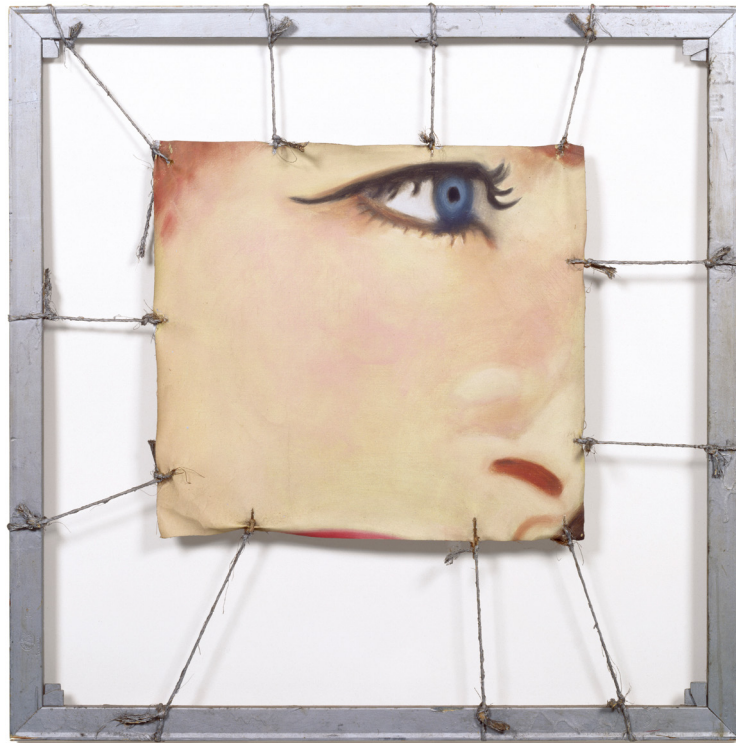


James Rosenquist

Dream World: *Paintings, drawings and collages, 1961–1968*

21 November 2024—25 January 2025

Thaddaeus Ropac
Seoul Fort Hill
2F, 122-1, Dokseodang-ro, Yongsan-gu, Seoul



James Rosenquist, *Bedspring*, 1962.
Oil on canvas, with painted twine and painted wood stretcher bars. 91.4 x 91.4 cm (36 x 36 in).

Following the recent large-scale retrospective of James Rosenquist's work in Korea at The Sehwa Museum of Art, Seoul, Thaddaeus Ropac Seoul will present *Dream World: Paintings, drawings and collages, 1961–1968*, foregrounding a defining decade for the American artist. The exhibition will bring together important works, including a monumental painting, a shaped canvas and a number of rarely shown studies, preparatory sketches and collages – foundational works for some of the artist's most celebrated paintings, now housed in

major international museums – to explore the period in which Rosenquist emerged as one of the most influential artists of his generation.

In these significant early years of his career, Rosenquist extensively investigated the nature of the picture plane. Drawing on his background as a commercial billboard painter, he employed radical disjunctions of scale and enigmatic compositions, using collage techniques and popular imagery from magazines to create his own idiosyncratic



James Rosenquist, *Playmate*, 1966.
Oil on canvas in four parts, wood and metal wire. 244.4 x 543.3 cm (96.22 x 213.9 in).

visual vocabulary. It was during this decade that he completed what many consider his magnum opus: the room-sized installation, *F-111* (1964–65), now on permanent display at The Museum of Modern Art, New York. His work radically tested the possibilities of perception, image and the painted medium itself, establishing his place at the forefront of his time and the nascent Pop art movement.

In his multi-dimensional work, he continually merged his personal world with global political concerns – the power of the military industrial complex, the destruction of our environment and human rights for all races and sexes, to name a few. Jim had a plain-spoken reason for including them, 'I painted the things that needed painting.'
— Mimi Thompson Rosenquist

Rosenquist's active engagement with the social movements and progressive ideas of the 1960s – often termed the 'countercultural decade', characterised by anti-war protest as well as cultural and sexual liberation – permeated his work. Exhibited for the first time in 15 years, the monumental painting, *Playmate* (1966), speaks profoundly and subversively to the zeitgeist of the time of its creation, disrupting the idealised and oversimplified representations of women typical of commercial consumer culture. It is also one of only four monumental works from this period. Rosenquist once stated that he regarded the subject matter of

his works as the 'relationships' between fragments, rather than the objects themselves. In *Playmate*, the torso of a nude woman is flanked on either side by a pickle and a luscious depiction of strawberries and cream overlaid with the pared-back silhouette of a wastebasket. The shifting relationships between these elements – depicted on different scales and on four separate, gently unaligned canvases – play with the viewers' sense of perspective, leaving them to wonder whether the elements should be understood separately or as part of the same scene.

The artist explained that he had based the figure on a pregnant model: a commentary that introduces an alternative interpretative layer to the image, reversing the dynamic of the imagined male viewer's desire for the female subject to focus instead on the pregnant woman's potential food cravings. Having become a father for the first time in 1964, the demands and effects of pregnancy on a woman's body were fresh in the artist's mind as he painted the work. Both through subject matter – undermining norms by paying homage to an underlooked reality of the female experience – and in his construction, or deconstruction, of the composition itself, the artist encourages the viewer to look at the image, and perhaps other imagery like it, through a different lens, subverting the preliminary impression of eroticism to tell a more complex story about the varied manifestations of desire within the female experience.



James Rosenquist, *Shadows*, 1961.
Oil on canvas. 172.7 x 243.8 cm (68.11 x 96.06 in)

The monumental scale of works such as *Playmate* and another large-scale painting, *Shadows* (1961), on view, reveals the influence of Rosenquist's experience as a billboard artist, perched on scaffolding high above the city streets, painting an enormous image in segments from which he would have to distance himself in order to see the entirety of the work. As curator Marcia Tucker argues, 'What is important is not the size of the work, but its scale, that is, the size of a painted image in relation to other images in the work, the canvas, and the observer. His scale is so enormous that the identity of images seems to disappear.'

During this period, Rosenquist began investigating the nature of the picture plane, stretching its boundaries by incorporating real objects into his paintings, allowing glimpses of the wall behind the painting, and using shaped canvases as in *Paramus* (1966). As he explained in a 1987 interview, 'The big thing... was violating the picture plane by cutting a hole in a canvas. That was really sacred. [Lucio] Fontana did it... Bob Rauschenberg did a lot of crazy things with the sacred picture plane. I was curious.' While *Playmate* dissects and plays with the idea of the stretcher, with two of the horizontal wooden rods on which the work is mounted left visible in places, Rosenquist's curiosity had earlier led him to create, *Bedspring* (1962) – his most radical pictorial intervention at the time of its creation. As suggested by the title, the square of painted canvas depicting part of a woman's face is stretched on a silver wood frame, held taut by eleven pieces of twine.

Extending his interest in disrupting the picture plane, Rosenquist used sliced Mylar in a number of works from this period to address different issues. The subject of his *Daley Portrait* (1968) was Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley, who became infamous for his violent handling of the 1968 Chicago riots after the assassination of Dr Martin Luther King. Painted as a form of protest on Mylar strips which fragment and recombine when exposed to a breeze, Rosenquist portrays Daley as a violent and impulsive leader.

Rosenquist's work was conceptually and compositionally based on the principle of collaging existing images – often taken from printed advertising – painting, layering and transforming his imagery through uncanny, mysterious juxtapositions. As the artist wrote, 'Collage is still a very contemporary medium, whether it is done with little bits of paper or in the cinema... In collage there is a glint... or reflection of modern life.' The starting point of his practice was the original preparatory collage itself, which the artist then translated onto his colossal gridded canvases. His rarely seen collage works not only offer insight into his wider practice, but stand as works in their own right.

Contextualising some of his most famous paintings, examples in this exhibition range from densely layered sheets ripped from magazine pages, as with *Source for The Promenade of Merce Cunningham* (1963) – the original collage for his painting of the same name held in the Menil Collection, Houston, TX – to arrangements depicting the artist's preliminary sketches. *Source and preliminary study for Zone* (1960) is a significant early study for *Zone* (1961) –



James Rosenquist, *Paramus*, 1966.
Oil on shaped canvas. 121.9 x 157.5 cm (48 x 62 in)

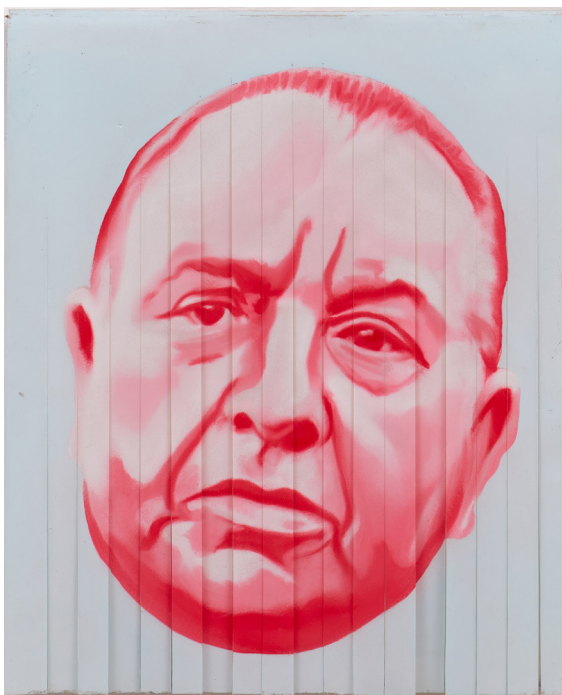
housed in the collection of the Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA – which Rosenquist defined as his first entirely Pop painting, while *Source and Preparatory Sketch for The Light That Won't Fail I* (1961) includes his preparatory sketches for his painting created the same year, now in the collection of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. The pencil drawings and scribbled notes provide an intimate look into his thought process, while the magazine cut-outs become historical artefacts, grounding the work in the concrete reality of the time it responds to. Together, they demonstrate not only Rosenquist's attentiveness to composition and form, but also the faithfulness of his reproductions and the bravura with which he painted.

Rosenquist's four *Studies for Horse Blinders* (1968) were developed in this period, demonstrating the artist's sense of colour and interest in creating his own references to work from. The dynamic streaks in these source works echo the streaks present in the room-sized installation, *Horse Blinders* (1968–69), in the collection of the Museum Ludwig, Cologne, which connect the seemingly disparate forms just outside the scope of the viewer's peripheral vision. Like his acclaimed *F-111* (1964–65), he plunged visitors into his unique pictorial universe, providing an uninterrupted framework for exploring politics,



James Rosenquist, *Source and Preparatory Sketch for The Light That Won't Fail I*, 1961.
Cropped magazine advertisement, paper, marker, pencil and crayon.
31 x 35.2 cm (12.2 x 13.86 in)

science, art and history. The third installation Rosenquist created for the Castelli Gallery over the course of his career, *Horizon Home Sweet Home* (1970), is currently on view in the exhibition *Expanded Horizons: American Art in the 70s* at Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Pantin, demonstrating how this early formative period of Rosenquist's career contributed to artistic developments of the subsequent decades.



James Rosenquist, *Daley Portrait*, 1968.
Oil on slit Mylar polyester film, with posterior aluminium panel.
62.2 x 50.8 cm (24.5 x 20 in)



James Rosenquist working on *Through the Eye of the Needle to the Anvil*, c.1988.
Photo © Russ Blaise

About the artist

Creating work for more than five decades, Rosenquist consistently demonstrated his mastery of painting, collage, drawing and printmaking. His first solo exhibition was at Richard Bellamy's Green Gallery, New York in 1962, followed by his inclusion in *Six Painters and the Object* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, also in New York, in 1963, curated by Lawrence Alloway and including works by Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg and Andy Warhol. Organised by the Denver Art Museum in 1985, *James Rosenquist: Paintings, 1961–1985* travelled to the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston; Des Moines Art Center; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and National Museum of American Art, Washington, D.C. In 1991, his exhibition at the Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow was one of the first by an American artist in Russia since the Cold War.

Between 2003 and 2005, his work was shown in a career retrospective organised by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, which travelled to the Menil Collection and the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston; Guggenheim Museum Bilbao; and Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg. Following the artist's death in 2017, his work was shown in the major survey exhibition *James Rosenquist: Painting as Immersion* at Museum Ludwig, Cologne and ARoS Aarhus Art Museum, Denmark. Rosenquist's work is held in major institutional collections including The Museum of Modern Art, New York; The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate, London; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

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