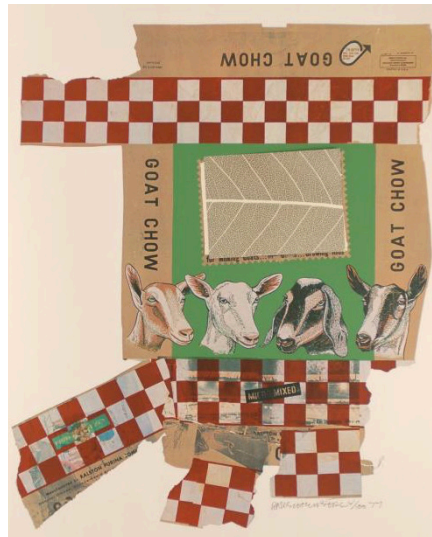




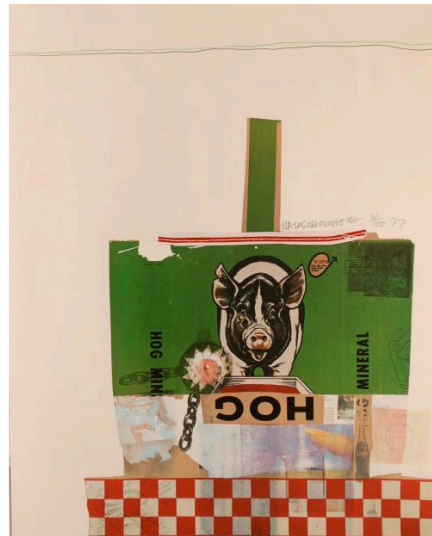
[Monkey Chow](#), Robert Rauschenberg [Object 1978.148]



[Goat Chow](#), Robert Rauschenberg [Object 1978.146]



[Rabbit Chow](#), Robert Rauschenberg [Object 1978.147]



[Hog Chow](#), Robert Rauschenberg [Object 1978.149]

Artist: Robert Rauschenberg

Date: 1977

Medium: Series of 6 screenprints and collages on paper with plastic twine

Classification: Prints

Credit Line: Gifts of Mr. Gerald B. Cramer '52, H'10

Teaching guide by Abigail Greenfield '25

This series of screenprint collages by American artist Robert Rauschenberg depicts bags of six different kinds of mass-produced livestock “chow,” or feed. Rauschenberg based the prints on paper feed bags produced by the Purina company. As part of his process, Rauschenberg manipulated and flattened the feed bags but retained their recognizable rectangular shape and centered the labels, which feature illustrations of the animals for which the “chow” was intended. He surrounded these animal portraits with images of objects from everyday human life, including flowers, leaves, cars, and a Coca Cola bottle. Rauschenberg retained the distinctive Purina checkerboard pattern, juxtaposing the familiarity of this brand’s popular domestic pet food with its less familiar feed offerings, including “chows” for monkeys and minks.

## Teaching Guide

# Chow Bag Series

# Context

The majority of animals featured in this series—[hogs](#), [monkeys](#), [goats](#), [rabbits](#), and [calves](#)—will be familiar to the majority of Americans as common domestic livestock, or, in the case of rabbits, as pets. In modern America, and in much of the world, there is a demand for the large-scale production of “chows” to feed these animals. In the United States, the mass production of animal feed is a major industry, consuming about 40% of all domestically grown corn crops. Focusing agriculture on producing corn and other feed grains creates negative climate impacts, as it reduces crop diversity, encourages less sustainable land use, and sustains livestock industries that are responsible for significant greenhouse gas emissions. Currently, half of the world’s habitable land is used for agriculture, and 77% of that land is used for livestock, either for grazing or for growing crops for animal feed. The production of feed grains also uses significant amounts of water, contributing to agriculture’s overall impact on the availability of freshwater worldwide.

The two less commonly recognizable chow bags featured in this series, monkey and mink chow, allude to animals raised largely outside of the agricultural industry. Monkey chow’s principal use is to feed monkeys and primates used in scientific research, where they are proxies for a closely-related species: humans. The CDC only permits monkeys to be imported to the United States for scientific, educational or exhibition purposes, due to the risk of monkey-borne infections spreading to humans. The use of non-human primates, especially great apes, in research has been a highly controversial topic, leading to the foundation of advocacy organizations such as the Great Ape Project, which has argued that great apes are entitled to the rights of life, freedom, and the prohibition of torture. In 2008, Spain became the first country to award great apes legal rights.

Mink, by contrast, are raised primarily in order to harvest their pelts for the fur trade. The fur industry is extremely controversial, with animal

rights activists arguing that it is inhumane and cruel. In addition to the animal welfare concerns surrounding the industry, recent studies have indicated that mink farming may detrimentally affect local environments. A 2022 study of Canadian lakes near mink farms found that when mink feed reached nearby lakes in the form of runoff from domestic mink excrement, it increased the levels of contamination in those bodies of water. The study hypothesizes that this is because mink feed can be rich in fish, and therefore often high in heavy metals, including mercury.

## Artist Background

Robert Rauschenberg (1925-2008) was an American artist who worked in a variety of mediums, including painting, sculpture, and printmaking. He often incorporated everyday materials and images into his works, experimenting frequently with the inclusion and transformation of modern media culture and images. Rauschenberg is considered important to both the Abstract Expressionist and Pop art movements, combining a gestural sensibility with homages to and critiques of the modern material and visual world.



[Calf Startena](#) [Object 1978.150]

# Discussion Questions

- Pop artists used images of popular culture in their work, often presenting these elements outside of their original contexts. Rauschenberg was an early pioneer of pop art. What elements of pop art can you see in this work? Considering other examples of pop art you know (eg: Andy Warhol), how are these works similar or different?
- Consider the depiction of animals in these works. What stands out to you about how the animals are illustrated? How does that compare with the circumstances in which many of these mass-produced “chows” were likely used? What does that say about how Purina designed, branded, and presented their products?
- Consider how the screenprint collages are constructed. What artistic choices and techniques did Rauschenberg make in the process of creating them? How does that impact our interpretation of the works and their significance?
- What does the juxtaposition of more “classic” livestock animals and more unexpected ones in this series do to your reading of the works?
- Of all the “chows” included in this series, monkey chow has the most dissimilar use to the rest of the collection. Why do you think Rauschenberg chose to include it? How does that impact your understanding of the series?
- What are your thoughts on the amount of land devoted to the production of animal feed? What tensions can you see in this industry, which creates highly processed food from raw materials (primarily plants) available in the natural world? How does that inform your understanding of agriculture and the agricultural industry, in the United States or globally?
- The connection between mink feed and water pollution indicates a cyclical relationship between mass food production and pollution. Where else do we see that relationship or similar ones in everyday life? What are your thoughts on these relationships?
- The presence of recognizable Purina branding and images from daily life helps to draw our attention to aspects of the agricultural, scientific, and luxury industries that are not familiar to most people. Why do you think Rauschenberg did this? What “everyday” images do you see in each of these prints and why do you think they were paired with their specific chow bag?
- Consider the different ethical framings used to argue against the use of primates in research and the use of mink in fur harvesting. Why do you think activists have chosen to use different arguments against each of these practices? Which do you find more compelling?

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# Art, Ecology, & Climate Project

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