

House of Fire
James Rosenquist



Date : 1989

Pressed paper pulp in colors with lithographic collage elements

54 1/2 x 119 3/4 in.

Edition of 54

Pencil signed, dated, titled and numbered

Artist bio

Since the late 1950's, James Rosenquist has been creating an exceptional and consistently intriguing body of work. In the 1960's, following his early days as a billboard painter in the Midwest and New York City, he gained fame as one of the leaders of the American Pop art movement. Along with contemporaries Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol, Rosenquist drew on the iconography of advertising and mass media to conjure a sense of modern life.

Rosenquist's paintings directly allude to the cultural and political tenor of the times in which they were created. From his renowned Pop canvases to his billboard-sized works and continuing with his recent use of abstract painting techniques, Rosenquist presents the artist's enduring interest in and mastery of texture, color, line, and shape that continues to dazzle audiences and influence younger generations of artists.

Born in 1933 in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Rosenquist took art classes at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts as a teenager and studied painting at the University of Minnesota between 1952 and 1954. During the summers, he worked as a billboard painter and in 1955 he moved to New York to study at the Art Students League with teachers such as the German Dadaist George Grosz and American painter Edwin Dickinson. He left the Art Students League after one year and in 1957 returned to a career painting billboards, in Times Square and across the city.

By 1960, Rosenquist had stopped painting commercial advertisements and rented a small studio space in Lower Manhattan where his neighbors included artists Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, and Jack Youngerman. During this period, Rosenquist, working against the prevailing tide of Abstract Expressionism, developed his own brand of New Realism – a style soon to be called Pop art. Here the artist's early training as a sign painter emerged in his continued use of advertising imagery, commercial colors, and the large scale of his work.

Rosenquist is among the first to utilize the jarring shifts in scale and content for which the artist is known. In 1962, he had his first solo exhibition at the Green Gallery in New York, and was subsequently included in virtually every groundbreaking group exhibition that established Pop art as a movement in the 1960's.

His specialty is taking fragmented, oddly disproportionate images and combining, overlapping, and juxtaposing them on canvases to create visual stories. This can leave viewers breathless, making them consider even the most familiar objects in more abstract and provocative ways. Rosenquist's visually complex narratives depict specific events, thoughts, or actions through a collage technique. The obvious brashness of these often salacious images, proffered in the slick manner of advertising, are eye-catching, but the combinations undercut the typical intentions of commercialism and instead suggest more subtle investigations into human interaction and contemporary living. These inventive works form cohesive narratives in which dissonant objects combine to form resonant commentary.

Thus, through his unique brand of imagery, Rosenquist has addressed modern issues and current events, registered antiwar statements, and voiced concern over the social, political, economic, and environmental fate of the planet.