

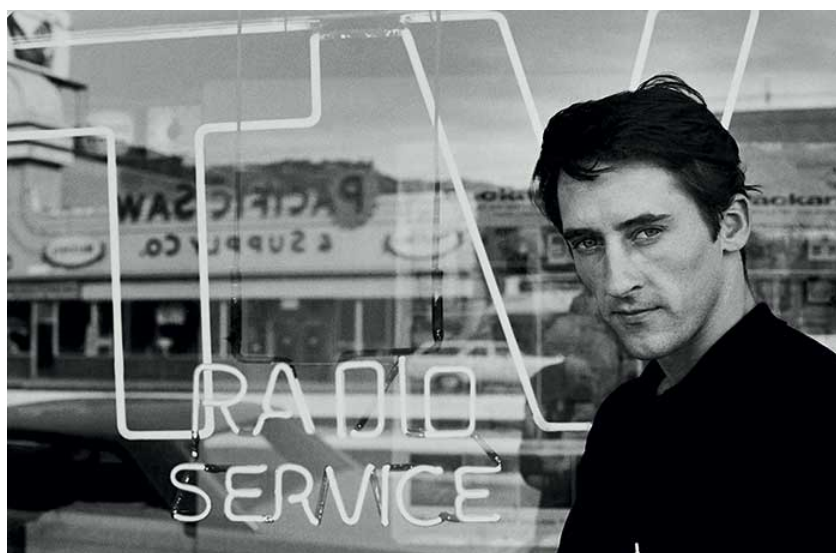
GAGOSIAN GALLERY



Ed Ruscha says artists should 'put the pedal to the metal'

As solo show opens in Rome, the Los Angeles-based artist reflects on his adopted city's population surge

Hannah McGivern and Federico Florian



Ed Ruscha in LA, 1964, photographed by Dennis Hopper

An exhibition of new works by Ed Ruscha opened last week at the Gagosian Gallery in Rome. “Ed Ruscha: Paintings” (until 17 January) sees the artist exploring familiar territory on the highways and byways of greater Los Angeles. The latest acrylic paintings “all have close ties to the ‘Psycho Spaghetti Westerns’, which are studies of objects found discarded by the side of the road,” he told our sister paper *Il Giornale dell’Arte*. Explaining the inspiration behind the earlier series, he said: “I got interested in trash balls, landscape litter, real worn-out things that look like scary animals. Debris, discharge, dustballs, discards, disarray, dispersal. I think of all those descriptive ‘D’ words.”

Ruscha also talked about how his adopted city has changed in the decades since he moved there to study at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts) in 1956. “Los Angeles has been a real rollercoaster ride since I came here years ago,” he said. “I’m baffled by my connection to this place—it has served my art in obvious ways. It offers me a dreamy reflection in its history but its present surge to attract new residents disappoints me. 13,000 people per day come here to live! That scares me but maybe it will offer some spark to my future work.”

When asked to define the role of the artist today, Ruscha was laconic: “To put pedal to metal.”