

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY
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Tue–Sat: 10:30am–7:00pm and by appointment

ED RUSCHA: *Paintings*

Through Tuesday, 10 February 2015

Deterioration is a fertile area to explore.
—Ed Ruscha

Gagosian Rome is pleased to present new paintings by Ed Ruscha.

In 2005, Ruscha represented the U.S. at the Biennale di Venezia with *Course of Empire*, a project inspired by five paintings by Thomas Cole which depicted the same landscape over time as it transforms from a pristine natural state into developed terrain, and, finally, barren desolation. In the elegiac *Psycho Spaghetti Westerns* of 2011, he continued this train of thought, zooming in on the effects of time on the contemporary American landscape in a manner both empirical and metaphorically charged. He described these finely nuanced exercises in perception and memory as “waste and retrieval.”

In these wide horizontal paintings, landscape became a mental construct of abutting abstract surfaces—one a *sfumato* backdrop, the other a representational ground (grass, scrub, rock). This structure—a strong diagonal cutting the picture plane and dividing background from foreground—is a pictorial device that Ruscha has often used, dating back as far as the *Standard Station* paintings of the 1960s. In the *Psycho Spaghetti Westerns* it provided a near-neutral picture plane for meticulously rendered *nature mortes* of incidental roadside trash—“gators” (tire shreds), beer cans, construction materials, packaging, and discarded bedding. In keeping with the historical painting genre, they provide reflection on time passing.

In his most recent paintings, Ruscha continues to meditate on the melancholy of *Psycho Spaghetti Westerns* in complex pictures that conflate his signature elements with the visual devices, perspectival techniques, and refined atmospheres of Old Master paintings to depict the romantic road trip of youth reduced to roadside dystopia. In *Gators*, meticulously rendered life-size images of tire blow-outs float like botanical specimens against a blank white background; in the delicately shaded crimson-to-white field of *Hydraulic Muscles*, *Pneumatic Smiles*, similar fragments hover behind that vertically set phrase, deftly conjoining machine and man. In *Bliss Bucket*, a painting that owes as much to Surrealist precedent as to reality, a shabby mattress with rumpled bedding—perhaps a makeshift refuge—lies enigmatically beneath a giant musical bar with treble clef, cunningly foreshortened to add depth and perspective to the picture plane.

Ruscha's deadpan representations of archetypal signs and symbols distill the imagery of popular culture into cinematic and typographical codes that are as accessible as they are profound. His wry and sometimes obtuse choice of words draws upon the moments of incidental ambiguity implicit in the interplay between language and image. Although his inspirations are undeniably rooted in his close observation of American vernacular, his elegantly laconic paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, and artists' books speak to more complex and widespread issues regarding the appearance, feel, and function of the world and our tenuous and transient place within it.

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A fully illustrated catalogue with an essay by Alex Kitnick and a text by Bob Monk is forthcoming.

Ed Ruscha was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1937 and studied painting, photography, and graphic design at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts). His work is collected by museums worldwide. Recent solo museum exhibitions include "Witty Wonders from Anagrams to Gunpowder and All the Parking Lots on Sunset Strip," Whitney Museum of American Art (2004); the drawing retrospective "Cotton Puffs, Q-Tips®, Smoke and Mirrors," which toured U.S. museums in 2004–05; "Ed Ruscha," MAXXI, Rome (2004); "Ed Ruscha: Photographer," Jeu de Paume, Paris (2006, traveled to Kunsthhaus Zurich; and Museum Ludwig, Cologne); "Ed Ruscha: Fifty Years of Painting," Hayward Gallery, London (2009, traveled to Haus der Kunst, Munich; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm); "Ed Ruscha: Road Tested," Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas (2011); "On the Road," Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2011, traveled to Denver Art Museum, Colorado; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami); "Reading Ed Ruscha," Kunsthhaus Bregenz, Austria (2012); "Artist Rooms on Tour: Ed Ruscha," Tate Gallery, London (2012, traveled to Hatton Gallery, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne, England); "Ed Ruscha: Standard," Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2012–13, traveled to Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA); "Ed Ruscha: Los Angeles Apartments," Kunstmuseum Basel (2013); "Ed Ruscha: Books and Paintings," Brandhorst Museum, Munich (2013); and "In Focus: Ed Ruscha," J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2013). Ruscha represented the United States in the 51st Biennale di Venezia (2005). In 2012, he curated "The Ancients Stole All Our Great Ideas" at Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.

Edward Ruscha Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings: Volume Six, 1998–2003 and *Edward Ruscha Catalogue Raisonné of the Drawings: Volume One, 1956–1976* were published by Gagolian earlier this year.

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Image: *Psycho Spaghetti Western #14*, 2013–14, acrylic on canvas, 54 x 132 inches (137.2 x 335.3 cm)

Gagolian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagolian.