http://shuffle.rauschenbergfoundation.org/exhibitions/nasher/essays/Acampora\_photography/

Throughout his career, Rauschenberg used photography to explore the contradictory qualities of photographic representation in varied applications of the medium. He produced both stand-alone prints and developed his well-known transfer method in order to incorporate photographs in collages and on paintings, silkscreens, tapestries, ceramics, and metal. In his lifelong investigation into the possible uses and functions of the photographic image, Rauschenberg struck a virtuoso equilibrium between the documentary aspect of photographs (by imbuing his works with cultural and historical import) and the medium’s potential for abstraction (by manipulating images to alter pre-conceived meanings), balancing his photographic results between the medium’s inherent technological objectivity and his own subjective framing.

Moreover, although it has gone unremarked, Rauschenberg’s use of photography in paintings and Combines must be understood as a critical break from the visual conventions of the New York School of painters in so far as photography enabled him to alter the traditional attributes of both the picture plane and the object in the round. At the same time, his photographs fix things, places, and people relative to his own existential experience. In this sense, Rauschenberg’s exploration of photography may be said to connect to philosophical aspects of the abstract expressionist ethos, however much he staunchly denied existentialism in his work, distancing himself from its angst and criticizing artists’ self-pity.

Rauschenberg frequently transferred found photographs to drawing paper by coating them with lighter fluid and rubbing the reverse side with a pencil. But by the spring of 1962, he began experimenting with printmaking at the invitation of Tatyana Grosman, founder of Universal Limited Art Editions (ULAE) in West Islip, New York, where Jasper Johns had been working since 1960. During this time, Rauschenberg began producing lithographs, transitioning to silkscreen paintings soon afterwards.His silkscreens feature images drawn from a variety of magazines, including National Geographic, Life, Esquire, Boxing& Wrestling, and he compiled a library of pictures, sorting them into various categorized files from which he selected photographs to be sent to commercial screenmakers. Determined not to confine himself to any one medium or style, Rauschenberg abandoned his collection of silkscreens after being awarded the International Grand Prize in painting at the Venice Biennale in 1964, finding other ways to incorporate appropriated photography into his art, and transferring images onto Plexiglas, fabric, metal, and various other materials.

With his return to practicing photography, Rauschenberg directly confronted the challenge of passing time and how his pictures transformed an ephemeral existential experience into an eternal image. This aspect of his work is vivid in how he used the camera to document his travels. For example, in 1980, he bought a 1936 Phaeton Ford and spent a month driving from New York to Captiva Island, Florida, with his assistant Terry Van Brunt. Traveling less than forty miles each day, they frequently stopped for Rauschenberg to photograph in cities from Atlantic City and Baltimore to Charleston and Savannah. He titled his collection of these and other locales In + Out City Limits.[9](http://shuffle.rauschenbergfoundation.org/exhibitions/nasher/essays/Acampora_photography/#fn-26-9) Over a hundred of Rauschenberg’s photographs from this series, together with twenty-eight photographs taken between 1949 and 1965, were included in Rauschenberg Photographe, an exhibition organized in 1981 by curator Alain Sayag at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. His high contrast photographs focus on the textures and details of ordinary objects: a towel hanging on a clothing line, the hull of a boat, the trunk of a tree painted white, a bucket on a floral tablecloth. Rauschenberg’s careful attention to light, shadows, the shapes of his subjects, and the qualities of their forms emphasize his effort to capture the genuine conditions of the world around him.

“Rauschenberg’s art extends a moral tradition of the artist as witness, functioning as time capsules, a composite of what he witnessed not in a single place or country but on television, in newspapers, and in his travels all over the world.” Barbara Rose