



GEMINI G.E.L. ^{AT} JONI MOISANT WEYL

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: ROOKERY MOUNDS

June 1 – August 25, 2017



Robert Rauschenberg at Gemini G.E.L. © 1979 Sidney B. Felsen

Gemini G.E.L. at Joni Moisant Weyl is pleased to present Robert Rauschenberg's *Rookery Mounds*, reunited in New York as the complete suite for the first time since they were initially exhibited at the legendary Castelli Graphics in 1979.

This historic series of eleven lithographs marks the first printmaking project in which Rauschenberg utilized his own photography, taken in and around the environs of his Captiva Island residence, rather than “found imagery” plucked from the public domain. This shift in approach was the direct result of a lawsuit in which Rauschenberg and the Gemini G.E.L. workshop had found themselves. The case, settled out of court in September 1980, involved Rauschenberg's use of an Acapulco diver photograph taken by Morton Beebe. Beebe's photograph, a small version of which had been used in a Nikon camera advertising campaign, was significantly enlarged and transferred to fabric in Rauschenberg's iconic editioned fabric work, *Pull (Hoarfrost)*, 1974. The case put Rauschenberg personally at odds with his own very public support of artists' rights. He wrote for the court case, “having used collage in my work since 1949, I have never felt I was infringing on anyone's rights as I have consistently transformed these images sympathetically with the use of solvent transfer, collage and reversal as ingredients in the composition which are dependent on reportage of current events and elements in our current environment, hopefully to give the work possibility of being reconsidered and viewed in a totally new context.”

The conflict between Rauschenberg and Beebe began in early 1977, and as it became apparent it would escalate, Rauschenberg needed to figure out his next step. For his work to continue to have imagery, he would need a solution.



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Thus, Rauschenberg decided to pick up a camera and start taking photographs again. He had taken beautiful black-and-white photos beginning in the late 1940s, but by around the early 1960s he had, for the most part, set aside his camera. Now, however, Rauschenberg had a reason and a renewed love for taking pictures, and *Rookery Mounds* became one platform to announce his return to the camera. Earlier in 1979, Rauschenberg collaborated with choreographer Trisha Brown in designing sets and costumes for *Glacial Decoy*, and he had taken thousands of photographs. "I became addicted to photography again...The camera heightened my desire to look." A selection of those photographs is what Rauschenberg brought to Los Angeles for his Gemini collaboration.

Much of the photographic imagery which appears in *Rookery Mounds* looms large on the page, and is, compared to prior works, relatively unlayered. Rauschenberg is making a statement: this is not found imagery, these are *my* photographs. Wheels, tires, fabrics, water, plants and other familiar Rauschenberg visual elements make their appearance in these prints.

Rauschenberg almost always worked serially; in much the same way his individual works move the viewer's eye around the work in its totality by the repeated use of a single image, he often slyly linked the works within a series to one another by the repetition of identical or similar images or forms. In *Rookery Mounds*, the appearance of checkered patterns, oceans and a variety of circular and rectangular forms connect the eleven prints. As strong as each individual work is, the totality of the series is a stunning visual sight.

The eleven lithographs in the *Rookery Mounds* series are all printed on exquisite sheets of deckled-edged paper, specially made for the project by Twinrocker. Based in Brookston, Indiana, Twinrocker has been instrumental in the revival of hand papermaking in America, and worked so directly with Rauschenberg and Gemini on the project that large Rauschenberg initials, "RR," are watermarked into the lower left corner of each sheet. This collaboration clearly impacted Rauschenberg's use of the edges of the paper; a key element of *Rookery Mounds* is that the imagery embraces and thereby focuses the viewer's attention to the Twinrocker paper's stunning deckles.

Having just received the prestigious Grand Prix d'Honneur at the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Arts, the series made its domestic debut on December 8, 1979, at Castelli Graphics, New York. In a memorable exhibition, the eleven 41x31-inch works circled the room which for years had been the location of Leo Castelli's famed painting gallery and now solely exhibited the graphic endeavors of his artists. Then and thereafter, *Rookery Mounds* were celebrated as a series but due to their scale rarely collected or exhibited as an entire suite.

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