Robert Rauschenberg x Willem De Kooning

In 1953 Robert Rauschenberg began to explore the notion of creating a drawing by erasing an existing work. With this in mind he had begun to erase drawings that he himself had created.

He soon realised that in order for the project to succeed he would need to erase a bonafide work of art and therefore, he would need to collaborate with an artist whose work would provide the endeavour with the required credibility.

Robert Rauschenberg x Willem De Kooning

Rauschenberg approached his friend, Abstract Expressionist, Willem De Kooning. After explaining the premise to De Kooning, it was agreed that Willem would select a work from his personal portfolio, for Robert to erase. De Kooning had explained that in order for the work to succeed he would have to select a work that he himself, would truly miss. This view both encouraged Rauschenberg and alarmed him. Still, he did agree with the sentiment of the statement. In an effort to make the task of erasing a drawing even more difficult for Rauschenberg, De Kooning had decided that the work should be one of mixed media thereby providing the artist with the challenge of deconstructing the layers of material that had been set down by the senior Artist.

It would take Robert Rauschenberg one month to erase the drawing, by De Kooning. Noting, that in the process, he had used a number of erasers to penetrate the thick layers of oil paint, crayon, and other materials, that had contributed to the construction of the original drawing. The outcome of this collaboration had resulted in one of the milestones in the history of 20th Century Art, with the work being viewed as not only a personal statement of intent, and a response to the philosophical debate that was taking place during this period, but also a work of profound implication for the generations of Artists, that followed.

Willem De Kooning