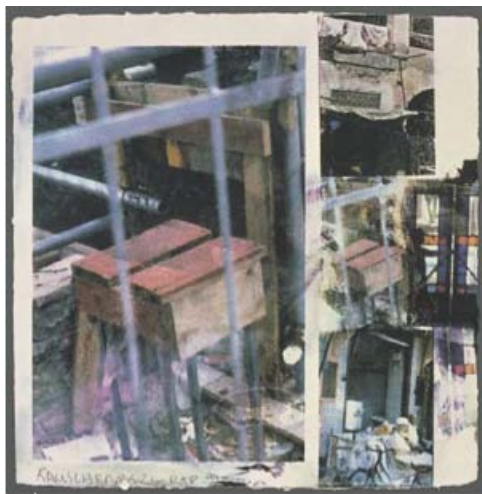


M A R G A R E T  
T H A T C H E R  
P R O J E C T S

# San Francisco Chronicle

## Rauschenberg is 80 – How is His Work Aging?

By Kenneth Baker  
December 31, 2005



"Local Focus" (2000) fifteen-color screenprint by Robert Rauschenberg. Photo courtesy Meyerovich Gallery, San Francisco

Now 80 years old, Robert Rauschenberg has long suffered the boomerang effect of his own influence.

Since the mid-1950s, his work has taught people to find syntax in collisions of material and image information. This in a culture that has proliferated collisions at every level, sliding whatever up against whatever in every medium from the daily mail to the city street to the Internet.

Rauschenberg probably helped a vast audience to new acceptance of continuity between their inner lives and ever more dissonant public realities. We see the offer of lessons in aesthetic tolerance in the mostly graphic works on view at Meyerovich.

Perhaps as long ago as the mid-'60s, the rhetoric of splintered, smeared image transfers, of snapshot immediacy seeming to corrode as it presents itself, turned to "the Rauschenberg look." He has struggled -- or should have -- to keep mannerism at bay ever since.

His early '70s "*Cardbirds*," collage efforts to respond to minimalism, look better today than they did in their day. They benefit by the convergence in historical hindsight of Pop and minimal art.

Spare, recent screen prints such as "*Local Focus*" (2000) must count as haiku relative to the image overload that made Rauschenberg's name. "*Local Focus*" develops an almost abstract composition from four or five snapshots screen-printed in powdery colors. Not everything on view provokes the feeling that it has the underlying order to sustain long familiarity, but this piece does.

The Meyerovich show may be short on surprises but since even Rauschenberg's failures can be more involving than the successes of most other contemporary artists, it merits a visit.

**Park** paintings at Toomey Tourell: Filmmakers showed us, long before television drove the message home, that images' meaning may depend on the speed of their consumption.

Bay Area painter **Maria Park** tries to fold that understanding back into static image-making.



"Passage 5" (2005) acrylic on expanded PVC, by Maria Park

Even at their most relaxed, **Park's** pictures at Toomey Tourell look brittle with immobility, thanks to the laborious process of their making. Beginning with a photograph, Park translates it roughly into flat shapes of which she then makes contact-paper stencils. Using the stencils, she transfers the shapes to a panel of PVCX, which resembles extra-firm foam core.

Gradually she assembles patterns of these stenciled-on shapes into images such as "*Passage 5*" (2005), which speaks more of its own structure than of the descriptive or narrative content we might wish to see in it.

"*Passage 5*" roughly describes an image that describes a canyon. Its palette of greens and tans emphasizes the likeness to camouflage implicit in all of **Park's** paintings.

Several pictures here riff on the American West, or the American Western, but they do not add up to any sort of narrative, despite the presence of what looks like an Iraq war picture.

Andy Warhol famously and cleverly made paintings of camouflage patterns, treating them as found abstractions that unmasked the way every image disguises the object that bears it.

**Park's** work glances back at that move and Warhol's earlier paint-by-numbers pictures from a very different generational viewpoint. It telescopes everything from digital imaging, manga and Pop art to classic propaganda posters and quaint forerunners such as cut-paper silhouettes.

**Park's** pictures have their pleasing passages, but they seem bent on denying us the pleasures of immersion for our own good. Even viewers who sympathize with their critical intent may dislike the scolding spirit that pervades them.

---

**Robert Rauschenberg:** *80th Birthday Exhibition*. Works in editions from the '70s through 2000. Through Jan. 15. Meyerovich Gallery, 251 Post St. San Francisco. (415) 421-7171, [www.meyerovich.com](http://www.meyerovich.com).

**Maria Park:** *paintings*. Through Jan. 28. Toomey Tourell Gallery, 49 Geary St., San Francisco. (415) 989-6444, [www.toomey-tourell.com](http://www.toomey-tourell.com).