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Whitney Museum of American Art  
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June 2004

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



**Ed Ruscha**, *Sun-Maid Raisins*, 1961. Gelatin silver print.

***Ed Ruscha and Photography***, a rare look at the artist's devotion to the medium of photography, opens on June 24 at the Whitney Museum of American Art. Organized to celebrate the Whitney's recent, historic acquisition of a treasure trove of photographs by Ruscha, the exhibition features more than one hundred original prints, many of which have never been published or exhibited before. The show coincides with a major retrospective of Ruscha's drawing, also on view at the Whitney from June 24 through 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."

The show will present several of Ruscha's photographic books of the 1960s and 1970s, which 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. Ruscha's involvement with photography extends far beyond his books, however, as is revealed in the publication accompanying this exhibition, in which 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.

Included in the exhibition are original prints from important photographic books in the Whitney's recent acquisition: *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963); *Various Small Fires and Milk* (1964); *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965); and *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967). In addition, the show features a striking selection from the more than 300 original photographs from a seven-month tour that Ruscha took of Europe in 1961 contained in the acquisition. Photographs from Austria, England, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Yugoslavia exhibit 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**

In March 2004, 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. In this acquisition of 456 objects are several photographs Ruscha never published, in particular 16 images from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) that were not included in the book. The acquisition 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 is an essential resource for the study and appreciation of Ruscha’s art in all media.

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.

#### **ABOUT THE WHITNEY**

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-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.

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art:

Benton and America: Works on Paper	Through September 5, 2004
Art and Photography 1963-1978	Through September 5, 2004
Ed Ruscha Drawings	Through September 26, 2004
Ed Ruscha and Photography	Through September 26, 2004
California Dreaming	Through August 22, 2004
Ana Mendieta	Through September 19, 2004
LOT-EK: Mobile Dwelling Unit	Through September 19, 2004
Pop Concept: Highlights from the Permanent Collection	Through October 24, 2004
Jennifer Pastor	October 6, 2004--January 2005
Romare Bearden	October 14, 2004--January 9, 2005
Isamu Noguchi: Master Sculptor	October 28, 2004--January 16, 2005

The museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. For information, please call 1-800 WHITNEY or visit [www.whitney.org](http://www.whitney.org).

Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria:

Architecture by Numbers	Through July 9, 2004
Teresa Hubbard and Alexander Birchler	July 22, 2004 - October 22, 2004
Fight or Flight	November 4, 2004 - January 2005

The Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria is located at 120 Park Avenue at 42nd Street. Gallery hours: Monday through Friday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Thursdays 11 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Sculpture Court Hours: Monday through Saturday from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., Sundays and holidays 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. The Whitney Museum at Altria is funded by Altria Group, Inc. Admission is free. Free gallery talks are offered every Wednesday and Friday at 1:00 p.m. For further information, please call (917) 663-2453.

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