

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

The David Booth Department of Conservation

TITLE: *Bed*

MUSEUM No.: 79.1989

ARTIST: Robert Rauschenberg

DATE: 1955

MEDIUM: Oil, pencil, finger nail polish, and toothpaste (est, see art historical information) on pillow, quilt, and sheet, on wood support

DIMENSIONS: 75 1/4 x 31 1/2 x 8 in.

SIGNATURE: None

CONSERVATORS: Laura Richter Le

DATE OF EXAMINATION: April 24, 2024

PROVENANCE

Gift of Leo Castelli in honor of Alfred H. Barr Jr.

ART HISTORICAL INFORMATION

From a 1963 article, Rauschenberg explains that the support materials were chosen spontaneously: "In 1955 he painted the controversial *Bed* which was censored out of the Spoleto Festival. 'I didn't have any money to buy canvas, and I wanted to paint. I was looking around for something to paint on. I wasn't using the quilt, so I put it on a stretcher. It looked strange without a pillow, so I added a pillow. It wasn't a preconceived idea.'"¹

In 2006, he added, "except it was summertime, it was hot, so I didn't need the quilt. So the quilt was, I thought, abstracted. But it wasn't abstracted enough, so that no matter what I did to it, it kept saying, 'I'm a bed.' So, finally I gave in and I gave it a pillow."²

In an interview with Barbara Rose in 1987 Rauschenberg explained: "...I didn't have a good technical background. I had a lucky foreground. For example, the *Bed*. I remember the day that I asked Leo if he knew what the red was up at the top. I said it was fingernail polish. Then I pointed to another place and asked him if he remembered when striped toothpaste first came out. I mean, now it looks like Winsor Newton. I know it drives restorationists crazy because they can't figure out why they haven't changed."³

DESCRIPTION

The painting is housed in a cherry stained, wooden L-frame.

The support is a cotton quilt and pillow mounted with quilting and stapes to a cotton duck fabric. This has been loose lined over a strainer stretched with linen canvas. The quilt has been folded in half and the upper half dropped down to create natural fold 1/3 way down the work. There are

There is a thin, white layer over the top of the sheet and across the pillow. Swirls of pencil are also found along the top edge. The paint layer ranges from thin washes to thick impasto strokes. According to the artist's statement, the paint included oil, toothpaste, and red nail polish.

¹ Swenson, G.R.. "Rauschenberg Paints a Picture," *Art News*, April 1963, volume 62.

² MoMA Highlights: 350 works from The Museum of Modern Art New York." New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2004, p. 207, ill.

³ Rose, Barbara, "An Interview with Robert Rauschenberg," Eds. Elizabeth Avedon, 1987, p. 53.

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TREATMENT HISTORY

1993: A new staple in the top right corner of the pillow was removed. The pillow was relaxed back into contact with the support and the original, painted staple adhered back in place.

1998: Cracking and cleaving paint, as well as the edges of the quilt where the fabric was frayed, were consolidated with Jade 403 in DI water. A loss in the black paint in the front, right corner of the pillow was inpainted with Charbonnel restoration colors.

2001: A small area of fraying and damage in quilt were set down with methyl cellulose.

2018: Nitrogen anoxic treatment by Hadley Conservation Services

CONDITION

The painting has a thick layer of dust, especially visible on the top edge of thick impasto strokes of folds of fabric. There are cotton fibers across the surface.

Past condition reports note extensive inpainting on the pillow. These areas are primarily found over cracks, and it is unclear whether this was done by the artist or a conservator.

The paint is crumbly and cracked. However, the surface has been extensively infused with adhesive and is generally stable.

The top right corner of the pillow has lifted. This has been an ongoing condition issue since the 90s (see treatment history above) and it does not appear to have worsened.

IMAGES

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APPENDIX A: EXHIBITION HISTORY

- New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, "Robert Rauschenberg", March 4 – 29, 1958
 - New York, American Federation of the Arts Time Life Building, "Art and the Found Object", January 12 – 30, 1959
 - Kassel, Museum Friedericianum, "Documenta II: Kunst nach 1945", July 11 – October 11, 1959
 - Paris, Galerie Daniel Cordier, "Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme", December 15, 1959 – February 1960
 - New York, D'arcy Gallery, "International Surrealism Exhibition", November 28, 1960 – January 14, 1961
 - Stockholm, Moderna Museet, "Four Americans", March 17 – May 6, 1962 and tour: Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, May – June 1962; Bern, Kunsthalle Bern, July – August 1962
 - New York, The Jewish Museum, "Robert Rauschenberg", March 13 – May 12, 1963
 - London, Whitechapel Gallery, "Robert Rauschenberg: Paintings, Drawings and Combines, 1949-1964", February 4 – March 8, 1964
 - Venice Biennale, "32nd International Venice Biennale", June 2 – October 18, 1964
 - Worcester Art Museum, March 1965
 - Minneapolis, Walker Art Center, "Robert Rauschenberg, Paintings 1953-1964", May 3 – June 6, 1965
 - MoMA Exh. #855: "Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage", March 27 - June 9, 1968 and tour: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, July 16 – September 8, 1968; Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago, October 19 – December 8, 1968
 - New York, Leo Castelli Gallery, "Benefit Exhibition for the Committee to Save Venice", October 18 – November 10, 1973
 - New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, "American Pop Art", April 6 – June 16, 1974 and tour: Salt Lake City, Utah Museum of Fine Arts; Hartford, Wadsworth Atheneum
 - Washington, D.C., National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, "Robert Rauschenberg", October 30, 1976 – January 2, 1977 and tour: MoMA Exh. #1170, March 25 – May 17, 1977; San Francisco Museum of Art, June 24 – August 21, 1977; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, September 23 – October 30, 1977; Chicago, The Art Institute of Chicago, December 3, 1977 – January 15, 1978
 - Berlin, Staatliche Kunsthalle, January 1980
 - New York, Pratt Institute of Art, "For Love or Money: Dealers Choose", November 1981
 - Paris, Musée National d'arte Moderne, Centre Pompidou, "Les Années 50", summer 1988
 - Madrid, Fundacion Juan March, "Coleccion Leo Castelli", October 7, 1988 – January 8, 1989
 - MoMA Exh. #1497: "Contemporary Works from the Collection", III-31, May 12 - June 6, 1989
 - MoMA Exh. #1522: "Contemporary Works from the Collection", III-31, June 24, 1989 - March 19, 1990
 - MoMA Exh. #1546: "Contemporary Work from the Collection", III-31, April 19 - October 23, 1990
 - MoMA Exh. #1562: "Contemporary Works from the Collection", III-31, November 1, 1990 - August 23, 1991
 - MoMA Exh. #1372: "Selections from the Permanent Collection: Painting and Sculpture", III-30, August 23, 1991 - removed July 28, 1992
 - MoMA Exh. #1632: "Selections from the Collection", September 9, 1992 - February 1993
 - MoMA Exh. #1656: "Selections from the Permanent Collection of Painting and Sculpture", III-25, July 1, 1993 - September 10, 1997
 - New York, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, "Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective", September 19, 1997 - January 7, 1998 and tour: Houston, The Menil Collection, February 12 - May 17, 1998
 - MoMA Exh. #1823A: "American Art 1940-1970: Selections from the Collection", December 11, 1998 – February 16, 1999
 - MoMA Exh. #1831A: "Postwar to Pop: Masterworks from MoMA's Collection", April 30 - October 5, 1999
 - MoMA Exh. #1867A: "Collection Highlights", May 25, 2000 - January 28, 2001
 - MoMA Exh. #1881a: "Collection Highlights", February 1, 2001 - February 19, 2002
 - MoMA Exh. #1899: "To Be Looked At: Painting and Sculpture from the Collection", MoMAQNS, Collection Space, June 29 - December 2, 2002
 - MoMA Exh. #1914: "In Honor of Kirk Varnedoe", MoMAQNS - Collection Space, October 23, 2003 - January 5, 2004
 - MoMA Exh. #1931: "Painting and Sculpture: Inaugural Installation", 4th Floor, gallery 19, November 20, 2004 - November 28, 2005
 - New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Robert Rauschenberg: Combines", December 20, 2005 - April 2, 2006
 - MoMA Exh. #1960a: "Painting and Sculpture Changes 2006", 4th Floor, gallery 20, added May 17, 2006 - June 8, 2010
 - MoMA Exh. #2103: "Painting and Sculpture Changes 2010", 4th Floor, gallery 25, added June 9 - July 6, 2010
 - MoMA Exh. #2138: "Painting and Sculpture Changes 2011", 4th Floor, gallery 17, May 20, 2011 - March 13, 2014
 - MoMA Exh. #2279: "Painting and Sculpture Changes 2014", 4th Floor, gallery 18, added March 13, 2014 - August 5, 2015
 - MoMA Exh. #2334: "Take an Object", 2nd Floor, Michael Dunn Gallery, August 22, 2015 – February 28, 2016
 - MoMA Exh. #2345B: "Painting and Sculpture Changes 2016", 5th Floor, gallery 11, added May 12 - October 18, 2016
 - London, Tate Modern, "Robert Rauschenberg", December 1, 2016 - April 2, 2017 and tour: MoMA Exh. #2378: "Robert Rauschenberg: Among Friends", 4th Floor, The Alfred H. Barr, Jr. Painting and Sculpture Galleries, May 21 - September 17, 2017; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, "Robert Rauschenberg: Erasing the Rules", November 18, 2017 - March 25, 2018
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