its influence on artists of the time. The absence of the priest's right arm at its cinquecento discovery caused speculation amongst fellow artists and the principal restorers Bandinelli and Mortosoli about the configuration of arms and snakes in this area. Alberti and Leonardo's advocacy of the serpentine line encouraged the practice of emphasising the twists of the snakes and transferring these tense undulating curves to the figures themselves.

The Italian restorative work was removed by Napoleon in an attempt to nationalise the sculpture to France. He also held a competition to find a French restorer, but Brigitte Bourgeois' study of previously unpublished documents suggests that although a competition open to all was the obvious democratic choice for post-revolution France, the French had not achieved the equivalent skill in marble conservation as the Italians, and the open competition offended French artists.

The French failure to engage with the Laocoon is countered by the next article, in which German thinkers such as Goethe find strong connections with Ancient Greece. Ian Balfour's discussion of 'Sculpting pain and poetry' develops our understanding of the position the Laocoon was beginning to hold in history, and particularly how it affected the understanding of art history and the sublime. The prevalence of copies and descriptions of the sculpture by the eighteenth century meant that the German intelligentsia were familiar with the work, even if they had not seen it, leading it to earn its place in canonical art historical works.

The similar popularity of copies in eighteenth-century Britain is the subject of Viccy Coltman's essay. As she identifies, the Grand Tour led many Brits to the Vatican's sculptures, but most eyewitnesses were already familiar with it, as the Bestland engraving demonstrates. The logistical issues of life-sized copies meant, however, that copies of fragments, such as Wilton's bust, led to in-depth study of certain areas. Interest in the Laocoon's facial expression sparked debate about his self-absorption and lack of concern for his sons.

The catalogue, like the exhibition, shines with new perspectives in the Laocoon legacy, identifying the elements of the sculpture's form that seep into the modern works, and considering why the coils and the pregnant moment have become so representative of the whole. The connections are woven together through clever juxtaposing in the gallery space, insightful short essays on the works by the three contemporary artists and catalogue essays that chart the expanding influence of the sculpture through Europe after its Renaissance rediscovery. The volume is as aesthetic as it is informative, images of the Laocoon, copies and related works accompany the beautiful installation photography, in which Deacon's awe-inspiring *Laocoon* rivals the original.

ROSALIND MCKEVER
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ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: TRANSFER DRAWINGS FROM THE 1960s

LEWIS KACHUR. FOREWORD BY JONATHAN O'HARA

Jonathan O'Hara Gallery 2007 $40.00
72 pp. 45 col/6 mono illus
ISBN 978-0-9740751-4-3
Distributed by DAP, Inc., New York
UK apply Jonathan O'Hara Gallery, New York or DAP

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG: CARDBOARDS AND RELATED PIECES

YVE-ALAIN BOIS AND JOSEF HELFENSTEIN WITH CLAIRE ELLIOT

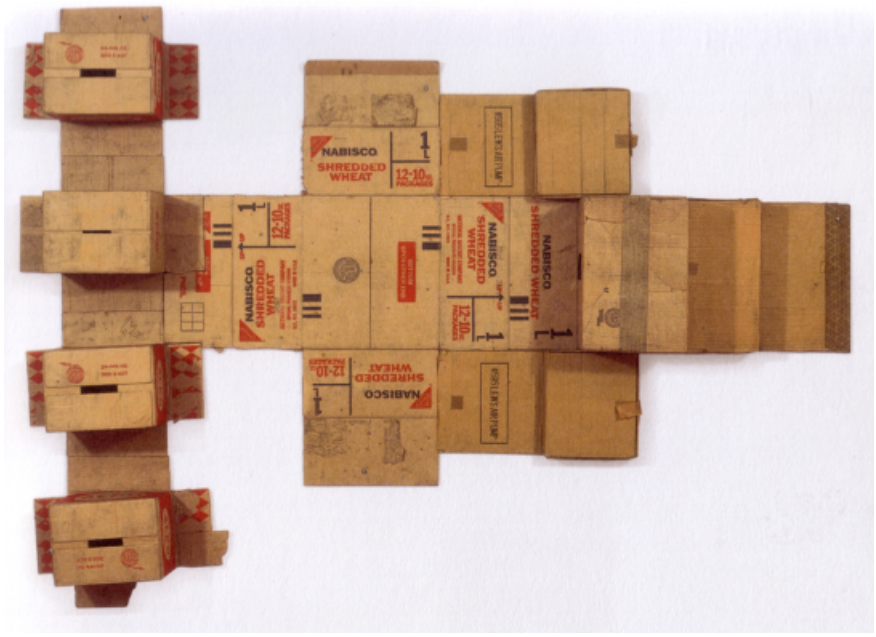
Menil Foundation, Inc. 2007 £ 35.00 $50.00
152 pp. 42 col/105 mono illus
ISBN 978-0-300-12378-4
Dist. Yale University Press, New Haven & London

These publications both accompanied exhibitions focusing on particular bodies of work by Robert Rauschenberg: his *Transfer Drawings*, made during 1962–9 by rubbing solvent-soaked imagery from newspapers and magazines onto paper, and *Cardboards*, 1971–4, arrangements of folded and manipulated packaging. The *Transfers* offered the artist a way of incorporating a wide range of imagery from printed media into new relationships. His interest in making work almost entirely from cardboard corresponded with his move from New York to the island of Captiva, off Florida, where he could no longer find the profusion and variety of urban refuse with which he formerly worked.

The books celebrate and document the shows and also have an afterlife as a reference works. Both are in part the fruit of archival research with the Rauschenberg Studio, and the texts place the work in a historical context. Both attempt to elbow themselves shelf space by suggesting that the work covered has not previously elicited as much commentary as other periods of the artist's output, such as the *Combines* with which he first made his reputation. With reference to an artist who has been as prolific, and as extensively exhibited and discussed, as Rauschenberg, this claim may of course only be valid in relative terms. The Menil Collection publication includes an authoritative 'catalogue raisonné' of the artist's related series 'Cardboards', 'Cardbirds', 'Tampa Clay', 'Venetians' and 'Early Egyptians', with reference photographs and exhibition information for each piece. The authors conscientiously note that 'in some instances, original documentation was unavailable for verification'. It is cheering when an artist's output is so profuse that it outruns the efforts of the cataloguer.

Lewis Kachur's book documents a large quantity of work in a relatively compact format, but feels spacious and uncluttered. The understandable zeal of commercial galleries to promote their exhibitions can sometimes taint an accompanying publication, however lavish, with the vulgar whiff of the 'brochure'. But this one will continue to be a useful, independent study. The essay by Kachur, Associate Professor of Art History at Kean University, New Jersey, is helpfully – if rather bossily – broken down under subheadings *technique*, *meaning*, *interpretation*, *context* and *1968*, with bibliographical and biographical footnotes. The straightforward description of how the transfers were actually made will be welcome to newcomers. The author successfully locates this peculiar technique as occupying an elusive zone somewhere between monotype, collage, rubbing, drawing and painting; neither entirely handmade nor mechanical; allowing the artist to touch big, public themes – Nixon and Vietnam, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, Arab-Israeli conflict – from newspaper front pages, yet lending the same content a kind of intimacy and reticence, restricted in scale and reduced to a burnished shadow of hatched strokes.

In the Menil Collection publication, the informative introduction by the Foundation's director Josef Helfenstein acts as frigate escort to the flagship essay by the Bonaparte of modern art history and criticism, co-editor of *October*, Yve-Alain Bois. Bois masterfully contextualises the cardboard pieces in relation to Rauschenberg's own career, to the US 'economy of



Nabisco Shredded Wheat (Cardboard) (1971). Photograph by Glenn Steigelman. From *Robert Rauschenberg: Cardboards and Related Pieces*.

abundance', to modernism, the European Arte Povera artists, the 'ready-made', Warhol, Schwitters, Minimalism and Cubism. His essay playfully acknowledges the gulf between his own Eurocentric perspective and the artist's immersion in American material culture. This is demonstrated by his struggle (an elegantly articulate struggle) to incorporate a reference to French writer Francis Ponge, who wrote a poem that Bois recalled as describing the fragile transience of a simple cardboard box. After checking his source, Bois found that the poem actually describes a wooden 'cageot' or fruit-crate: perhaps, at one time, nearly as familiar as cardboard, at least in Europe, but now the sort of quaint, exotic ephemera probably fetching respectable sums in Paris flea-markets, or serving as a light fixture in a tourist bar in La Rochelle.

One day soon, cardboard may achieve the same status. Rauschenberg was interested in its ordinariness, its global utilitarianism and drab homogenous appearance. He has been triumphant in squeezing a spare, poignant beauty from it; in showing us the poetry in the 'collection of lines imprinted like a friendly joke' on its surface: *National Spinning*, *Red Cheek*, *Glori-fried*, *Yarns from New England*.

One wonders whether the 'Transfers' or the 'Cardboards', with their restrained colour and fragile architecture, ever looked 'ugly', ever 'grated' in the way that some of the earlier 'Combines' still do. Morton Feldman, composer and friend of the artist, grumbled that 'in some swank Milano gallery' the 'Cardboards' looked 'a little too chic'. Both books hint that contemporary reaction to the work was somewhat muted.

The reproductions in both books are serviceable rather than sensuous. In the Jonathan O'Hara catalogue the images are too small to do anything but catalogue. Even in the larger Menil Collection volume, one misses the celebration of surface and texture that graces any half-decent cookery book.

Both books offer short quotations from the artist interspersed among the other text and images like little grenades of insight: 'A desire built up in me to work in a material of waste and softness . . .' '. . . you wrap your conscience in your newspaper just like you wrap your garbage . . .' 'There is no such thing as better material . . .' 'The one thing that has been consistent about my work has been an attempt to use the very last minutes of my life and the particular location as the source of energy and inspiration, rather than retiring to some kind of other time, or dream . . .'. I was left hungry to reread the complete interviews from which these nuggets were plucked.

The relationship of this very American artist to Europe is an interesting knot that is pulled at but ultimately left unpicked by Bois. It is understandable that, in the case of Rauschenberg's friend and contemporary Cy Twombly (domiciled in Italy and whose every painting explicitly cites Classical mythology) this relationship to 'the Old World' is unavoidable and addressed in all reference works. The European chassis to Rauschenberg's own sensibility could bear more research. It may be a fit framework for a long-awaited retrospective in Britain, a welcome opportunity to reconsider the complexity of his relationships to his contemporaries, his outward-looking (and ever more relevant) concern with global problems, how he assimilated the work of his predecessors or his undiscussed influence on British artists such as Tony Cragg or Bill Woodrow. Given his ubiquitous celebration in US museums, could there even be a trace of anti-Americanism at work in his near-total effacement from British galleries, or is it simply that we think we have seen enough of him already?

In the meantime, these books are welcome and well-researched explorations of specific aspects of his output. Both are entertainingly interspersed with photographs of the artist (many by Hans Namuth and Harry Shunk, two of the art world's most illustrious snappers): at work – frowning over the work bench or gazing thoughtfully from under his curly locks, slightly decadent, a middle-aged version of Caravaggio's *Boy Peeling Fruit* – or schmoozing with eminent gallery owners, who look very happy to be in his company.

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Artist, London

SEDUCED: ART & SEX FROM ANTIQUITY TO NOW

MARINA WALLACE, MARTIN KEMP, JOANNE BERNSTEIN (EDS)

Merrell Publishing, London 2007 £35.00 $49.95
ISBN 978-1-8589-4416-6

Seduced is the catalogue for an exhibition of the same name, which ran at London's Barbican Art Gallery from 12 October 2007–27 January 2008. The exhibition began with the plaster cast of a rather large fig leaf, created in 1857 to spare the blushes of Queen Victoria – that mother of nine – when she viewed the copy of Michelangelo's *David* presented to her by the Grand Duke of Tuscany. It ends with Nan Goldin's 2001 slideshow *Heartbeat*, showing couples coupling and cuddling while the sound of the slide projector ticks on like a heart beat, a *memento mori* reinforcing the idea that sex and death

