



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)

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 – 25, 2020