

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

July 7, 2014

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UPDATED PRESS RELEASE

GAGOSIAN GALLERY
980 MADISON AVENUE
4TH FLOOR
NEW YORK NY 10075
GALLERY HOURS:
SUMMER HOURS:

T. 212.744.2313
F. 212.772.7962
Tue–Sat 10:00am–6:00pm
Mon–Fri 10:00am–6:00pm



ED RUSCHA: *Prints and Photographs*

Through Saturday, September 27, 2014

This exhibition, organized by Gagosian director Bob Monk, surveys Ruscha's prints of the past forty years, together with rarely-seen photographs produced since 1959.

Ranging freely and dexterously across traditional, unconventional, or sometimes even comestible materials, Ruscha's prints are a fluid forum for the spirited investigation of what a limited edition artwork can be. His absorption and re-thinking of the requirements of each graphic procedure and format result in step-by-step transformations, a process that echoes the eternal return of the subjects that make up his broader oeuvre. Ruscha arrived in Los Angeles in 1956 to study commercial art at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts), and underwent a six-month apprenticeship with a printer beginning in 1958. Attracted to the reproducibility, collaborative processes, and happy accidents specific to printmaking, he began to create a wealth of lithographic editions, infusing the Pop and Conceptual sensibilities of the time with vernacular wit and melancholy. His exquisitely refined prints engage a breadth of formal themes, from text and typography to still life and quotidian architecture, played out in a spirit of rigorous yet restless experimentation.

The quartet of gas stations *Standard Station*, *Mocha Standard*, *Cheese Mold Standard with Olive*, and *Double Standard* (1966–69) merge Euclidean space with Renaissance perspective and word play, while depictions of the Hollywood Sign and its surrounding hills convey an attitude to the region's landscape, at once scientific and romantic, natural and artificial. In *Hollywood in the Rain* (1969), the monumental sign forms part of a linear landscape in the style of early topographic illustrations; while the lithographic series *Landmark Decay* and *Further Landmark Decay* (2006) depict the letters in various stages of collapse. "'Hollywood' is like a verb to me," Ruscha once said. "It's something you can do to any subject or any thing." Parallel to his output of paintings and drawings, Ruscha's prints of the past four decades are random yet refined expressions of this unrestricted approach.

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In the portfolio of screenprints *News, Mews, Pews, Brews, Stews, Dues* (1970), produced at Editions Alecto, London, rhyming words appear in Gothic typeface, printed in edible substances such as pie fillings, bolognese sauce, caviar, and chocolate syrup. Each word alludes to Ruscha's impressions of England: *News* symbolizes "a tabloid-minded country," while *Stews*, made from baked beans, strawberries, chutney, and other foodstuffs, sums up British cooking.

During the production of his second short film *Miracle*, for the first time Ruscha used photography as the basis for prints: the incongruously titled *Tropical Fish Series* (1975) presents banal tabletop still lifes against lustrous fabrics, from *Air, Water, Fire* with bicycle pump, seltzer bottle, and Satan statuette to the chocolates, raw cuts, and bedsheets of *Sweets, Meats, Sheets*. These were propped up horizontally and photographed, then rotated during the silkscreening process to produce a vertical stack of plastic-wrapped subjects—an analog stunt that presaged digital magic. In a series of four works made at Tamarind Lithography Workshop the same year, he applied sprays of tusche ink to the lithographic plates to create background textures, atmospheres of dematerialized particles that coalesce into clichés—THERE'S NO JOB TOO SMALL; YOU KNOW THE OLD STORY; THANKS FOR BEING WITH US.

Final, Precise, and That is Right (1989) combine faint text with fleeting impressions of light filtered through window frames. In recent richly colored lithographs, catchy yet meaningless terms, such as WALL ROCKET and JET BABY, are set against dramatic mountainscapes in scenic connotations of linguistic and visual appropriation; unique color trial proofs are presented side by side to show the evolutive process by which Ruscha decides for a final image.

Ruscha's early photographs also provided foundations for his broader artistic practice. Isolating overlooked quotidian subjects, he used the camera to "flatten" the images he intended to draw and paint, from apartment buildings to commodities and comestibles such as raisins and bottles of turpentine. Exercises in the ambiguity of scale, such as *Untitled (Newspaper Sculpture)* (1959–60, printed in 2005) and *Dodger's Stadium* (1967, printed in 2013) reveal a common abstraction in small objects and large-scale architecture; while *Joyce Wallace's Automatic Table Arrangement* (1962, printed in 2005) shows his compositional mind at work. Images of gas stations along Route 66 were collected in *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations* (1963), the first of sixteen artist's books produced between 1963 and 1978. *Roof Top Views* (1961) pictures local suburban streets from a high vantage point, while *Roof Top Views 50 Years Later* (2003) returns to the same locations to reveal neighborhoods only subtly changed by the sluggish pace of time, economy, and demographics.

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 and phrases 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 prints, photographs, drawings, and paintings speak to more complex and widespread issues regarding the appearance, feel, and function of the world and our tenuous and transient place within it.

Ruscha's first public art commission in New York, *Honey, I Twisted Through More Damn Traffic Today*, was unveiled at the High Line on May 6, 2014 and will be on view through May 2015.

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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: Photographer," Jeu de Paume, Paris (2006, traveled to Kunsthaus 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," Kunsthaus 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).

For further information please contact the gallery at newyork@gagosian.com or at +1.212.744.2313. All images are subject to copyright. Gallery approval must be granted prior to reproduction.

Press Enquiries

Blue Medium, Inc.

T. +1.212.675.1800

www.bluemedium.com

Contact: Deirdre Maher

E. deirdre@bluemedium.com

Contact: Andy Ptaschinski

E. andy@bluemedium.com

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Image: *Double Standard*, 1966–69, screenprint on wove paper, 25 3/4 x 40 inches (65.4 x 101.6 cm) © Ed Ruscha

Gagosian Gallery was established in 1980 by Larry Gagossian.

980 MADISON AVENUE NEW YORK NY 10075 T. 212.744.2313 F. 212.772.7962

NEWYORK@GAGOSIAN.COM WWW.GAGOSIAN.COM