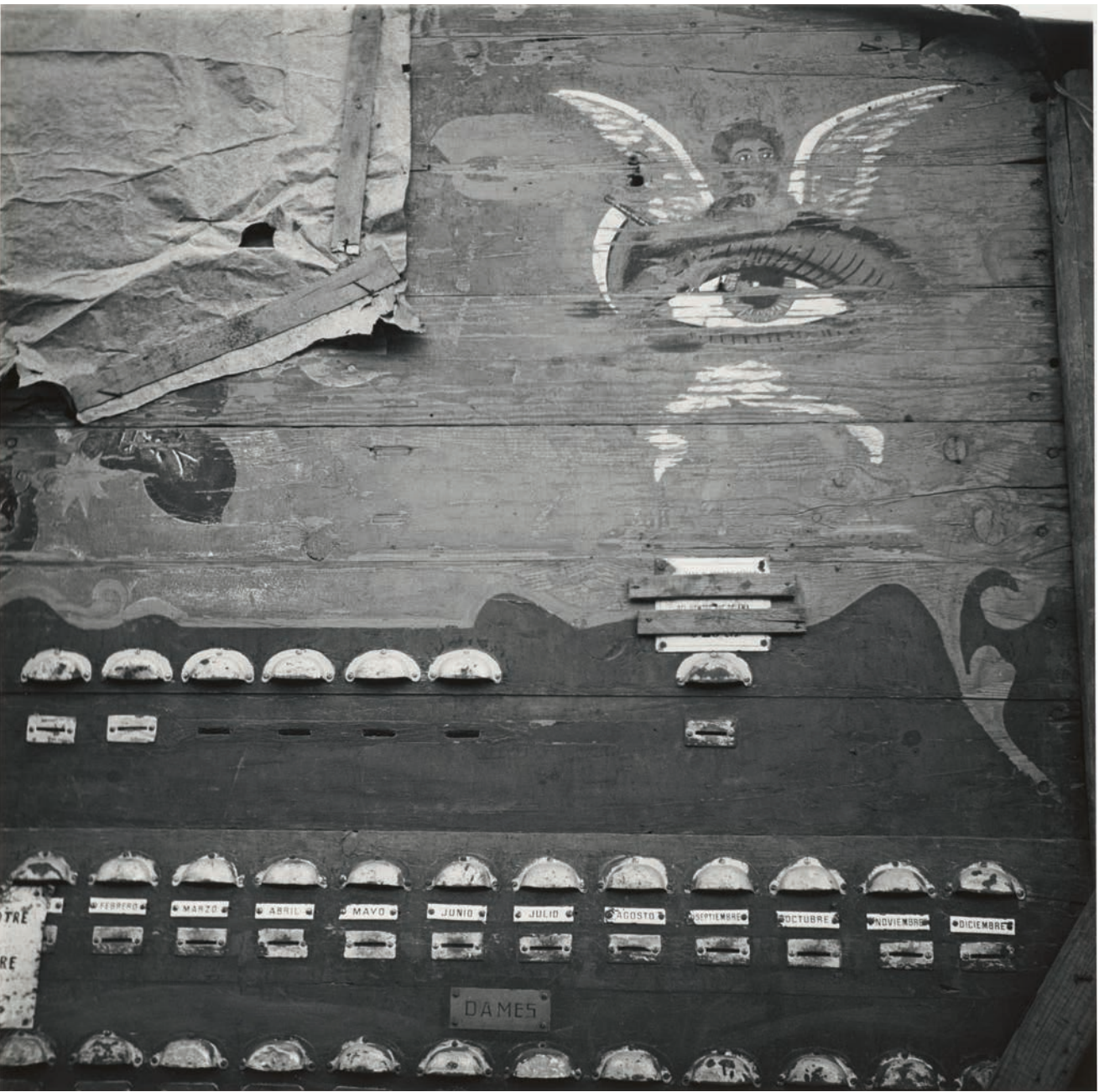


*Ceiling + Light Bulb*, ca. 1951  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)

This photograph demonstrates Rauschenberg’s keen interest in intricate wall patterns observed during his travels with Cy Twombly. Recent research shows that this image was taken while Rauschenberg was in Spanish Morocco, though it was previously thought to have been captured in Madrid. In the upper right corner, a painted angel intersects a large eye, evoking the Catholic “Eye of God” motif. The absence of a triangle enclosing the “the all-encompassing eye,” symbolizing the Holy Trinity, complicates this reading and suggests a secular interpretation. The artist photographed this motif twice, selecting this composition to be printed as a fine art photograph. Its inclusion opposite a Combine painting titled *Dam* (1959) in Andrew Forge’s 1969 monograph, where it is overprinted with text, evokes Rauschenberg’s deliberate interest in the photograph’s collage-like composition.<sup>5</sup> The photograph anticipates the visual concerns and symbolism of Rauschenberg’s *Thirty-Four Illustrations for Dante’s Inferno* (1958–60), wherein he imagines Dante’s descent into an inferno of modern motifs and figures using solvent-transferred images with varying opacity and legibility, resembling the isolated motif of the angel and the eye.

—Antonia Machado Oliver

5      Andrew Forge, *Robert Rauschenberg* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1969), p. 18.

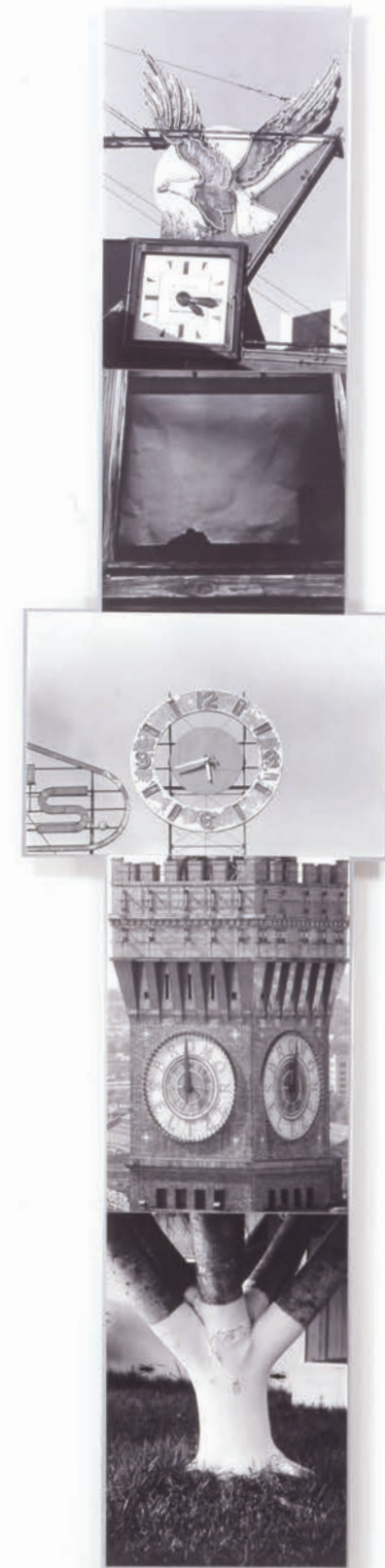


Untitled [Spanish Morocco], ca. 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)

In 1981 Rauschenberg produced a series of large-scale artworks called *Photems*, splicing the word “photo” with “totem” to coin the project’s title. One notable piece from this series, *Photem Series I #9*, re-appropriated and sequenced photographs taken by the artist across multiple cities nearly thirty years apart, collaging these distinct images into a unified visual composition. The artist began to avidly photograph again for the first time since the 1960s in the years preceding the *Photem Series*, prompted in part by his collaboration with the Trisha Brown Dance Company on the performance *Glacial Decoy* (1979). For the set of *Glacial Decoy*, Rauschenberg created a slideshow projection of hundreds of unaltered photographs, choreographing a continuous loop of images that reflected the parallel movements of the dancers during the performance. This renewed artistic relationship with the camera informed the creation of *Photem Series I #9*, which continues this engagement with temporality and movement. The artwork presents a vertical frame, juxtaposing separate moments in time, beginning with *Vancouver* (1980) on top, followed by *Charleston Window (I)* (1952), *Boston, Massachusetts* (1980), *Baltimore, Maryland* (1980), and ending with *Fort Myers, Florida* (1979) at the bottom. A rhythm emerges through the artist’s subjective visual vocabulary of the city, in which repeated clockfaces, weathered signage, and a particular attention to surface and texture construct a sequence characterized by both continuity and disruption.

—Anika Zempleni

*Photem Series I #9*, 1981  
Gelatin silver prints mounted on aluminum  
99 × 23 ¼ inches (251.5 × 59.1 cm)



This photograph features a partially torn poster announcing the death of Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. It was likely taken between March 5, 1953—the day of his demise—and April of the same year, when Rauschenberg left Rome. The rough texture of the wall marked with stains and remnants of old posters evokes photographs by Siskind, who taught at Black Mountain College in the summer of 1951 when Rauschenberg was a student there. The photograph shows a shared interest between Rauschenberg and Siskind in the materiality of subjects. Whereas Siskind, by means of extreme close-ups, elevated the fragments of the decaying cityscape into images reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism, Rauschenberg embraced the banality of the subject. He took the photograph at a distance, capturing both the political imagery and urban destitution as they were. In this sense, *Rome Wall (III)* foreshadows the artist's renouncement of modernist abstraction in favor of everyday subject matter.

The photograph may also allude to Italy's political landscape in 1953. During the postwar period, the Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI)—the Italian Communist Party—gained traction, throwing the country into an ambiguous position amid the escalating tensions between the Western and Eastern Blocs. The composition may express Rauschenberg's reflection on this ideological conflict as well as his own precarious position as an American artist in postwar Italy.

—Yuya Kawata



*Rome Wall (III)*, 1953  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)

Taken during Rauschenberg's travels in Venice, the photograph shows the entrance to the Cinema Garibaldi in the sestiere of Castello. This movie theater underwent multiple urban renovations; the religious bas-reliefs of the portal indicate that a church was originally on this site. Among the posters chaotically displayed above and around the entrance, one can read the theater's winter schedule and advertisements for an Italian film, *Tre Storie Proibite* (*Three Forbidden Stories*). The heads of several people entering the theater are visible at the bottom of the photograph, but the artist's attention is more focused on the striking juxtaposition between the bas-reliefs on the architrave and the tympanum of the portal and the images of mass culture. Despite the details that seemingly distinguish high and low in this image—for example, the composition puts the bas-reliefs of saints, bishops, and Christ above the glamorous movie posters—it is the very coexistence of and proximity between the two that primarily catch the viewer's attention.

The photograph anticipates what the critic and artist Brian O'Doherty would later call the “vernacular glance” in his analysis of Rauschenberg's work, a mode of looking that “dispenses with hierarchies of importance” and ignores “categories of the beautiful and ugly.”<sup>6</sup> Also implicit in the image is the artist's fascination with the palimpsest later manifest in the layered compositions of his Combines (1954–64) and silkscreen paintings (1962–64). In this sense, the work is an early example of the visual vocabulary that would come to define Rauschenberg's artistic achievements.

—Yuya Kawata

6 Brian O'Doherty, “Rauschenberg and the Vernacular Glance,” *Art in America* (New York) 61, no. 5 (Sept.–Oct. 1973), p. 84.



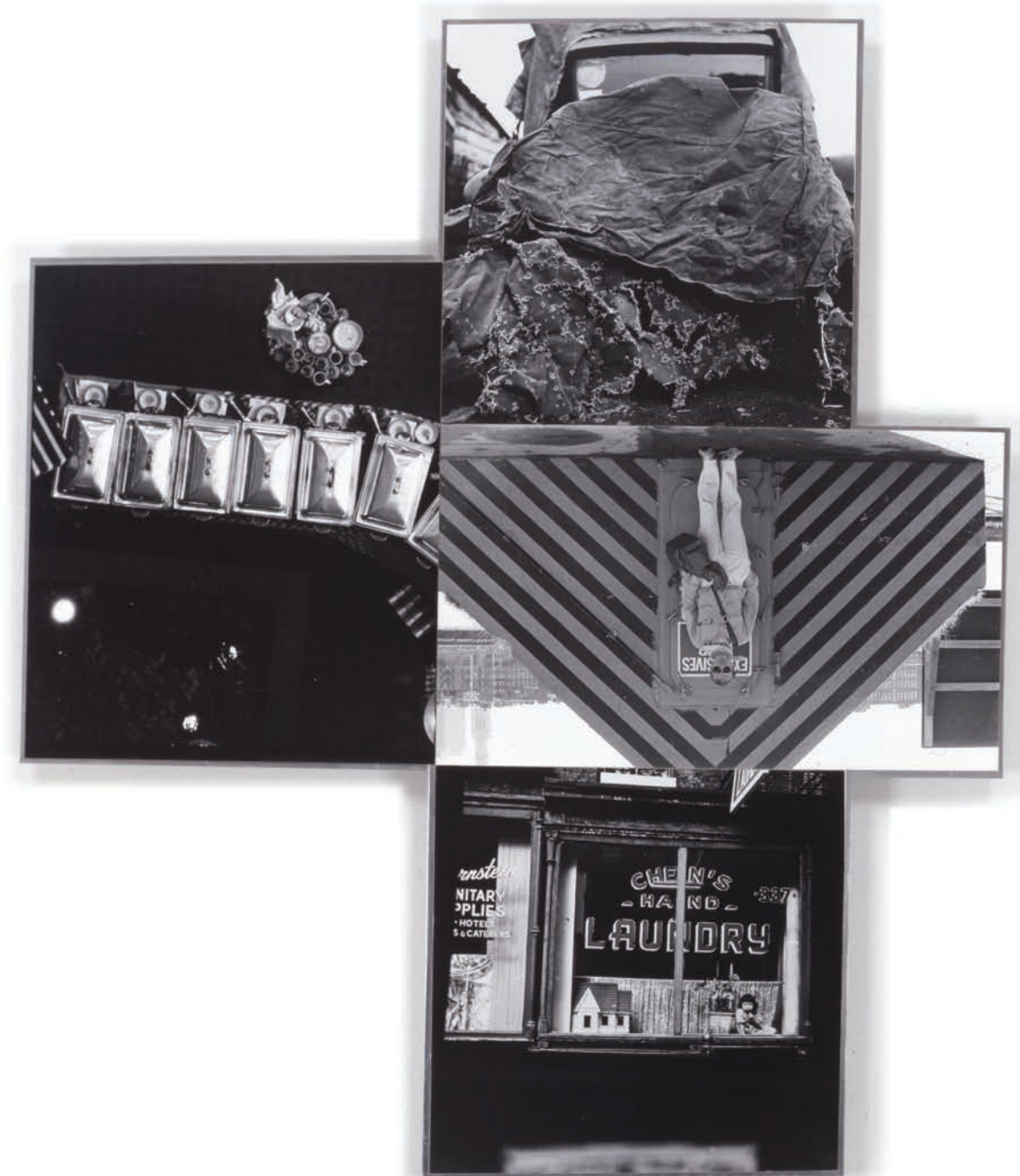
Untitled [movie house, Venice], 1953  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)



Untitled [*Feticcio Personale*, Rome], 1953  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)

Rauschenberg's attunement to unexpected visual encounters in the cities he photographed is particularly evident in *Photem Series I #15*. All the works from *Photem Series* included in this installation are collages the artist made from previous photographs, mostly taken from the *In + Out City Limits* series (1979–81). *In + Out* was an ambitious project in which Rauschenberg photographed six American cities: Fort Myers, Florida; Charleston, South Carolina; Baltimore; Boston; Los Angeles; and New York. The intersecting horizontal and vertical lines created by the arrangement of the four photographs in *Photem Series I #15* disrupt these images through seamless juxtapositions, croppings, and rotations. For instance, Rauschenberg stacked *Rome Flea Market (III)*, featuring an object from Rome's Porta Portese flea market, with two images of Boston (1980) below it. The leftmost photograph depicts a buffet with an array of covered chafing dishes, and the central photograph—inserted upside down—portrays the artist's studio assistant and partner, Terry Van Brunt, standing in front of a partially obscured view of the Boston city skyline. Positioned below these is an image of a store window in New York, *Laundry, N.Y.C. (I)* (1955). Here, Rauschenberg varied the orientation of the images to obscure their visual content and to place greater emphasis on shape and form.

—Anika Zempleni



*Photem Series I #15*, 1981  
Gelatin silver prints mounted on aluminum  
44 × 37 inches (111.8 × 94 cm)



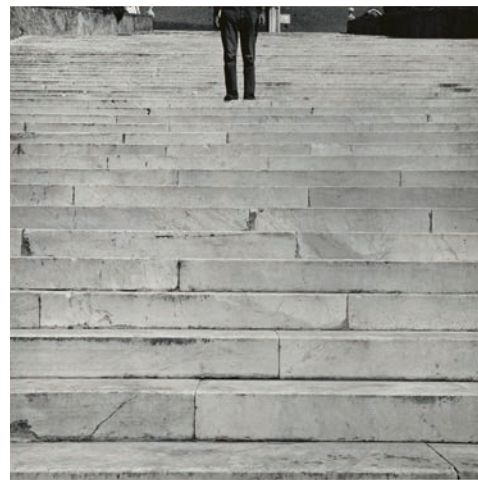
*From the Bleacher Series: Rome, 1952, 1990*  
 Manipulated black-and-white Polaroids on aluminum  
 52 × 45 inches (132.1 × 114.3 cm)



*Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (I)*, 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
5 5/8 × 3 1/4 inches (14.3 × 8.3 cm)



*Postcard Self-Portrait, Black Mountain (II)*, 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
3 ¼ × 5 ½ inches (8.3 × 14.3 cm)



*Cy + Roman Steps (I, II, III, IV, V), 1952*  
Suite of five gelatin silver prints  
14  $\frac{3}{4}$   $\times$  14  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches (37.5  $\times$  37.5 cm) each

The “drugstore prints” inhabit the nebulous space between ephemera and artwork. Scaled one-to-one with their corresponding 2 ¼-inch negatives, these images were produced through a commercial film development and printing process offered by drugstores in the 1950s, hence their name. The over 140 retained drugstore prints of Rauschenberg’s negatives overlap and exceed the artist’s selection for his fine art photographs. Their smaller format and distinct material quality lend them an intimate, almost ephemeral quality. This contrast prompts consideration of how different printing methods impact the aura of the photographic object. The small format of the drugstore prints offers an opportunity to view the idiosyncrasies in Rauschenberg’s style *en masse* by placing numerous images side by side. The textures, forms, and motifs visually established include obfuscation, dramatic horizontality and verticality, and fragmentation of the picture plane, themes that recur throughout Rauschenberg’s career.

While at Black Mountain College, Rauschenberg conceived of a project to walk across the United States and photograph it “inch by inch,” an idea of encyclopedic proportions that never came to fruition.<sup>7</sup> Yet the journalistic echoes of this dream permeate his early photography. To photograph a country inch by inch requires careful consideration of framing—at what distance should one photograph a corner of the world? Rauschenberg tested various perspectives while in Tangier, photographing a brick building both from a distance as a whole structure, and up close. He explored a similar strategy when photographing a reflective buggy in Rome, capturing its entirety from afar in one image and its details in another, filling one frame with only its mirrored surface. By nature of their commercial printing, the drugstore prints are not cropped or edited by the artist. Rauschenberg similarly did not believe in cropping his fine art photographs. Rather, he preferred what he described as “the adventure of waiting until the whole frame is full.”<sup>8</sup>

—Devin Shaffer

7 Quoted in Alain Sayag, “Interview with Robert Rauschenberg,” *Robert Rauschenberg Photographs* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), n.p.

8 Sayag, n.p.



Clockwise from top left:

Car with jacquard dust cover, Rome, Italy, 1952  
Stone facade with arched windows and doorway, Tangier, Morocco, 1952  
Rear window of carriage, Rome, Italy, ca. 1953  
Cy Twombly, Rome, Italy, 1953

Photos: Robert Rauschenberg  
Photographs likely printed by a drugstore or similar film lab service  
Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York

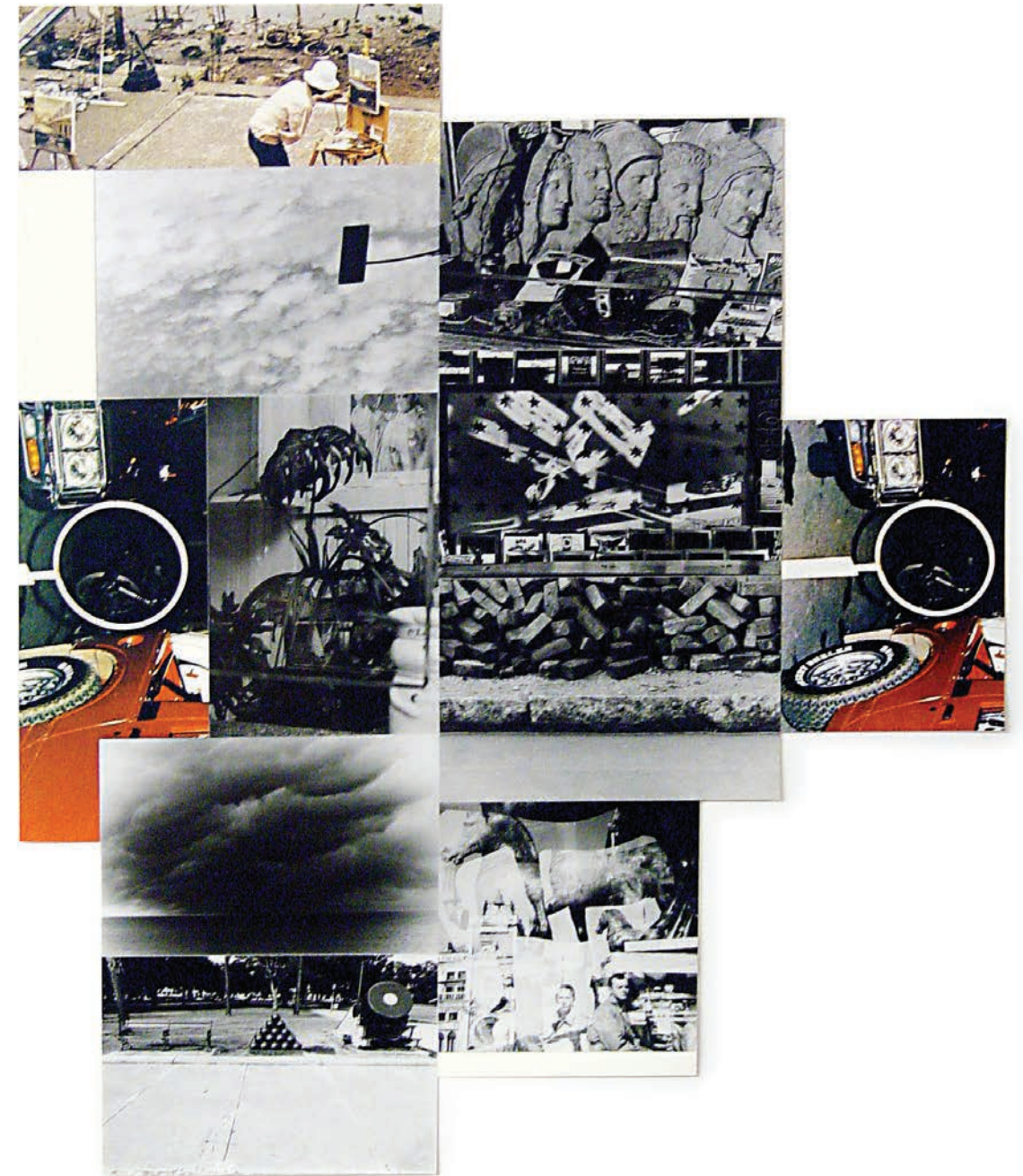
This artwork—often associated with an unidentified “Venice Print Project”—presents a visual arrangement, with pictures juxtaposed edge-to-edge, echoing the *Photem Series* in the multidirectional relationship of photographs that follow Rauschenberg’s travels in the United States between 1980 and 1981, and in Japan in 1982, where he photographed his surroundings using color slide film. Rauschenberg’s statement for the *In + Out City Limits* photography project suggests that this composition represents his experience of moments in time. As he writes, these photos “make no attempt to totally document, moralize or editorialize the specific locations. They are a collection of selected provocative facts (at least to me) that are the results of my happening to be there.”<sup>9</sup> The photographic ensemble is achieved through a mixed technique of color screenprinting and photocollage on hand-cut paper.

Several photographs from this work that were originally selected by Rauschenberg for two other print series demonstrate his practice of repurposing images from his archive. The *American Pewter with Burroughs* series (1981) includes the photographic images of relief faces in Boston and a thunderstorm from Florida, the latter of which is also featured in *Poster for World Artists Against Apartheid* (1983). While Rauschenberg’s exact motivations for regenerating these images remain unclear, their repetition in multiple projects underscores his interest in exploring renewed perspectives and associations.

One of the most intriguing inclusions of *Untitled* is a gelatin silver print of Rauschenberg’s early photograph *Bob + Cy, Venice* (1953), a double exposure featuring him and Twombly, also on view in this installation.

—Elisa Gutiérrez Eriksen

9 Robert Rauschenberg, statement in Rauschenberg, *Photos In + Out City Limits: Boston* (West Islip, New York: Universal Limited Art Editions, 1981), n.p.



Untitled, 1984  
Screenprint with gelatin silver prints and fabric on hand-cut paper  
31 7/8 × 26 1/4 inches (81 × 66.8 cm)



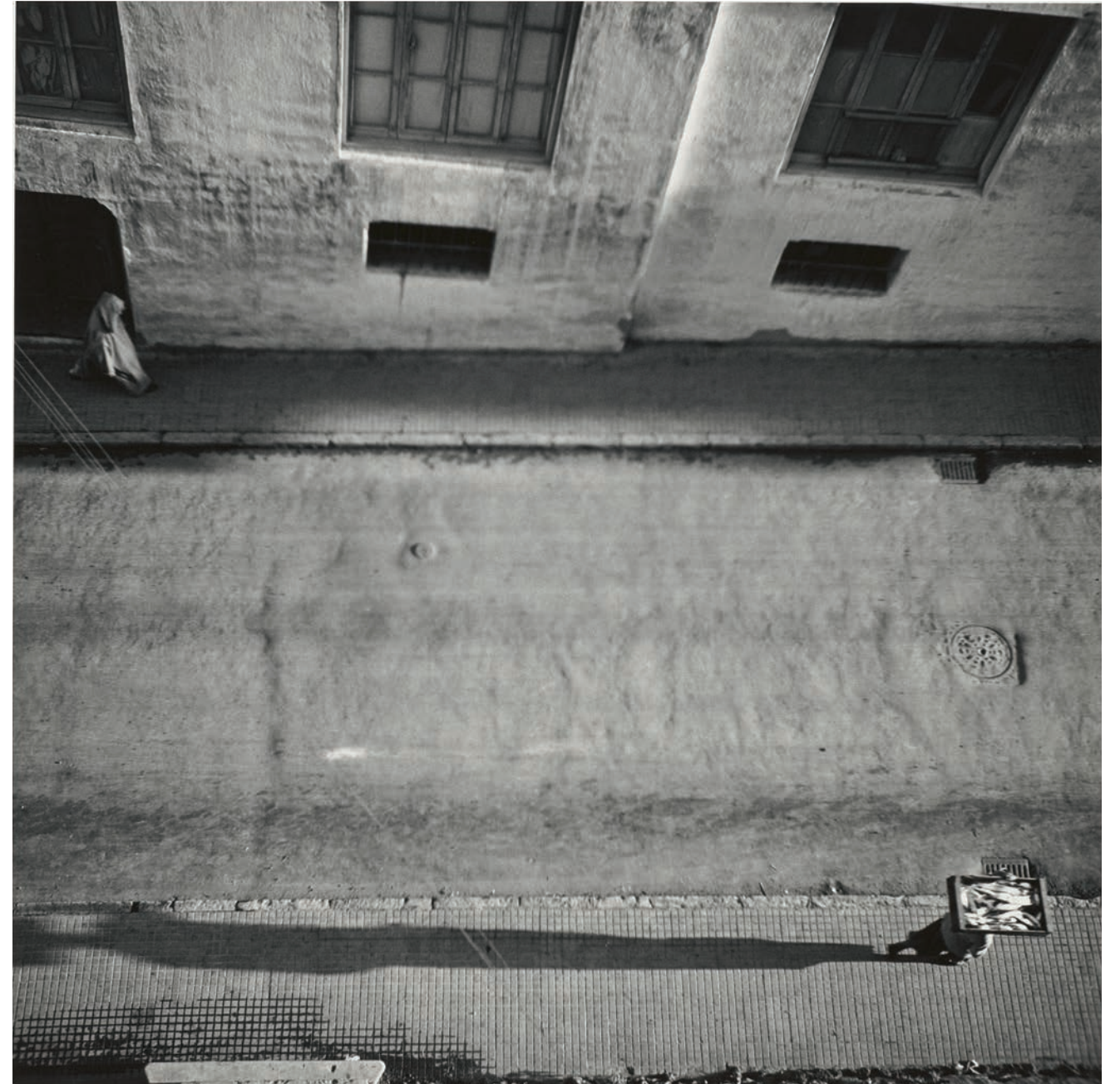
*Tangier Street (I)*, 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)



*Palermo or Algeciras—Vendors on the Sea*, ca. 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
14 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> × 14 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches (37.8 × 37.8 cm)

In late 1952, while traveling in Europe with Twombly, Rauschenberg ventured on his own to Morocco seeking work in Casablanca. He later reunited with Twombly in December and settled in Tangier, where they remained until early 1953. Shifting his aesthetic focus from found objects and signage as he had done in Europe, Rauschenberg became captivated by the architecture and people of Morocco. His photographs from this time primarily depicted streets, exteriors, and local passersby. *Tangier Street (II)* captures a bird's-eye view of two individuals walking on opposite sides of a street. The unusual perspective simultaneously flattens the picture plane and creates complex relationships between verticality and horizontality, light and shadow. The composition also harks back to the experimental framing of New Vision photography from the 1920s—a term coined by artist László Moholy-Nagy to describe alternative approaches to the medium that emerged in response to new technologies of the twentieth century. This photographic style directly related to the principles of the Bauhaus movement and involved unique vantage points and depictions of everyday life. The building facing the lens appears to be leaning toward the viewer, imposing and distorted. Patterns of parallel horizontal bands, formed by the pavement of the sidewalks and the street, make up the bottom two-thirds of the composition. Shadows cast by one of the figures and the building read as additional lines, serving to further flatten the photograph and emphasize the horizontal divisions. The photograph underscores Rauschenberg's fascination with fluctuations in the light, highlighting or dulling the rich textures of the building's exterior, the gridded sidewalk, and the street's surface. The long shadow at the bottom of the photograph acts as its focal point, both compositionally and thematically, exemplifying Rauschenberg's belief in choosing the exact moment to capture each photograph with intentionality.

—Sophia DeLoatche



*Tangier Street (II)*, 1952  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)

*Photem Series I #11, 1981*  
Gelatin silver prints mounted on aluminum  
83 ¾ × 15 ¾ inches (212.7 × 40 cm)





*From the Bleacher Series: Madrid, 1952, 1990\**  
 Manipulated black-and-white Polaroids on aluminum  
 52 × 45 inches (132.1 × 114.3 cm)

\*The subject of this photograph was previously misidentified. Rauschenberg photographed the image in Spanish Morocco, ca. 1952.

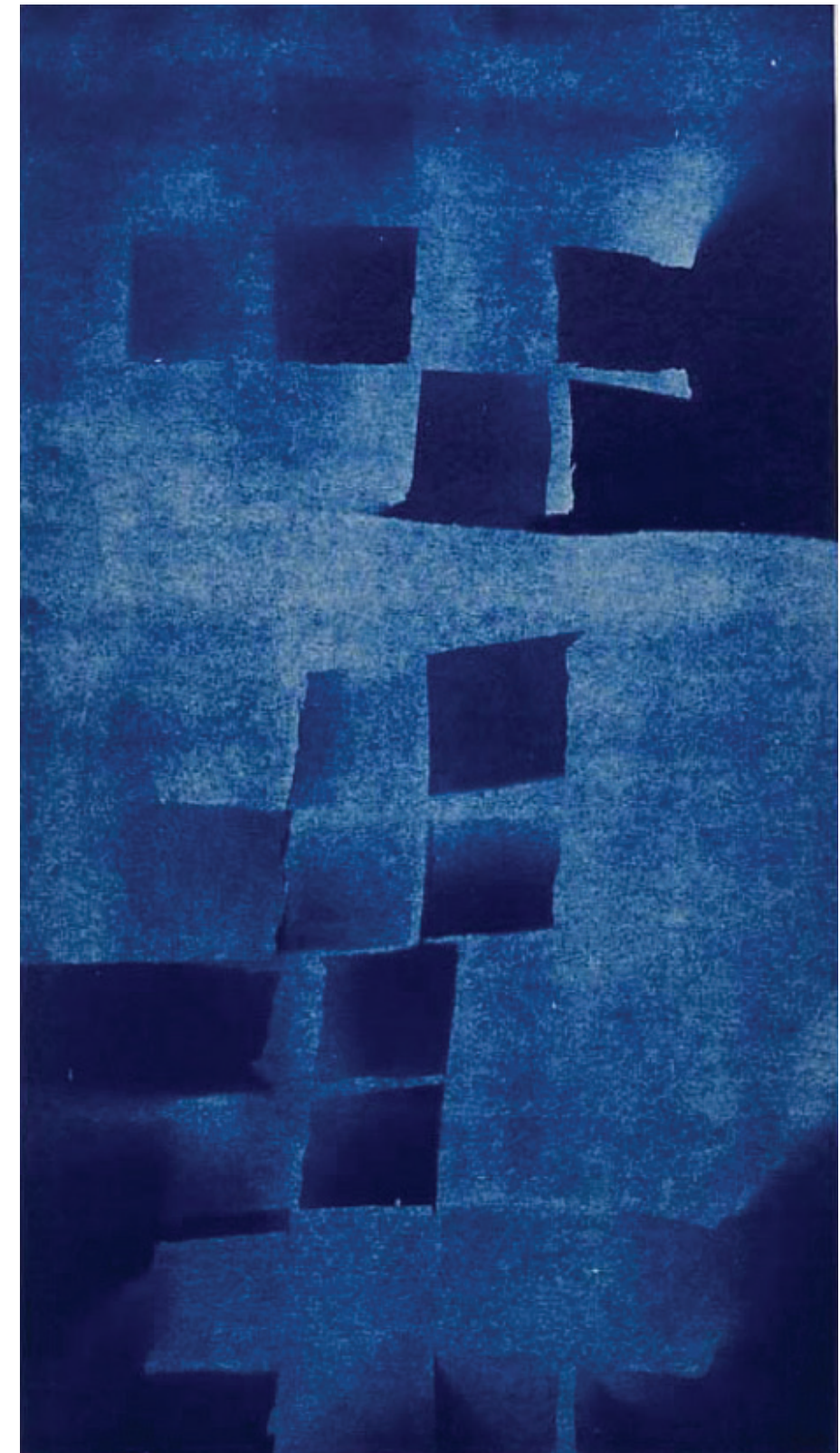
The *Blueprint Portfolio* created by Rauschenberg and Susan Weil is made up of ten cyanotypes. Research has shown that four of the images in the portfolio are miniature reproductions of full-scale blueprints that Rauschenberg made in collaboration with Weil, approximately between 1949 and 1951. Though it is believed all ten miniatures are based on the full-size originals, no matching counterparts have been uncovered for six, including the two works presented in this installation. The blueprint, or cyanotype, process begins with chemically treated paper that is sensitive to UV light. Objects or negatives are laid on the material and then exposed to sunlight or, in this case, a UV lamp. After removing the objects, the blueprint material is then washed with water to reveal the vibrant blue in the areas the light was able to reach, and crisp white in areas obscured by the objects.

Rauschenberg and Weil's blueprints reflect their experimentation at Black Mountain College and, in particular, Albers's teachings on *matière*—a study of material manipulation, combination, and texture. *Suspended \* Shadow \* Declared \* Eternal \* By \* The \* Death \* of \* Time* emphasizes Rauschenberg's fascination with time, evidenced in his assiduous assembling of multiple cut negatives of body parts that transmit a sense of ethereality and impermanence. In comparison, *Fugue* depicts a geometric composition as opposed to an organic one. A grid-like pattern consisting of dark blue squares of different values are arranged in a way that is reminiscent of Albers's exercises on figure/ground and collage; significantly, Albers made an artwork of the same title in 1926 where color patterns and lines intersect.<sup>10</sup> The work by Rauschenberg and Weil engages in a dialogue with Albers's exploration of patterns comprising hues and squares, thereby enriching their collaborative endeavor.

—Katie Raudenbush

10 Vanessa S. Troiano, "The 'Bauhaus Idea' in Robert Rauschenberg's Blueprints," *Wolkenkuckucksheim | Cloud-Cuckoo-Land | Воздушный замок: International Journal of Architectural Theory* (Cottbus, Germany) 24, no. 39 (2019), pp. 107-08.

Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil  
*Fugue* from *Blueprint Portfolio*, ca. 1950  
 Cyanotype  
 10 ⅞ × 5 ½ inches (25.7 × 14 cm)



Robert Rauschenberg and Susan Weil  
*Suspended \* Shadow \* Declared \* Eternal \* By \* The \* Death \* of \* Time* from *Blueprint Portfolio*, ca. 1950  
Cyanotype  
9 7/8 × 5 7/8 inches (25.1 × 14.3 cm)



In the summer of 1950, Rauschenberg and Weil—or Sue—celebrated their wedding at her family home in Outer Island, Connecticut. This portrait of Sue and Rauschenberg’s sister, Janet, was taken during this time. This non-traditional portrait photograph, with two rigid female figures depicted within a geometrical frame, can be read as a humorous reference to Rauschenberg’s time in the Navy (1944–46). Sue is depicted in profile, playing with the formal codes of an identi-fying photograph of a police suspect. In contrast, Janet, who was fourteen at the time, is portrayed frontally and at a closer range, so that she seems to be standing at a higher level. She is wearing a neckerchief on top of a monogrammed sweater belonging to Sue, and looks triumphant.<sup>11</sup> The repetition created by the openings of the door frames results in an interesting double framing. This effect resonates again across later portraits taken by Rauschenberg of Twombly at Black Mountain College, where the figure is also positioned within a geometric space. In 1963, Andy Warhol would invert, multiply, cut, and incorporate the image of *Sue + Janet* as part of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a large silkscreen ink on canvas painting that was based on portraits of Rauschenberg and his family.

—Alicia Ehni

11 The Reminiscences of Janet Begneaud, 2015, *Robert Rauschenberg Oral History Project* (Conducted in collaboration with INCITE/Columbia Center for Oral History Research, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York), pp. 2, 73–74.



*Sue + Janet—Outer Island, Conn., 1950*  
Gelatin silver print  
15 × 15 inches (38.1 × 38.1 cm)

Captured inside the intimate space of Rauschenberg and Weil's apartment on West Ninety-fifth Street in New York City, this image depicts an early sculptural object made by Rauschenberg in 1950. The sculpture foreshadows his later *Elemental Sculptures* (1953/1959), which also incorporate found materials. It consists of two green glass bottles—one encasing a twig, the other an arrow shaft's end—and a glass rod, both set in a solid plaster block. For the photograph, Rauschenberg chose a particular angle and light setting that enhances the sculpture's translucent materials, echoing the nature of the transparency of photographic film. This compositional framing also results in an image that suggests movement and vibration, allowing the photograph to capture the object's dimensionality in space, highlighting Rauschenberg's interest in the camera as an instrument that alerts the photographer to see "what ever [sic] the light or the darkness touches."<sup>12</sup> This visual ambiguity is a deliberate departure from documentary photography; it prompts a contemplative interaction with Rauschenberg's sculpture, engaging the viewer in the dualities of transparency and obscurity; stillness and motion; light and shadow; reality and representation. Moreover, the dualities suggested by the photographic technique resonate with the title previously attributed to the sculpture: *The Man with Two Souls*.<sup>13</sup>

—Allie Taylor

12 Robert Rauschenberg's handwritten draft of a statement on photography, January 1981. Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.

13 Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, exh. cat. (Houston: The Menil Collection and Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), pp. 13, 30–31, 55.



*The Man with Two Souls*, ca. 1951  
Gelatin silver print  
13 × 13 inches (33 × 33 cm)

*N.Y.C. (Stop)* is a stark portrayal of a lone, quotidian subject—a stop sign, eroded and nearly illegible, embedded in a horizontal plane of asphalt. The photograph emblemizes the artwork Rauschenberg produced as a student—both in New York and at Black Mountain College—and comprises the seeds of themes recurrent throughout his later work. Its gritty texture, verticality, and striking contrast between bright white and pitch black—like a beam of light incised into a thick, oily void—evoke his *Night Blooming* paintings from the same year. The recurring motif of the stop sign emerges in the silkscreen painting *Overdrive* (1963) and as material in the metal assemblage *Stop Side Early Winter Glut* (1987). This interest in signage may hint at Rauschenberg’s broader inquiry into how humans perceive and interact with visual information. By centering exhortative signage in his art, Rauschenberg foreshadows a quality which is often attributed to his later work: a kind of “spectator modification” that prompts viewers to actively participate in the process of interpretation and meaning-making.<sup>14</sup>

—Elisa Russell

14 Craig Owens, “The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism Part 2,” *October* 13 (1980), p. 67.



*N.Y.C. (Stop)*, 1951  
Gelatin silver print  
14 7/8 × 14 7/8 inches (37.9 × 37.9 cm)

Taken by Rauschenberg during a seven-month journey across Europe and North Africa, this self-portrait with Twombly points to the experimental nature of Rauschenberg's early photography and the impact of his education at Black Mountain College. Although he began experimenting with in-camera double exposures as early as 1950, studying with photographer Harry Callahan likely deepened Rauschenberg's investigation into the technique, offering a new strategy that gave him the opportunity to compress human motion in space and time. In this image, the young Rauschenberg and Twombly are immersed within a space of intersecting transparent layers, both revealing and obscuring the impressive monuments in the Loggia of San Marco in Venice. Similar to the five-image sequence representing *Cy + Roman Steps (I-V)* from the same year, this double exposure speaks to Rauschenberg's lifelong preoccupation with the passage of time. In a 1962 interview with critic André Parinaud, Rauschenberg reflected on the themes of temporality in his work. "The past is part of the present," he said. "It is presumptuous to think of the past or of the future without realizing that they are only interpretations made on the moment. For me the past changes continuously while the future always remains the same."<sup>15</sup> This philosophy guided Rauschenberg's practice of revisiting imagery from his early photographs for use in later works. In 1984, this image was included in the untitled edition that is also exhibited in this installation.

—Jani Zubkovs

15 Robert Rauschenberg quoted in André Parinaud, "Un 'Misfit' de la peinture new-yorkaise se confesse" *Arts* (Paris), May 10, 1961, p. 18. Trans. by Antonio Homem, Robert Rauschenberg papers, A1135, Robert Rauschenberg Foundation Archives, New York.



*Bob + Cy, Venice, 1953*  
Gelatin silver print  
7 × 7 inches (17.8 × 17.8 cm)

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Front cover: *Rome Flea Market (III)*, ca. 1952 (detail; see page 9)  
Back cover: *From the Bleacher Series: Rome, 1952, 1990* (detail; see page 27)

