

Conservation notes on materials relating to Robert Rauschenberg's
Untitled [glossy black painting] (ca. 1951), 2010 and 2012

Artist: Robert Rauschenberg

Title: *Untitled* [glossy black painting]

Creation Date: ca. 1951

Media: enamel and newspaper on canvas

Dimensions: 71 15/16 in. x 53 in. (182.72 cm x 134.62 cm)

Accession No.: 98.306

Temp ID: PSP98.432

November 30, 2012 Summary of Mock-up Process

Conservators often create mock-ups or replicas of an object in order to understand how an artist used materials and techniques in a specific work. Mock-ups are also valuable to test cleaning and repair methods and to monitor aging characteristics of particular materials.

A mock-up of *Untitled* [glossy black painting] was undertaken in order to understand the types of papers used in the work and how the collage elements were painted and applied. There are small areas of unpainted paper with printed text visible in *Untitled* [glossy black painting] as well as serrated edges often seen in newspapers. To verify that the collage elements were composed of newspaper, mock-ups were made using soft-sized brown packing paper and hard-sized calendared newspaper for comparison. (Calendared paper is compressed between rollers to create a uniformly smooth, even printing surface.) The papers were ripped and cut to compare how the edges held the paint, or media. Rauschenberg's original paint is unknown; Rust-Oleum® black enamel was chosen for the mock-up.

The soft-sized packing paper absorbed the enamel differently and the surface appeared slightly rough after the enamel was applied, due to swelling of the fibers. The hard-sized calendared newspaper remained smooth after the enamel was applied and dried. The collage elements on the original appear smooth and slick, most likely confirming the use of newspaper overall. Results of the tests also showed that the collage elements were torn, not cut, prior to media application.

Multiple tests were applied to a horizontal painted canvas using a variety of techniques, in order to compare the results to the original. For example, the paper was crumpled before or after it was



dipped in enamel, and wet collage elements were applied to both wet and dried painted canvas, to assess points of difference. Once the crumpled paper had been dipped in enamel, it became very heavy, but the weight of the media did not flatten the folds and creases of the paper upon drying. This observation was consistent with the original and confirms that a hard-sized calendared paper (newspaper) was used, as the paper on *Untitled* [glossy black painting] did not soften and flatten after absorbing the paint.

Observations of the tests also led to the conclusion that the paper scraps were attached to the canvas support with wet paint; there was no additional adhesive. Rauschenberg used numerous techniques for this work, including: wet-on-wet, wet-on-dry, and additional media on an applied collage element. He also used his fingers—fingerprints are observed in the impasto of the media.

The pooling of enamel in the valleys of the crumpled paper seen in the original work was reproduced in the mock-ups. This reinforced the indication that many of the collage elements were applied while the canvas was flat. Drips on tacking margins (outside edges) of the canvas also support the observation that the first layers of black were applied with the painting lying flat. Later media applications were made when the work was upright, as evidenced by the vertical drip patterns running from top to bottom, especially in the upper left region.

Amanda Hunter Johnson

Associate Conservator



In November 2012, Paula De Cristofaro painted a test canvas as part of the mock-up process relating to *Untitled* [glossy black painting]. Élodie Lévêque and Amanda Hunter Johnson prepare the paper samples to incorporate onto the canvases.



The conservators tested two types of paper: soft-sized brown packing paper and heavily-sized, calendared newspaper.



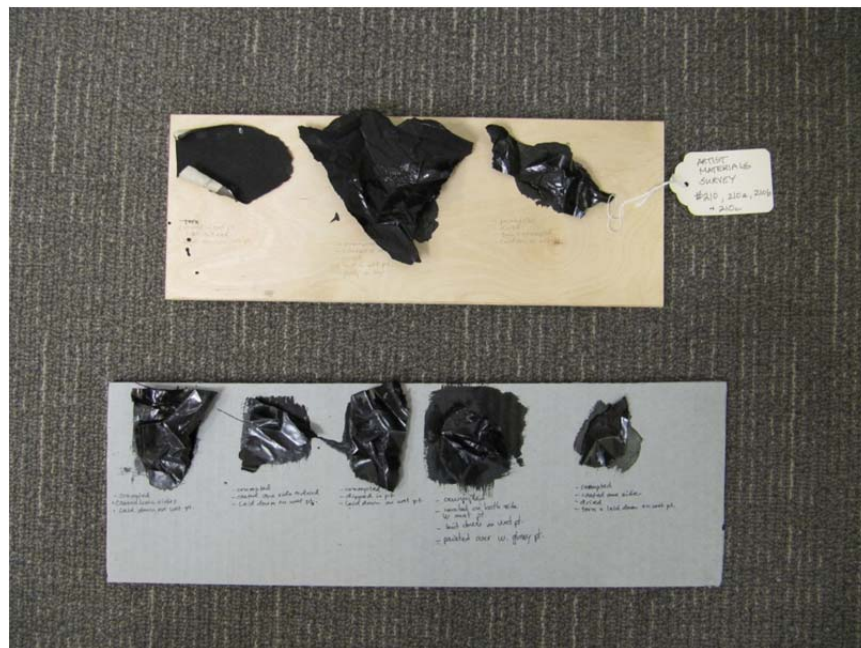
The conservators experimented with different paint application methods on the two paper types.



These painted paper samples were then applied to the mock-up canvases.



One of the three completed mock-ups is shown here.



In addition to the canvas mock-ups, the conservators created two panels that outline the different methods used for each paper test.