

Collection

By [Sarah Roberts](#), July 2013

Part of the [Rauschenberg Research Project](#)

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- 1 Recent scholarship on Robert Rauschenberg's [Collection](#) (1954/1955) has trained a wide array of theoretical lenses on the artwork's endlessly complex and connotative surface, reading it variously as an autobiography, an embodiment of postmodern multiplicity, or a coded communiqué to Jasper Johns (b. 1930).¹ Yet perhaps the most compelling story to be told about the artwork centers on the material life of the object itself, a narrative that includes Rauschenberg tussling with the implications of his own evolving artistic strategies in a significant reworking of the piece around 1955. The development of *Collection* from its first showing in late 1954 (at which point it was untitled)² through its subsequent changes charts a path away from jumbled surfaces unified through monochromatic paint coverage—as seen in the *Red Paintings* (1953–54) and the *Black paintings* (1951–53)—toward a more expressive use of varied paint colors and a freewheeling assemblage of fragments of daily life. Rauschenberg's development of the Combine—a radical form that blends painting and sculpture—took place during the evolution of *Collection*. The Combines are subdivided into "Combine paintings," which hang or orient themselves primarily against the wall, and "Combines," which contain wall and floor components or stand fully on the floor. The first Combine works were Combine paintings, such as *Collection* and *Charlene* (1954).³ The present essay argues for an understanding of *Collection* not only as the key transitional work leading to the Combines, but also as a marker of the point at which Rauschenberg began breaking down the boundaries between art, life, and society—an engagement with everyday materials and events that would come to define his oeuvre and, indeed, much of postwar art.



1. Robert Rauschenberg, *Collection*, 1954/1955; oil, paper, fabric, wood, and metal on canvas, 80 x 96 x 3 1/2 in. (203.2 x 243.84 x 8.89 cm); Collection SFMOMA, Gift of Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

Collection, First State

- 2 Rauschenberg began work on *Collection* sometime in mid-1954,⁴ and he constructed it as a triptych, a format he had used previously, most notably in his 1951 [White Painting \[three panel\]](#). From left to right, *Collection*'s three raw canvas substrates are overlaid with bright red, yellow, and blue silk, respectively. The silks are now moderately faded, but their original intensity is still visible at their tacked edges in the panel joints on the artwork's verso (fig. 2). In a 1999 interview conducted at SFMOMA, Rauschenberg described his decision to cover the canvases with the colored fabrics as a deliberate effort to break away from his previous three monochromatic series (*Black paintings*, *White Paintings*, and *Red Paintings*). He quipped that he thought the primary colors "would scare me enough to get into color,"⁵ suggesting that from the very start he set out to explore new territory through the creation of *Collection*.
- 3 The earliest known [photograph](#) of *Collection* shows it at an oblique angle, hanging in a gallery context (fig. 3). Based on the physical characteristics of the room, this previously unpublished black-and-white snapshot has been identified as an installation view of the first public presentation of the artwork, the 1954–55 exhibition of Rauschenberg's *Red Paintings* and Combines at Charles Egan Gallery, New York.⁶ The angle and small format of the photo complicate any detailed visual reading of *Collection*'s surface, but side-by-side comparison with more recent photos of the artwork reveals that the artist made major alterations after the snapshot was taken, presumably after the exhibition closed.⁷ Accepting that this artwork was a proving ground on which the artist worked through many of the strategies that distinguish the Combines from his earlier series, what can we learn from the differences between the early state of *Collection* as seen in the Egan photo and the final, current state? In the Egan snapshot, much of the work's basic structure corresponds to its current condition. The multicolored stripes across the bottom are present, while the upper two-thirds is cluttered with newspaper, scraps of fabric, and thin washes and patches of paint. The small mirror is there, embedded just off-center and veiled with sheer fabric, and the scraps of wood and metal affixed to the top edge appear



2. Detail of verso of Robert Rauschenberg's *Collection* (1954/1955) showing the abutment of two panels



3. Installation view of Robert Rauschenberg's *Collection* (1954/1955) in *Bob Rauschenberg*, Charles Egan Gallery, New York, December 1954–January 1955. Photo: Robert Rauschenberg, courtesy the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation

just as they do today. In this first state, the formula of layered paint, printed matter, and fabrics resembles that of many of the *Red Paintings* and the Black paintings. Paint unifies disparate elements with color and conveys a sense of motion or activity through gestural brushwork. However, much of the newsprint in *Collection* is left uncharacteristically bare in comparison to a typical *Red Painting*, and the inclusion of three-dimensional found elements is also atypical.



4. Robert Rauschenberg, *Red Painting*, 1954. Oil and collage on canvas, 76 1/2 x 51 in. (194.3 x 130 cm). Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation, Los Angeles; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY



5. Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled (Red Painting)*, 1954. Oil, fabric, and newspaper on canvas, 70 3/4 x 47 7/8 in. (179.7 x 121.6 cm). Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

- 4 In the earliest *Red Paintings*, such as *Red Painting* (1954; fig. 4),⁸ paint completely coats all the collage materials, and any color variations arise primarily from the different colors and textures of the underlying surfaces.⁹ *Untitled (Red Painting)* (1954; fig. 5) incorporates colors other than red through both paint and colored textiles and begins to allow some of the disparate elements to shake loose from complete integration with the red surface, notably the striped fabrics across the top and the lacy gold textile at lower right. Nevertheless, the latter work still is overwhelmingly covered in red paint, differing markedly from the torrent of colors and materials at play on the surface of *Collection*. Significantly, both *Red Paintings* remain very much paintings. By contrast, *Collection* clearly steps away from the painterly approach to surface construction that marks the *Red Paintings* and toward the open-minded, “come as you are” attitude to materials that is a defining characteristic of the Combines. The noteworthy differences between the early state of *Collection* and the *Red Paintings* are the palette of primary colors, the higher percentage of surfaces left unpainted, and the sculptural elements assembled on the surface and top edge. In this first incarnation, then, *Collection* was arguably well on its way to being a Combine.

- 5 To be fair, the concurrent showing of *Red Paintings* and Combines at Egan Gallery is indicative of the fact that Rauschenberg’s transition from one to the other was by no means linear, and in fact the two series were not considered by the artist or observers to be separate entities until several years later.¹⁰ Decades of scholarship have produced a general chronology for Rauschenberg’s artistic evolution in the period 1953 to 1955, based on formal developments such as the introduction of additional colors and an increasing openness to leaving collage elements unpainted. However, the artist’s habits of working on multiple pieces simultaneously and revisiting works that had been considered “finished” defy any attempt to define a work-by-work progression. Perhaps we should not be surprised, then, that some art historians have considered *Collection* to be a *Red Painting* while others have declared it the first full-blown Combine.¹¹ But curator Walter Hopps’s early instinct that *Collection* marked new territory¹² does seem to be confirmed by the nature of the changes that Rauschenberg wrought on the work soon after the Egan showing.

Reworking *Collection*, Second State

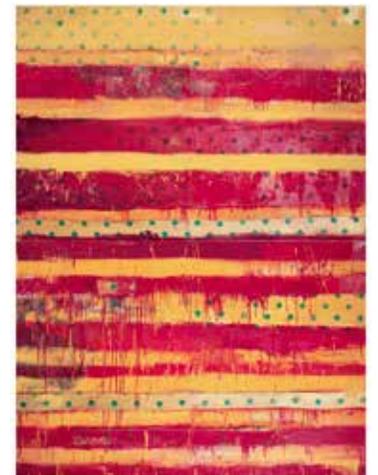
6 After the Egan installation photo was taken, Rauschenberg significantly reworked the upper two-thirds of *Collection*, adding many of its now-signature elements (fig. 6).¹³ Writer and friend of the artist David Myers purchased the artwork directly from Rauschenberg in about 1955;¹⁴ Rauschenberg presumably had finished his reworking before Myers took possession.¹⁵ The next extant photo—Rudy Burckhardt’s photograph for the Swedish journal *Konstrevy*¹⁶—dates from 1961, and here the surface appears as we see it today. The upper register has gained large swaths of fabric and paint, partially concealing elements such as the sheets of newspaper that had once been visible at the top of the center panel. Off-white fabric rectangles and a thin floral printed fabric have been layered over the upper regions, and each fabric addition has been finished off with a flourish of paint. Quick, brushy swirls of blue and gray top the added textiles in the upper corners, and a distinctive thick line of red paint, possibly squeezed directly from the tube, meanders across the left and center panels. Finally, Rauschenberg has added the focal-point swiipe of drippy white that trails down the central panel.



6. View of Robert Rauschenberg's *Collection* (1954/1955) with highlighting indicating alterations the artist made after the work was first exhibited

7 The isolated swiipe of dripping paint is a recurrent gesture in the artist's repertoire from 1954 on, and this type of mark has frequently been referred to in the Rauschenberg literature as a "hinge" stroke.¹⁷ The mark emerged in the *Red Paintings*, with its earliest incarnation being the short stroke of white floating off-center in the *Weisman Red Painting* of 1954, introduced above as figure 4. Throughout the *Red Paintings* and in *Yoicks* (1954), paint becomes less and less a material with which to cover canvases and more a self-contained entity used self-consciously to reference Painting with a capital "P"—a transition much discussed in recent Rauschenberg literature. Regarding the white hinge stroke in *Collection*, Branden W. Joseph has written that Rauschenberg invented a new relationship between painter and paint stroke, in which brushstrokes sit atop the canvas "as quotations or allegorical appropriations of expressive gestures."¹⁸ Similarly, Yve-Alain Bois discusses Rauschenberg's strategy of "leveling" materials, an approach that equates paint with all the other physical materials in the Combines: "There is no fundamental difference between a collage element and a painted one. In his work, any atom—whether industrially, mechanically, or manually produced—is, as it were, in quotation marks."¹⁹ The iconic paint stroke would go on to appear in Combines such as *Bed* and *Rebus* (both 1955), and it would reach its full potential in *Factum I* and *Factum II* of 1957, a pair of nearly identical paintings that doubles down on the idea of the paint stroke in quotation marks, as the strokes in each painting effectively cite those in the other. So used, paint ceases to be Painting and becomes instead a declaration of non-painting, an indicator that these works are resolutely something else.

8 If the introduction of the white hinge stroke and the aforementioned red squeeze line to *Collection* exemplifies a new relationship between painter and paint stroke, the layered fabrics added to the upper sections of the work demonstrate a new, nearly concurrent development in the artist's attitude toward collage. Many of the fabrics chosen for *Collection* appear in multiple artworks created between 1953 and 1956: *Yoicks* (1954, fig. 7), *Charlene* (1954), *Interview* (1955), *Small Rebus* (1956), and *Honeysuckle* (1956), as well as several untitled pieces. As noted by Walter Hopps, *Yoicks* offers the earliest example of Rauschenberg using the inherent patterns, colors, and textures of textiles as compositional elements.²⁰ *Collection* continues this strategy and goes a step further, employing the textiles in the complex game of hide-and-seek that also is typical of the Combines. This strategy of the partial reveal was initiated in the first state of *Collection* as overlapping sheets of newsprint and paint strokes of varying transparency that both invite and discourage attempts to read the surface. However, the push-pull dynamic reached a new level when the resolutely opaque swatches of fabric were attached, adding an almost archaeological character to the work.



7. Robert Rauschenberg, *Yoicks*, 1954. Oil, fabric, paper, and newsprint on two separately stretched canvases, 96 x 72 in. (243.8 x 182.9 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; gift of the artist; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

9 All the strategies that define the Combines visibly unfold in the post-Egan alterations to *Collection*: the as-is juxtaposition of found objects, the democratic approach to materials, and the interplay of revealed versus concealed content and meaning. Hopps long ago identified the import of *Collection* in the earliest systematic scholarly consideration of Rauschenberg's corpus, writing "it is probably the first work in which Rauschenberg

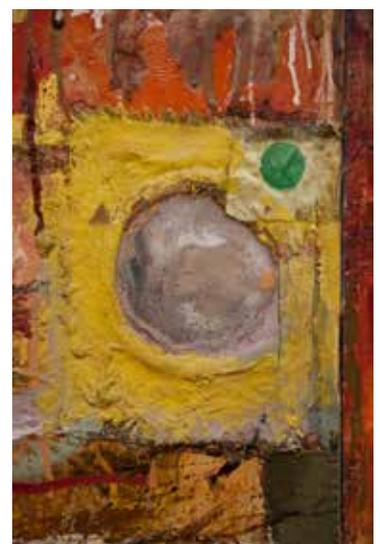
incorporated the full range of art-making techniques that have come to be associated with his combines.”²¹ Yet, what Hopps could not know was that the surface of this seminal work was an ongoing testing ground for the development of Rauschenberg’s evolving artistic vocabulary.

American and European Exhibitions, 1963–1976

- 10 *Collection* remained largely out of circulation in the eight years following the Egan exhibition; the artwork was not exhibited publicly and appeared only once in print, as the above-mentioned illustration to a 1961 article by Öyvind Fahlström in *Konstrevy*.²² The next exhibition of *Collection* did not take place until 1963, when it was shown in Lawrence Alloway’s *Six Painters and the Object* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.²³ By that time, it had been sold to Ileana and Michael Sonnabend.²⁴ (Although the Sonnabends took up permanent residence in Paris in late 1961, the artwork appears to have remained in New York until shortly after the Guggenheim exhibition ended.²⁵) Ileana Sonnabend brought *Collection* across the Atlantic in late 1963 or early 1964 and placed it in six major European exhibitions between 1964 and 1971,²⁶ years that brought Rauschenberg widespread recognition and financial success. This period of international achievement was unprecedented for an American artist, and it coincided with the upsurge of both the recognition of New York’s dominance of the international art scene and the value of American art more generally in the global marketplace.²⁷ Circulating in high-profile European exhibitions and publications in these years, *Collection* played a significant role in the rise of Rauschenberg’s reputation.
- 11 Sonnabend sold *Collection* to SFMOMA in 1972, and it made its way to the West Coast. The work was the first Rauschenberg SFMOMA acquired (Harry W. and Mary Margaret Anderson purchased it for the museum), and it has been on view at the museum nearly continuously since its arrival.²⁸ Due to its fragility, *Collection* is lent only in exceptional circumstances, as it was for the 1976 retrospective that Hopps organized for the National Collection of Fine Arts (NCFA; now the Smithsonian American Art Museum). Shortly before the 1976 show, *Collection* received the name by which it is now known. The work was one of a number of Combines that had remained untitled through the 1970s, and in preparation for the exhibition Hopps discussed with the artist the possibility of naming them. Rauschenberg was clearly open to the change, and he later conveyed in the 1999 SFMOMA interview his distaste for untitled paintings, saying that it was “Cause I like language so much.”²⁹ Hopps suggested that the choice of the name *Collection* was influenced by the venue, the National Collection of Fine Arts, but presumably it was also a reference to the collection of artwork reproductions gathered on its surface.³⁰ NCFA officials [notified SFMOMA](#) of the title change.³¹

The Mirror and Veil

- 12 Shortly after *Collection*’s arrival at SFMOMA in 1972, the piece of sheer silk fabric that had covered the small mirror in the center of the canvas was found on the gallery floor. It is unclear how the fabric had detached from the artwork, though it appears that it had become brittle and subject to breakage simply due to age. SFMOMA conservators noted and preserved the found scrap but chose not to reattach it at that time, as the fabric was too deteriorated. The mirror was left bare (fig. 8), and the artwork was exhibited and published this way for more than two decades, including in the artist’s 1976 and 1997 retrospective catalogues.
- 13 On the occasion of SFMOMA’s suite of Rauschenberg acquisitions in 1998, the artist visited the museum, and staff consulted with him regarding the condition of the work and the possible [replacement of the silk](#). The artist then returned to his studio and dyed two pieces of fabric with a combination of powdered tea and two varieties of red wine to obtain the desired color. A new veil was made from the first piece of fabric and meticulously attached to the remaining frayed edge on the surface. (The second piece of fabric was retained in SFMOMA’s Artist Materials Archive in the event that it was needed in the future.) Some fourteen years later, the color had again faded noticeably (a change



8. Detail of Robert Rauschenberg’s *Collection* (1954/1955) showing the mirror without the fabric veil

due to the organic pigments of the tea and wine dye bath) and the edges of the adhesive had begun to lift. In 2012, the conservation team decided to [replace the silk again](#), using the 1998 template but with a more colorfast fabric. Synthetic dyes were mixed to match the color of the replacement veil to the reserved, unfaded 1998 swatch.

- 14 In retrospect, the decision to leave the mirror uncovered for more than twenty-five years seems perplexing, considering how central the veiled mirror is to the work's presence and the viewer's experience of its surface. In a peekaboo, game-like manner, the mirror reflects the room around it and offers us a tantalizing, yet ultimately frustrated, opportunity to glimpse ourselves through the veil. Rauschenberg discussed the use of mirrors as a way to counteract the stillness of a static finished painting,³² and mirrors do indeed appear in many of the major pieces he made between 1949 and 1960. Since the work's first showing at Egan Gallery, the veiled mirror has always been the most discussed aspect of *Collection*, beginning with Frank O'Hara's oft-quoted review in *ARTnews*: "Lifting up a bit of pink gauze you stare out of the picture into your own magnified eye. He provides a means by which you, as well as he, can get 'in' the painting."³³ Getting "in" the painting requires, of course, that the work be hung at a height that positions the mirror at eye level. The Egan photo shows *Collection* hanging perhaps twelve or thirteen inches from the floor, which is much lower than is typical of a museum or gallery context. At such a height, the mirror sits directly at eye level.³⁴
- 15 The mirror itself has grown cloudy over time, reflecting less and less of its environment and offering diminishing viewer interaction. The work's overall color has also changed considerably, with both the newsprint and the colored fabrics fading. After seeing the early Combines in the 2005 exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, Jasper Johns (whose firsthand knowledge of their original appearance is unparalleled) noted that "the unfortunate thing about those early works is that they take on a quality of being relics. Originally, they were fresh, immediate, not precious—things apt to be overlooked, picked up here and there, like a minute ago."³⁵ Early color images of the artwork convey this freshness to the degree possible in a reproduction. Although *Collection* still feels vibrant and the layered elements retain some of that feeling of being swept up off the streets, the work has acquired a patina of age that is somewhat at odds with its original conception (fig. 9). The ephemeral nature of the materials Rauschenberg chose will continue to present conservation as well as presentation challenges as the aging process transforms the experience viewers will have of the artwork.



9. Views of Robert Rauschenberg's *Collection* (1954/1955) documenting changes in appearance from 1969 to 2013

- 16 In 1956, Rauschenberg wrote of his works: "They are usually over-sized, awkward, spontaneously constructed and most of the materials used are fairly impermanent. Consequently, the finished work is either fragile or in need of repair. . . . I try to use these materials in such a way that they do not forfeit their identities for the sake of color, form or texture. (They are these already.) In this way, I consider the text of a newspaper, the detail of a photograph, the stitch of a baseball and the filament in a light bulb as fundamental to the painting as the brush stroke or enamel drip of paint."³⁶ Fellow artist and friend Dorothea Rockburne later remembered the debut of the Combines at the 1954–55 Egan Gallery exhibition and noted that "Everyone hated them. However, little by little, people began to see in them a way out of the orthodoxies that then dominated the art world."³⁷ Rauschenberg's way out was directly through his radically new approach to materials, an approach that he literally worked out on the surface of *Collection*.

Notes

1. Recent texts referencing *Collection* include Yve-Alain Bois, "Eye to the Ground," *Artforum* 44, no. 7 (March 2006): 245–48, 317; Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 72–119; Tom Folland, "Robert Rauschenberg's Queer Modernism: The Early Combines and Decoration," *Art Bulletin* 92, no. 4 (December 2010): 348–65; Jonathan D. Katz, "'Committing the Perfect Crime': Sexuality, Assemblage, and the Postmodern Turn in American Art," *Art Journal* 67, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 38–53; Jonathan D. Katz, "Jasper Johns' Alley Oop: On Comic Strips and Camouflage," Queer Cultural Center, accessed August 1, 2011, <http://www.queerculturalcenter.org/Pages/KatzPages/Katzoops.html>; and Paul Schimmel, "Autobiography and Self-Portraiture in Rauschenberg's Combines," in *Robert Rauschenberg: Combines*, ed. Paul Schimmel (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2005), 210–29. Though it does not specifically reference *Collection*, see also Rosalind Krauss, "Perpetual Inventory," in *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*, ed. Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 206–23.
2. *Collection* was known as *Untitled* from its first showing in 1954–55 until 1976. See later discussion in the main text and notes 24 and 26 below.
3. Rauschenberg continued to produce Combine paintings even after the stand-alone works evolved. *Untitled* (1954, private collection, Paris), with an illuminated stained-glass panel across the top, is frequently referred to as the first Combine. *Minutiae* (1954, replica in collection of Walker Art Center) was created as a set for the Merce Cunningham Dance Company's performance of the same name that opened in December 1954. *Minutiae* likely provided an impetus to explore the three-dimensional possibilities of the Combine form.
4. The left panel includes a newspaper clipping dated August 22, 1954. *Collection* (then known as *Untitled*) was dated 1954 in its first publication, in the Swedish journal *Konstrevy*. Öyvind Fahlström, "En gata full av presenter," *Konstrevy* 37, nos. 5–6 (1961): 176–81. In the 1963 catalogue for *Six Painters and the Object*, it was dated 1953–54. This second dating held until Walter Hopps conducted research with the artist in preparation for the 1991 exhibition and catalogue *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, at which point the date was changed to 1954. In light of the changes made to *Collection* after the Egan Gallery exhibition closed in January 1955, the work has now been ascribed to 1954/1955.
5. Robert Rauschenberg, video interview by David A. Ross, Walter Hopps, Gary Garrels, and Peter Samis, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, May 6, 1999. [Unpublished transcript](#) at the SFMOMA Research Library and Archives, N 6537 .R27 A35 1999a, 54–55. This discussion occurs 2:15 min. into the [video excerpt on Collection](#).
6. The Egan Gallery exhibition is generally referred to in the literature as *Red Paintings and Combines*, but the scant extant documentation of this show refers to it only by the artist's name. See Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: Menil Foundation and Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), 167. No checklist exists for this exhibition; however, two other snapshots of the exhibition taken by Rauschenberg show *Yoicks* (1954), *Untitled* (1954; no longer extant), and *Untitled (Red Painting)* (1954; Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles); see [figure 5](#). The floorboards, baseboards, and overhead beam in the snapshot of *Collection* correspond to known photos of Egan Gallery taken by the artist and held in the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation archives. The paper and physical format also match these archival photos, confirming that this is a snapshot of the show. See Walter Hopps and Susan Davidson, eds., *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1997), 554.
7. I wish to thank my colleague Paula De Cristofaro, paintings conservator at SFMOMA, for offering many insights during the extended period in which we studied the construction of *Collection* together. I also extend thanks and acknowledgment to my colleague Amanda Hunter Johnson, associate conservator at SFMOMA, who first noticed differences in the surface of *Collection* when we were reviewing photos at the Rauschenberg studio in May 2010.
8. This painting has been dated ca. 1953 in previous publications, but a newspaper clipping embedded in the surface shows a date of May 23, 1954.
9. See Rosalind Krauss's analysis of Rauschenberg's interplay of color and underlying materials in "Rauschenberg and the Materialized Image," *Artforum* 13, no. 4 (December 1974): 36–43; reprinted in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Branden W. Joseph (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 39–55. See especially 45–46.
10. The exact date that the term *Combine* was coined is unclear, but it was in circulation by the time of Rauschenberg's next published review in January 1956. Leo Steinberg also used the term in his appraisal of the group exhibition at the Stable Gallery, "Month in Review, Contemporary Group at Stable Gallery," *Arts Magazine* 30, no. 4 (January 1956): 46–47. Rauschenberg used the term himself in an unpublished January 1956 statement. See Catherine Craft, "In Need of Repair: The Early Exhibition History of Robert Rauschenberg," *Burlington Magazine* 154, no. 1308 (March 2012): 191.
11. Walter Hopps considered *Collection* to be an early Combine. See Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, 164–68. Paul Schimmel also argues that *Collection*, *Charlene*, *Pink Door* (1954), and *Red Interior* (1954) are early Combines in "Autobiography and Self-Portraiture in Rauschenberg's Combines," 214–16. In contrast, Roni Feinstein classifies *Collection* and *Charlene* as *Red Paintings* in "Random Order: The First Fifteen Years of Robert Rauschenberg's Art, 1949–1964" (PhD diss., New York University, 1990), 165.
12. Walter Hopps, ed., *Robert Rauschenberg* (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 1976), 77.
13. Rauschenberg frequently revisited and altered his works, sometimes many years after the initial date of completion. As noted by Feinstein ("Random Order," 172), *Charlene* appears in the 1976 National Collection of Fine Arts catalogue in an earlier state. Rauschenberg is also known to have continued altering and adding to his works long after they had been transferred to others' possession. Perhaps the best-known instance of this is his 1985 repainting of a 1953 Black painting owned by John Cage, which had originally been a 1951 painted collage. Cage acquired the collage out of the 1951 Rauschenberg exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, and Rauschenberg shortly thereafter turned it into a Black painting, without Cage's consent. See Hopps, *The Early 1950s*, 172, plate 99. See also Michael Kimmelman, "Robert Rauschenberg, American Artist, Dies at 82," *New York Times*, May 14, 2008, accessed August 2, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/14/arts/design/14rauschenberg.html>.

14. The actual acquisition date is not recorded in any archival documents that have come to light to date. Myers does not recall the specific date, but he is certain it was no later than 1958. David Myers, interview with the author, October 2011. Correspondence from Ileana Sonnabend incorrectly notes that Myers received it as a gift of the artist. See SFMOMA Permanent Collection Object Files: *Collection*, 72.26; letter from Ileana Sonnabend to Maryse Posenae, October 29, 1983.
15. The precise date of the reworking cannot be determined, though presumably the changes were made after the exhibition closed in January 1955. In conversation with the author, Myers confirmed that Rauschenberg never reworked *Collection* while it was in his possession. The floral fabric in the upper left quadrant was used in other works created between 1954 and 1956, including *Red Interior* (1954), *Interview and Monk* (both 1955), and *Honeysuckle, Rhyme*, and *Small Rebus* (all 1956). This particular fabric does not appear in any works made after 1956. Thus, the reworking must have taken place in 1955 or possibly 1956, though the later date seems less likely, as Rauschenberg had moved on to different ideas and strategies.
16. See notes 4 and 22 for citation information and further discussion of the *Konstrevy* article.
17. The term *hinge stroke* first appears in the literature, attributed to Jasper Johns, in Brian O'Doherty's "Rauschenberg and the Vernacular Gance," *Art in America* 61, no. 5 (September–October 1973): 82–87. Feinstein also notes that Johns may have been the first to denote this type of painted element as a hinge stroke. Feinstein, "Random Order," 156, 184n17.
18. Joseph, *Random Order*, 110.
19. Bois, "Eye to the Ground," 248.
20. Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 76.
21. *Ibid.*, 77.
22. Fahlström, "En gata full av presenter," 181.
23. Exhibition Checklist. Circa 1963. Six Painters and the Object. Exhibition records. A0003. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Archives, New York. *Six Painters and the Object* was the first New York museum exhibition to grapple with the emergence of Pop art, and among the first to characterize Rauschenberg as a forerunner to the movement. The Guggenheim exhibition ran March 14–June 12, 1963, overlapping with the retrospective at The Jewish Museum, New York, March 31–May 8, 1963.
24. The exact date of transfer from Myers to Sonnabend cannot be determined. Sonnabend noted that she purchased the painting from Myers in 1959 or 1960 in an October 29, 1983, letter to Maryse Posenae, now in the SFMOMA Permanent Collection Object Files: *Collection*, 72.26. However, the Rauschenberg studio archive records Sonnabend's purchase as 1961 or 1962. In a July 4, 1958, telegram, Sonnabend asks Castelli, "DID YOU QUOTE PRICE MYERS PICTURE?" The question suggests the beginning of a negotiation for purchase. A later, handwritten memo by Leo Castelli with the notation "before Ileana's departure Nov. 1961" divides up the Rauschenberg works among "LC" and "II" and "RR" [LC=Castelli, II=Sonnabend, RR= Rauschenberg]. "Myers piece?" is listed under Sonnabend's name. Because the work was still untitled at this time, it is generally referred to in correspondence and notes as "Myers piece" or "Myers picture." Series 1: Correspondence, Box 20, Folder 16, Sonnabend, Ileana, 1961. Leo Castelli Gallery records, ca. 1880–2000, bulk 1957–1999. Archives of American Art. Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. No further correspondence or receipts have been found to document the actual date ownership was transferred. I suspect that Sonnabend purchased *Collection* sometime in 1959 or 1960 and that it was essentially mingled with the Castelli Gallery stock. Then, when she and Castelli divided the works in advance of her move to Paris, she officially took sole possession of it. The price of \$900 written on the back of *Collection* reinforces the idea that it was in Sonnabend/Castelli's holdings before 1960. The \$900 figure is entirely consistent with Castelli price lists for similar works by Rauschenberg in 1957–59; by 1960, works of this scale commanded prices between \$2,000 and \$5,000. Series 2: Administrative Files, Box 38, Folder 10, Price Lists, 1957–63. Leo Castelli Gallery records, ca. 1880–2000, bulk 1957–1999. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
25. *Collection* did not appear in Galerie Ileana Sonnabend's Rauschenberg shows in February and March of 1963, instead being lent to the Guggenheim's *Six Painters* exhibition. The loan documents from the Guggenheim went to Sonnabend care of Castelli at the Leo Castelli Gallery, so certainly by then her ownership was clear. Series 2: Administrative Files, Box 34, Folder 5, Loans Completed 1963–1964. Leo Castelli Gallery Records, ca. 1880–2000, bulk 1957–1999. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
26. The October 29, 1983, letter from Sonnabend to Posenae cited in note 24, above, states that Galerie Ileana Sonnabend showed *Collection* in 1964 before the Venice Biennale. However, the only Rauschenberg show at Sonnabend in 1964 before the May biennale opening conflicts with a confirmed London showing of *Collection* at the Tate Gallery in *Painting and Sculpture of a Decade, 1954–1964*, April 22–June 28, 1964. I believe *Collection* was shown at Sonnabend's gallery later in the year in *Robert Rauschenberg: Untitled 1953–54 and Thirty-Four Dante Drawings*, December 1964–January 13, 1965. Start date unknown. As noted previously, the piece was referred to as *Untitled* and dated 1953–54 as of 1964; it also was the only work carrying that title and date significant enough to build this Sonnabend exhibition around. It is unclear what remains of records from the Sonnabend Gallery in this era. The 1983 letter also states that *Collection* was shown at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1964, which is not true but has been incorrectly published previously by SFMOMA. See the [exhibition history](#) on the artwork overview page for a complete history.
27. For the most thorough and intelligent consideration of Rauschenberg's role in the rise of American art in Europe, see chapters 1 and 2 in Hiroko Ikegami's *The Great Migrator: Robert Rauschenberg and the Global Rise of American Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), 17–101.
28. Since the 1992 acquisition of the Anderson Collection of Pop Art, the museum has contractually agreed to show *Collection* in a dedicated Anderson Gallery, a permanent installation of works from this significant gift.
29. Rauschenberg, interview with Ross, Hopps, et al., May 6, 1999, 53.
30. *Ibid.*, 52–54.
31. Neil Printz, National Collection of Fine Arts, [letter to Karen Tsujimoto](#), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, July 26, 1976. SFMOMA Permanent Collection Object Files: *Collection*: 72.26.

32. "Robert Rauschenberg," in *Record of Interviews with Artists Participating in the Popular Image Exhibition* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Gallery of Modern Art, 1963), 45.
33. Frank O'Hara, "Bob Rauschenberg," *ARTnews* 53, no. 9 (January 1955): 47. Interestingly, O'Hara's choice of words echoes László Moholy-Nagy's ideas on reflectivity as the logical endpoint of modernist painting. For a compelling assessment of John Cage's distillation of Moholy-Nagy as evidenced in Cage's response to Rauschenberg's *White Paintings*, see Joseph, *Random Order*, 33–42.
34. With the lower edge at twelve to thirteen inches from the floor, the midline of the artwork would be at fifty-two or fifty-three inches, extremely low in a museum context. SFMOMA typically hangs paintings of this size on a sixty-inch midline, which would place the mirror several inches above eye level for most viewers. At twelve inches from the floor, the mirror would be at eye level. David White has noted the artist's general preference for lower hanging heights. "[SFMOMA 75th Anniversary: David White](#)," interview conducted by Richard Cándida Smith, Sarah Roberts, Peter Samis, and Jill Sterrett, 2009, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 73–74. Accessed August 2, 2011, http://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/white_david.pdf.
35. Jasper Johns, quoted in Calvin Tomkins, *Lives of the Artists* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 184.
36. January 1956 statement by Rauschenberg quoted on untitled, undated typescript information sheet on Rauschenberg in Castelli Gallery papers. Series 2: Administrative Files, Box 38, Folder 26, Rauschenberg, Robert–Writings, ca. 1956–1961, Leo Castelli Gallery records, ca. 1880–2000, bulk 1957–1999. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
37. Dorothea Rockburne and Nan Rosenthal, "Tribute to Robert Rauschenberg," *The Brooklyn Rail*, June 2008. Accessed August 12, 2011, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2008/06/art/tribute-to-robert-rauschenberg-19252008>.