

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Radio Waves: New York ‘Nouveau Réalisme’ and Rauschenberg”

Curated by David Leiber

17 September – 2 November 2013

Sperone Westwater is pleased to present, in cooperation with the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, an exhibition of sculpture and drawings by members of the ‘Nouveau Réaliste’ group and by Rauschenberg. What links this French ‘Nouveau Réaliste’ group to Rauschenberg is their shared attempt to find new ways to merge art and life, to create a new sense of reality in a postwar consumer-driven industrial society. “Radio Waves: New York, ‘Nouveau Réalisme’ and Rauschenberg” features Arman (1928-2005); Niki de Saint Phalle (1930-2002); Martial Raysse (born 1936); Jean Tinguely (1925-1991); Per Olof Ultvedt (1927-2006) and Rauschenberg (1925-2008). All works on view come from Rauschenberg’s personal art collection and were mostly made in New York City between 1960 and 1965, a period of developing artistic collaboratives, multisensory art experiences and Happenings.

‘Nouveau Réalisme’ was coined by the art critic Pierre Restany in 1960. The group forged an anti-aesthetic as these “bricoleurs” employed junk materials and urban debris to create assemblages and performances, stimulating collaboration and engaging a new level of viewer participation. Often utilizing sound as a medium through sensors and simple motors, Tinguely, in particular, appealed to all of the senses. In his work, a playful neo-Dada spirit prevails, despite a tension that exists between the human hand and technology.

Tinguely and Rauschenberg met in New York in 1960, introduced by Dore Ashton and the artists Richard Huelsenbeck and Marcel Duchamp, and a long lasting friendship and collaboration ensued. Important in this exhibition is a rare Tinguely drawing, his “Study for Homage to New York” (1960), a monumental sculpture, a 27-foot high ‘self-constructing and self-destructing work of art’. Consisting of 80 bicycle wheels, bottles, saws, a piano, a baby carriage and hundreds of other discarded objects, “Homage to New York” was “exhibited” for less than an hour on March 17, 1960 in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art.

To quote the eloquent art historian and former MOMA curator Peter Selz, who orchestrated this NY event: “We know that emotion cannot be petrified, that love cannot be bound, that life cannot be conserved, and time cannot be held.....Being very much part of his time, Tinguely uses machines to show movement, but he is fully aware that machines are no more permanent than life itself.”

Rauschenberg participated in this legendary MOMA spectacle and reminisced: “I felt privileged to be able to hand him a screwdriver. There were so many different aspects of life involved in the big piece. It was as real, as interesting, as complicated, as vulnerable, and as gay as life itself.”

Tinguely’s first “Radio” sculpture, “Radio No. 1” (1960) (also included in this exhibition) soon followed and was reportedly made in Rauschenberg’s Broadway studio. In a box-like frame, an old bicycle wheel is affixed above the innards of a dismantled but functioning radio. By means of an electric motor, this mechanical sculpture blares out a carpet of cacophonous sound created by the abrupt changes of station frequencies. This work, showing its influence of John Cage (sound as a medium) and Duchamp (the bicycle wheel), appealed instantly to Rauschenberg who acquired the sculpture and whose own “Combine” painting, entitled “Broadcast” one year earlier had incorporated three radios attached to the back of the canvas.

Other highlights are Tinguely’s kinetic sculpture, “Untitled” (1962) which juxtaposes a cinderblock brick with tape, metal and a motor activated feather atop the sculpture; a Niki de Saint Phalle work “Element of Tir tableau pour DYLABY” (1962) consisting of a painted metal roller skate with leather straps that was included in the DYLABY (Dynamic Labyrinth) collaborative exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, in the fall of 1962.

Rauschenberg will be represented by two of his seminal works: “Art Box” (1963) and “Dry Cell” (1963), an assemblage which combines a folding camp stool, a coat hanger and a sheet of silkscreened Plexiglas through which one sees a piece of crushed metal that spins when a sensor picks up sounds in the immediate vicinity.

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