



## Rauschenberg & Johns—Significant Others at Geelong Gallery



Jasper Johns  
*Bent 'Blue'* from the *Fragments—according to what* series 1971  
(published by Gemini G.E.L., Los Angeles)  
National Gallery of Australia, Kamberri/Canberra  
Purchased 1973  
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**'For a number of years we were each other's main audience.'**  
—Jasper Johns on Robert Rauschenberg, 1980

A new exhibition depicting one of North America's most important artistic dialogues opens on Saturday 16 November at Geelong Gallery.

The National Gallery of Australia's touring exhibition *Rauschenberg & Johns—Significant Others* reveals how, at the height of the Abstract Expressionist movement, a new avant-garde began to materialise from the same-sex relationship between two young artists: Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) and Jasper Johns (born 1930).

During the homophobic 1950s, from their run-down New York studios, Rauschenberg and Johns began a private creative dialogue that introduced everyday signs, objects, and media into their work, collapsing the distinction between art and life.

Together from 1953 to 1961, during which time same-sex relationships were illegal in the United States, the couple was forced to navigate the expression of their sexuality within a society that didn't accept them.

Drawn from the National Gallery's Kenneth Tyler Collection, *Rauschenberg & Johns* brings together print and multimedia works by both artists, including Rauschenberg's *Booster* masterpiece and Johns' iconic *Color Numerals* series. The exhibition highlights how Rauschenberg and Johns expanded on ideas developed through their private discourse, influencing each other beyond their relationship.

At the time, New York's artistic culture was focused on Abstract Expressionism

which was often framed as an exposure of the self and subconscious. Defying the trending theme and mindful of their personal circumstances, both Rauschenberg and Johns claimed their art was not about themselves and did not reflect their personalities.

Jason Smith, Geelong Gallery Director & CEO commented, 'We enjoy and appreciate a close working relationship with the National Gallery of Australia and are delighted to be presenting this major touring exhibition *Rauschenberg & Johns—Significant Others*. Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns are considered two of the most significant artists of the twentieth century whose groundbreaking works shaped our understanding of aspects of American art history. This exhibition is a fascinating and important reflection of the private creative dialogue that began when they were young artists in a relationship and the careers that ensued.'

One of Geelong Gallery's great collection strengths is printmaking, and it is a privilege to host this exhibition from the National Gallery which draws on its own extraordinary holding of international printmaking.'

David Greenhalgh, the National Gallery's Associate Curator, International Art, said he is excited about the national tour of *Rauschenberg & Johns*, whose works questioned ideas of authorship, value, and how art needs to communicate to a public audience.

'The success of both Rauschenberg and Johns is a result of them being an audience to each other. While their relationship would end after seven years, their art would continue to radiate the new ideas of their creative exchange', said Greenhalgh.



# Media Release

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Rauschenberg and Johns helped reshape American printmaking, working with the celebrated printmaker Kenneth Tyler to create ground-breaking works in lithography and screen-printing, as seen in the exhibition.

'Both Rauschenberg and Johns were highly engaged with the processes and materials of printmaking', continues Greenhalgh. 'They saw this 'different physique' as an opportunity to explore new ideas derived from new methods for creating work. These methods spoke directly to the abundance of printed matter in twentieth-century life, and how printmaking methods shaped everyday culture. Their understanding of the physical processes of making prints created rich new avenues to convey ideas.'

Geelong Gallery is the exclusive Victorian venue for the exhibition and the last opportunity for national audiences to see the *Rauschenberg & Johns—Significant Others* National Gallery Touring Exhibition. The exhibition will be open from Saturday 16 November to Sunday 9 February.

*Rauschenberg & Johns—Significant Others* is a National Gallery Touring Exhibition supported by Visions of Australia. The National Gallery gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Tyler Charitable Foundation in presenting the exhibition and supporting the digital publication.

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