

## SITI stretches with American canvas

Director Ann Bogart and her SITI Company have explored the lives of a wide range of modern artists—Robert Wilson, Leonard Bernstein, Orson Welles, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein.

"I'm interested in exploring the creative spirit," Bogart said. "I want to stand on these artists' shoulders and learn from them. And the best way to do that is to make a play."

When she invited playwright Charles L. Mee ("The Berlin Circle," "Big Love") to write a piece about Andy Warhol, another artist who interested her, Mee told her he hated Warhol's work. Instead, he suggested the Texas-bred Robert

Rauschenberg, the pioneering post-war artist known for his complex mixes of found materials and media imagery. The result, "bobrauschenbergamerica," will play Thursday through Sunday at the Athenaeum Theatre, 2936 N. Southport. Call (773) 722-5463.

"Frankly, I was rather indifferent to Rauschenberg's work," Bogart confessed. "But Chuck's play has taught me a great deal about why he is such a great artist. And it echoes Rauschenberg's combine canvases, creating a cross-section vision of America—with a trucker, a scientist, a businessman in a suit, a dancer, a Japanese woman in a bikini.

"His play gives you a real sense of Rauschenberg's hugely democratic spirit—a man who used the stuff that was there, urban detritus, and traveled the world absorbing everything he saw. He had a genuine populist sense of aesthetics—in contrast to the corporate approach that casts things away so easily. And there's a generosity and expansiveness in his work."

So what do all these creative powerhouses have in common?

"They are all very big," Bogart said. "They take up space in the world. They're courageous. And they transform the art form they're dealing with into something new."



A scene from Charles L. Mee's "bobrauschenbergamerica."