JAMES ROSENQUIST: PROCESS, REPRESENTATION, AND THE SIMULACRUM

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American artist James Rosenquist is best known for his Pop Art paintings, which existing scholarship has studied in regard to its formal features and social and cultural significance. Rosenquist’s manner of working, specifically his process, remains understudied. Focusing on three paintings and three corresponding collages, President Elect (1960-61, 1964), Star Thief (1980), and The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light (2000), this thesis considers features of Rosenquist’s studio practice to propose a new interpretation involving the representational status and significance of the artist’s collages and paintings that is elucidated by French theorist Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum. Additionally, the thesis addresses the treatment of Rosenquist’s collages and paintings in publications and exhibitions since 1992 by suggesting how Baudrillard’s ideas about the simulacrum clarify the museological narrativizing and consumption of the artist’s work.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................................................................................................... iii

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ....................................................................................................................... v

Chapter

1. INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................... 1

   Statement of Problem
   Methodology
   Review of Literature

2. JAMES ROSENQUIST AND THE SIMULACRUM ................................................................. 12

   The “Era of Simulation”
   *President Elect*
   *Star Thief*
   *The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light*
   Collages: Language as Institutionalization

3. JAMES ROSENQUIST AND EXHIBITION .............................................................................. 24

   Exhibition History
   Collages: The First Exhibition
   James Rosenquist: A Retrospective?
   Baudrillard and the Museum as Institution

4. CONCLUSION............................................................................................................................. 32

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY .............................................................................................................. 44
### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Rosenquist, <em>Zone</em>, painting</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rosenquist, <em>President Elect</em>, collage</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rosenquist, <em>President Elect</em>, painting</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rosenquist, <em>Star Thief</em>, collage</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rosenquist, <em>Star Thief</em>, painting</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rosenquist, <em>The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light</em>, collage</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Rosenquist, <em>The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light</em>, painting</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation view RG-717-008 of <em>James Rosenquist: A Retrospective</em></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation view RG-717-050 of <em>James Rosenquist: A Retrospective</em></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation view RG-717-179 of <em>James Rosenquist: A Retrospective</em></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

James Albert Rosenquist was born November 29, 1933 in Grand Forks, North Dakota and he spent the majority of his childhood there and in Minnesota and Ohio. Rosenquist was awarded a scholarship to the Art Students League and arrived in New York during September 1955. Five years later, when he moved into a new loft space at 3-5 Coenties Slip, his life and work took a fortuitous turn. Much like some of the other American artists associated with what was to be known as the Pop art movement, he had experience in commercial art (sign painting) and he would explore the pervading ideology of compulsive consumption and its cultural form of printed advertising for inspiration. Rosenquist’s familiarity with sign painting techniques resulted from employment with Midwest commercial painting contractor W.G. Fischer in the summer of 1953, Local 230 and General Outdoor Advertising in 1957 in New York, and Artkraft-Strauss Sign Corporation from 1957 to 1960, also in New York. Rosenquist scholar Judith Goldman suggests the effect of his experience as a billboard painter on his art: “When he painted billboards, Rosenquist worked from tiny black and white photographs that he would have to scale up hundreds of times. He also painted in sections, working on enormous sheets of masonite.” ¹ The process of scaling up from much smaller “source” material would become of utmost importance in Rosenquist’s art. In fact, it was by utilizing this practice that Rosenquist departed from his previously Abstract Expressionist-inspired art and reintroduced the image to the art world alongside fellow American Pop artists Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and others.

In 1960-61 Rosenquist produced his first quintessentially “Pop” painting, *Zone* (Figure 1), which reveals his mastery of juxtaposition by presenting side-by-side unrelated images of a face and hands of a woman taken from the same advertisement for hand cream and a shiny, ripe tomato from a separate advertisement. Combinations of disparate images such as the aforementioned were facilitated by Rosenquist stockpiling imagery that he obtained from mass produced and mass distributed print sources; he kept some print sources intact, pasting them on the walls of his studio. As the late Walter Hopps described,

...he began collecting, from magazines and other sources, advertisements and photographic reproductions that he spread out across the floor and pinned to the walls. He arranged them in certain ways, as he tried to decide what he was going to paint. Eventually, the clippings were incorporated into collages that he made in preparation for the paintings.²

It was from this “bulletin board” that Rosenquist fashioned collages of images he had culled from serial print publications such as *Life* magazine; later on, he used his own photographs as a source of imagery.³ After making the collages he began his painting process, which consisted of scaling up or enlarging the smaller collage into a massive painting on canvas.

This paper is concerned with Rosenquist’s studio practice as it reveals something about the relationship of the collages to the paintings, i.e. representational status, along with the ways aspects of his process correlate with French philosopher Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum. One of the foremost contemporary cultural theorists, Baudrillard (1929 - 2007) was a prolific author; however, the essay most pertinent to this project is his “The Precession of Simulacra.” The essay was first published in French in

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³ Goldman, *Early Pictures*, 100.
the seminal publication *L’echange symbolique et la mort* (1976) and subsequently it appeared in English in the collection of essays, *Simulacra & Simulation* (1983). My paper argues that features of the simulacrum articulate the representational aspect of Rosenquist’s paintings, alerting us to their status less as signs of things than as signs of visual signs that are images of images, and also to the importance that process has for the paintings in this regard. In addition, using the concept of the simulacrum to analyze the paintings alerts us to their relationship with the collages and to possibilities for narrativizing the relationship, which the paper shows is being explored in museum installations. In doing so, this paper connects Rosenquist’s art to his studio practice and, finally, the use of his work in exhibition.

The postmodern society that Baudrillard observed, saturated with mass media, forms the basis for his theories. According to Baudrillard, the media produces a general language of imagery unrelenting in its demands on consumers’ attention. Considering the ubiquity of signs perpetuated by the media and their location in the public sphere, the consuming public then becomes over-stimulated and finds it difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between the object (real) and the image (unreal). In this context, Baudrillard explains “simulation” as the process that produces the simulacra (unreal). He perceives “simulation” as the act of “feign[ing] to have what one doesn't have.” An example that Baudrillard employs in his essay is the faking of symptoms of illness, meaning that one may be portraying the symptoms of an illness (real), but does not indeed possess the sickness that would produce said symptoms (unreal). This illustrates the lack of a concrete referent to something “authentic,” in this case sickness, a desire to

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attain the signs of it, and consequently the creation of symptoms of authenticity that do not exist in a prior form that otherwise would cause the symptoms to come into existence as indexical signs. Baudrillard explains that the simulacrum threatens one’s perception of “real” and “imagined.” For example, it eliminates characteristics of images that would otherwise distinguish them from one another in a chronology of process, with one being prior to and potentially causing the other, or from their cause or source in the world, which an image, subsequently, would represent. As Michael Camille affirms, “The simulacrum disturbs the order or priority: that the image must be secondary to, or come after, its model.” The simulacrum calls into question the very existence of reality not only by emphasizing signs as having no origin outside signification, but also by presenting imagery and environments as substitutes for authentic experiences and objects. Baudrillard writes, “[the image] is the reflection of a profound reality; it masks and denatures a profound reality; it masks the absence of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever; it is its own pure simulacrum.” Baudrillard here suggests that an image, ostensibly a representation that makes a source present, conceals the existence of no reality at all, as there is no ultimately original “source” from which the image or concept derives. Baudrillard would argue that these ersatz images, or simulacra in this case, then become surrogates for things that do not exist. Re-production after re-production of an image distances the consumer so far from an “original” from which the image was derived to the extent that a faux “reality” is manufactured while the existence of said reality diminishes. Because images are visual signs that are not what they signify,

6 Baudrillard, 6.
somehow they have no indexical or iconic relationship to what they signify – in other words, no relationship to an original.

Pertinent to the study of Rosenquist’s art are these ideas about media-saturation, the ubiquitous reproduction of images and their effects on expectations about the relationship of representations to reality and consequent reduction of the efficacy of those expectations in a media world saturated with images, and ensuing disbelief that representations are caused by and represent what is outside to or prior to signification or semiosis. Rosenquist’s paintings have an appearance of realism that suggests their imagery relates to a pre-existing reality by faithfully reproducing it, but in truth, the paintings do not function so. With their seemingly hyper-realist manifestation, the paintings look as if they describe objects and images by carefully, empirically, representing the material features of their appearance. However, the subjects and composition have been translated via the artist through several steps, therefore furthering the paintings from objects in the world that the appearance of the paintings suggests is their source. By using advertisements and mass print culture as points of departure, Rosenquist depicts not things but images of things and he further distances his paintings from the material reality of the image of a thing by taking liberties with the ways he visually represents the advertising and mass print culture examples that are his resources: for example, via image collection, cropping and subsequent de-contextualization, juxtaposition, application of paint on canvas, and display. In fact, his process can be understood as consisting of the creation of collages and paintings that respectively refer to “sources” that do not in fact materially exist; and, through a series of calculated steps on the part of the artist, distance the work of art from where it “originated.” For example,
to make collages Rosenquist combined images that he procured from mass produced and
distributed magazines and, as noted, later from his own photographs. Thereby, the
collages we can understand as “simulacra” in that they are a combination of images
whose fundamental origins as images are impossible to identify due to Rosenquist’s
transposition of the images through various techniques of visual representation and
multiple states of being. In other words, his treatment of images is to emphasize their
image-ness while reducing references to their status as material things in the world, as
part of a page from a magazine or newspaper. Like that of the simulacra, within his
oeuvre there is an indistinguishable relationship of an original to a reproduction –
meaning, then, that there is an inability to identify a preceding “source” for the printed
material. Even though he employed collages and magazine cutouts in his process, the
images Rosenquist begins with and ends up with collectively do not reference a reality,
rather, they are the artist’s construct. This aspect of Rosenquist’s studio practice raises
questions about the relationships we may expect the collages to have with the paintings.

The thesis will utilize Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum in order to
elucidate Rosenquist’s paintings’ relationships to process and collages’ relationships to
paintings, in regard to three paintings and three corresponding collages: President Elect
(1960-61, 1964), Star Thief (1980), and The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light
(2000). The selection of works intends to illustrate that while Rosenquist has made a
number of aesthetic shifts throughout his career, his process largely has remained
constant. The thesis will also take a critical look at the 2003 Guggenheim-organized
retrospective exhibition to establish that questions regarding the status of Rosenquist’s
paintings as representations arise as museums narrativize their relationship with the collages.

Statement of Problem

There is no existing scholarship that affiliates the art of James Rosenquist with Jean Baudrillard’s published writing. In actuality, very little scholarship concerning Rosenquist departs from iconographic, socio-historical, or art historical analysis. It is with this in mind that the thesis will address several questions in regard to the relationship of Rosenquist’s art to Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum. What is it about Rosenquist’s art that makes the comparison to Baudrillard’s simulacrum a rewarding subject for inquiry? How does the in-depth study of Rosenquist’s art in relation to the simulacrum contribute to an understanding of his process and its components? What does an understanding of process reveal about the representational status of his art? What can we learn about the representational status of Rosenquist’s paintings when we examine the recent inclusion of his collages in exhibitions and their related publications? How does an understanding of process in Rosenquist’s practice contribute to the scholarly understanding of process in contemporary art? In responding to these questions, the thesis aspires to emphasize the significance of Rosenquist’s process within artistic practice, a theme of increasing import in the scholarship of art since 1945.

Methodology

The formulation of the thesis problem initially emphasized the collages Rosenquist made for a specific group of paintings from the late 1980s and early 1990s. Subsequently, the thesis subject was reconfigured in light of new insights. Rosenquist’s
oeuvre, as that of any artist with a career as comprehensive and industrious as his, has ebbed and flowed and, according to critics, thrived and faltered. There is no question, however, that his work has made a number of decisive aesthetic shifts, critically successful or not. It is with this in mind that the thesis was broadened to include the previously mentioned collages and paintings from three different periods of his artistic production. The examination of collages and paintings representative of several decades aims to demonstrate the relevance of the analysis for the greater part of his oeuvre. It is the artist’s process involving the use and consequent creation of cultural forms in between the stages of conception and painting as well as his use of mass-media advertisements that invites study in relation to the simulacrum. Utilizing Baudrillard’s concept in this paper will identify process as a means of elucidating the representational status of Rosenquist’s art, meaning the status of Rosenquist’s art as images of images rather than representing an empirical reality. It is imperative to frame the author’s critical practice within this thesis in noting that in utilizing the simulacrum, a specific set of cogent and pertinent ideas are presented from “The Precession of Simulacra,” as well as a dismissal of others within the essay in an effort to illuminate the usage and understanding of simulacra. The handling of Baudrillard’s essay in this manner is justified for two reasons: firstly, an existing pattern of practice by other scholars provides a precedence of sorts, such as in Donald Kuspit’s 1987 essay “Andy’s Feelings,” for example, extracts specific aspects of the simulacrum from Baudrillard’s text to argue that Andy Warhol’s art, specifically his use of photography, are simulacra and therefore a destruction of the “real.” The second reason for my selective usage of ideas within Baudrillard’s text is that certain parts of the essay most clearly bring to light many significant and central

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7 The article cited was published in the June/July 1987 issue of Artscribe.
aspects of Rosenquist’s work that have not yet been addressed in previous scholarship. The essay makes possible the argument of several key points regarding the artist’s work: importance of process in understanding and contextualizing it, dismantling the privileging of one medium over another, and making evident the representational status of Rosenquist’s art.

Additionally, the thesis will address the treatment of Rosenquist’s collages and corresponding paintings in publications and exhibitions. Pursuing this theme will involve consulting various exhibitions mounted since 1992 and, when relevant, their accompanying catalogues. The inclusion of the collages in the Rosenquist retrospective exhibition of 2003 will be examined in light of the importance placed on the collages in the publication and the rather startling installation in the galleries. In particular, the retrospective’s installation at the Museum of Fine Arts and the Menil Collection in Houston will be addressed from the perspective of the author’s examination of the organization’s installation and study of relevant archives of The Museum of Fine Arts.

Furthermore, a conundrum was discovered in the examination of Rosenquist’s works in relation to the simulacrum and their institutional treatment. This paper strives to describe the artists’ paintings and collages in a way that does not corroborate with the existing institutions of academia and museological practices insofar as scholars and curators have reduced Rosenquist’s collages to works of little import and privilege one medium over another. However, this thesis presents inconsistencies via the very same

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8 Preceding the 1992 Gagosian exhibition, Jared Sable Gallery in New York organized an exhibition of Rosenquist’s work in 1974. The exhibition contained corresponding paintings and sketches, but for the sake of the arguments within the thesis, the collages in relation to Rosenquist’s process are of utmost importance, and not the drawings contained within the Sable exhibition.

activities and practices with which it takes issue: the use of nomenclature for which no
new language has been proposed, the order in which the visual aids are presented in the
list of illustrations and the works are referred to within the paper, and even the
introduction to Rosenquist and his work via biographical information in a linear and
chronological handling, and all are to be addressed further in the concluding chapter.

Review of Literature

The version of Jean Baudrillard’s essay “The Precession of Simulacra” published
in English in 1983 serves as the primary reference for the examination of Rosenquist’s
art. In addition, the thesis will refer to monographs containing images of or essays
addressing Rosenquist’s collages. The collages’ first appearance in a major publication
was in the 1992 catalogue James Rosenquist: The Early Pictures, 1961-1964 that
accompanied the exhibition of the same title at Gagosian Gallery. The following year, a
catalogue raisonné of Rosenquist’s graphic work, Time Dust, James Rosenquist,
Complete Graphics: 1962 - 1992 (1993), was published. Although this catalogue
included a number of collages, however, often they appeared alongside corresponding,
although not necessarily identical, lithographs, etchings, and screenprints. The
publication included an essay discussing Rosenquist’s collages, but it did not reference
his working process in terms of the translation from collage to painting to print.

The more recent James Rosenquist: A Retrospective, 2003, is dedicated solely to
establishing and representing the full scope of the artist’s oeuvre, 1958-2001.¹⁰ This was
the first comprehensive publication that included a rather lengthy essay, relative to
previous publications, along with reproductions of 57 collages. The essay was an in-

¹⁰ At the time of the publication of this thesis, Rosenquist is still a working artist, and since the
retrospective exhibition and publication in 2003, he has produced more work.
depth look at collage as a medium and the medium’s art historical position and did not consider how the artist’s studio practices impacted the status of the paintings as representations or the relationship of the collages to the paintings. Although Rosenquist has participated in hundreds of exhibitions, both solo and group shows, the related published literature has not substantively addressed the key themes of this project.

Moreover, few scholars have examined with any rigor the relevance of Rosenquist’s working process to contemporary art practice and the representational status of his art as images of images and signs of signs. Although some have studied his art as pictorial, biographical anecdotes, and some analyzed his work in a formal fashion, no scholar has focused on his process as revelatory of the representational significance of his art. Further, no scholar has made the attempt to connect Jean Baudrillard’s simulacrum to Rosenquist’s work. This thesis will, with diligence, examine the import of the artist’s process in light of the dearth of scholarship concerning such an essential figure in the history of art.
CHAPTER 2
JAMES ROSENQUIST AND THE SIMULACRUM

The following chapter will discuss the impact of Rosenquist’s sign painting on his
art-making; reiterate the significance of Jean Baudrillard’s view of the “era of
simulation” for Rosenquist’s work; discuss the artist’s “source” material and numerous
steps in his working process in relation to his works in their “final” state, the painting;
and, lastly, address the ways scholarly vocabulary references a relationship of cause and
effect between Rosenquist’s collages and paintings and the implications the concept of
the simulacrum has for this relationship.

In beginning with Rosenquist’s training as a sign-painter, his introduction to
commercial techniques and daily inundation with printed marketing material proved to be
formative experiences in the development of his artistic process. It was in 1959 that
Rosenquist adopted his fine-tuned commercial sign-painting techniques for use in his
own art while shifting the subject matter from abstraction to advertisement imagery he
obtained from publications such as Life and Vogue. When asked about his sign-painting
process, Rosenquist likened his preparation for a sign-painting job to that of visiting a
veritable image buffet in that he would arrive at work and:

…there’d be photographs of anything on this desk, a picture of Hercules holding a
big chain, a picture of a gun with flowers coming out of it, a fish, a bagel – so
you’d pick anything you’d want to paint that day…Sometimes the picture
wouldn’t even look like anything.\footnote{Marcia Tucker, James Rosenquist (New
Haven: Eastern Press, 1972), 16.}

He has insinuated that he prefers to work from two-dimensional still photographs rather
than objects, a method likely taken from derived billboard days. He exclaims:

…and they’d say, ‘Put this up fifty by sixty feet.’ And that’s it. Well how in the
hell do you do that? You square up the wall that you’re going to paint it on, and
you square up this drawing, scale it up, then you mix all the paints and all the colors, then you draw it all in by pre-hand, then you use squares, just as is done in mural painting.\textsuperscript{12}

It was the practice of using commercial imagery as a source, the process of scaling-up, and a decided democracy in Rosenquist’s choice of imagery that influenced not only the subject matter of his art, but also his art-making process. Upon deciding to use existing commercial imagery in his art, the artist resolved,

\begin{quote}
What I wanted to do was take these images, anonymous images from advertising, place them in a picture plane, in a certain size and scale – really well-painted fragments – and have the largest fragment the most close-up and the most anonymous because it was magnified so much.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}

The “Era of Simulation”

The imagery Rosenquist so devotedly referred to in his early work he procured from what Jean Baudrillard calls the “era of simulation” that, Baudrillard argues, began with the introduction of a media-saturated, day-to-day existence.\textsuperscript{14} As Rosenquist confirmed, “Being a child in America you are getting advertised at. It’s like being hit on the head with a ball-pin hammer. You become numb. You’re constantly hit upon.”\textsuperscript{15} By way of mediation and the re-production of imagery (in the vein of Walter Benjamin), Baudrillard explains that a reality is “less and less retrievable through the consumption of media…” and that the proliferation of images due to uninterrupted exposure to the mass media has liquidated any kind of authentic experience or origin and created simulacra.\textsuperscript{16} Simulacra are images, experiences, and feelings that masquerade as authentic and real. Often, much about them appears to be empirically real; however, their artificiality is fostered by their

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re-presentation in abundance as iterations for which there are no originals. Their replication in abundance is witnessed by Rosenquist’s “source” material for his collages and paintings as derived from mass-distributed publications that included imagery intended for commercial purposes, that is, to advertise a product or service for purchase. It is this material intended for mass consumption that Rosenquist translates into the forms that compose his paintings. In considering the relationship of Rosenquist’s paintings to his collages, seeking to determine the actual “source” from the printed material proves challenging. Even in the case of this thesis, consideration of the collages and paintings for President Elect, Star Thief, and Stowaway depends on using print versions of digital reproductions rather than the study of works of art in person, hereby introducing one more step of removal from a “source.”

Rosenquist determined that not only the brash and garish aesthetics of marketing appealed to him, but also, and more importantly, the process of image choice, rendering, and the scaling-up procedure introduced to him as a sign-painter. The effect of his sign-painting on Rosenquist’s artistic practice informs the study of the following works: President Elect (Figure 3), the collage of President Elect (Figure 2), Star Thief (Figure 5), the corresponding collage of Star Thief (Figure 4), The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light (Figure 7), and lastly, Stowaway’s related collage (Figure 6).

While President Elect, Star Thief, and The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light, each tell us about respective eras in Rosenquist’s aesthetic development, the works have in common the compounding of reproduced “sources” and all demonstrate the multiple stages in image collection, cropping and subsequent de-contextualization, juxtaposition, realization, and display (to be discussed in the third chapter). President
*Elect* and *Star Thief* relate to the simulacrum in that they both utilize re-produced material culture originally intended for commercial use as a “source;” *Stowaway* relates in the artist’s use of the photo-copy as “source.” However, two commonalities among the three works is their several-phase removal from the aforementioned “sources” and the implication of their status as representative objects.

**President Elect**

As an example of his early work, the collage of *President Elect* (Figure 2) developed from Rosenquist’s collection of imagery and subsequent decisions regarding what components he would use in the work. He chose parts from a poster of John F. Kennedy’s 1960 presidential campaign, an advertisement for Swans Down Devil’s Food Cake and an advertisement for Chevrolet. The latter advertisements had been published in *Life* magazine. Moreover, as advertisements, all three images promoted specific “products” – Kennedy as president/celebrity, and Swans Down and Chevrolet as enticements to purchase cake mix and a car, respectively. In the collage and painting for *President Elect*, Rosenquist re-presents the images and “dismantles the original intent of the advertiser” as one scholar notes. He removes the images from their theoretical original contexts of advertising and re-presents them in the context of art. Rosenquist breaks down the objective of the advertiser by cropping and placing the images with other images, further removing evidence of their previous incarnation and therefore diluting their intended functions as ads.

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17 It should be noted that two different photographic representations of this collage exist in publications (one in *James Rosenquist: The Early Pictures* and a variation on this one in *James Rosenquist: A Retrospective*). In describing and referring to the collage of *President Elect*, the most recent example is used.


In several interviews Rosenquist revealed that he produced collages in relation to every one of his paintings. Certainly, not all of the corresponding collages still exist, but curiously this vital step in his creative process seems to have been ignored by scholars, curators, and gallerists until the Gagosian Gallery exhibition and publication in 1992. Most of the early collages are constructed of “found” clippings from magazines and newspapers several years removed from the dates of the clippings’ appearance in publications, as is the case with President Elect. Rosenquist has stated:

I use images from old magazines--when I say old, I mean 1945 to 1955--a time we haven't started to ferret out as history yet. If it was the front end of a new car there would be people who would be passionate about it, and the front end of an old car might make some people nostalgic. The images are like no-images.\(^\text{20}\)

Rosenquist’s use of “no-images” corresponds to Baudrillard’s references to the simulacrum in that “no-images” have no “origin” and are emptied of the initial meaning and the simulacrum similarly has no origin and is characterized by the dissolution its initial meaning, which means that insofar as the images have no origin, they cannot be assigned a beginning or a place in a relationship of source and image, or cause to the effect, according to Baudrillard.

As seen in President Elect, the collages piece together images in a textile-esque fashion. Rosenquist’s sliced up, commercially-derived, photographic images with traces of the artist’s hand-written scrawls, masking tape, ink smudges, glue residue, etc. As Michael Lobel points out insofar as the collages are plans for the paintings, “Like so many of his peers, Rosenquist took great pains to jettison evidence of the artist’s touch from his work. Yet the collages show just how much effort it took to create paintings that

look machinelike and devoid of expression.”21 The collages may seem to be created hastily and with messy enthusiasm, yet they reflect a calculated assemblage of elements the artist had collected for years. He took “whole” images and tore them into parts that he wished to use within the collage and painting. President Elect’s collage has evidence of folding and tearing. The tears mark a separation of one element from another indicating Rosenquist’s calculated parting of imagery intended for his art from the imagery deemed ineffective by the artist. For instance, the text from the Kennedy campaign poster “Kennedy for President/Leadership for the 1960’s,” was conspicuously omitted. The cake appears taped to a piece of paper containing the words “Pres Elect 1960-61 J.R.” The tape seems to indicate a sense of impermanence or move-ability in terms of where these disparate pieces should be placed in relation to each other. Atop sections of JFK’s face, the hands presenting the piece of cake and image of the car are grids marking areas Rosenquist intended to treat as sources for the painting.22 Upon further examination, the grids do not line up and indicate that each image will be scaled up to certain sizes within the painting. Section by section and image by image the painting materializes on Masonite via the hand of the artist, in a manner that recalls how he worked as a billboard painter.23 It is the completion of the paintings in parts, as in the collages, that conveys the status of Rosenquist’s art as reproductions of reproductions, meaning that there is an element of fluidity in terms of a “beginning” and an “end.”

The painting, President Elect, shows evidence of translations from the collage to the “final product.” Kennedy’s face is depicted in color as opposed to the grisailles

22 Kennedy’s face has more divisions within the grid system, perhaps this is due to the complicated nature of creating a believable likeness of a person.
23 Typically, the substrate for billboards was Masonite.
palette within the collage and, in opposition, the hands and cake are in black-and-white, changed from their color representation within the collage. Lastly, the car was reduced to a nameless piece of machinery as Rosenquist removed the Chevrolet emblem from the hubcap as well as the windshield. In comparison to the much more unrestrained collage, Rosenquist has tightly cropped out Kennedy’s forehead and seamlessly transitioned into the grisailles hands presenting the cake and finally into the car hood.

It is with the above information in mind that President Elect is considered in light of Baudrillard’s simulacrum. President Elect, as well as the following two examples, was created with multiple steps, various techniques, and are separated from several, often unknown sources. The painting refers to the collage, which refers to advertising relating to a campaign poster that had been photographed, with relationships between each cultural form characterized by reference and translation more than iconic resemblance or empirically-driven representation. The cultural forms have additional complexities. In the case of the advertisements, they were likely studio photographs of a staged scene or subject or sketches intended for commercial purposes. This means the photographs record not things in everyday life but a constructed composition or staged arrangement of things brought together and organized for the purpose of becoming a photographic image. This construction and its objective to become a photographic image do not refer to a concrete state of being as an origin, but refer to simulacra. Simulacra deny the notion of narrativity as they deny the existence of “originals” or “sources.” It is this notion of narrativity or cause and effect that is altogether ineffective in viewing Rosenquist’s works – as the relationship of the paintings to the collages is largely fluid. This correlation is

24 The popularization and consequent democratization of photography caused critics to question the authenticity of the medium in addition to authorship.
not wholly cause and effect because the paintings condense and obscure their references to features of the collages. Finally, the collages reduce and shroud what they owe to reproductions.

*Star Thief*²⁵

*Star Thief* (Figures 4 and 5) exemplifies Rosenquist’s first foray into jagged cross-hatching as a pictorial unifying device. Slicing the composition with piercing divisions causes the surface to oscillate between slivers of an indeterminable foreground and a background. While this is undoubtedly a departure from his previous quilt-like, over- and under-placement of imagery, as evidenced by *President Elect*, within the collage one can still make out the clippings from glossy magazines and/or advertisements: the fatty, but slightly graying bacon, the flawless visage of a beautiful woman (likely from a women’s magazine), a breathtaking cosmic skyscape, sinuous colored cables, and a ball bearing amongst a miscellany industrial parts.²⁶ Rosenquist assembled the disparate elements, some torn from magazines and some unidentified in their sources, into a mixture of torn, sliced, taped, and de-contextualized images. In translating the collage to the painting, Rosenquist did not make many modifications other than deleting the image of earth on the right and infusing the images with richer hues. He unified the painting as a cohesive whole with the polished transitions and beguiling juxtapositions.

The creation of the painting was documented by photographer Bob Adelman and featured in “Evolution of a Painting” published in the February 1981 issue of *Life* magazine. Adelman shadowed Rosenquist for 36 weeks to document the creation of *Star*

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²⁵ In 1981 much controversy surrounded this painting as it was selected for the Miami International Airport, but former astronaut and chairman of Eastern Airlines deemed the painting inappropriate and prevented its acquisition.

²⁶ Its appearance is reminiscent of Kurt Schwitters’ collage, but certainly doesn’t draw from Schwitters’ apparent randomness, but much more deliberate decisions in placement, color, and juxtaposition.
Thief and interestingly, the collage stage in the creation of the work is mentioned only in reference to Rosenquist consulting the “maquette.” Nor are the sources for his images discussed. Certainly, the documentation of the painting from start to finish divulges something about Rosenquist’s painting techniques but it does not tell us about Rosenquist’s studio practice as a whole. Indeed, the article title communicates that it documents the creation of the “painting”; however, in Rosenquist’s creation of a painting, the creation of a collage is a fundamental component and, retrospectively, it metonymically signifies his process. It is instances such as this that propagate the value of the paintings as finished products over the collages.  In this context, the simulacrum can be corrective. As a way to correct this short-sighted interpretation of Rosenquist’s process, the simulacrum provides an all-inclusive view of Rosenquist’s entire working method without exclusion. Since the relationship of the collages and paintings is more fluid than simple cause and effect suggests, the process has aspects of the simulacrum involving representations having no “origin” and no “beginning,” and confuses the status of the collages as preliminary to the paintings and thereupon confuses the status of the paintings as the absolute and singular termination of the process and its pre-eminent result.

*The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light*

Illustrative of his more recent abstract work from his Speed of Light series, the collage of *The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light* (Figures 6 and 7) reveals its medium as color photocopies and mixed media mounted on plywood.\(^27\) For works Rosenquist made after 1966, he used photographs as additional source material, and he

\(^{27}\) Rosenquist’s *Stowaway* is part of his recent, almost entirely abstract *Speed of Light* series which draws upon Einstein’s theory of relativity in placing the artist and the viewer in two different positions of spectatorship.
began to refer to them more frequently in later collages and paintings. In this case, the use of Rosenquist’s photocopies detaches the collage even further from a “source” material in that the “origin” of the abstract subjects is entirely indefinite as the photocopies are copies of something we cannot define. Layers of dynamic, richly-colored and seemingly reflective vortices intermingle with hand-writing and Rosenquist’s gridded composition for scaling up the collage to painting. In comparing the collage to the painting, Rosenquist did not seem to make major alterations, save some noticeable shifts in color and scale. While *Stowaway* is abstract in nature and does not refer to recognizable subjects, the work remains faithful to the process Rosenquist developed decades before.

Indeed, there exists a temporal relationship of cause and effect within the aforementioned six works. As can typically be gleaned from the dates assigned to the collages in comparison to those ascribed to the paintings, the dates suggest that one is theoretically created before the other. However, the lack of identifiable sources and the modification of the works from their previously existing state further begs for examination in relation to the simulacrum.

Rosenquist culls imagery from diverse sources and creates a dynamic and engaging composition first realized in collage and then in painted form. Rosenquist’s collage work is one step away from its “final” state of being: the painting. However, in all three pairs, the paintings are at best several steps removed from a direct “original” source, and determining exactly from what they derive proves to be challenging. This relates to the simulacrum in that if we are unable to assign a source to something we want to consider its representation, we cannot with certainty identify an origin as a cause.
Collages: Language as Institutionalization

In citing the word “source,” one can easily align oneself with the existing scholarly treatment of Rosenquist’s oeuvre, which is organized in terms of collages as preliminary source material for the paintings. Rosenquist scholarship refers to his collages under various labels: “preliminary collages,” “maquettes,” “source collages,” “source images,” and “studies.” The nomenclature carries a weighty, pointed judgment indicating that one object Rosenquist creates precedes another and it also infers a sequence in production and hierarchy of status in cultural forms – paste ups to painting, assembled images to painted ones, collages to paintings.

To be sure, Rosenquist did not become comfortable with the idea of displaying his collages until curator Constance Glenn’s encouragement. This doubt still appears to be present, as noted in a footnote of curator Julia Blaut’s contribution to the 2003 retrospective catalogue:

> The term “source” or “preparatory” collage is used by the artist to refer to multiple images brought together and glued to a paper support; “source image” is employed to refer to a single image he used as inspiration for a painting.\(^\text{28}\)

However, considering the recent admission of the artist on several occasions that the collages are works of art in and of themselves, the enthusiasm to embrace the collages as such is remarkably slow in coming, save for the 2006 Haunch of Venison exhibition and publication. The extensive use of the aforementioned vocabulary infers that the collage’s relationship to the painting is strictly linear “cause,” the collage, and “effect,” the painting, which imbues the painting with achievement and conclusion. However, the discussion of Rosenquist’s process in regard to the production of collages and paintings indicates there is no absolute original source from which his collages and paintings

\(^{28}\) Blaut, “Collage,” 37.
derive, respectively, and in considering the simulacrum and the lack of a so-called
“original” one can assume that the collages are not cause, and the paintings effect; some
fluidity or dialogue between the collages and paintings indicate a somewhat, non-linear
development in his process.

As reflected in Rosenquist’s more recent paintings and collages, his methods
“have changed little. He still works from small collages which he scales up into
monumental paintings.”29 In keeping with his tradition of using re-produced “sources”
and a process several times removed from its “beginning,” Rosenquist distances his work
at any and every point within his process from the non-existent “original.” In light of
these considerations, the subsequent treatment of Rosenquist’s paintings, collages, and
process in exhibition display and accompanying publications calls for revelation.

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CHAPTER 3

JAMES ROSENQUIST AND EXHIBITION

This chapter provides a brief account of Rosenquist’s exhibition history, discusses a recent exhibition and publication of his collages, expounds upon the status of his process within the institutional setting and lastly, suggests that Baudrillard’s simulacrum is in play in the production and consequent museological narrativizing and consumption of the artist’s work.

Exhibition History

Rosenquist’s exhibition history is extensive and international. His first solo exhibition in February 1962 at Green Gallery in lower Manhattan sold out. It was around this time that critics descended upon Pop Art, as Lawrence Alloway so suitably titled the movement. The Pop Art front was divided. Some embraced the movement and its biting cultural commentary and others rejected its seeming vapidity and emptiness. In 1965, Rosenquist displayed several times what is considered one of his most important works, *F-111*, which addressed reckless American military spending, among other controversial political issues. In 1968, he had his first retrospective at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Several retrospective exhibitions followed: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne, 1972; Whitney Museum of American Art, 1972; Tretaiakov Gallery, Moscow, 1991; and the Institut Valencià d’Art Modern, Valencia, Spain, 1991. These retrospectives primarily considered Rosenquist’s paintings of principal and foremost importance, with occasional attention paid to his sculpture and graphic work.
Collages: The First Exhibition

It was not until 1992 that Rosenquist’s collages were shown in New York at the Gagosian Gallery in James Rosenquist: The Early Pictures, 1961-1964 and consequently published for the first time in an accompanying catalogue. Until then, Rosenquist was hesitant to reveal his collages as indicated in Judith Goldman’s “Collages and Sources” essay in the publication. As Goldman noted, “He was afraid of being misunderstood, afraid that his extraordinary skill might cause observers to think that he worked photographically.”

The inclusion of the collages introduced a new dimension of Rosenquist’s work to the art world while providing insight into his studio practice. Although several subsequent exhibitions and publications followed suit by including selections of the artist’s collage work, the most substantial presentation to-date is the Guggenheim Museum’s retrospective co-curated by the late Walter Hopps and Sarah Bancroft.

James Rosenquist: A Retrospective?

In 2000 the Guggenheim Museum began the organization of Rosenquist’s most recent U.S. retrospective. In 2003, the exhibition traveled to Houston and was installed at the Menil Collection and the Museum of Fine Arts (MFAH); then it traveled to the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao and, lastly, to the Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany. The Menil Collection featured Rosenquist’s early work from 1956 – 1969 and one painting from 1999, while the installation at the Museum of Fine Arts (MFAH) included works dating from 1970 – 2002. Architectural restrictions at the Menil limited installation configurations there, but the cavernous Cullinan Hall in the Mies van der Rohe-designed Carline Weiss Law building at the MFAH proved to be a perfectly-

30 Goldman, Early Pictures, 59.
suited venue for the installation of Rosenquist’s latest monumental works, which measure up to 90 feet in length (Figures 8 and 10).

At the MFAH, the installation space proper contained paintings, a sculpture, works on paper, and prints in a chronological arrangement – meaning that the works were more or less organized within the space in order from his works of the 1970s to his most recent works, indicating a progression over the course of his oeuvre. Indeed, nineteen of Rosenquist’s collages were installed for the show. However, they were not included in the main exhibition space; rather, they were installed along a staircase below that gallery along with a silkscreened text panel titled James Rosenquist: Collages, which began, “This selection of collages is part of the larger exhibition James Rosenquist: A Retrospective presented in the galleries on the main and upper levels of this building.”

As seen in Figures 8, 9, and 10, the collages were placed physically below the installation of Rosenquist’s three monumental paintings: Through the Eye of the Needle to the Anvil (1988), The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light (2000), and Joystick (2002).

While the collages’ fragility may have been a viable concern (due to the increased exposure to natural light they would incur in the main galleries), the spatial relationship between the paintings and the collages revealed a rather deliberate and significant hierarchy assigned to the works by installing the collages in an ancillary space.

There are several narratives at play in the installation: hierarchy, subordination, and cause and effect. The installation of the collages beneath the main exhibition spaces reveals a consideration of those works as lesser than the others, as subordinates, and as contributing less to the understanding of his oeuvre as a whole. It also places a

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hierarchical ranking upon media as well; in art historical scholarship collage, as a cultural genre, has not been venerated as has painting or sculpture or even print-making. Inferred in this hierarchy is a physical and symbolic subordination of the collages to the other works. Also in play is the narrative of cause and effect: the idea that the collage precedes the painting and was created primarily in preparation for the painting and not deemed important enough to be exhibited among the relevant works of art for which they were implicitly cast as preliminary.

The corresponding installation at the Renzo Piano-designed Menil Collection seemed like an entirely different exhibition. However, this thesis speculates that the installation design was not primarily dictated by the space itself, but by the decision to install Rosenquist’s earlier works (1956-1969, save the single painting from 1999). In this installation the collages were essentially grouped together on a wall all their own, but some were placed next to or near the related painting. *President Elect* and its collage were displayed alongside one another, which could be perceived as didacticism or trivialization of the collage – with an installation reminiscent of a teaching tool, the viewer would clearly infer that the two works relate and that one (the collage) precedes the other (the painting). Given the typical difference in scale between Rosenquist’s paintings and collages, it is also easy for the collage, when placed alongside its painting, to be dwarfed by even the most intimately-sized paintings. Thus, the size difference between the smaller collages and larger paintings contributes to imparting a lesser importance than the major, larger paintings. Grouping the collages seems to be the most successful way for museums to illustrate their importance within Rosenquist’s process.
and highlight their own aesthetic importance as they carry with them an illuminating and informative glimpse into the stages of development.

While the grouping of collages at the MFAH installation was evocative, the location was indeed revealing in terms of their ultimate perceived importance in the larger scheme of the exhibition. In being placed in a space both below and removed from the exhibition galleries proper, the collages are cast in a subordinate light. It is in this hierarchical placement of the works and the nomenclature used in the retrospective catalogue that reinforces the existing scholarly and institutional practice of narrating and portraying the collages in an antecedent and thus, trivial role. The Houston exhibitions emphasize the superiority of the paintings and, therefore, perpetuate the traditional relationship between the collages and paintings in presenting Rosenquist’s work.

Baudrillard and the Museum as Institution

Correspondence between Baudrillard’s simulacrum and the representational status of Rosenquist’s images is not limited to his mass media-derived “sources” and the various steps over the course of the “completion” of his works. As demonstrated in the retrospective installation, the art world’s treatment of Rosenquist’s work aligned with Baudrillard’s themes of the consumption of imagery and signs via the narrativization of the artist’s process. Conceptual artist Daniel Buren explains: “In collecting and presenting the work of a single artist (one-man show) the Museum stresses difference within a single body of work and insists (economically) on (presumed) successful works and (presumed) failures. As a result, such shows set off the “miraculous” aspect of “successful” works.”32 In this case, the inferior placement of Rosenquist’s collages at venues such as the MFAH reveals the cultural significance and value placed on “finality”

and “completion.” However, beginning in the 1960’s, the post-studio movement de-emphasized the cultural and artistic value of artist’s studio as a site of authentic and unique subjectivity and cause and effect in the use of materials to create a work of art. It is important to note that in considering Rosenquist’s studio practice, process is part of the works themselves, and it is this process of including various techniques that contributes to distancing the paintings and collages from “source” material and helps constitute their status as simulacra.

Post-studio practice began with renowned artist Robert Smithson, who, with earthworks like *Spiral Jetty* (1970) and *Amarillo Ramp* (1973), challenged the idea of creative practice necessarily taking place within the confines of the romanticized artist’s studio. Artists like Smithson and, Daniel Buren created works that called into question the system of art-making by way of their objects’ existence both within and outside of the museum and gallery. Buren is known for his uniform striped works and was part of movement (titled by critic Benjamin Buchloh in 1990, rather than the artists involved) called “Intitutional Critique,” which took aim at artistic, curatorial, and museums practices as established traditions and thus forms a trajectory of post-studio practice.

In their criticism, artists like Buren condemned the museum as an institution for engaging in perpetuating traditional ideologies such as selection, categorization, presentation, and consumption in the exhibition and acquisition of art. In one of his seminal essays, Buren argued,

> it was the reality of the work, its “truth,” its relationship to its creator and place of creation, that was irretrievably lost in this transfer [the movement of art object from the space of its creation, studio, to museum, wherein the object implies completion and exists for veneration]. In the studio we generally find finished
work, work in progress, abandoned work, sketches – a collection of visible evidence viewed simultaneously that allows an understanding of process…

With this in mind, both Buren and Baudrillard would likely agree on the point that the institution of the museum exists as a taste-maker and a presenter of pre-interpreted and re-presented cultural material that chronologizes art into cause and effect instead of a more fluid process.

Baudrillard’s views on the museum as institution were rather fatalistic, but very much in line with his simulacrum. He viewed the museum as a place that removed objects so far from an original context and in turn fetishized and consumed them to such an extent that they no longer exist as authentic objects but as simulacra. In other words, he considered the museum as a technology that, through certain standard practices, treated works of art as simulacra. Baudrillard designated this process “extermination by museumification.” In his essay, “The Precession of Simulacra,” he cited a number of cultural objects as being placed in the hands of various institutions, but the most revealing and apropos is an anecdote concerning the mummy of Ramses II. The pharaoh’s mummy was discovered to have been quickly decomposing, and scientists rushed to step in. Baudrillard quips,

Because mummies don’t rot from worms; they die from being transplanted from a slow order of the symbolic, master over putrefaction and death, to an order of history, science, and museums, our order, which no longer masters anything which only knows how to condemn what preceded it from decay and death and subsequently to try to revive it with science.

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35 Ibid.
In the case of art objects, Baudrillard would argue the same, that art objects are separated so far from their “original” contexts and places within the sterile land of the simulation, the museum, become simulacra, reproductions of the cultural imagery that they represent.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The complex relationship of what James Rosenquist creates (such as collages and paintings), to what he uses (such as magazine advertisements and photographs), in addition to a recognition that the images he propagates also are visual representations that have been created or manufactured, and the fluidity of his processes, muddle expectations about the correlation between the genres of works he makes. This intricate relationship also confuses their status as representations that render objects or images identifiable in their real world locations, present pictorially. Aspects of these realizations become more apparent in light of Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum.

A consideration of Rosenquist’s collages and paintings in light of the concept identifies the artist’s process as an integral theme within his work and as more fluid than linear cause and effect relationships of collages to paintings, as most museum and gallery installations have suggested. In keeping with Baudrillard’s concept, the simulacrum provides one with the opportunity to explore the lack of cause and effect by way of the notions of “origins” and “reproductions” within Rosenquist’s work.

Recent exhibitions including Rosenquist’s collages not only provide access to more of the artist’s work than previously shown, but permit scholars to scrutinize how art institutions narrativize it. Classification and chronologization are traditional functions of museums. In the case of Rosenquist, museums effectively classify the collage as a step in his process, as mere progress toward a final work. Curators’ account of the artist’s methodology devalues the collages within the installation (or exhibition) hierarchy and in publications. However, it was virtually impossible not to engage in the very ideological
practices of art history and museology that this paper critiques by the prescribed usage of value-laden language and treatment of information and images. For instance, even in discussion of a collage in relation to a painting, it’s referred to as the collage of, collage for. Even treating the title as a possessive noun as in “Stowaway’s collage” indicates the collage as an antecedent of the more-celebrated painting; the possessive nature of the title also designates the collage as less important, or as belonging to the final product, the painting. These seemingly innocuous grammatical decisions indicate a proclivity toward valuing one work more than another or corroboration with the previously existing scholarly structure that describes one as exceeding the other in cultural worth. Certainly, even the dates assigned to works indicate a temporal relationship of cause and effect between the collages and paintings, meaning that one did indeed precede the other. Yet, in viewing the works in light of the simulacrum, the relationship is less temporal cause and effect, but a much more fluid correlation between the two.

The perpetuation of hierarchy, subordination, and cause and effect prove to be unjust, albeit wholly unavoidable, treatments of the work of one of the most important American artists working today. Ultimately, Rosenquist’s collages and paintings challenge concrete ideas about process and bring to light its ultimate fluidity.
Figure 1.

Zone, 1960-61
Oil on canvas
7 feet 11 inches × 7 feet 11 ½ inches (241.3 × 242.6 cm)
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Purchased with the Edith H. Bell Fund, 1982
Art © James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Figure 2.

*President Elect*, 1960-61
Cropped poster, magazine clippings, and mixed media
14 ½ × 23 13/16 inches (36.8 × 60.5 cm)
Collection of the artist
Art © James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Figure 3.

*President Elect*, 1960-61/1964
Oil on Masonite
7 feet 5 ¾ inches × 12 feet (228 × 365.8 cm)
Centre Georges Pompidou, Musée National d’Art Moderne/Centre de Création Industrielle, Paris
Art © James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Figure 4.

*Star Thief*, 1980
Magazine clippings, unidentified clippings, and mixed media on paper
15 7/8 × 29 7/8 inches (40.3 × 75.9 cm)
Collection of the artist
Art © James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Figure 5.

*Star Thief, 1980*
Oil on canvas
17 feet 1 inch × 5 feet 6 inches (198.1 × 167.6 cm)
Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Ludwig Collection
Art © James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light, 2000
Color photocopies and mixed media on plywood
14 × 29 ½ inches (35.6 × 74.9 cm)
Collection of the artist
Art © James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Figure 7.

*The Stowaway Peers Out at the Speed of Light*, 2000
Oil on canvas
17 × 46 feet (518.2 × 1402.1 cm)
Collection of the artist
Art © James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY
Figure 8.

(RG-717-008) Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Archives.
Figure 9.

(RG-717-050) Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston Archives.
Figure 10.

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