

The Museum of Modern Art

MoMA ANNOUNCES *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN*, THE ARTIST'S MOST COMPREHENSIVE RETROSPECTIVE TO DATE

Exhibition Will Explore the Artist's Influential Career by Gathering over 250 Works in All Media Spanning 65 Years

NEW YORK, NY, October 19, 2022—The Museum of Modern Art announces *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN*, the most comprehensive presentation of the artist's work, and his first solo exhibition at the Museum, from September 10, 2023, through January 13, 2024, in the Steven and Alexandra Cohen Center for Special Exhibitions. Spanning 65 years of Ed Ruscha's remarkable career and mirroring his own cross-disciplinary approach, the exhibition will feature over 250 works, produced from 1958 to the present, in various mediums—including painting, drawing, prints, film, photography, artist's books, and installation—displayed according to a loose chronology throughout the Museum's sixth-floor galleries. Alongside the artist's most acclaimed works, the exhibition will highlight lesser-known aspects of his practice, offering new perspectives on one of the most influential figures in postwar American art and stressing Ruscha's role as a keen observer of our rapidly changing world.

ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN is co-organized by MoMA and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The exhibition is organized by Christophe Cherix, The Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints, with Ana Torok, The Sue and Eugene Mercy, Jr. Assistant Curator, and Kiko Aebi, Curatorial Assistant, Department of Drawings and Prints. Following its presentation at MoMA, the exhibition will travel to LACMA, where it will be realized in association with Michael Govan, CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, from April 7 through October 6, 2024.

"I am greatly looking forward to this exhibit. It will be like various acquaintances gathering for a reunion," said Ruscha, who is working closely with the curatorial team. "The show grew out of the desire to see Ed's work under a new light, beyond the categories traditionally imposed on an artist," added Cherix. "For us he is no more a painter or a bookmaker than he is a Pop or a Conceptual artist. His work charted new paths into the 20th and 21st centuries, and this is what our exhibition will attempt to reveal."

Raised in Oklahoma City, Ed Ruscha (American, born 1937) moved to Los Angeles in 1956 to study commercial art at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts). Beginning with these formative years, the exhibition will include rarely seen paintings and works on paper made during, or in reference to, his extensive travels throughout the United States and Europe, revealing the artist's keen attention to everyday sights—including vernacular architecture, consumer items, and public signage. The exhibition will also reunite a number of

breakthrough paintings, which Ruscha made shortly after graduating from Chouinard, in order to demonstrate his foundational and enduring interest in language for its plastic and sonic qualities. For instance, *OOF* (1962, reworked 1963), a painting in MoMA's collection, depicts a one-syllable word with a bold shape and guttural sound that not only recalls the dynamic exclamations found in comic strips, but also highlights Ruscha's acute understanding of design and typography.

Cross-media installations throughout the retrospective will offer insight into Ruscha's unique working methods. Viewers will have the opportunity to trace the migration of subjects across mediums—following, for example, an image of a Standard gasoline station from its small black-and-white reproduction in his self-published artist's book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) to the monumental, brightly rendered oil paintings made shortly after, which remain as some of Ruscha's most recognizable works. These displays will also highlight the artist's continual experimentation with unconventional materials and techniques, including drawings made with gunpowder, airbrushed paintings of enigmatic silhouettes, and vintage drum skins emblazoned with double negatives.

Ruscha's multisensory *Chocolate Room* (1970)—the artist's only single-room installation—will be presented in New York for the first time on the occasion of the exhibition. Ruscha created this work for the United States pavilion during the 35th Venice Biennale in 1970, representing a major moment in his use of unexpected materials. Using an on-site press, the artist screenprinted chocolate paste onto hundreds of sheets of paper, lining the walls from floor to ceiling.

Serving as a counterpoint to *Chocolate Room*, a selection of paintings titled *Course of Empire* (1992/2003–5), first presented at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005, will be reunited for the retrospective. Inspired by a 19th-century painting cycle by Thomas Cole, Ruscha's *Course of Empire* pairs a series of black-and-white paintings from 1992, showing generic industrial buildings, with new, colorful renditions made some 10 years later that imagine the same sites as they might exist under vastly different social and economic realities. This presentation of *Course of Empire* will be complemented by a selection of photographic and working materials from the Getty Research Institute's Ed Ruscha's Streets of Los Angeles Archive. Spanning more than 40 years, the photographs, meticulously documenting various LA streets, chronicle a city in constant flux—just as this retrospective seeks to capture the ceaseless reinvention that has defined Ruscha's prolific, six-decade career.

The exhibition will be accompanied by a richly illustrated catalogue featuring original essays by an interdisciplinary group of contributors.

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