

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum of American Art

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WHITNEY PRESENTS ED RUSCHA AND PHOTOGRAPHY,
JUNE 24 TO SEPTEMBER 26, 2004

Organized to celebrate the Whitney's acquisition of a treasure trove of photographs by Ed Ruscha, the museum presents *Ed Ruscha and Photography*, an exhibition of more than seventy original prints, many of which have never been published or exhibited before. The collection of 456 objects acquired by the Museum makes the Whitney the principal repository of Ruscha's photographic works. Because of what the photographs reveal about his vision and his career, the collection will be an essential resource for the study and appreciation of Ruscha's art in all media. The show runs June 24 to September 26, 2004.

"Since the beginning of Ed Ruscha's career in the late 1950s, photography has been both an inspiration and a source of discovery," notes Sylvia Wolf, the Whitney's Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, who organized the show. "This exhibition presents Ruscha's signature photographic books and dozens of previously unseen original prints. Among these are unique photographs taken in Europe in 1961 that contain motifs and stylistic treatments that would emerge in Ruscha's paintings in later years. The exhibition suggests the depth of Ruscha's engagement with photography and sheds light on his career as a whole."

Ruscha's photographic books of the 1960s and 1970s have come to embody the Conceptualists' embrace of serial imaging. The books have had a profound impact on the art and careers of many American artists, including Lewis Baltz, Dan Graham, and Robert Venturi. German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher presented Ruscha's work to their students, including Thomas Struth and Andreas Gursky, whose own work incorporates a similar dry documentary aesthetic. And Canadian artist Jeff Wall has called Ruscha the "American Everyman." Ruscha's involvement with photography extends far beyond his books, however, as is revealed in the publication accompanying this exhibition. The artist identifies photographers Walker Evans and Robert Frank as influential to his art. He also acknowledges the impact of photography on his work in other media.

Last month, the Whitney announced that it had acquired a major body of original photographic works from Ruscha through the generosity of The Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Foundation, with additional support from Tom and Diane Tuft, and through a significant gift of unique early works from the artist. Included are original prints from his photographic books *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963); *Various Small Fires and Milk* (1964); *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965); *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967); *Royal Road Test* (1967); *Babycakes with Weights* (1970) and *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970). Also in this acquisition are several photographs

Ruscha never published, in particular 16 images from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) that were not included in the book.

In addition, the acquisition contains more than 300 vintage photographs from a seven-month tour that Ruscha took of Europe in 1961. Photographs from Austria, England, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Yugoslavia feature many motifs and stylistic elements that have marked Ruscha's work over the past 40 years, in particular his interest in typography and signage, and his strong graphic sensibility. They also show him experimenting with the camera. Ms. Wolf observes, "The lack of self-consciousness and intense curiosity reflected in these early photographs makes them both refreshing and revelatory of a fertile time in a young artist's career. Ruscha's use of photography would later develop into a systematic inquiry with clarity of purpose, but during his months in Europe, his pictures suggest spontaneity, playfulness, and a pure delight in seeing."

THE ARTIST

Born in 1937 in Omaha, Nebraska, and raised in Oklahoma City, Ruscha moved to Los Angeles when he was 18. He attended the Chouinard Art Institute until 1960, before working briefly in commercial advertising. In 1961, Ruscha embarked on a career as an artist and produced enigmatic paintings, drawings, and photographic books of gasoline stations, apartment buildings, palm trees, vacant lots, and Los Angeles's famous "Hollywood" sign. The irony and objective stance of his works from this period placed him in the context of Pop art and Conceptualism, but Ruscha consistently defies categorization. Now 66, Ruscha is recognized as one of our most important and influential contemporary American artists.

WHITNEY HOLDINGS AND EXHIBITIONS

The Whitney first exhibited Ed Ruscha's work in the 1967 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Painting. It has since collected his art and exhibited it in several group exhibitions. In 1982, the Whitney was the New York venue for an SFMoMA retrospective. Among the Whitney's holdings are two master paintings, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* (1962) and *Hollywood to Pico* (1998), two portfolios of prints, six individual prints, and three drawings. This initiative extends a vigorous program of acquisitions in contemporary photography that began with the formation of the Photography Collection Committee in 1991.

CONCURRENT EXHIBITION

The photographs, on view in the Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Lobby Gallery on the first floor, are being shown concurrently with a landmark exhibition of Ruscha's drawings, ***Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha***, organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, to be shown in the Peter Norton Family Galleries on the third floor.

PROGRAMS

On Thursday, June 24 at 7 pm, in conjunction with the exhibitions ***Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha and Ed Ruscha and Photography***, the museum presents **An Evening with Ed Ruscha**, in which the artist discusses his process, influences, and relationship to photography, drawing, and popular culture.

On Thursday, July 1 at 7 pm, in ***Ruscha/Baldessari/Rauschenberg: The Artist and his Films***, Whitney curator Chrissie Iles highlights Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, and Robert Rauschenberg and their films of the late 1960s and early 1970s with screenings of Ruscha's *Miracle* (1975) and *Premium* (1970), Baldessari's *Police Drawing* (1971), and Rauschenberg's *Linoleum* (1966).

ABOUT THE WHITNEY

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20th and 21st-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is regarded as the preeminent collection of American art and includes the entire artistic estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, and Lucas Samaras, as well as significant works by Jasper

Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists. With its history of exhibiting the most promising and influential American artists and provoking intense critical and public debate, the Whitney's signature show, the Biennial, has become a measure of the state of contemporary art in America today.