

GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Robert Rauschenberg, Jammers, Gagosian Gallery, London

There is a photograph of American artist Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) relaxing on a lilo in the swimming-pool of the Villa de Madame Sarabhai in Ahmedabad, India. The year is 1975.

Designed by Le Corbusier in 1951, the villa featured a slide, or “tropical toboggan run”, connecting the roof garden to the pool. In the evening, bats would swoop down and drink the water. Peacocks would wander nearby.

Walled off from everyday India, it was a setting that would inspire Rauschenberg to create the Jammers series: mostly large rectangles of silk, muslin, and cotton in stunning, burnt colours, supported by rattan poles.

The works exist only in relation to the gallery wall; they droop, hang, and stretch. There is little tension in these brilliantly coloured banners, but rather lightness and looseness. They are named after the sails of the Windjammer merchant ships.

Hibiscus (Jammer) (1976) is comprised of coral-coloured silk, hanging between two poles. A pouch is sewn onto the centre. It is open, but the contents are hidden from the viewer. The

sag of silk creates shadows. The colour is both gentle and hot. The surface of the material is opalescent, as though covered in a sheen of water.

These works are a departure from the muscular Combines for which Rauschenberg is best known. They combined everyday objects with splatters of Abstract Expressionism, rejecting the boundaries between painting and sculpture, and anticipating Pop Art.

Hibiscus, however, recalls *Bed* (1955), one of Rauschenberg's earliest Combines, which consists of a blanket, stolen from the laundry basket of a friend when he was too poor to buy canvases, mounted on the wall and attacked by oil paint. Like *Hibiscus*, *Bed* includes a pillow that bulges out of the work but remains closed to the viewer.

Earlier still, Rauschenberg experimented with monochrome paintings in red, white, and black. While many of the *Jammers* are likewise monochrome, the fabric's subtlety of colour is permitted to speak for itself.

Snowpool (*Jammer*) (1976) is divided in half by a pole. The top half is a greyish white, the colour of a very pale stone. It is muted but not bleak. The lower half is comprised of vertical stripes, ranging from blue to brown to yellow. A layer of gauze covers the latter, concealing and softening the contrast, floating free of the work.

These works are minimalist but warm. They pay respect to the country which inspired them.