If artists were Looney Tunes, Robert Rauschenberg was the Tasmanian Devil.

The Texas-born painter (1925-2008) whirled through media, moving down Western art traditions and leaving critics in the dust the second half of the 20th century. He was unstoppable, a blur of frenzied creativity chronicling American culture for 60 years.

Rauschenberg's work is accessible, deliberately so. He was a master of the unexpected, a major influence on generations of artists. His work has been critically acclaimed and widely exhibited.

A radical is born. First up is Rauschenberg at GRAM. Coordinated by GRAM curatorial assistant Julie Burgess, twenty-five works illustrate how RR, a U.S. Marine who studied art in Paris on the GI Bill, rejected the angst of the Abstract Expressionism in New York during the late 1940s and 1950s.

An excellent draftsmanship, Rauschenberg admired his elders’ spontaneity and expressive brushstrokes, but found their squiggles and geometric fields of color oppressive. Masters included Josef Albers (his former teacher) and the great Willem de Kooning.

More to his liking were "readymades," found objects presented as art by French surrealist Marcel Duchamp, representative in this segment. RR's credo for satiating his work with everyday odds and ends—and challenging the viewer to provide a storyline—"all goes back to Duchamp," Burgess says.

Eraserhead. Fittingly, RR's most notorious piece—Eraser de Kooning (1955) is conspicuous by its absence. Rauschenberg approached the master artist in the early 1950s and requested an original drawing. The upstart returned home and painstakingly erased it. He replaced