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## Rauschenberg: Experimental artist from a complex era

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Undisputed as a 20th century master, Robert Rauschenberg first took the New York art scene by storm with assemblage art, in the mid-1950s and early '60s. Yet he is widely known for an astonishing 40-some years of printmaking. In an exhibition of 19 photographic silkscreen prints from 1970, the Carlos Museum offers a view inside the workings of a complex era, an evolving medium and an artist crystallizing his vision.



Carlos Museum

(ENLARGE)

Robert Rauschenberg's 'Features from Currents #58' is a striking compilation of text and images.



### REVIEW

#### "Robert Rauschenberg's Currents: Features and Surface Series"

Through February 17. 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays. Michael C. Carlos Museum, Emory University. 571 S. Kilgo Circle. 404-727-4282. [www.carlos.emory.edu](http://www.carlos.emory.edu)

**Bottom line:** Instructive and illuminating

mastery of texture, spatial relationships, his aesthetic sensibility in a still formative medium. These works are instructive and stunning markers of a tumultuous time and, even more so, of an extraordinary talent.

Rauschenberg sought to blur the boundaries of reality and art. He pioneered neo-Dada assemblages (everyday objects combined with painting), emerging on the Pop Art scene with brilliant sculptural experiments he called "combines."

These subsequently yielded to other preoccupations. Photo silkscreen prints were a new medium in the 1960s, one which Rauschenberg, like Andy Warhol, began to push. The works in these series are highly-regarded examples of Rauschenberg's experimentation with photographic collage, from which he assembled remarkable, even painterly, works that he then screen printed.

Purposely using art to call attention to critical issues of the day, he exploits newspaper advertisements, photographs, headlines and articles to create an absorbing encapsulation of cultural, social and political turmoil.

In clean, monochromatic form, you can also see the artist's process at work. Newsprint is torn, cut, shredded, abraded, pasted, painted over, inverted, marked. What remains is then beautifully orchestrated into pointed compositions, expertly guiding the eye through an uneasy tour of subject matter.

"Features from Currents #58" is a striking compilation of text and images addressing politics, sexuality, drugs, the religious establishment. At its heart, an overt symbol of despair: a nameless figure, slumped over on a park bench, empty hat upturned on the ground. Pulling from the ironies of pop culture, a small photograph of Mickey Mouse appears lower left, seemingly set adrift.

Other prints present equally lucid observations of the day. "Features from Currents #66" is a clever juxtaposition of ads, a surfing image and marijuana, highlighting the eccentricities of American consumption and recreation.

As documentary, these prints present a portrait of a country undergoing immense and rapid change. As art, we are struck by Rauschenberg's visual acuity, clarity of composition, as well as his