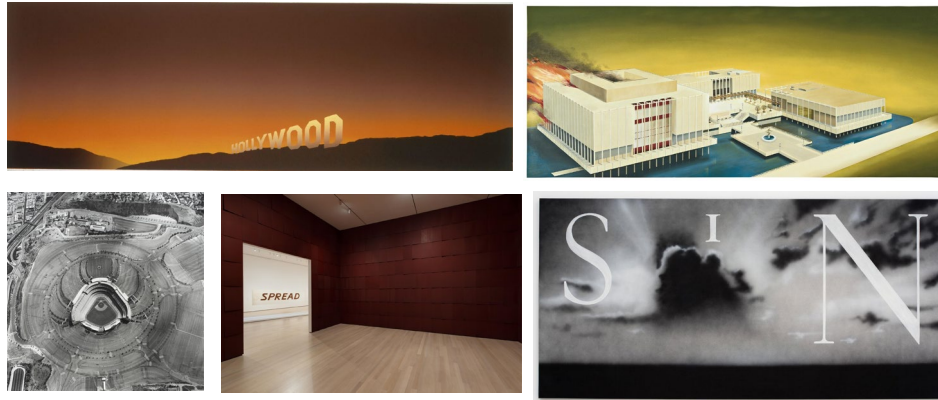


Exhibition: *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN*

Dates: April 7– October 6, 2024

Location: BCAM, Level 2



(Image captions on page 4)

(Los Angeles, CA—March 7, 2024) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN*, the artist’s first retrospective in over 20 years. Conceived in collaboration with Ed Ruscha (b. 1937), this comprehensive retrospective will present Ruscha’s remarkable career and extensive exploration of all media, including painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, and artist’s books. With over 250 works, the exhibition will feature his most acclaimed works alongside lesser-known aspects of his more than 60-year practice. This includes his early works on paper, his installations—such as the *Chocolate Room* and the *Course of Empire* series, as well as his photographic documentation of the streets of Los Angeles beginning in 1965.

Ruscha has consistently held up a mirror to American society by transforming some of its defining attributes—from consumer culture and popular entertainment to the ever-changing urban landscape—into the very subject of his art. In 1956, at the age of 18, Ruscha drove west from his hometown of Oklahoma City to Los Angeles to study commercial art at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts). There, his graphic design courses focused on precision and balance, while his fine art classes emphasized spontaneity and gesture. Ruscha would ultimately merge these two approaches in his own work by neatly ordering text and images within painted compositions.

“Ed Ruscha is a defining figure of postwar American art, and has drawn inspiration from Los Angeles for more than six decades,” said Michael Govan, LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director and exhibition co-curator. “This cross-media retrospective is the most comprehensive presentation to date, and

we are thrilled to share this show with audiences in Los Angeles, the artist's adopted hometown. The artist's sustained interest in language for its material form, sonic qualities, and cultural references, as well as his publication of artists' books, which traveled well beyond the boundaries of the art world, are among the many remarkable contributions that Ed has made to the art of his time."

*ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN* is organized by LACMA and The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, and co-organized by Christophe Cherix, the Robert Lehman Foundation Chief Curator of Drawings and Prints, MoMA and Michael Govan, CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director, LACMA. The LACMA presentation is supported by Rebecca Morse, Curator, Wallis Annenberg Photography Department, LACMA, and Deliasofia Zacarias, Executive Assistant & Director's Office Fellow, LACMA. Accompanying the exhibition is an in-depth and extensively illustrated catalogue, featuring original essays by Michael Govan and interdisciplinary scholars.

LACMA shares a long history with Ed Ruscha. Over the years, important examples of the artist's work have been added to the museum's holdings, including *Actual Size* (1962) and the artist's near-complete print archive, acquired in 2006. In total, the museum's permanent collection includes over 500 works by the artist. Ed Ruscha's work has also been featured in over a dozen group shows organized by LACMA. In 2012, Ed Ruscha was honored alongside filmmaker Stanley Kubrick the museum's Art+Film Gala, an annual event that honors a visual artist and a filmmaker for their artistic achievements.

### **Exhibition Organization**

Drawing from Ruscha's 1973 painting *Now Then As I Was About to Say*, the exhibition will provide a full picture of Ruscha's body of work. Organized chronologically, *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN* features more than 200 works from 1958 to the present.

A series of travels in the '50s and '60s sharpened Ruscha's attention to signage, architecture, and everyday objects. He began rendering single, outsized works in impasto, accentuating the shape of letters with thick layers of paint, including exclamations and slang, such as "oof" or "ace" and brand names, such as Spam. Ruscha's references to mass media and consumer culture aligned him with the burgeoning Pop art movement of the time. Ruscha's work in the mid-1960s took familiar subjects—single words, common objects, roadside architecture—and transformed them through novel compositions, such as the monumental 20th Century Fox production logo. Ruscha recreated the film studio's dynamic emblem on canvas. The image's dramatic diagonal composition—what he termed its "horizontal thrust" or "megaphone effect"—would become an integral pictorial device for the artist.

In the late '60s, Ruscha explored language as material and began experimenting with non-art substances like gunpowder and organic matter, including chocolate, water from the Pacific Ocean, and blood. Following this period of experimentation with unconventional materials, Ruscha returned in the mid-1970s to traditional mediums, including oil and pastel, to paint and draw prismatically colored backgrounds. Ruscha's use of language further evolved at this time. In place of single words, he began depicting longer strings of text that he pulled "from memory, sometimes from dreams, sometimes from listening to the radio."

In the mid-1980s, Ruscha's use of color and language became more restrained, using a limited palette reminiscent of black-and-white photography and celluloid film. Using acrylic paint applied with an airbrush, Ruscha made a series of "strokeless" pictures portraying subjects drawn from history and fantasy that functioned more as symbols than as specific representations.

Ruscha's more recent work, from the early 2000s to present day, includes a grouping of paintings created for the 2005 Venice Biennale called *Course of Empire*, named after Thomas Cole's 19th-century painting cycle that charted a fictional civilization's rise and fall, and new landscape-based motifs—soaring snow-capped mountain peaks—that became the background of his word paintings.

### **Exhibition Highlights**

In *Hollywood (1968)*, a work in LACMA's collection, the Hollywood sign is composed of billboard-size letters propped up on the horizon line. The extreme horizontal format is characteristic of Ruscha's work and is related to certain American styles of presentation, such as cinemascope and huge roadside poster boards, as well as being natural to the broad perspectives of the West Coast landscape.

Through the use of photography, Ruscha rendered Los Angeles's iconic architecture and locals in new and unusual ways. *Los Angeles County Museum Of Art on Fire (1965–68)* pictures the William Pereira buildings engulfed in flames and smoke. This oblique aerial perspective originated from a series of photographs made from a helicopter. A year later, Ruscha began documenting Los Angeles's Sunset Boulevard with a camera affixed to the bed of a pickup truck capturing both sides of a mile-and-a-half stretch, which culminated into *Every Building on the Sunset Strip (1966)*, an artist's book in the collection of LACMA's Balch Library. Ruscha published his book *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles (1967)*, which features aerial views of empty parking lots belonging to department stores, universities, and workplaces. Shot by photographer Art Alanis, they were printed by Ruscha in 1999 as 15 x 15 in. gelatin silver prints.

*Chocolate Room (1970/2023)* is Ruscha's only single-room installation, which he created for the United States Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1970. At the time,

Ruscha worked with a Venetian printshop to screenprint locally sourced chocolate paste onto hundreds of sheets of paper. Tiled from floor to ceiling like shingles, the sheets surrounded viewers with the rich color and sweet scent of chocolate. Because of the fragile and ephemeral nature of its materials, the installation is refabricated on-site by La Paloma Art Print studio in Los Angeles each time it is shown.

In *Sin/Without (1990)*, Ruscha embraces his method of converting pop culture imagery into cinematic and typographical codes. The painting displays a simple word, “sin,” on top of beams of sunlight shining through clouds. Ruscha breaks apart the word—which means “transgression” in English and “without” in Spanish—by changing the size of its compositional letters, thereby challenging preconceived assumptions regarding language. The work also alludes to clichés found in pop culture and the deterioration of vernacular language.

### Credit

*ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN* is co-organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Bank of America is the national sponsor of *ED RUSCHA / NOW THEN*



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Lead support provided by Jane and Marc Nathanson Family Foundation and Larry Gagosian.

Major support provided by Lenore S. and Bernard A. Greenberg Fund in memory of Dagny Corcoran, Lyn and Norman Lear, Peter Morton, and The Wattis Family.

Additional support provided by Fred and Laura Clarke, Contemporary Projects Endowment Fund, Tracy Lew, MaddocksBrown Foundation, Laura S. Maslon, and Sarah Meade.

All exhibitions at LACMA are underwritten by the LACMA Exhibition Fund. Major annual support is provided by The David & Meredith Kaplan Foundation, with generous annual funding from Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Mary and Daniel James, Justin Lubliner, Alfred E. Mann Charities, Kelsey Lee Offield, Koni and Geoff Rich, Maggie Tang, Lenore and Richard Wayne, and Marietta Wu and Thomas Yamamoto.

### About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of nearly 152,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with

artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 900036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

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