

NOTES FROM A TELEPHONE CONVERSATION WITH WALTER HOPPS

REGARDING RAUSCHENBERG'S COLLECTION
(SFMOMA Acc. No. 72.26)

15 May 1992

Mr. Hopps, of the Menil Collection, Houston, feels that he has accepted a "mandate" from the artist to enter into matters of conservation of his works. The Menil's conservator, Carol Mancusi-Ungaro, also has a particular interest in Mr. Rauschenberg's works and their condition; she has consulted with the National Gallery of Art on their works by the artist.

Mr. Hopps was, therefore, interested in helping to solve the problem of the fabric element that once covered the concave shaving mirror on Collection but which is no longer present. A piece of silk clearly covers the mirror in a color plate on p. 125 of Andrew Forge's Rauschenberg (1967). The central location of the "oculus" makes the question of whether or not it was intended to be obscured a rather significant formal matter. 175

Minutae is the only major red work related to Collection which is still in the artist's possession. It is on long-term loan to the National Gallery, Mr. Hopps notes. These two works, which both feature a shaving mirror, should be compared visually.

The artist "will indeed, when the time is right," make decisions about the appearance of his early works. Mr. Hopps suggests that the correct way to go about gaining this information is by building a "dossier" to present to Mr. Rauschenberg.

The November 1976 exhibition addressed issues about Collection, which is included in the Smithsonian's catalog. Its title was created only in 1976. Along with a number of other previously untitled works, it was "christened" by Mr. Rauschenberg at the instigation of Mr. Hopps.

The history of the piece and any published or unpublished photos needs to be traced:

Old photos from Rauschenberg Archives (see David White at Rauschenberg Studio, Lafayette Street, NYC, (212) 228-5283, c/o Denise LeBow);

Fulton Street studio photographs? (Hopps doesn't think so);

1954 Eagen Gallery exhibition: installation shots; Frank O'Hara review of this exhibition;

Rauschenberg Collection - 2

The Forge catalog photograph; any photos before or after this catalog;

Provenance before Hunk Anderson bought it;

Anderson Collection (Saga Foods, Menlo Park) photos;

SFMA photos from 1972 or later;

Mr. Hopps suggests that the most satisfactory means of soliciting an answer from the artist is by assembling identical color photographs from the above periods and giving Mr. Rauschenberg a clear visual choice. He can then make the decision on whether or not to replace the pink silk that once covered the centrally located mirror.

Walter Hopps and Carol Mancusi-Ungaro can be reached at the Menil Collection, 1511 Branard, Houston, TX 77006.

J. William Shank
Chief Conservator



This scrap of sheer fabric originally covered the mirror in *Collection*. Made of delicate silk, it deteriorated over the years and finally fell off the artwork in 1972. At that time, SFMOMA conservators determined that the fabric was too disintegrated to reattach, but they retained this original detached veil in the event of future developments that might make a repair possible. In 1998, the conservation staff consulted with Rauschenberg and used the preserved scrap as a model for a new piece of fabric, which the artist provided and a conservator attached to the work.

27 July 1998



Mr. Robert Rauschenberg
P. O. Box 54
Captiva, FL 33924

Mr. David White
381 Lafayette Street
New York, NY 10003

Dear Mr. Rauschenberg and Mr. White:

I am writing to you not about our new accessions (which everyone at SFMOMA is very much looking forward to receiving), but about our permanent collection piece of long-standing, *Collection*, the combine of 1954-55. We have a visual and structural problem that I hope you will be interested in helping us to solve.

The artwork is in good condition as it is currently presented on permanent display in the second floor galleries of our new museum. One central element, however, is significantly changed from the initial concept, and I wonder whether you would recommend returning it to its earlier state.

The concave mirror that appears as a central "oculus" in *Collection* was originally covered by a piece of delicate pink silk fabric. Shortly after the piece entered the SFMOMA collection in 1972, the larger part of the fabric, i.e. the lower two-thirds which was not firmly adhered to the background, became dislodged and was found on the gallery floor. Still a bit tattered and faded, the silk has been kept in a safe place ever since. The naked oculus has for twenty-six years stared at the viewers of *Collection* without a covering.

I enclose a series of photographs to jog your memory. Color photocopies from an earlier photograph show the mirror partially covered by the silk, and the recent details show the detail of the mirror, and the detached fragment itself.

We are clever enough to figure out a way either to reattach the original or to fabricate a facsimile of the original silk and to attach it to *Collection*. Your collective opinion on this matter would be an invaluable asset to our plan to proceed with this intervention.

Many thanks for considering this matter. I look forward to hearing back from you. My card is enclosed to let you know the various ways to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

J. William Shank
Chief Conservator

Enclosures

NOTES FROM A MEETING WITH ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG
at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
regarding *Collection* (formerly *Untitled*), 1953-54 (Acc. No. 72.26)

on Friday, 14 August 1998

Present:

Will Shank
Gary Garrels
David Ross
Rauschenberg assistant Darryl Pottorf

Mr. Rauschenberg's attention was drawn to this combine painting after contact by mail on the part of SFMOMA's Chief Conservator over the matter of the exposed mirror. (Correspondence is attached.)

Upon approaching the painting, with the mirror in mind, the artist began nodding to indicate that, yes, the mirror should be covered, as it had been originally. When we compared the remaining detached fragment to the painting, it became clear that a great deal of the fabric is entirely missing. Mr. Rauschenberg and his assistant jumped to help to solve the problem, noting that they could provide similar (ir not identical) fabric for reattachment. They took the remaining pink fabric fragment with them for comparison. (They promised to return the original for our archives.)

Otherwise, the painting was determined to be little changed. Even when a direct question was posed to the artist about fading, he did not observe any obvious changes. (Early photographs show *Collection* to be a much redder painting, especially in the left third, than it is currently.) He observed that this was his first colorful, break-away painting from his black period, and that it was all about color. The left third, he noted, is primarily red, the middle third yellow, and the right third blue.

David Ross asked Mr. Rauschenberg about the three-dimensional piece at the top and its origin. It was a house sign or house number, broken into pieces, according to the artist. The printed pink (formerly red) fabric with impressionist-type paintings came from a bolt of cloth, according to the artist. (Will Shank noted that our paintings conservator Paula De Cristofaro owns a blouse of the same material.) When asked about the newspaper collage elements and the comic strip inclusions, and whether there was any significance to the choices, the artist replied, "no." Then should we not look for any hidden messages in the text of the newsprint? "Only Roy [Leichtenstein] would do that," Rauschenberg replied.

Once it is provided by the artist's studio, we plan to replace the fabric over the mirror. It was not attached all around its perimeter, but rather hung from the top, parallel to the picture plane, according to the artist.

JWS

Robert Rauschenberg

P.O. Box 54, Captiva, Florida 33924

September 29, 1998

David A. Ross, Director
San Francisco Museum of Modern Art
151 Third Street
San Francisco, CA 94103

Dear David, HI!

Enclosed is the material for the mirror on Collection, 1954.

My recollection is that the vertical length is just above the white and the width is clear by the glue marks.

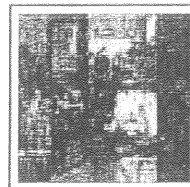
The color is instant powdered diet tea and a cup of Napa Valley Merlot and 1/2 cup Far Niente Cabernet Sauvignon.

Best wishes,

BOBRAUSCHENBERG

Robert Rauschenberg

Accession Number 72.26
 Temp ID x.2000.ANDCOL.646
 Display Artist Robert Rauschenberg
 Display Title Collection (formerly Untitled)



Object Status Location : 151 : 2 : G208
 Electronic Publication : Artstor 2010; Restrictions : See Restrictions Notes

Service Request Condition concern

Initiated by Paula De Cristofaro, SFMOMA

Date Initiated March 22, 1999

Trmt Auth'd (Non-PC)? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Examination Report After extensive consultation with the artist and research into handling silk fabric, and creating mock ups of the suggested treatment, it is proposed that the portion of the deteriorated silk fabric which has fallen off the painting (presumably in the early 1970's) be reconstructed with silk fabric provided by the artist which has been dyed to match the color of a remnant of the original fabric.

Examined by Cons Paula De Cristofaro, SFMOMA

Date Examined 00/00/00

Cons Obj Type

Purp of exm_trmt

Lab # 99.97

Status Awaiting authorization

Trmt Conservator Paula De Cristofaro, SFMOMA

Trmt Site

Treatment Date

Log In 00/00/00

Log Out 00/00/00

Trmt Registrar

Authorized By

Authorization Date 00/00/00

Trmt Auth'd (PC)? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Auth Method

Auth Located

Auth Received By

Lender Contact

Contact Date 00/00/00

Lender Contacted? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Contacted By

Invoice copy type

Invoice number

Other conservator

Invoice Date 00/00/00

Invoice Sent? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Treatment Report Done? ☐ Yes ☒ No

Treatment Proposal Documentary photography before, during and after treatment (35 mm color slides).
 Examine condition of painting, noting unusual materials and technical aspects.
 Make mockups of silk on panel to test various adhesives.
 Dust surface of painting in area to be treated.
 Adhere lifing and flaking paint in area of yellow field and "oculus".
 Attach appropriate size of pre-dyed pink-brown silk to paint surface in area of oculus.
 Attachment will be carried out as follows: prepare edges of residual silk fabric which are already adhered to underlying enamel paint. In several areas, the extreme edges of the adhered silk are lifing slightly along the jagged edge from which point the rest of the silk once hung downward. A non-staining adhesive such as BEVA 371 will be introduced to the lifting edges of fabric, which will then be tamped down and heat set with a thermal spatula.
 A template on mylar will be made of the jagged edge of the adhered silk fabric. This will serve as a guide in cutting the appropriate shape of the sample fabric provided by the artist.
 Once the fabric is cut, a thin profile of BEVA film will be cut to match the edge of the sample fabric. the BEVA film edge strip will be tacked on to the extreme edge of the cut sample fabric.
 The silk addition will be precisely aligned with the edge of original fabric and tacked to the underlying enamel paint with a thermal spatula.
 The edges of the silk addition will be distressed and frayed as necessary.
 Provide treatment report.

Treatment Proposal

Treatment Report Before and after documentary photography (35 mm color slides).
A mock-up of the surface of the painting was prepared. The following materials were used on a foam-board substrate:

- aluminum foil (to recreate the impermeable surface of the enamel paint applied to the surface adjacent to the "oculus" element)
- white silk to replicate the original silk and silk samples the artist had prepared and sent to the SFMOMA conservation studio
- drawing on mylar template of the contour of the border of the silk which remained attached to the painting

Mock-up procedure:

A square of wrinkled aluminum foil (approximately 4 in. x 5 in., which is the size of the area on the painting to be treated) were attached to a rigid foam-board surface with double-stick tape.

The mylar square was laid over the surface of the painting and the contour of the edge of the original fabric was drawn on the mylar. The contour corresponds to the border between residual original fabric which remains securely attached to the painting's surface (with an unidentified resin or glue) and rest of the original fabric rectangle which had "floated", un-attached, over the oculus element (and which had deteriorated and become completely detached).

A drawing of the profile of the original silk border was transferred to the white silk mock-up material. The white mock-up silk was then cut along this pattern so that two pieces were constructed: one representing the remaining silk on the painting, the second representing the silk fabric which had deteriorated and fallen off.

The silk mock-up fragment was adhered to the aluminum foil surface with a clear, penetrating synthetic resin varnish. The "floating" element received a > 1/4 inch application of BEVA 371 solution (ethyl-vinyl acetate solids dissolved in toluene and naphtha) along the irregular, cut border which is the site where the "floating" element of silk would be attached to the "adhered" element of silk. BEVA 371 was chosen as the adhesive due to its strength, relative transparency, and control and ease of application (by means of a fine paint-brush) to the irregular contour of the silk. The adhesive was allowed to dry overnight.

The floating element of silk was attached to the anchored element of silk on the mock up panel by aligning the two pieces of silk along the edges and by activating the thermosetting adhesive on the floating element with a heated spatula. The test procedure of applying the mock up silk fabric was satisfactory and had good visual appearance and a strong bond, where attached.

The mock-up procedure described above was employed to treat the artwork itself. The piece of silk applied by the artist (colored/dyed with "instant powdered diet tea and a cup of Napa Valley Merlot and 1/2 cup Far Niente Carbernet Sauvignon"—see letter dated September 1998 from artist in archive) was cut using the mylar template. The edges were frayed and teased about 1/2 in. The length of the attached piece was dictated by the artist himself, "My recollection is that the vertical length is just above the white and the width is clear by the glue marks" (ibid). Of the two pieces of silk supplied, the lighter colored one was selected, as this was closer in color to the remnant of the original floating silk element. The artist-applied silk was prepared with adhesive and aligned to the original silk on the surface of the painting. The adhesive on the floating silk edge was activated with a thermal spatula (heat was applied through a slip of silicon mylar), and was tacked on to the surface enamel paint at the border of the original silk. The floating silk element was tamped down with fingertip pressure while the adhesive cooled and set.

As with the mock up, the end results were very satisfactory. The only observations to be noted are: 1) the adhesive is slightly shiny through the edge of the floating element of the silk (unobtrusive with the painting is observed at normal viewing distance); 2) the original silk which remains adhered to the painting is much darker due to the adhesive which saturates it. Hence the attached element does not "read" as one continuous piece of silk with the original remnant of silk still attached to the surface. A similar color discrepancy can be observed between the original detached floating fabric remnant and the silk which remains on the painting.

Treatment carried out 22-25 March, 1999.

The artist reviewed the work shortly after the treatment was completed and was pleased with the