

Ruscha, 1963
Photograph: Joe Goode

[Ed Ruscha artist website](#)

[Ruscha at Gagosian Gallery](#)

[Ruscha at MoMA](#)

“I have always felt attracted to anything that had to do with that phenomenon of people speaking to each other...the printed page and books began--I began to see not so much the content of it, but the curiosity of the thing itself,” Ruscha reflected in an [oral history](#) with the Smithsonian Archives of American Art recorded in 1980-81. “I visually took that on as material...I felt newspapers, magazines, books, words, to be more meaningful than what some damn oil painter was doing. So I suppose it developed itself from that, into the idea of questioning the printed word.”

Ruscha spoke with [Believer Magazine](#) in 2006 about his book of photography, *Then & Now*, the attraction to and inspiration derived from LA, Pop art, and language. “it’s not my job to communicate with people. A picture is made in a solitary spot. Trying to reach people with a well-defined message is almost impossible, and unnecessary. So various interpretations of a single word are welcome...That’s the nature of art.”

“It’s not important to me for people to see that way I see things because I don’t even know how I see things. I just produce things that I feel have to be made official. I just make a picture and I have to satisfy myself with this and hope someone can derive something from it,” Ruscha reflected during [an interview in his LA studio in 2016](#) about becoming a professional artist and finding his personal aesthetic in an art world that adores abstraction.

[San Francisco’s de Young Museum](#) highlighted Ruscha’s relationship and fascination with American landscapes in 2016 with nearly 100 photographs, lithographs, and archival publications dating from the 1970s. Fellow LA-based artist Sterling Ruby talked with Ruscha for [Interview Magazine](#) about the exhibition, art school, and his practice.

“I’ve got this language that I’m speaking, that maybe it’s got some potential to it that I’ll increase and keep addressing, visiting back...the flatness of all this landscape between California and Oklahoma began to infect my work, I could see it coming at me,” Ruscha told Denmark’s [Louisiana Museum of Art](#) in a video interview in association with his [2018 exhibition, Very](#), which took a close look at Ruscha’s technical and graphic innovations from 1960 onward in his paintings, photography, and artist books.

[The National Gallery](#), London, showcased Ruscha’s 2005 Venice Biennale cycle [The Course of Empire](#) in 2018, which played off Thomas Cole’s 1833-36 cycle of the same name. [Ruscha discusses his relationship with the original paintings](#) and their legacy in an interview with the Gagosian Gallery and MET curator Elizabeth Kornhauser.

Ruscha spoke of his influences inside and outside of the art world in [an artist talk](#) at the Tate Modern in 2019, in conjunction with the opening of his [Artist Rooms exhibition](#) exploring the range of techniques Ruscha used in paintings, photography, and book making over the course of his sixty-year career. Ruscha also talked about his intuitive process in [a quick-fire interview](#) with the Tate.

[Oklahoma Contemporary Art](#) will feature Ruscha for his first solo exhibition in his home state in 2021.



Ruscha, 2018
Photograph: Manfredi Gioacchini

Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)

Tril Bil Mil, 2016

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2024:112.2

Pop artist Ed Ruscha is known for his paintings, prints, and artist books that examine the power of words and phrases in contemporary culture. Now in his late eighties, the artist has continued over the past decade to produce works that reflect on the current moment, using his signature “Boy Scout Utility Modern” font. **Tril Bil Mil** seeks to assign relationships between incomprehensible amounts from a trillion to one. The stack of abbreviated words may call to mind the often daunting, nearly incomprehensible presence of numbers and metrics in contemporary life, whether in reference to population statistics, measure of wealth inequality, or other data sets. The painting was the centerpiece of his 2016 exhibition at Gagosian Gallery in London entitled *Extremes and In-betweens*. As the artist observes: “I mean, what size is a word, after all?”



On view April 23 – July 27, 2025



Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)

Music, 1969

Pastel and graphite on paper

Private Collection; L2024:107.1

American artist Ed Ruscha moved to Los Angeles from Oklahoma in 1956, where he became fascinated by the words, logos, and signs of the west coast landscape. He began to create “word paintings” in the 1960s, using typography and phrasing to draw attention to the constructs of language and the abstraction of words. With swooping cursive letters and careful shading, the word in **Music** appears to float off the canvas. Ruscha often reflects on the sound and sources of words, saying: “A lot of my ideas for my art come from the radio.... I like the texture.... It's best when it's music overlapping talk, or talk over talk. You can turn on the radio and the radio becomes the soundtrack for what you see out the window!”

On view January 22 – July 22, 2025

Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)

Various Values, 2023

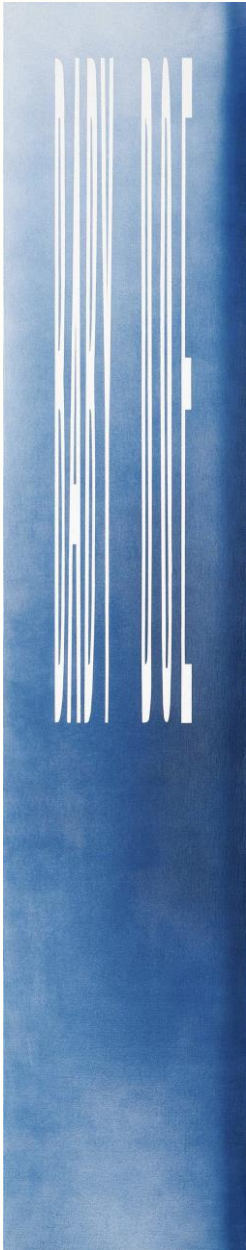
Acrylic on linen

Private Collection; L2023:112.1

Ed Ruscha moved to California in 1956 and has worked in Los Angeles County for the majority of his career. He began to create “word paintings” in the 1960s that depict typography and short phrases against solid backgrounds, a series which he continues to produce today. Like many other Pop artists interested in language, Ruscha often explores the intersections of commercial art, conceptualism, and the ironies of pop culture. **Various Values** features the two words in a serif font, balanced on thin dark lines, and casting long shadows. Reflecting back, Ruscha said: “When I began painting, all my paintings were of words which were guttural utterances like Smash, Boss, Eat. Those words were like flowers in a vase.”

On view February 7 – May 12, 2024





Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)
Baby Doe, 1994-1995
Acrylic on canvasboard

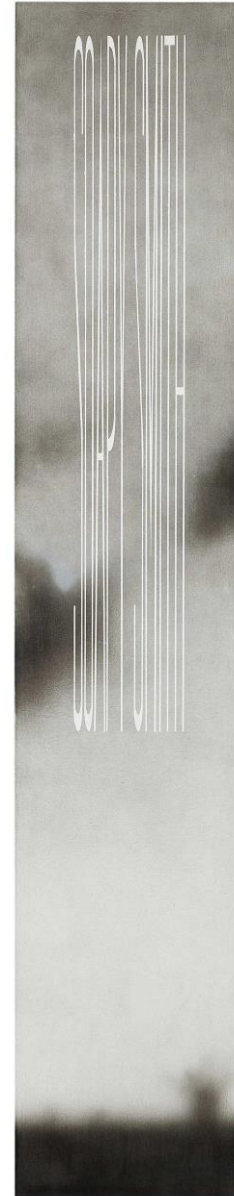
Private Collection; L2023:10.1

On view March 8 – June 11, 2023

Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)
Soapy Smith, 1993
Acrylic on canvasboard

Private Collection; L2023:10.2

On view March 8 – June 11, 2023





Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)

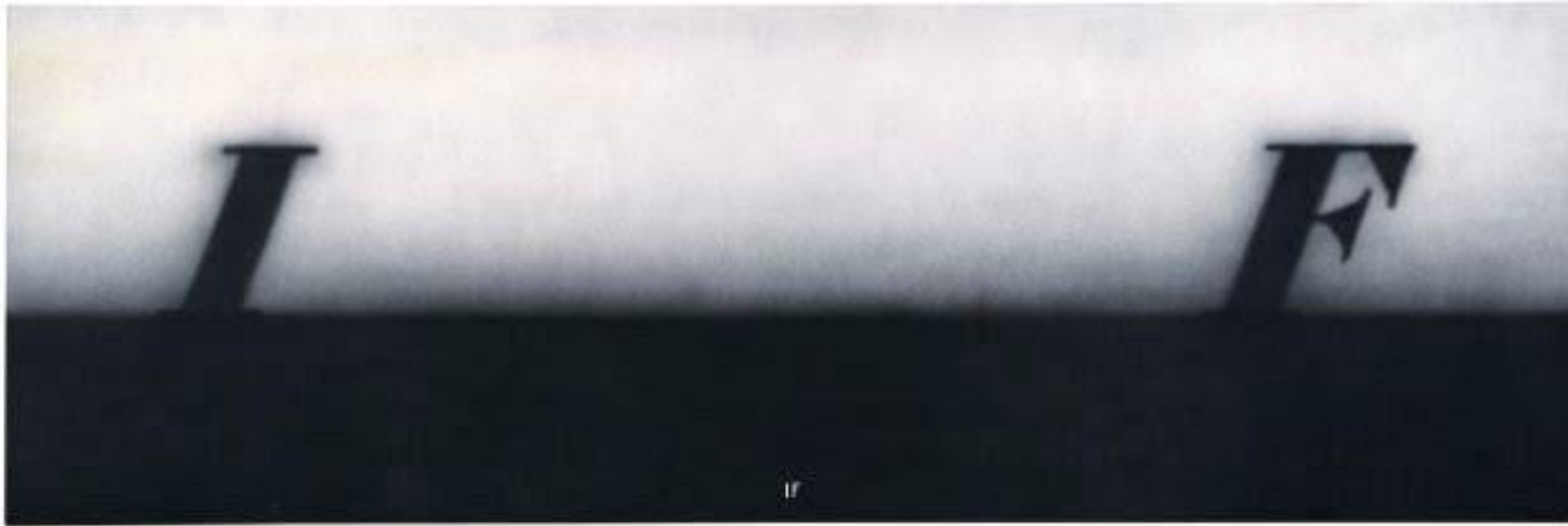
Trademark (#6), 1962

Oil and pencil on paper

Private Collection; L2022:126.2

Ed Ruscha moved to California in 1956 and was inspired by the words, logos, and signs that dot the west coast landscape. With a background in commercial illustration and advertising, Ruscha's Pop Art works are iconic representations of American culture. **Trademark (#6)** is part of the artist's well-known series illustrating the 20th Century Fox logo. The horizontal format evokes a movie screen or billboard with the Hollywood company's insignia rising from the bottom right corner. Though unfinished, this iteration of the design still reflects the monumentality of the silver screen and the dominance of Hollywood in Los Angeles. As the artist once said: "All my artistic response comes from American things, and I guess I've always had a weakness for heroic imagery."

On view January 25 – April 30, 2023



Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)

IF, IF, 1996

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection; L2021:126.1

“A lot of my paintings are anonymous backdrops for the drama of words.” Born in Omaha, Nebraska, Ed Ruscha moved to Southern California in 1956. While studying at the Chouinard Art Institute (now the California Institute of the Arts), Ruscha was struck by the urban sprawl of suburbia and the expanse of signage and advertising. The artist’s Pop Art works often feature words, phrases, and fonts juxtaposed against scenes of the American West. **IF, IF** evokes an open landscape at dusk. The capital letters “IF” rest on the horizon line, while the lowercase “if” in white gesso is almost overlooked at the bottom center of the composition. Together, the two typefaces ask the perpetual question: “what if?”

On view January 19 – April 24, 2022

Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)

An Invasion of Privacy, 1973

Grass stain on canvas

Private Collection; L2020:127.5

“I have always operated on a kind of waste-retrieval method. I retrieve and renew things that have been forgotten or wasted,” reflected painter and photographer Ed Ruscha in 1985. After leaving his home state of Oklahoma and settling in Los Angeles in 1956, Ruscha studied at the Chouinard Art Institute, exploring the potential of abstraction and language. His prolific output remains one of the most significant of the twentieth century, balancing tenants of Pop Art and Conceptual Art while experimenting with the boundaries of photography, printmaking, and painting. In the 1960s and 1970s, Ruscha devoted his attention to unusual materials, frequently food and condiments including eggs and ketchup, spinach and carrot juice. Grass stain, mottled and aged over time, gives **An Invasion of Privacy** its unusual hue. Placing single words or whole phrases against nondescript backgrounds, Ruscha asks viewers to question how meaning functions and how individual memory and experience play a role in the act of interpretation. Anonymous and dramatic in capital block letters, the phrase is simultaneously arbitrary and saturated with meaning.

On view March 3 – June 6, 2021





Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937)

Wavy Robot, 1975

Gunpowder on paper

Private Collection; L2019:133.1

Discussing his “word” paintings and drawings, California artist Ed Ruscha says, “I like the idea of a word becoming a picture, almost leaving its body, then coming back and becoming a word again.” Ruscha’s prolific oeuvre explores a range of mediums within twentieth-century art. Central to his output is the interrogation of language. Beginning with his formative *Ribbon Word* series in the 1960s, Ruscha has explored the relationship between words and meaning in works on paper that blur the surreal with the conceptual. Each installment presents a word floating in ambiguous space, rendered in curvy script with the appearance of coiled ribbons. Ruscha accomplished the illusion with a unique *trompe l’oeil* (“fool the eye”) technique that employs gunpowder refined with water as an artistic medium. Like **Wavy Robot**, Ruscha’s word drawings expose language as a malleable object with an arbitrary relationship to the material world.

On view October 7 – October 25, 2020