

White Painting [three panel]

By [Sarah Roberts](#), July 2013

Part of the [Rauschenberg Research Project](#)

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- 1 In 1951 Robert Rauschenberg painted a series of stretched canvases a plain, solid white, leaving minimal brush or roller marks. Each of these works consists of a different number of panels—there are one-, two-, three- (as seen here), four-, and seven-panel iterations—and they are known collectively as the *White Paintings*.¹ The units within each painting are uniform in size, proportionally balanced, and modular. Because Rauschenberg considered it essential that they be pristine, all of the works in the series have a history of being repainted and even refabricated from scratch, usually by friends or studio assistants—an extraordinary conceptual choice in 1951. The artist's positioning of these works as remakeable has not been fully addressed in any recent or historical interpretations or criticism. Instead, scholars have focused almost exclusively on their status as receptors for light and shadow, a reading that has been heavily influenced by composer John Cage's (1912–1992) earliest writings on the series. Moreover, because the *White Paintings* all emerged from a single concept and each painting's surface is basically indistinguishable from that of the next, the tendency, understandably, has been to treat the *White Paintings* en bloc, rather than as individual pieces. One might draw associations based purely on specific panel configurations—the use of the traditional triptych format, for example, makes *White Painting* [three panel] the most classical work of the group. But beyond this type of connotation, little can be said to distinguish any single painting from another. This essay, therefore, will address both the specific physical history of this three-panel painting and the history of repainting and refabrication shared by all five works in the series, with the aim of situating the *White Paintings* as a groundbreaking precursor to Conceptualism.



1. Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting [three panel]*, 1951; latex paint on canvas, 72 x 108 in. (182.88 x 274.32 cm); Collection SFMOMA, Purchase through a gift of Phyllis Wattis; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY; photo: Ben Blackwell

- 2 After completing the *White Paintings* in early fall 1951 at Black Mountain College near Asheville, North Carolina, Rauschenberg immediately tried to secure an exhibition at Betty Parsons Gallery, New York, where he had shown a different body of work the previous spring. In an effusive [letter to Parsons](#) posted on October 18, 1951, from Black Mountain, he described his recently completed paintings as if they had descended through divine inspiration. His often-quoted characterizations of these works, such as, “they are large white (1 white as 1 GOD)” and “it is completely irrelevant that I am making them—Today is their creator [sic],”² cast the artist as a spiritual vessel or conduit for a higher message. Branden W. Joseph has connected the expression of spirituality in this letter (and, by extension, in the *White Paintings* themselves) to the religious overtones of Rauschenberg's 1949–50 paintings, including *Crucifixion and Reflection* (ca. 1950, Menil Collection) and particularly [Mother of God](#) (ca. 1950).³



2. Robert Rauschenberg, *Untitled* [matte black triptych], ca. 1951. Oil on canvas, 72 x 108 in. (182.9 x 274.3 cm). Robert Rauschenberg Foundation; © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY

- 3 Joseph also convincingly identifies a strain of critic Clement Greenberg's formalist mode of Modernism in the language of Rauschenberg's letter. Fittingly, Joseph further suggests that with the *White Paintings*, Rauschenberg enacted the evolution toward essential flatness foretold by Greenberg as the extreme, logical end point of modernist painting.⁴ With this flatness would come an absolute eradication of image, mark, and color. Taking this argument a step further, the removal of painterly gestures of any kind would in effect require the elimination of the artist's hand. Rauschenberg fully embraced this, doing away with evidence that the *White Paintings* were handmade and even relinquishing his role as creator by enlisting friends to help repaint their surfaces in 1952–53. In choosing this path, he threw into turmoil the notion of an "original" painting. The remark "Today is their creator" could thus be read as an altogether different statement of faith, one centered on abdication of the concept of individual authorship.⁵
- 4 Given Rauschenberg's known lack of financial resources in the 1950s and his propensity for reusing canvases, it is likely that the *White Paintings* began to be remade and repainted almost immediately after their completion in fall 1951, a fact that testifies to the artist's understanding of these works as primarily conceptual rather than material. In some cases, he used these paintings as the supports for entirely new works, then resurrected the original *White Paintings* years later. The 1951 three-panel *White Painting* is believed to have been painted over almost immediately as *Untitled* [matte black triptych] (ca. 1951, fig. 2).⁶ In fact, there is no exhibition history or any other evidence to indicate that *White Painting* [three panel] was extant between 1951 and 1968;⁷ in those years, most of the original *White Paintings* had slipped out of existence, their canvases used as the supports for other pieces.⁸ Though artists throughout history have created new works on used canvases, Rauschenberg did so with an unusual frequency and ease, particularly in the early 1950s.⁹ Looking back at that period some ten years later, he commented, "Today I wouldn't do that. . . I'd know that an early picture might be better than something I was working on right now. But then I just thought, Oh, the next thing will be much better!"¹⁰ In the case of the *White Paintings*, it is clear that the artist had something else in mind. When painted over, the works did not permanently cease to exist, sacrificed for the promise of something better to come. Instead, they went dormant, each of them living on as a concept, with the potential to be made again in the future.
- 5 Notably, these works were not always or even usually repainted or remade by Rauschenberg; they may in fact have been painted by others from the very beginning. Rauschenberg reported that Cy Twombly (1928–2011) helped paint some of them, most likely during the 1952 summer session at Black Mountain College, where both artists were students.¹¹ It is entirely plausible that the *White Paintings* in John Cage's *Theater Piece #1*¹² at Black Mountain that summer—the series' first public appearance—were second iterations of the fall 1951 paintings. Twombly may also have helped Rauschenberg prepare

two from the series—the two panel and seven panel—for their September 1953 exhibition at the Stable Gallery, New York¹³ (fig. 3). The negative critical response to the *White Paintings* at this first showing has been addressed by other authors, particularly Roni Feinstein and Joseph.¹⁴ Of the six reviewers, three chose to ignore the works altogether, and the other three either reviled them or proclaimed that they were not art. The disfavor stemmed primarily from the fact that in the eyes of the reviewers the *White Paintings* did not look painted. Dore Ashton noted that the white canvases seemed untouched, and identified this as the source of their failing: they lacked the trace of the artist's hand, and this left them bereft of any reference or relevance to human culture and history.¹⁵ Herbert Crehan characterized the unpainted quality of the *White Paintings* as an affront, dismissing them as “incompatible with the needs of professional painting.”¹⁶ In the early 1950s art world, which was dominated by the gestural, painterly ethos of Abstract Expressionism, the *White Paintings* were too bitter a pill, even for critics and audiences unaware that Rauschenberg might not have painted their mute white surfaces himself. Not a single critic attempted to construct a framework for understanding or interpreting this innovative body of work.



3. Robert Rauschenberg in the exhibition *Rauschenberg: Paintings and Sculpture; Cy Twombly: Paintings and Drawings*, Stable Gallery, New York, September 15–October 3, 1953. *White Painting* [two panel] is on the wall at right and several *Elemental Sculptures* appear in the background. Photo: Allan Grant; © Time Life Pictures / Getty Images

- 6 Into this critical vacuum stepped Cage, whose enthusiastic embrace of the *White Paintings* has dominated discourse about the series ever since, especially with relation to his iconic silent piece *4'33"* (1952).¹⁷ The Greenbergian undercurrents and spiritual references in Rauschenberg's 1951 letter to Parsons were quickly subsumed by the interpretive armature Cage's engagement with the paintings supplied.¹⁸ Several weeks into the 1953 exhibition at the Stable Gallery mentioned above, Cage wrote a poetic declaration in their honor:

To Whom / No subject / No image / No taste / No object / No beauty / No message / No talent / No technique (no why) / No idea / No intention / No art / No object / No feeling / No black / No white (no and) / After careful consideration, I have come to the conclusion that there is nothing in these paintings that could not be changed, that they can be seen in any light and are not destroyed by the action of shadows. / Hallelujah! the blind can see again; the water's fine.¹⁹

This statement was hung in the gallery, then printed as an addendum to a *New York Herald Tribune* review of the show by Emily Genauer some weeks after it closed, and has since become a touchstone for discussions of the series. While the lines “No talent / No technique” are the most direct reference to the idea that the artist's hand has been completely removed from these works, nearly all of this language points to Rauschenberg's radical renunciation of authorship in the *White Paintings*.

- 7 Ultimately, however, it was Cage's emphasis on the action of light and shadow on the white surfaces of these paintings that had the greatest impact on shaping their interpretation by art historians. In Cage's formulation, the *White Paintings* are open screens that invite and register fluctuations in light levels and activity in their environment. In 1961, he expanded on this reading in his widely circulated and highly influential article “On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work,” memorably asserting that “the white paintings were airports for the lights, shadows and particles” and noting that they “caught whatever fell on them.”²⁰ Most authors take Cage's text at its most basic level and describe the *White Paintings* as empty stages. The series is frequently positioned as among the earliest group of works in which Rauschenberg sought to let the world into his art, and it is put forth as an example of his ongoing involvement with indexical marking, the direct transfer or tracing of an object or body (or in this case, light and shadow) onto the surface of a work.²¹ Yet these assessments miss much of the subtlety of Cage's thinking about receptivity.
- 8 A more nuanced reading of Cage opens new ways of understanding the *White Paintings* and their relationship to his composition *4'33"*, a work whose approach to silence has often been misunderstood. Discussions of *4'33"* have tended to conclude that its purpose is to emphasize that there is no such thing as true silence and to encourage listeners to

appreciate the raw, unorchestrated aural experience of the world around them. Like the suggestion that the *White Paintings* reflect shifts in light and shadow, this interpretation of 4'33" situates the work as an attempt to draw attention to the subtle phenomena that infuse our environment but are rarely appreciated for their emotive or expressive effects. Yet Cage's Zen-infused concept of silence was in fact far more complex and fluid. As James Pritchett and others have established, Cage considered silence to be neither the opposite of sound and music nor its absence. For him, silence was a landscape of unintentional sounds experienced between intentional sounds; as such, it was absolutely substantive, inseparable from and interdependent with sound.²² By extension, we might expand our view of the *White Paintings*, considering them not as inert screens waiting to be activated by life's subtle projections but rather as provocative agents of activity and profoundly physical objects that link our actions and perceptions, making us aware of the same perceptual interdependency that was central to silence for Cage.

- 9 Cage's score for 4'33" exists in several forms, but it is essentially a set of directions prompting the performer to indicate the beginning and end of each movement. The compositional structure sets up a framework for the experience, but audience activity, concert hall acoustics, and even weather ultimately dominate the aural landscape, overwriting any authorial presence Cage might have had. Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* function much the same way.²³ In 1965 the artist prepared written instructions for their execution in advance of an exhibition organized by Pontus Hultén for the Moderna Museet, Stockholm.²⁴ The modular configurations of the panels in each painting are based on mathematical ratios: *White Painting* [three panel] measures 72 x 108 inches overall, with each unit being exactly half as wide as it is tall. Beyond these prescribed measurements and the uniform application of white paint, the artist's control ends. Each time the works are installed, lighting conditions, room color, seasonal changes, and activity within the space alter their appearance. If one arrangement better suits the irregularities of the wall on which they are hung, the order of the panels may be changed as well.²⁵ This history of repainting and refabrication reinforces the parallel with 4'33"—not only do the exhibition settings change but the paintings themselves can and do as well.
- 10 The first documented presentation of *White Painting* [three panel] was at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, in the October 1968 exhibition *White Paintings 1951*, a small show focused solely on the five *White Paintings*. As Minimalism coalesced and gained recognition in the mid-1960s, Rauschenberg and Castelli wanted to establish the precedence of this body of work, as the inclusion of the paintings' original creation date in the exhibition title attests. Before the show, Rauschenberg directed Brice Marden (b. 1938), who worked for him as a studio assistant at the time, to prepare the entire series, including executing new versions of any missing panels. The extant *White Painting* [three panel] is believed to be the very work shown in the exhibition, which was fabricated by a hired stretcher-maker and painted by Marden according to Rauschenberg's verbal instructions.²⁶ Marden recalls being given very little specific direction—just dimensions and the charge to eliminate brush marks from the painted surface. The paintings were to appear completely anonymous.²⁷
- 11 The fact that these 1951 paintings had been remade by someone other than the artist in advance of the Castelli show did not go unremarked by critics. Grace Glueck referred to them as "simply replicas" but was not especially troubled by this history, noting, "The artist's *intention* was that the works can and should be re-created by diagram."²⁸ The exhibition's only other reviewer, Robert Pincus-Witten, was far more vexed by these "reconstructions—re-issuings, reproductions, what have you," unable even to find the vocabulary to describe their existential status. These remade paintings transgressed his conviction that "some critical portion of a work of art . . . is irretrievably linked to the actual moment in which it was fabricated."²⁹ He concluded that in 1968, the *White Paintings* must be seen either as forgeries or as approximations of the originals with entirely different intentions. However, the Castelli exhibition achieved the aim of making a place for Rauschenberg in the early lineage of what would shortly be labeled Minimalism, with one reviewer noting that they looked "like prophecies of 1968, elegant and extreme."³⁰ Glueck describes the *White Paintings* as precursors to "Cool" (her term for the stripped-down painting and sculpture that had yet to be assigned its "-ism").³¹

For his part Pincus-Witten conceded that, as works of 1951, the *White Paintings* had been important precursors to “the current minimal mode.”³²

- 12 Rauschenberg, who was always deeply engaged with other artists, would have been well aware not only of the aesthetics of Minimalism but also of related developments, such as process art and Conceptualism, which had been incubating since at least 1962 and began to emerge in exhibitions and art journals in 1966–67. Beyond the ascendance of Minimalism, the process-oriented and idea-based work and writing of artists such as Sol LeWitt (1928–2007) and Robert Morris (b. 1931) would certainly have been a catalyst for showing the *White Paintings* in 1968. Rauschenberg and Morris’s connection through Judson Dance Theater and Surplus Dance Theater reached back to 1962, and the years 1966 to 1968 were decisive in Morris’s evolution as both a writer and artist as he moved from his minimalist work to his permutations, felt, and thread waste pieces.³³ LeWitt’s first wall drawings were executed at the Paula Cooper Gallery, New York, in October 1968. His pivotal article “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” published in the summer of 1967, articulated the parameters of Conceptualism as follows: “All of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. . . . It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman.”³⁴ The existence of the *White Paintings* as nothing more than a concept and a set of measurements from 1953 until the Castelli show conforms perfectly to LeWitt’s definition.³⁵ By showing these freshly executed paintings in 1968, Rauschenberg not only established his work from 1951 as a precursor to Minimalism but also asserted a place for the *White Paintings* in the evolution of Conceptualism.
- 13 Since the Castelli show, *White Painting* [three panel] has been completely repainted at least once, but it is not believed to have been refabricated, suggesting yet another turn of thinking for the artist.³⁶ Instead of allowing the painting to float in and out of existence, he seems to have determined that this particular execution should stand as the artwork of record. His attention turned to the maintenance of the pristine surface, and he specified a formulation of Benjamin Moore & Co. paint as the white of choice for any future repaintings.³⁷ Perhaps it was at the moment of his 1997 retrospective—with the *White Paintings* firmly placed in the lineage of Minimalism and Conceptualism—that Rauschenberg signed and inscribed the verso of the work, dated it 1951, and added a [red thumbprint](#) on the wooden strainer bar of each panel, leaving the mark of his hand on the painting for the very first time.

Notes

1. A five-panel painting created in 1951 as part of the original series was dismantled or destroyed and never shown. Walter Hopps suggests that one of its panels may have been used in an early state of *Monogram* (1955–59). See Walter Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s* (Houston: Menil Foundation and Houston Fine Art Press, 1991), 80. Curiously, Rauschenberg never chose to refabricate the five-panel work.
2. This letter is reprinted in its entirety in Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, 230. The original is missing from the Betty Parsons Papers at the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
3. Branden W. Joseph, *Random Order: Robert Rauschenberg and the Neo-Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 25–30.
4. Ibid.
5. In a 1999 interview, Rauschenberg underscored this message, saying of the *White Paintings*, “Want one? Paint one.” Robert Rauschenberg, video interview by David A. Ross, Walter Hopps, Gary Garrels, and Peter Samis, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, May 6, 1999. [Unpublished transcript](#), SFMOMA Research Library and Archives, N 6537 .R27 A35 1999a, 18.
6. See Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, 87, 190. A review of the 1968 exhibition *White Paintings* 1951 at the Leo Castelli Gallery (October 12–27, 1968) also mentions the three panel having been turned into a Black painting. Robert Pincus-Witten, “New York: Robert Rauschenberg, Castelli Gallery,” *Artforum* 7, no. 4 (December 1968): 55. According to notes in the files at the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, the extant three-panel matte Black painting also was refabricated later in its history, so it is impossible to determine what was underneath the ca. 1951 version. The single-panel *White Painting* may also have been immediately repurposed as a Black painting, as there is a lost or destroyed Black painting with similar dimensions. Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*, 184–85.
7. The *White Paintings* received little attention from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, a hiatus explained by the success of Rauschenberg’s Combines in this period. After the first significant showing of Combines in the Leo Castelli Gallery exhibition *Robert Rauschenberg* (March 4–29, 1958), almost no attention was paid to any of the artist’s pre-1954 work until Walter Hopps’s 1991 exhibition and catalogue *Robert Rauschenberg: The Early 1950s*.

8. After the 1953 Stable Gallery exhibition, the two-panel *White Painting* became *Yoicks* (1954, Whitney Museum of American Art), and the seven panel provided the support for *Trophy II (for Teeny and Marcel Duchamp)* (1960, Walker Art Center). The four-panel painting became *K249765* (1956, Philadelphia Museum of Art).
9. An extreme instance of this iconoclastic attitude occurred when Rauschenberg painted over the works that had been the basis for Betty Parsons deciding to give him a show. Parsons went to the studio to make a final selection only to discover, much to her surprise, that many of the previously "finished" paintings no longer existed. Calvin Tomkins, "Profiles: Moving Out," *New Yorker*, February 29, 1964, 52, 54.
10. *Ibid.*, 54.
11. William McGee, a student in the 1952 summer session, recalled seeing Twombly working on the *White Paintings* along with Rauschenberg that summer. William McGee, "Some Memorable Personalities," in *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds—An Anthology of Personal Accounts*, ed. Mervin Lane (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 316. Rauschenberg also confirmed that Twombly painted them in Rauschenberg, interview by Ross, Hopps, et al., 17.
12. It is not known exactly which of the *White Paintings* appeared in this event, but most accounts note that a selection of them was hung from the ceiling. For a summary of the event and its genesis, see Jonathan Fineberg, *Art Since 1940: Strategies of Being* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 176. See also Kenneth Silverman, *Begin Again: A Biography of John Cage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 115–16.
13. The two- and seven-panel *White Paintings* appeared with a selection of Rauschenberg's Black paintings and *Elemental Sculptures* in *Rauschenberg: Paintings and Sculpture; Cy Twombly: Paintings and Drawings*, Stable Gallery, New York (September 15–October 3, 1953). Rauschenberg had stored some works with friends from late 1952 to early 1953, when he was traveling; because he was not in the studio to paint over them, it is possible that some of the earliest *White Paintings* may have survived. However, such storage conditions would certainly have been less than ideal for preserving their pristine white surfaces, so it is likely that all of them were given a fresh coat of paint before they were exhibited.
14. See Roni Feinstein, "The Early Work of Robert Rauschenberg: The White Paintings, the Black Paintings, and the Elemental Sculptures," *Arts Magazine* 61, no. 1 (September 1986): 28–32; and Joseph, *Random Order*, 30–31.
15. Dore Ashton, "Fifty-Seventh Street: Bob Rauschenberg," *Art Digest* 27, no. 20 (September 1953): 21, 25.
16. Hubert Crehan, "The See Change: Raw Duck," *Art Digest* 27, no. 20 (September 1953): 25.
17. I wish to thank Jeffrey Saletnik for generously reading a draft of this essay and offering his thoughts on Cage's understanding of the *White Paintings*.
18. Joseph devotes much of a chapter to the impact of Cage's discourse on the *White Paintings*' post-1953 reception. See Joseph, *Random Order*, 33–71. See also Feinstein, "The Early Work of Robert Rauschenberg," 30. Lawrence Alloway also notes a disconnect between Rauschenberg's earliest description of the series and the environmental reading founded by Cage. Lawrence Alloway, "Rauschenberg's Development," in *Robert Rauschenberg*, ed. Walter Hopps (Washington, D.C.: National Collection of Fine Arts, Smithsonian Institution, 1976), 3.
19. Emily Genauer, "Art and Artists: Musings on Miscellany," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 27, 1953.
20. These statements have formed the primary interpretive matrix for the series. See John Cage, "On Robert Rauschenberg, Artist, and His Work," *Metro* 2 (May 1961): 43, 50. Written for the Italian periodical *Metro*, Cage's article was reprinted or extracted in several European publications. It appeared in the Swedish journal *Konstrevy* as "Om Robert Rauschenberg: konstnär, och hans arbete," *Konstrevy* 37, no. 5–6 (1961): 166–74; and in *Rauschenberg* (Paris: Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, 1963), n.p. It also was included in Cage's 1961 book of collected writings, *Silence: Lectures and Writings by John Cage* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), 98–107.
21. Major texts to further this interpretation include: Richard Kostelanetz, *Master Minds: Portraits of Contemporary American Artists and Intellectuals* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 261; Hopps, *Robert Rauschenberg*, 66; *Robert Rauschenberg* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1981), n.p.; Roni Feinstein, "The Early Work of Robert Rauschenberg: The White Paintings, the Black Paintings, and the Elemental Sculptures," 30–32; and *Rauschenberg: The White and Black Paintings 1949–1952* (New York: Larry Gagosian Gallery, 1986), n.p.
22. See James Pritchett, "What Silence Taught John Cage: The Story of 4'33'" in *The Anarchy of Silence: John Cage and Experimental Art* (Barcelona: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, 2009), 171–77.
23. The confluence between the time-based framework that Cage constructed for his performance and the conceptual underpinnings of the *White Paintings* warrants further exploration. Cage affirmed that the *White Paintings* preceded 4'33" (Cage, *Silence*, 98): the paintings were created in fall 1951, and 4'33" was composed in early 1952 and first performed that August. Cage's writings and ideas on the concept of silence, however, date back to 1948, so it is not a question of the *White Paintings* directly influencing or inspiring 4'33". Rather, Rauschenberg's explorations perhaps strengthened Cage's resolve to write a silent composition for performance in a concert setting. See Pritchett, "What Silence Taught John Cage," 177. For a thoughtful consideration of the question of influence/inspiration in relation to the *White Paintings* and 4'33", see Kay Larson, *Where the Heart Beats: John Cage, Zen Buddhism, and the Inner Life of Artists* (New York: Penguin Press, 2012), 233–35, 269–71, 302–6.
24. To save the expense of transatlantic shipping, Hultén was granted permission to have the paintings made in Sweden for the exhibition *Den inre och den yttre rymden: En utställning rörande en universell konst* (The Inner and the Outer Space: An Exhibition Devoted to Universal Art), Moderna Museet, Stockholm (December 26, 1965–February 13, 1966). Ultimately, only one from the series, the two panel, was executed. It was later destroyed by Rauschenberg's studio staff to prevent two iterations of the same painting from existing at one time.

25. Although the units in *White Painting* [three panel] were [numbered sequentially](#) by the artist on the back of the canvases, slight variations in their shapes and in specific installation situations have led them to be reordered as needed to ensure that the joints between each panel are as tight as possible when the work is installed. The variability this practice introduces was accepted by Rauschenberg and is consistent with the installation of other paintings in the series supervised by the artist or his studio representatives. Thomas Buehler, David White, and Susan Davidson, conversation with the author, May 1, 2012, Mount Vernon, New York.
26. Marden does not recall being given written instructions in 1968 or at any other time. Rauschenberg communicated his directions verbally, and Marden had the canvases stretched and executed the works using an existing panel from the series for reference. Brice Marden, conversation with Gary Garrels, January 22, 2013. Rauschenberg did not document the refabrication or repainting of the *White Paintings*. Artist David Prentice (b. 1943) recalls fabricating and painting *White Paintings* once and possibly twice in the early 1970s, though he does not remember specific details of the works. David Prentice, telephone interview with the author, March 5, 2012.
27. This mandate to make the paintings look anonymous was repeated to Darryl Pottorf and Lawrence Voytek, both of whom assisted Rauschenberg in the studio later in his life and repainted *White Paintings* in the 1990s and 2000s. Pottorf repainted the three-panel painting in Bilbao under the artist's supervision prior to the November 1998 installation of *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective* at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. He reports using a brush and having the explicit understanding that the paintings were supposed to look as though no one in particular had painted them. Darryl Pottorf, interview with the author, November 6, 2012, Captiva Island, Florida. Voytek also reports using a brush and receiving the directive to make the surface appear "anonymous." Lawrence Voytek, telephone interview with the author, February 6, 2013.
28. Grace Glueck, "Ben Shahn Shines On," *New York Times*, October 13, 1968.
29. Pincus-Witten, "New York," 55.
30. John Perrault, "Robert Rauschenberg," *ARTNews* 67, no. 8 (December 1968): 52.
31. Glueck, "Ben Shahn Shines On."
32. Pincus-Witten, "New York," 55.
33. See Robert Morris, "Anti Form," *Artforum* 6, no. 8 (April 1968): 33–35. See also his "Notes on Sculpture" series, which appeared in *Artforum* in four parts: "Notes on Sculpture: Part I," *Artforum* 4, no. 6 (February 1966): 42–44; "Notes on Sculpture: Part II," *Artforum* 5, no. 2 (October 1966): 20–23; "Notes on Sculpture: Part III," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 24–29; and "Notes on Sculpture: Part IV," *Artforum* 7, no. 8 (April 1969): 50–54. Morris also organized the groundbreaking exhibition of ephemeral and process-oriented art *9 at Leo Castelli* at the Leo Castelli Gallery warehouse (December 4–28, 1968).
34. Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967): 80.
35. Interestingly, LeWitt later referred to Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* as a marker of the end of Minimalism. "Interview by Saul Ostrow," in *Sol LeWitt* (Metz, France: Centre Pompidou-Metz, 2012), 272.
36. Any exhibition between 1968 and 1998 (when SFMOMA acquired the three-panel painting) might have occasioned a fresh coat of paint. See the [exhibition history](#) on the artwork overview page for complete exhibition details. Although a technical analysis of the work's surface has not been undertaken, conservation examination suggests the presence of at least two and possibly three layers of paint. One of these was applied in 1998, as mentioned in note 27 above, to repair a scuff mark that developed while the painting was traveling with *Robert Rauschenberg: A Retrospective*. Correspondence relating to the repainting is in SFMOMA Permanent Collection Object Files: *White Painting* [three panel], 98.308.A–C.
37. The preferred paint formulation is documented in the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation files. David White, senior curator at the Rauschenberg Foundation, believes that it may have been selected in the mid-1990s, possibly at the time of the 1997 retrospective. David White, email to the author, May 29, 2013.