

Peder

Ed
Ruscha

L.A. Restaurants

June 11 - August 20, 2022

Lund

BARMAN BUILDING

La Dolce Vita

9785

La Dolce Vita





Ed Ruscha (1937-)
L.A. Restaurants
2019
4K mp4 video from Lumix GH4/GH5 cameras at 60fps
22 min. 16 sec.







Beginning Saturday, June 11, Peder Lund is delighted to present the film *L.A. Restaurants* (2019) by the American artist Ed Ruscha (1937-). A contemporary master and one of the most recognized and influential artists working today, Ruscha is widely celebrated for his pioneering use of myriad media, including conceptually driven artist's books, drawing, printmaking, photography, painting, and film. He has redefined our vision of American scenery through his landscapes and text-based works that explore the formal elements of printed text and its fluid relationship to the visual image. *L.A. Restaurants*, shown for the first time in Europe, continues Ruscha's interest in creating a kind of typological catalogue of the sites of Los Angeles, the city where the artist has lived since he was a young man. Ruscha's approach to documenting the gas stations and buildings on the Sunset Strip, first explored in his seminal artist's books of the 1960s, comes full circle - sixty-four restaurants emblematic of "Old Hollywood" across the LA region are lovingly immortalized on film. In honor of this summer exhibition, the gallery will hold extended hours each Thursday evening to maximize the film's cinematic and transportive effect.

Born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1937, Ruscha moved to Oklahoma City in 1941. In 1956, he relocated to Los Angeles, in a Jack Kerouac-style road trip along Route 66. In LA, he attended Chouinard Art Institute (1956-60) with the intention of becoming a commercial artist, taking both commercial and fine art classes. Like most art students in America at the time, Ruscha had a fling with Abstract Expressionism, but soon found himself attracted to the work of Jasper Johns, whose symmetrical aesthetics went against everything Ruscha had been taught in art school. Although for Ruscha, the lure of a possible career as an illustrator working for Walt Disney and the film industry was an equally great opportunity as the life of a painter, by the early 1960s, he had become well known for his paintings, collages, and printmaking, and for his association with the Ferus Gallery group, which also included the artists Robert Irwin, Edward Moses, Ken Price, and Edward Kienholz.

There exist numerous affinities and connections between Ruscha's art and both films and filmmaking. Hollywood was literally Ruscha's home for most of his early career; from 1958 to 1961 and again from 1965 to 1985, his studios were located in that neighborhood. Just as the era in





which Ruscha came of age was a critical one for L.A. visual art, it was also a vital, transitional time for the Hollywood film industry, when the “old guard” of the 1940s and 1950s began to give way to the “New Hollywood” of the late 1960s and 1970s. Ruscha forged his career in a city that was consumed, both culturally and economically, by these changes, and they considerably affected his life and livelihood as an artist. Although the evolution of the New Hollywood has been well chronicled, its connection to the Los Angeles visual arts community has been largely overlooked. Yet the worlds of Los Angeles visual art and New Hollywood filmmaking were, at times, quite closely related, and the experiments of the L.A. artistic avant-garde had a significant impact on the birth of New Hollywood film. Ruscha was a crucial participant in these developments, as both a practicing filmmaker and an observer of Hollywood culture through his art. Indeed, his work was intertwined with that of a number of members of the New Hollywood, most importantly the actor-director-artist Dennis Hopper, whose productions also bridged the art and film communities.

Long-time friends and interlocutors, Ruscha and Hopper may be seen as foils to each other: the former as a visual artist with close affiliations to the mainstream film industry, the latter as a Hollywood star with intimate ties to the Los Angeles avant-garde. Historically, there exist numerous links between the two artists. Not only were they part of the same artistic and social circle, but many of their principal subjects – the L.A. streetscape, its vernacular architecture, and popular signage – overlap considerably. Notably, Hopper's photograph *Double Standard* (1961) was reproduced on the announcement for Ruscha's first solo show at Ferus in 1964. That exhibition showcased Ruscha's *Standard Station* pictures, many of which depict gas stations along the legendary Route 66 (as did the photos in his 1963 book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*); Hopper's *Double Standard* shows a gas station near the terminus of Route 66 in L.A. Ruscha and Hopper's *Standard Station* images have since often been exhibited and published together.



Ruscha's relationship with Hopper stemmed in part from the fact that he himself has had a lifelong fascination with filmmaking. As a child growing up in Oklahoma, Ruscha was a movie buff, often seeing multiple films in one sitting, and was particularly taken with the storytelling aspect of the movies. (His love of film was not, however, what led to his coming to Los Angeles: the city that most arrested him on film was New York.) Upon arriving in Los Angeles in the late 1950s, he continued to frequent the cinema, his favorite being old Hollywood movies. However, Ruscha regularly consumed work by American and European avant-garde filmmakers, perhaps most importantly, films by Andy Warhol. Ruscha first met Warhol in New York in 1962, after having driven cross-country with artist and fellow Oklahoman Joe Goode, and he has recalled, "*Empire and Sleep* were profound statements to me ... genuinely landmark statements with film. [Warhol] was taking the whole aspect of film and [making] a right-hand turn with it.... [He was] doing something with this medium that was completely the antithesis of the way you're supposed to make a movie."¹

Ruscha was captivated by the beginnings of the widespread artist-filmmaking movement of the 1960s. It was not until several years later, however, that Ruscha tried his own hand at making films. His first effort, which was never released, was entitled *Books*: a forty-minute, 16mm, optical sound, color film featuring his friend and sometime collaborator, Mason Williams. He made his first fully realized film, *Premium*, based on his and Williams's 1969 book *Crackers*, in 1970. Ruscha's next film would come in 1975, with another narrative project entitled *Miracle*.

To a degree, Ruscha's films constitute isolated experiments within his larger oeuvre, but there exist important connections between his films and his two-dimensional works. In the most straightforward sense, *Premium* represents a live-action retelling of *Crackers*, which, like an old-fashioned flipbook, comprises a series of sequential photographs that together reveal a story. In its concern with motion, *Crackers* bears a close kinship to Ruscha's artist books, such as *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, which document the artist's movement along streets and highways. *Miracle* is thematically linked to other Ruscha's works, particularly in its preoccupation with L.A.'s car culture, but the artist has also drawn parallels between that film and many of his paintings and drawings.





TWENTYSIX GASOLINE STATIONS

In 1963, Ruscha published his first book, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*. Flipping it open, one finds the twenty-six gasoline stations the title promises – snapshot-style black-and-white photographs, labeled with the name of the station and its location. All the photographs were shot from some distance, and the stretches of road in the foreground of each imply that they were snapped from the highway itself. (Ruscha pulled over and stood beside his car to take each picture; as in most of his architectural books, he took these photographs “on the move,” and motion plays a central part in his depiction of this subject.)

In its plain appearance and banal yet mythic themes – the car, the road, the American vernacular landscape – it provided the prototype for many of Ruscha’s subsequent books. Of the eighteen books he made between 1963 and 1978, five – *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965), *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* (1966), *Thirtyfour Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967), *Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass* (1968), and *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970) – focus specifically on the built environment of Los Angeles and its environs. As in *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, the books’ subjects are succinctly indicated by their titles, and they share the same pared-down style, with typographical covers, spare layouts, snapshot-like photographs, and sparse captions.

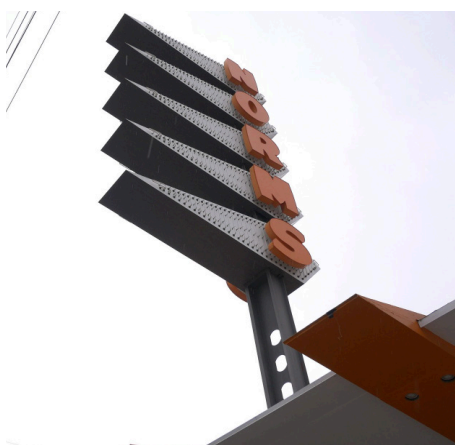
Like most of Ruscha’s books, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* was designed to convey the most objective, deadpan view of its subject. The artist mused in a 1965 interview, “I want absolutely neutral material [in my books]. My pictures are not that interesting, nor the subject matter. They are simply a collection of ‘facts.’”² He frequently expressed the hope that his books would remind viewers of training manuals for industrial or household machines and likened the images in them to industrial photography, explaining, “this is the camera’s eye, the closest delineation of [a] subject.”³ Insisting that he did not wish them to circulate as art objects in the traditional sense (expensive,

sold only in galleries, preserved in museums), he peddled his books for only a few dollars each and hoped that "regular people" rather than art collectors would buy them. He claimed to have no objection if, once sold, his books were read, traded among friends, and ultimately, as he put it in a 1972 interview, would "end up in the trash."⁴ He did not wish them to be perceived as beautiful or valuable (which they now, of course, are), or to convey a weighty meaning – or really any meaning. Ruscha's books constituted his great utopian experiment: a populist, accessible, disposable art form for the masses.



Since the early 1970s, Ruscha's books have most often been discussed as pioneering works of conceptual art. Although conceptualism did not come together as a codified "movement" until several years after the appearance of *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, such critics as Ursula Meyer, Lucy R. Lippard, and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh have persuasively argued this view. The books' prediction of and affinity with conceptualism ensured their status within the art world, where they developed a cult following and influenced the work of such contemporaneous artists as Dan Graham, Robert Smithson, and Bernd and Hilla Becher, as well as later photographers such as Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth.

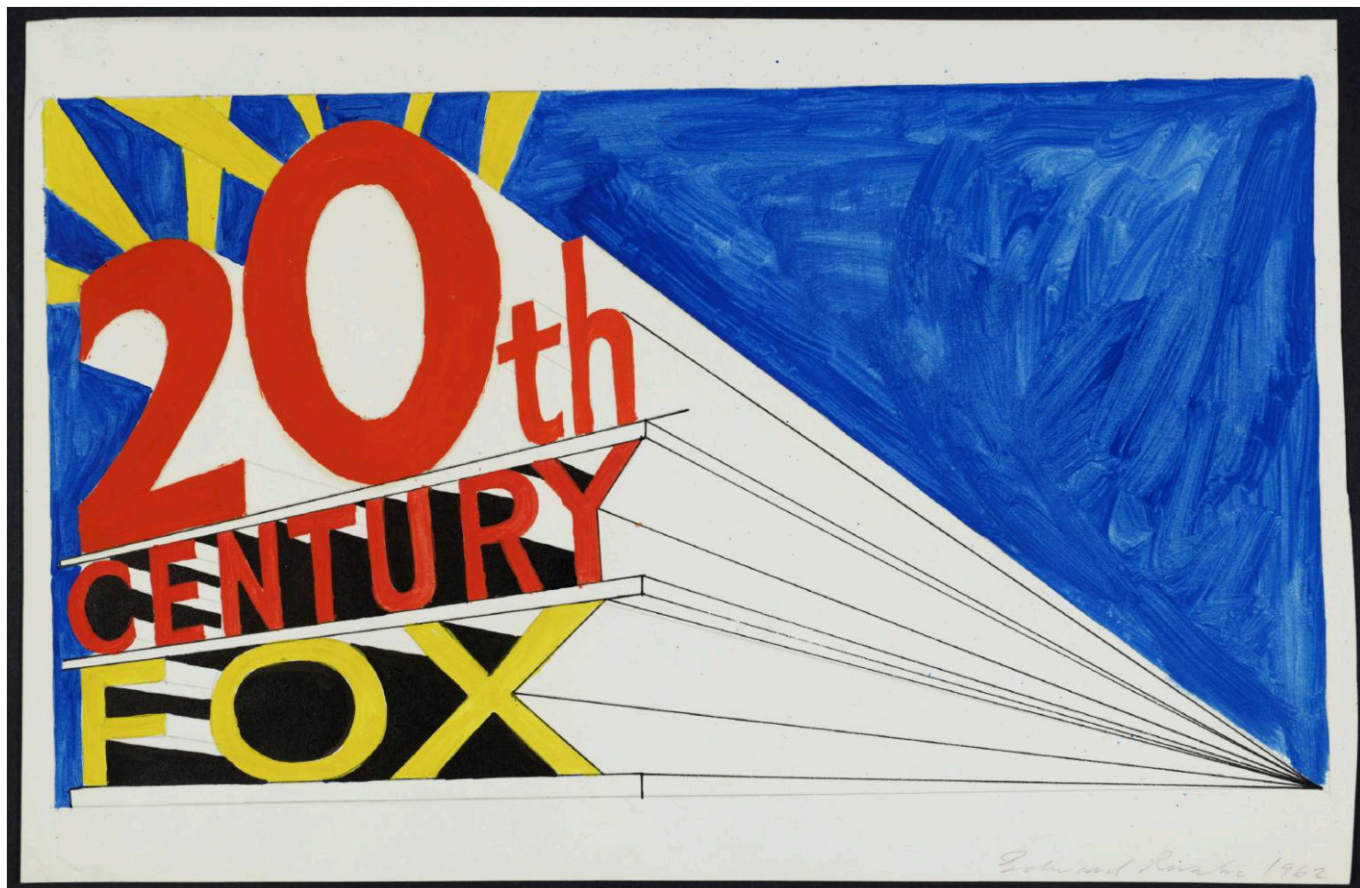
Ruscha has never identified himself as a conceptualist, having historically shunned such labels; instead, he actively cultivated the notion of the book's inscrutability and defiance of categorization. Nevertheless, he has always expressed interest in how the books are received by their audiences. Not surprisingly, they have been embraced by avant-garde architectural theorists, many of whom were greatly impressed by the books' original manner of representing L.A.'s urban fabric. Each of his architectural books could also be construed as a study of a vernacular, and distinctively Angelino, building type: gas stations, parking lots, apartment buildings, swimming pools. The architectural and urban theorists who interpreted Ruscha's books uncovered a crucial layer of their meaning, zeroing in on the books' depiction of Los Angeles's distinctive cityscape, and the problems and pleasures that this new mode of urbanism entailed.



Ruscha's *L.A. Restaurants*, presented at Peder Lund, is the apotheosis of so many undercurrents in the artist's oeuvre. It opens with a panned shot recorded while driving past Cole's P.E. Buffet in downtown Los Angeles, which was founded in 1908 and claims to be the oldest restaurant and bar in the city. The artist uses the moving image to "tune in" to the outside world, documenting sixty-four restaurants emblematic of "Old Hollywood" across the LA region. This visual perambulation moves in a spiral formation, from the outer limits of the San Fernando Valley along Ventura Boulevard to the centrally located restaurants near Culver City. A restaurant such as Norm's, which Ruscha dramatically painted on fire in 1964, is here captured from below, the roadside diner's iconic, architectonic sign backlit by a bland, smoggy sky.

Los Angeles is a crowded city known for its horizontal layout, as opposed to the vertical arrangement of major East Coast cities like New York. Despite its dramatic population increase, the city continues to sprawl outwards as opposed to upwards, refusing to abandon the nostalgia of the wide-open West. Although car culture had figured largely in L.A. life since the 1920s and a precursor to the freeway plan was developed in the 1930s, construction on the freeways as they currently exist did not begin until the late 1950s. Therefore, in the 1960s, the city's freeway network was still fairly new. Residents of L.A. at the time reported an exhilarating experience navigating the huge interchanges and over-passes and a kinesthetic sensation akin to a kind of high-speed game when driving across the city. Ruscha's *L.A. Restaurants* harkens back to the golden age of Los Angeles car culture, when stars like Frank Sinatra would arrange that his date for the evening's gown would match the paint job of the car they would be seen riding in. A kind of augmented commercial exchange occurred between the city-dweller and his car – it was at once a utilitarian tool, as well as a locus for creative expression. *L.A. Restaurants* gives a subtle nod to the air of possibility that imbues Los Angeles – the idea that one's dreams of stardom and wealth could be fulfilled just by taking a drive to your favorite restaurant.

L.A. Restaurants visually documents the suburban setting of Los Angeles and simultaneously reflects Ruscha's ongoing interests and process. The panning shots of well-known L.A. watering holes, 24-hour diners, and Hollywood haunts serve as visual metaphors for the



vastness of the modern-day, American West and depict the simple, boxy aesthetic in the facades of L.A. structures and the city layout – aspects highlighted in the paintings, drawings, and photography Ruscha has produced since he first moved to the West. There is a fantastic through-line from work such as Ruscha's project *Then and Now* (2005), where the artist produced two continuous panoramic views of the north and south sides of Hollywood Boulevard and then re-shot the street with the same type of camera equipment nearly 30 years later; a drawing such as *Trademark #5* (1962) in the collection of the Tate museum, whose dramatic diagonal thrust of the composition Ruscha has compared to the movement of a locomotive; and *L.A. Restaurants* from 2019 – all hint towards the inevitable, hopefully positive, progression of a great American city.

Ed Ruscha has had major exhibitions across the world, most recently at the Oklahoma Contemporary, Oklahoma City (2021); Blanton Museum of Art, Austin (2020); KODE Art Museums and Composer Homes, Bergen (2018); de Young Museum, San Francisco, organized by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco (2016); The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2013); Kunstmuseum Basel, Switzerland (2013); Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2012); and Tate Modern, London (2009), to mention only a few. His work is included in the world's most prestigious institutional collections, including Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. Ruscha represented the United States in the 51st Biennale di Venezia in 2005, and was featured in the 2015 Biennale de Lyon's exhibition, "La Vie Moderne." A publication dedicated to the artist's work in film is forthcoming. Ruscha lives and works in Los Angeles.

List of illustrations:

- 1 Portrait of Ed Ruscha.
- 2 Ed Ruscha, *L.A. Restaurants*, 2019 (still).
- 3 Dennis Hopper, *Double Standard*, 1961, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY.
- 4 Ed Ruscha, *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1963, Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
- 5 Dennis Hopper, *Ed Ruscha*, 1964.
- 6 Andy Warhol, *Sleep*, 1964 (still).
- 7 Andy Warhol, *Empire*, 1965 (still).
- 8 Ed Ruscha, *Miracle*, 1975 (still).
- 9 Ed Ruscha, *Premium*, 1971 (still)
- 10 Ed Ruscha, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, 1963 (cover).
- 11 Ed Ruscha, *L.A. Restaurants*, 2019 (still).
- 12 Ed Ruscha, *Norm's, La Cienega, on Fire*, 1964, The Broad, Los Angeles, CA.
- 13 Ed Ruscha, *L.A. Restaurants*, 2019 (still).
- 14 Ed Ruscha, *Trademark #5*, 1962, Tate collection, London, UK.
- 15 Ed Ruscha, *Then and Now*, 2005.
- 16 Ed Ruscha, *Then and Now*, 2005.

List of notes:

*Text excerpted from *Ed Ruscha's Los Angeles* by Alexandra Schwartz (MIT Press, 2010).

- 1 Ed Ruscha interview with Alexandra Schwartz, July 31, 2006.
- 2 John Coplans, "Concerning 'Various Small Fires': Edward Ruscha Discusses His Perplexing Publications," in *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, 26; originally published in *Artforum* 5 (February 1965)
- 3 A.D. Coleman, "'My Books End Up in the Trash,'" in *Leave Any Information at the Signal*, 49; originally published in the *New York Times*, August 27, 1972.
- 4 Ibid.