

NEWS RELEASE
January 19, 2023



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USF Institute for Research in Art Announces Historic Gift of Artwork

Dr. Donald Saff, Founder of Graphicstudio, Donates
Important Robert Rauschenberg Artwork to USF

(TAMPA, FL – January 19, 2023) The USF Institute for Research in Art, part of the USF College of The Arts and made up of Graphicstudio, the Contemporary Art Museum, and the Public Art program, is excited to announce the gift of a historic artwork by Robert Rauschenberg, among the most influential artists of the second half of the 20th century. The artwork was donated by Dr. Donald Saff, founder of Graphicstudio in 1968 and founding Dean of the College of The Arts at USF in 1971.

Margaret Miller, Director of the Institute for Research in Art, stated regarding the gift, “The donation of this early and significant artwork by Robert Rauschenberg elevates the University’s art holdings. Students and scholars will have access to study and research *Scatole Personali*. I am grateful to Dr. Donald Saff for this unique contribution. This major gift will contextualize the print and sculpture editions produced by Rauschenberg at Graphicstudio.”



Robert Rauschenberg, *Scatole Personali*, 1951. Painted wooden box with lid, wooden beads, fabric, soil, stones, winged insect. 1-3/4 x 3-3/4 x 13-1/4 inches. Collection of Institute for Research in Art, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL. © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation. Photo Credit: Will Lytch.

Rauschenberg pushed the boundaries of printmaking while collaborating with Graphicstudio throughout his career, beginning with his *Made in Tampa* series of prints in 1972, which combined lithography, cyanotype, sepia print, and collage, and continuing through the realization of several works as part of the Rauschenberg Overseas Culture Interchange (ROCI)

project. ROCI was Rauschenberg's program of artistic exchange with countries around the world, for which Dr. Saff served as artistic director from 1984 to 1991.

Dr. Saff described the decision to donate the work to the Institute for Research in Art, saying, "After reviewing requests from museums and collectors for the acquisition of the *Scatole*, I concluded that the extraordinary presence of Rauschenberg art at Graphicstudio and in the USF Collection would be enhanced if students could experience this pivotal work that segued Mr. Rauschenberg's early art to his Combines that created a new paradigm in art. Further, the global reach of the Institute for Research in Art and the appreciation consistently demonstrated by the academic and Tampa community would make many the beneficiaries of this iconic work. I am delighted with *Scatole's* new home."



Robert Rauschenberg, *Araucan Mastaba/ROCI Chile*, 1985-86. Screenprinted enamel with painted editions on polished natural aluminum over a plywood substructure, with sterling silver and lapis lazuli. 20-5/8 x 22 x 22 inches. Edition: 25. Published by Graphicstudio.

Scatole Personali is part of a series of artworks created by Robert Rauschenberg in the early 1950s. The sculpture is a small wooden box containing beads, stones, fabric, soil, and the desiccated body of a winged insect, collected by Rauschenberg during travels in Italy and North Africa with fellow artist Cy Twombly. The *Scatole Personali* series of objects are exceedingly rare because Rauschenberg cast many of the sculptures into the Arno River, following the advice of a particularly harsh Italian critic amid the largely negative reception to their exhibition at the Galleria d'Arte Contemporanea in Florence in 1953. Rauschenberg carried only a few *Scatole Personali* with him back to the United States by plane.

The *Scatole Personali* artworks are significant because they prefigure Rauschenberg's "Combines," a prolific series of artworks from 1954-1964. Combines broke down the distinction between paintings and sculptures and marked a fundamental transformation of contemporary art.

Traveling to Italy and North Africa with artist Cy Twombly was a noteworthy event in both Rauschenberg's artistic oeuvre and personal life. *Scatole Personali* is Italian for "personal box," and in addition to being a crucial shift in Rauschenberg's artworks, it also marks an important period in his personal life, coming after his separation from Susan Weil and before the start of his renowned romantic and artistic relationship with Jasper Johns in 1953.

At USF, *Scatole Personali* will be available to be studied by students, scholars, and researchers from around the world.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH IN ART // The USF Institute for Research in Art is the umbrella organization for the Contemporary Art Museum, Graphicstudio, and Public Art program. Part of the University of South Florida College of The Arts, the Institute for Research in Art is dedicated to an international artists' residency program that brings to the University and Tampa Bay community today's most accomplished and influential artists working in the international art arena. Exhibitions, collection development, publication of limited-edition graphics and sculpture multiples, commissioned public art works, interdisciplinary arts research, lectures, symposia, workshops and special events are designed to foster awareness about the role of contemporary artists in shaping our culture and society. Participating artists represent the full and diverse spectrum of contemporary art practice including, but not limited to, painting, sculpture, photography, electronic media, and performance. The USF Collection is maintained by the USF Contemporary Art Museum and comprises over 5,000 contemporary artworks.



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