

■ A tribute to Robert Rauschenberg

This year's opening Bulgari Conversation was a poignant tribute to Robert Rauschenberg, the legendary Florida painter. Although still vivacious in spirit, the artist has suffered a series of strokes and was wheeled in to spontaneous applause. Swiss curator Hans Ulrich Obrist traced the arc of Rauschenberg's career, citing the painter as "a man who has given generations of artists the courage to get beyond the fear of collaboration." Next, Obrist introduced French film-

maker and novelist Alain Robbe-Grillet, who described the idiosyncratic process of working with Rauschenberg on an artist book and recalled the painter's 50th birthday party, describing the event as "*très peu heterosexual*" (very gay) and recalled a half-naked nymphet who danced provocatively around them. Fellow painting giant James Rosenquist followed up, lauding Rauschenberg as an inspiration, but also recalled the bon vivant popping up in

bedrooms and hotel elevators all over the world, explaining his presence with the simple phrase: "I came for the party." After dinner, the crowd—which included luminaries such as curator Richard Flood, publisher Benedikt Taschen, gallerist Jamileh Weber, collectors Ulla Dreyfus and artists Joop van Lieshout and John Armleder—was entertained by the final tribute, a concert from guitarist and singer Arto Lindsay.

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