inside a wire cage, as in Greenhouse (Combine). Rauschenberg creates a web of conflicting energies. And in Untitled (Run), he juxtaposes two photographs of an American flag painted onto a white picket fence with images of a truck wheel and a row of fast-food signs. A closer look at the flag painted on the fence reveals it to be the same reproduction of a Jasper Johns “Flag” that Rauschenberg used in the 1955 Short Circuit (Combine Painting), installed adjacent to Greenhouse (Combine). The worlds of everyday reality and art history bump up against each other, setting off sparks that lift the artist’s work far beyond its seemingly humble subject.

Meetings between high and low art include the collage Mexican Cannary (ROCI Mexico), 1985, set inside a metal frame with the image from a container of “La Constancia Chile Jalapenos,” and Index (Japanese Claywork), 1985, which juxtaposes a Michihikado painting with a photo of a traffic light.

Rauschenberg never forced the high-low dichotomy. He simply found the beauty in all of these objects. While there is plenty of contrast, there isn’t much conflict. The harmony here could comfortably transform the humblest of materials into art, as in Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard), 1971—disassembled boxes for Shredded Wheat and Alpo Dog Food installed on the wall. Rauschenberg could also take an art-historical icon like the Mona Lisa and give it a humorous spin, as in Pneuma Lisa (Japanese Recreational Claywork), 1982, without coming off as flip or confrontational. In these works, wit and irony are tempered by this artist’s rare and refreshing sense of wonder.

—Steve Barnes