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PAINTINGS TO READ. RAUSCHENBERG,
ROSENQUIST, SALLE, BRAUNTUCH

The essay investigates the category of contemporary painting which transforms the visual component into textual. This is the case of Robert Rauschenberg's combined paintings and silkscreens from 1950s and 1960s, which offer the viewer a specific kind of collage. By juxtaposing images derived from various aesthetic modes, Rauschenberg enforced the reading of his work part-by-part. Such a composition did not remain a holistic unity – a Gestalt – as was the case of the abstract painting from that period (eg. Kenneth Noland's), since it evoked a strictly discursive experience based on syntactic relations between the signs / images.

The article focuses on the discursive turn and its impact on the reception of both pop-art such as Rauschenberg's and James Rosenquist's paintings, and the work of artists from the American movement partly deriving from pop-art, that is The Pictures Generation, with David Salle and Troy Brauntuch among them. The aim is to employ allegory and palimpsest as a conceptual frame to read contemporary painting not only as a product of mass culture in the age of mechanical (and digital) reproduction, but also as discursive structures, deconstructing cultural myths and their essential internal contradictions.