Art of the Real

"I think art is more like the real world when it's made out of the real world." –Robert Rauschenberg

What do the artwork on this page and the one on the cover have in common? For starters, they were both constructed in the late 1950s, and both took the art world by storm. Like all great artists, their young creator—Robert Rauschenberg (ROWSH-en-burg)—saw things in a new way and was not afraid to present his vision to the world.

In 1949, when 24-year-old Rauschenberg (opposite page, left) moved to New York City to begin his art career, the older painter Willem de Kooning (VIL-im Deh KOWN-eeng) (opposite page, right) was already a legend.

De Kooning was part of a group of painters who then dominated the art world. These painters were called Abstract Expressionists because their work didn't represent physical reality. Instead, it was made up of bold, spontaneous paint strokes that were seen as an expression of the painters' emotions. Rauschenberg's work was different. Instead of showing the inner world of his emotions, he wanted to show the physical world found right outside his door. So to create the piece on the left and the work on the cover, the artist brought real everyday objects into his art.

To make Coca Cola Plan (left),
Rauschenberg used real Coca Cola bottles along with other found objects: a wooden stair-railing ornament, cast-metal wings, and some wooden boxes. To transform these objects into art, he mixed them with more-traditional art materials, such as pencil, paper, and oil paint. He applied paint to the Coca Cola bottles by using loose brush strokes to lay down thick layers, creating rough textures and colorful paint drips. He applied paint to the cover image in the same way. This style of painting is similar to the style that de Kooning and other Abstract Expressionists used. But with works like Coca Cola Plan, Rauschenberg had created an entirely new type of art.

Abstract Expressionist painters saw painting as something separate from sculpture. Rauschenberg's work combined painting and other two-dimensional elements, like drawing and collage, with three-dimensional elements, like found objects. Rauschenberg's Combines inspired later generations of artists by giving them the freedom to make art out of anything.

As he gained confidence in his new approach to art, Rauschenberg decided to try something bold and symbolic: he wanted to completely erase one of de Kooning's drawings and present the result as a new work of art. De Kooning agreed to the project, but he didn't like it. He wanted to make sure the young artist had as hard a time as possible. So he gave Rauschenberg a drawing made with layers of oil paint, charcoal, pencil, and crayon. It took the young artist nearly a month and 17 different erasers to erase it. But when he was finished, he had given the art world something that he thought it needed: a clean slate.
A Personal Journey

"Every time I've moved, my work has changed radically."
—Robert Rauschenberg

Growing up, Rauschenberg didn't get to see a lot of art. Born in 1925, he was raised in Port Arthur, Texas, a town built around oil refineries and power plants like the one where his father worked. But he was a natural artist. As a boy, he drew shapes and patterns all over the walls of the bedroom he shared with his sister. He also painted the furniture and built a room divider out of wooden crates, where he placed jars and boxes filled with found objects. Later, when he joined the Navy, he found some oil paints and made portraits of his fellow sailors. On his day off, he visited a museum for the first time and realized that he wanted to become an artist.

Rauschenberg came to New York City with dreams of making it in the art world. He was poor, sometimes living on only 26 cents a day, which was worth more then but not by much. Still, he loved the city. He loved its sharp contrasts: a 40-story building next to a tiny wooden shack; an empty parking lot next to a building filled with a maze of offices; the smell of coffee from a café mixing with the smell of fish from a fish market. This juxtaposition and overlapping of mismatched things can also be seen in his Combines, which tell stories about the places he's been.

Satellite

Satellite (above), is made up of fragmented images that suggest Rauschenberg's Texas childhood. It's crowded and messy, like a lived-in home.
Scrap of patterned wallpaper (bottom left corner and top right corner), bits of lace (top half, right), and a warm color scheme (reds, yellows, oranges) also make the work feel homey. A newspaper comic strip that runs through the center of the image suggests childhood. Over it, a bright yellow stripe forms a kind of timeline. The wild pheasant walking along the top of the Combine might have walked through the yard of Rauschenberg's childhood home.

**First Landing Jump**

*First Landing Jump* (right), which suggests New York City, is made up of urban and industrial materials: a license plate, a tire, a striped road block, and a working light. It looks simpler than *Satellite* because the contrast between the dark and light parts of the Combine organizes the work into clear areas of positive and negative space. The black tire set against the light area echoes the white metal disk above, and balances the composition.

**Canyon**

*Canyon* (pages 8-9) tells a personal story. It is based on a Greek myth in which Zeus, the king of the gods, transforms himself into an eagle and carries a young boy up to heaven. In *Canyon*, the stuffed bald eagle with its wings spread represents Zeus, while the sack hanging from the bottom of the piece represents the young boy. What makes this work personal is the photo of a boy reaching upward (middle, left side). It is a photo of Rauschenberg's son, Christopher, who stayed with his mother after she and Rauschenberg divorced. Maybe the swooping eagle represents Rauschenberg's desire to be reunited with his son. A bald eagle is also a symbol of America. Right next to the photo of Christopher, almost invisible under a thin layer of white paint, is a picture of the Statue of Liberty. The statue's raised arm and Christopher's raised arm form a mirror image. Is Rauschenberg also making a statement about life in America? His layered imagery inspires many readings.
Making a Combine
Robert Rauschenberg turns found objects into art

To find the objects he used in his art, Rauschenberg would go on walks around the streets of New York City. He had a rule for working with the objects he brought back to his studio. He had to transform them. The art that he made with them had to be at least as interesting as the scenes he saw when he looked outside his window.

On one of his walks, he noticed a stuffed goat standing outside an office-supply store and talked the storeowner into selling it to him. The goat was a great find, but it was hard to work with. At first, Rauschenberg tried hanging a flat artwork on a wall and attaching the goat to it (right). But the goat had so much character that it stood out from the work instead of becoming part of it.

Rauschenberg wanted to break up the goat’s form to make it become part of a larger artwork, so he wrapped a tire around its middle. He stood it on the ground and placed the flat piece behind it. But this made the goat look as if it were hauling the piece instead of being part of it. Finally, Rauschenberg decided to lay the flat piece on the ground and stand the goat on top of it (opposite page). In this setup, the goat looked natural and at home.

By arranging and rearranging elements, Rauschenberg had created an urban nature scene: a goat grazing on a pasture made from objects found on the streets of New York City.

The interlocking shapes of the goat and tire suggest a monogram—a design made from two interlocking letters, usually someone’s initials. Rauschenberg liked this idea so much that he called the finished work Monogram. To this day it remains his signature Combine.
Rauschenberg used many different techniques to create Monogram:

**VARIETY** Rauschenberg applied paint in a variety of ways. This detail shows how he brushed a thin, transparent layer of paint over the figure on the left, laid a thick, opaque stroke of orange paint on the right, and let some white paint drip down the center.

**REPETITION** The artist repeated shapes to create visual rhythm. The curve of the figure on the left is echoed by the curved orange brushstroke on the right and the rounded heel in the center.

**SYMBOLISM** Rauschenberg used symbolic images to create meaning. This tightrope walker might represent the delicate balance between two-dimensional and three-dimensional art.

**PERSONAL IMAGERY** By including actual footprints and other personal imagery in Monogram, Rauschenberg showed traces of real people in his art.

"He refused to be abstracted into art, so I put a tire around him, and everything went to rest." - Robert Rauschenberg

Robert Rauschenberg, Monogram, 1959-1961. Oil, paper, fabrics, printed paper, mixed media, wood, metal, rubber, venetian blinds, fabricated figures, rubber tire. 61 x 83 x 69 in. Photograph: ©Estate of Robert Rauschenberg. All rights reserved. Image courtesy of Overall Miami.
Canyon
by Robert Rauschenberg

“You begin with the possibilities of the materials, then you let them do what they can do.”
—Robert Rauschenberg
Lost and Found
Found objects express these three artists' worlds

Pablo Picasso

In 1950, the year he created Baboon and Young (right), Spanish artist Pablo Picasso was the most famous painter in the world. When he painted, he had always experimented with new styles and techniques. Now, he was experimenting with sculpture by using everyday household objects in unexpected ways.

At first glance, Baboon and Young shows a baboon holding its baby in its arms. But look just a little closer and you'll notice the baboon's head is actually a toy car. When he made the sculpture, Picasso was in his late 60s and had recently become a new father.

His studio, which was in his home, was filled with his son's toys. Picasso used those toys to create a comical sculpture expressing how strange it felt to be a new father at such an advanced age. The rest of the sculpture is made out of other objects Picasso found around his house: a round clay pot acts as the body, two cup handles form the ears, and a steel spring makes up the tail.

Hannah Höch

If the word Dada doesn't mean anything to you, you're not alone. The artists who used the term to describe their style probably chose it because it was a nonsense word. Their movement began as a response to World War I (1914-1918), a brutal war that many thought was pointless. Later, these artists questioned and rebelled against the nonsense they saw in society.

In the image to the right, German Dada artist Hannah Höch (Hock) questioned the purpose of fashion. She combined fragmented images she found in fashion magazines into a strange jumble that's anything but attractive. Let your eyes follow the thin red outline around the edge of the women's faces; you'll see that they join to form a man's head in profile. Why do you think Höch used found images instead of drawing to make her point?
Jean-Michel Basquiat

American artist Jean-Michel Basquiat (BASS-ke-at) spent a great deal of time on the streets of New York City as a graffiti artist. At times, he was homeless. Born in 1960 into a middle-class Puerto Rican and Haitian family in Brooklyn, Basquiat began spray painting on Manhattan subways when he was 17 years old. A year later, he left home to try to become an artist. Inspired by the city streets, he painted on everything he could get his hands on: refrigerators, cardboard boxes, and doors.

The word derelict can mean "homeless person" or "something that has been thrown away." Basquiat's 1982 piece, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Derelict (below), is a self-portrait painted on found doors. The rough surface of the doors, and the artist's thick, sloppy brushstrokes, and scratchy lines suggest the rough life of the city streets. Basquiat also used words and symbols to tell his story.

In the central panel, Basquiat drew two feet violently cut off at the ankles. Below that, on a patch of blue, he wrote the word ANKLE three times. He covered the last letters to form the word ANK or ANKH, the ancient Egyptian symbol of life. Slightly to the right, you can see a cross under the word MORTE, a word that means "death" in many languages. Above the cross is a simplified drawing of a tall building. On the right panel, the stylized face of the artist watches the story of life and death in the city play out.

Basquiat's unusual style made him famous at a young age. Sadly, the real story of his life is all too short. He died in 1988 from a drug overdose at the age of 27.
Transformations

Rylie Goddard turns trash into treasure.

Eighteen-year-old Rylie Goddard is always on the lookout for items that will make an interesting art piece. As a student at South Doyle High School in Knoxville, Tennessee, Rylie rescued some ink rollers from the art room trash and used them in his award-winning sculpture, Turkey Fish 641C (opposite page).

Today, Rylie is a freshman at Maryville College in Tennessee, where he is pursuing an art degree. After college, he plans to become a high school art teacher so that he can inspire students the way his high school teacher inspired him.

How did you first get involved in art? Before high school, I didn’t have much art skill. I couldn’t draw and never dreamed of being an artist. Mr. Hickman, my high school art teacher, introduced me to a wide range of artists’ works and showed me that drawing and painting were not the only ways to make art. By introducing me to different techniques, like working with found objects, he sparked my creativity.

Where did the idea for your piece come from? I was carving a post on a wood lathe when Mr. Hickman suggested I use it to make a sculpture. I did some research and found artists who worked with carved wood, including one who worked by putting things in boxes. That’s how I got the idea to put a box on top of the post.

How did your idea develop from there? I thought the box would make a perfect home for a bird. As I found objects, I chose ones that might build on that theme. I found a nest in a tree right outside the art room and placed it in the box on top of a scrap of old carpet. I tried to make the ink rollers look like leaves falling off a tree. I added branches, pinecones, and two eggs I had speckled with paint. To create the other nest on the side of the box, I cut a bowl in half and added a piece of myself–some hair I had saved from a haircut. I added the light fixture to give the piece a break from nature and to suggest the modern industrial world.

How did you decide where to place these objects? I positioned the box off-center to create visual interest. Once the box was in place, it fueled where I placed everything else. I kept adding layers and layers to create a sense of balance, even though nothing is truly balanced in the sculpture.

What do these objects mean to you? They’re meaningful on a personal level. My hair is in it. So is my love of nature.
I live right next to the Smoky Mountains and am surrounded by natural beauty. I feel this piece expresses my appreciation of the natural world.

How did you know you were done? I didn't, actually. I felt something was missing, but I didn't know what. At one point, I got so frustrated I threw a film reel that was lying around at the sculpture. I loved how the film wrapped around everything and tied the piece together! So I glued the film into place and nailed the reel to the base.

Do you have any advice for aspiring artists? There are no rules in art. Whatever you feel like creating, if it's something that you're passionate about, no matter what it is, it's artwork.
Create A Combine
Collect images and found objects, then turn them into a work of art

You've seen in this issue how Robert Rauschenberg combined found objects with traditional art materials to create art that reflects his environment. For this workshop, you'll create your own Combine.

**Step 1: Gather Your Materials**
What are the images that make up your world? Start by selecting photos, socks, shirts, or any other objects, you find meaningful. Then, clip images that relate to your found objects from magazines, newspapers, and comic books. Gather additional two-dimensional materials, like scraps of wallpaper, colored paper, etc. Finally, find a cardboard piece to use as a base. **TIP:** If you don't want to damage your photographs, use photocopies instead. You can also use a photocopier to play with scale by enlarging or shrinking images.

**Step 2: Compose the Image**
Think about whether you want a vertical or horizontal composition. Begin laying out your objects, images, and materials. Cut out images as needed. Let your ideas develop as you arrange your images. Consider using three-dimensional objects to extend flat images—for example, paste real peanuts over a flat image of peanuts (see Elliot's Combine). You can create a relief effect by pasting a backing behind some flat images. Consider tearing off the top layer of cardboard to reveal the texture underneath (see Allison’s Combine). Once you’re happy with the composition, glue down your elements. **TIP:** Pay attention to images like eyes and hands, which can lead a viewer’s gaze around the composition (see Elliot’s Combine).

**Step 3: Paint the Image**
Choose or mix paint colors that will contrast with or unify the elements in your composition. On a separate piece of paper, experiment with a variety of techniques. Try applying paint in thin layers, thick layers, fluid strokes, drybrush, drips, etc. When
Makenzi’s Combine
Makenzi made her Combine personal and engaging by using images of friends who look directly out at the viewer. She let the printed images on her cardboard base show through to complement her theme of bubblegum fun.

Eliot’s Combine
Can you spot the three-dimensional object in this Combine? Eliot has glued real peanuts onto a two-dimensional image of a peanut can. He used photocopied images of people to create focal points that lead the viewer’s eye around the composition.

you’re ready to paint, begin with broad, bold strokes, then go in with smaller strokes. Consider letting some of the cardboard base show through (see Makenzi’s Combine). Remember, brushstrokes can define the edges of an image, break the image, and create movement and visual rhythm.

TIP: You need only a few bright colors to create a dramatic image. Don’t overmix or overwork your paint.

Tyler & Katie’s Combine
Tyler and Katie layered colored paper, photocopies, playing cards, and paint. The white paint drips draw the viewer’s eyes down to the football player.

Allison’s Combine
Allison tore off a layer of cardboard to reveal the texture underneath.
Graphic Designer

Charles Wilkin makes his living doing what he loves. Find out how he turned his interest in art into a rewarding career.

ART MAGAZINE: What is your job?
CHARLES WILKIN: I'm a graphic designer. I own and run my own studio, so I'm also a creative director, art director, illustrator, and manager. I wear all the hats!

AM: What kind of projects do you do?
CW: Mostly, I design for books, magazines, catalogs, and advertising. I also work on interactive projects, such as Web sites.

AM: When did you know this was the career for you?
CW: When I reached 11th grade, I realized that I had taken all the art classes that my school offered, so I took art classes at a vocational school. That's where I took my first commercial art class and really got into it.

AM: What is your artistic process?
CW: I'm always looking to find art for inspiration with my graphic design. Rauschenberg has been a huge influence. Like him, my style can feel gritty and handmade. I find objects that don't go together and combine them to create something different and unexpected.

AM: What skills do you need to succeed?
CW: You need to be self-motivated, organized, and open-minded. Projects can change suddenly, and you need to be able to adapt. You also need to be willing to explore ideas that you don't like, because a client might have a specific request for a project. You need to make connections. Most of my clients were referred to me by people I know.

AM: What's the best part of your job?
CW: I love coming up with ideas and solving design problems. I chose graphic design over fine art because I love problem solving.