

The Museum of Modern Art

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

Exhibition Explores the Artist's Influential Career by Gathering over 200 Works in All Media Spanning More Than Six Decades

ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN

September 10, 2023—January 13, 2024

Floor Six, The Steven and Alexandra Cohen Center for Special Exhibitions

NEW YORK, NY, August 16, 2023—The Museum of Modern Art presents *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN*, the most comprehensive retrospective of the artist's work ever staged, and his first solo exhibition at the Museum, from September 10, 2023, through January 13, 2024. Organized in close collaboration with the artist and mirroring his own cross-disciplinary approach, the exhibition will feature over 200 works, produced from 1958 to the present, in various media—including painting, drawing, printmaking, 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.

ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN is 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, Rebecca Morse, Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department, LACMA, and Deliasofia Zacarias, Executive Assistant & Director's Office Fellow, LACMA 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. "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

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formative years, the exhibition will include rarely seen paintings and works on paper, which reference his extensive travels throughout the United States and Europe, revealing the artist's keen attention to everyday sights—including roadside architecture, consumer items, and public signage. The exhibition will also reunite a number of breakthrough word paintings that Ruscha made shortly after completing his studies at Chouinard. Works, such as *Oof* (1962/1963), a painting in MoMA's collection, demonstrate the artist's longstanding fascination with the shape, sound, and impact of language. It depicts a one-syllable word with a bold shape and guttural sound that recalls the dynamic exclamations found in comic strips, while also highlighting Ruscha's acute understanding of design and typography.

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

As part of this exhibition, Ruscha's multisensory *Chocolate Room* (1970)—the artist's only single-room installation—will be presented in New York for the first time. Created for the United States pavilion during the 35th Venice Biennale in 1970, it represents a major moment in his use of unexpected materials due to its immersive scale and ephemeral nature. To create the work, the artist screenprinted chocolate paste onto hundreds of sheets of paper, lining the walls from floor to ceiling. Following its original presentation in Venice, the work has been refabricated for subsequent installations by the artist's preferred fabricator, La Paloma Fine Arts, who will be producing *Chocolate Room* on site for its presentation at MoMA.

Serving as a counterpoint to *Chocolate Room*, a selection of paintings from *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 a decade 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 fifty years, the photographs meticulously document various LA streets, chronicling a city in constant flux—just as this retrospective seeks to capture the ceaseless reinvention that has defined Ruscha's prolific career.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS:

A variety of public programs offered throughout the run of the exhibition will bring together artists, scholars, publishers, poets, and others to explore the influence of Ruscha's work across disciplines. Details and dates to be announced soon.

FILM:

This fall, MoMA will organize a theater presentation featuring a selection of Ruscha's films from the 1970s. Produced during a period of immense experimentation with novel materials and techniques, Ruscha's filmic works explore storytelling through the structure and conventions of cinema. This presentation will provide a unique opportunity to reflect on the artist's films, which have been recently scanned and restored in 4K, some fifty years after their making.

PUBLICATION:

Published in conjunction with the exhibition, *Ed Ruscha / Now Then: A Retrospective* is edited by Christophe Cherix with Ana Torok and Kiko Aebi, and includes contributions by Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Donna De Salvo and Linda Norden, Michael Govan, Ellen Lupton and Jennifer Tobias, Andrew Perchuk, and Jeffrey Weiss. Featuring more than 200 artworks produced from 1958 to the present, this richly illustrated catalogue celebrates Ruscha's work across all media. An interdisciplinary group of contributors examines Ruscha's production under a new light, beyond the categories of Pop and Conceptual art with which he has traditionally been associated, to present fresh perspectives on one of the most influential figures in postwar American art. Supplemented by an illustrated chronology, this publication captures the ceaseless reinvention that has long defined Ruscha's prolific art making, now in its seventh decade. 336 pages, 374 color illustrations. Hardcover, \$75. ISBN: 978-1-63345-150-6. Published by The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and available at MoMA stores and online at store.moma.org. Distributed to the trade through ARTBOOK|D.A.P. in the United States and Canada, and through Thames & Hudson in the rest of the world.

DESIGN STORE:

MoMA Design Store has developed a unique range of products, in collaboration with the artist, to commemorate *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN*. The special-edition hoodie, hat, tote bag, Blackwing pencil set, and poster are exclusive to MoMA Design Store and will be available online at store.moma.org and in our stores—including the sixth-floor store adjacent to the exhibition—this September.

AUDIO GUIDE:

Discover the themes and materials that have shaped Ed Ruscha's art over sixty-five years. With twenty stops across ten galleries, the audio playlist explores the range of influences on Ruscha's work—from comic strips and advertising to city streets and chocolate. Listeners will be guided through the exhibition with commentary by the artist as well as graphic designer Gail Anderson, architect Frank Gehry, Harlem-based chocolatier Jessica Spaulding, and others.

EXHIBITION SUPPORT:

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