

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



The New York Times *Style* Magazine

Multimedia | Rauschenberg's Photos

CULTURE | BY MATT MCCANN | SEPTEMBER 16, 2011, 2:00 PM



"Untitled [John Cage, Black Mountain]," 1952.

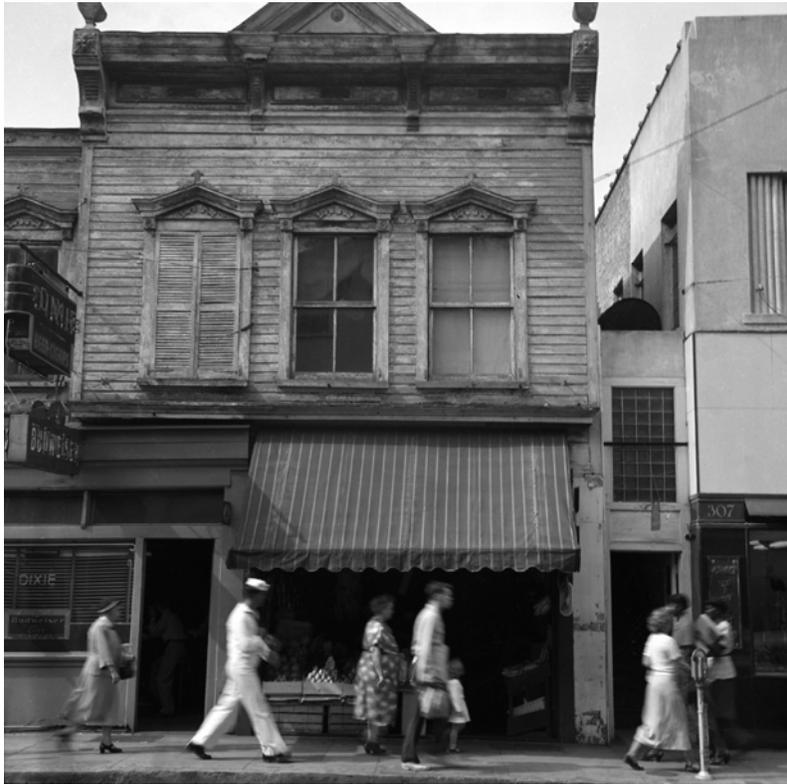
It's fitting that an artist whose work hinged so scrupulously on process — elaborate, showy, delicate process — would be drawn to photography as a medium. Robert Rauschenberg's paintings often incorporated many elements: premade images, junk, animal matter, all smothered in paint. They weren't paintings so much as developments, events, narratives of the process that produced them. There were the "Combines," which involved scraps of found items, clippings, stuffed creatures and silk-screens. Some works smashed the wall separating painting and sculpture. He once erased a drawing by his friend Willem de Kooning. Another time, he covered a painting acquired by John Cage in all black. In 1961, his submission to a show of portraits dedicated to the gallery owner and curator Iris Clert consisted of a telegram, stating, "This is a portrait of Iris Clert if I say so." The power of the work is diminished without taking note of the process. And photography, trapping light on a sensitive surface and using chemical wizardry to turn it into a printed image, is nothing if not about process.

Rauschenberg died in 2008, and it's been 30 years since his photographs have gotten serious attention outside and separate from the sprawl of paintings, prints, dances and designs he's also known for. "Robert Rauschenberg: Photographs 1949-1962" (Schirmer/Mosel, \$75) is a thorough (though not exhaustive) collection; many of these photographs were personally permitted at one point or another, by the artist, to be published or displayed. As such, the catalog offers a unique and focused view from the eye of a tremendously energetic and industrious artist, whose purview seemed to exclude nothing.

The book collects gorgeous North African landscapes, urban interiors of New York, portraits of now-famous lovers and friends, restrained glances of North Carolina, double exposures and experiments with blueprint. Many of the same works will also be publicly displayed beginning Friday at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation's new project space at 455 West 19th St. These photographs are useful in demonstrating that, while he was often as concerned with a given work's conceptual value, Rauschenberg had a strong sense of composition — image for image's sake. One is tempted to say that his photography was informed by the paintings and other works for which he's better known, but it may be the other way around. Or better, he chose not to make any such distinctions — indeed, many of these photos are incorporated into paintings. His vision was nothing if not convicted. As Susan Davidson and David White, co-editors and co-curators, write in the preface, Rauschenberg was "always adhering to the aesthetic he once defined as 'random order,' he never cropped his images after developing them, stating in an interview: 'Photography is like diamond cutting. If you miss you miss.'"



"Penn Station" Date Unknown



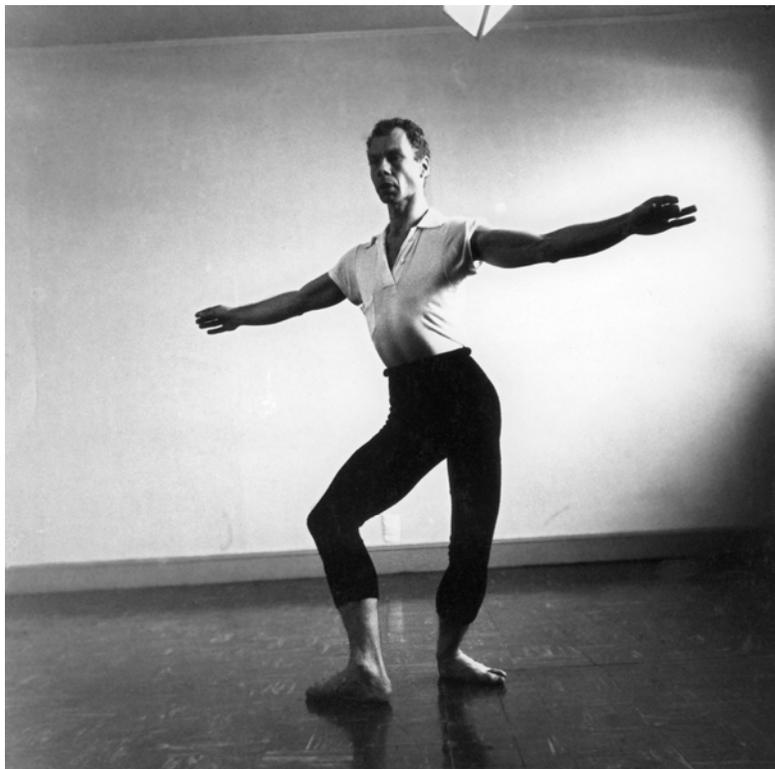
"Charleston Street," 1952.



"Cy + Relics, Rome," 1952.



"Tangier Street (II)," 1952.



"Untitled [Merce (II)]," 1953.