

PEDER LUND

ED RUSCHA - NEW WORKS ON PAPER

Peder Lund June 1 - September 9, 2017

- p. 3 Kåre Bulie, "Stemmen fra California," *D2*, June 1, 2017
- p. 8 Line Ulekleiv, "Filmatiske topper," *Klassekampen*, June 7, 2017
- p. 9 "Previewed," *Art Review*, Summer 2017

THE VOICE FROM CALIFORNIA

Ed Ruscha (79) is one of the world's most famous artists alive today. Set to unveil a new exhibition in Oslo, the artist himself compares his paintings to a traditional Southern dish.



Ed Ruscha
American artist born in 1937



Ed Ruscha has worked with a variety of media such as photographs, artist's books, films, paintings, drawings, and prints.

Regarded as one of the pioneers of American postwar art and is above all associated with the West Coast.

His books are considered conceptual classics, but his works also evince traces of Pop Art.

Ruscha has exhibited his art at several of the world's most prestigious museums.

He has turned up in movies and ads and is also a well-known figure in popular culture—in 2013, Time magazine listed him as one of their hundred most influential people in the world.

His exhibition *New Works on Paper* is currently being shown at Peder Lund in Oslo.

"I like to think of my work as a kind of gumbo," Ed Ruscha (79) says over the phone. "Do you know what gumbo is?"

Ruscha, one of the most celebrated artists of the postwar era, is sitting at his desk in his studio at home in Los Angeles. His voice sounds far younger than his age of seventy-nine years would suggest. For a whole hour, the American has held forth about such topics as the manner in which people see and read, his love for the shape of gas stations, and the "dollhouse" he constructed in order to determine how his exhibition in Oslo would look. It was upon being asked whether he had anything to add that he began talking about something as far removed from the world of art as gumbo, a traditional dish from the New Orleans area.

"It's a type of food where you mix all kinds of stuff together," he explains.

According to Wikipedia, gumbo can indeed be made from just about anything and is found in countless variants, with different families all adding their own twist.

"And my art is like gumbo," Ruscha continues. "It's been made from all types of stuff that join together in a picture. And I think that's just fine."

Intoxication

Ed Ruscha is currently opening an exhibition at Peder Lund at Tjuvholmen in Oslo. This entire spring, however, some of his pictures—of a gas station, of a word—have been on display at the National Gallery's exhibition of classical American prints. These pictures are typical of his work: for years, Ruscha has explored the relationship between image and text, and his works are rife with a type of anonymous architecture that was widely ignored in artistic circles when he began drawing attention to it.

Both the buildings and the snatches of text are intimately linked to the landscapes he has immortalized. At the age of eighteen—in the mid-1950s—Ruscha left his home state of Oklahoma, and he and a friend drove out to California together, an experience he says changed his life. A few years, after reading Jack Kerouac's famed beat novel *On the Road*—a book the adult Ruscha would later make his own version of—

he thought to himself that it was something like that he had had in mind when he embarked on his own road trip. “When it was time for me to leave home, I could really have done whatever I wanted to do. But I thought that maybe California could be the right place, because New York seemed cold, and California wasn’t cold.”

He laughs for a second.

“The place appealed to me. It was intoxicating. I felt that that’s where all the rainbows are—go there! So I visited the place, and it blinked and it sparkled. There was a vitality about it. I let it all in, and I’ve been living here ever since. I love and hate the place at the same time.”

He laughs again.

“But I don’t feel the need to leave it. It’s like a lifelong habit.”

Ruscha initially wanted to become a sign painter. He thought an art school was the most logical place to apply to. “But then I began to see things that were happening in the world of art, in photography, even in the world of movies. All of this was like a language I was waking up to. And then I met quite a few artists, and I realized that this was the thing for me.”

Signs would become an ever-recurring ingredient in his artistic output.

“I worked in the ad business for a while, doing layouts, but I didn’t really find it satisfying. I just wanted to go home at night and start painting. I could see that this wasn’t the way I wanted to live—I felt I had to spend all my time on art.”

Verticality

The place he moved to would prove uncommonly influential for Ruscha’s artistic universe. When asked about this, however, Ruscha begins to talk about the joy he experiences from going out into the desert east of Los Angeles, which he regards as a “sacred” place, and spending a week or two there, rather than about the streets that have informed his pictures.

“It’s a very faraway place, and wanting to live that way is part of how I’m made up. I’m very much on the same wavelength as the life that exists in the desert, as the plants and animals there. In Los Angeles we live in a desert anyway, it’s just that we’ve imported all this water and all these palm trees.”

Ruscha laughs once again. He begins talking about the many thousands of people who move to Los Angeles every single day and about all the space they need.

“Things are changing in the city. We’re on the verge of becoming vertical. There have always been buildings here with one, two, or three stories. Now they’re beginning to build skyscrapers. So there’ll be less sunshine and more shade here, and I’m not sure I like that.”

His musings are especially relevant because they come from an artist who for years has worked with the West Coast’s distinctive landscape of roads, parking lots, cars, and the gas stations that keep these cars going.

“My connection to architecture is entirely fundamental,” Ruscha explains. “Architecture is about boxes outfitted

with windows—it's about basic shapes. At any given time, when you open your eyes—no matter where you are—you see architecture. I began looking at architecture when I passed by gas stations.”

His first artist's book consists of twenty-six pictures of gas stations along the highway between California and Oklahoma. For a long while, Ruscha has even dreamed of being able to live in a gas station.

“Architecture is crucial for humanity. It is more direct than painting and sculpture. People live in architecture.”

He laughs.

“But I'm completely certain that I don't want to make architecture. I'd rather look at it than make it.”

The artist hasn't stopped driving, even though there is one important aspect that has changed.

“As a young man, I was interested in hot rod culture and what people did with their cars, how they souped them up and tinkered with them,” Ruscha says of the vehicle it's impossible to envision his art without. “I liked this culture, but I didn't like working on cars myself—the mechanical aspect of it all was not something I was ever interested in. But I still drive—I drive electric cars. When I was young, I always liked the sound of a gas engine. Now I really love the quiet of the electric car.”

Hair Blown Back

Ruscha becomes non-committal when asked about how the movie industry has shaped his work. The very location of his studio does give an indication, however.

“My studio is in Culver City, and Culver City came about because of the movie industry. So I've got film studios on all sides. But they are so private and out of sight that you don't know what's going on there.”

“The Hollywood sign, and the words and atmospheres from movies—they're all heavily present in your work, aren't they?”

“Well, I find myself exploring symbols of what Hollywood is all about, really. But it would be hard to see my exhibition in Oslo and say, ‘That was inspired by Hollywood.’”

Ruscha changes the subject.

“When I started out as an artist, I had no idea whatsoever that I could make a living from it. I only felt that this was fun, that I wanted to do it to have a good time. All my friends were artists and wanted to make art that blew your hair back—that would, in a way, speak to one another. Things are very different now, there are many more artists, many more galleries. It's accelerated almost out of control. There's plenty of activity, and people tell me that artists move to Los Angeles every day.”

“What do you think about that?”

“Well, I see that it's happening,” he says, before he goes on to talk about all the projects this has led to. After many years in the shadow of the East Coast, Los Angeles has now become a prominent art metropolis.

“But I think it’s hard to take part in this scene, because I’m always working when I’m here.”

“Can you say anything about your process as an artist?”

“I’ve always envied artists who do one thing and one thing only, whether it’s, say, painting, etching, or drawing. In a way, I’ve navigated between all of these isms and ways of doing things, and I can transition from one thing to something else. I can become exhausted from making paintings, and then I might perhaps rather do a book. So then I take a step to the side and do just that. And then I drift back to painting again. There is no grand strategy behind my way of thinking. I merely follow things spontaneously.”

The Bookman

The books he alluded to are particularly important for his place in art history. In the 1960s and 1970s, Ruscha published a series of small, inexpensive artist’s books that featured strikingly quotidian photographs of things he observed in his surroundings in his new hometown of Los Angeles, such as *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* or *Some Los Angeles Apartments*.

“When I went to art school, part of my training had to do with typography and printing, and from early on I became really interested in books and book design,” Ruscha recalls. “I learned how to handle a press and set metal type. I’ve always felt close to books and have made many books myself. I consider books to be an endangered species in today’s information society.”

Ruscha used both his own and others’ pictures in the detached, witty books he made as a young man. “I could see that some photographs were impossible for me to take—aerial photographs, for example—so I hired someone who did that sort of thing and who could fly over Los Angeles and take pictures of parking lots. I didn’t feel that it was terribly important that I had to push the shutter button myself—someone else could do that better than me.” Ruscha makes a comparison to filmmaking, where directors are routinely assisted by other people. Challenging Romantic notions of the artist’s role was typical of the nascent American conceptualism that Ruscha’s books were instrumental in furthering. Indeed, using photography at all in a work of art was by no means uncontroversial at the time.

“I saw that photography wasn’t regarded as an art form in the world of art,” Ruscha says.

“I felt that photography was missing out on something, and so I began taking pictures when I went to art school.”

A Lonely Occupation

When Ruscha talks about what he will be doing the rest of this particular day in May, he compares himself to a worker.

“An artist is in many ways an ordinary man, but one who has chosen a very lonely occupation,” he says. “We don’t work for anyone else. We trust in our own instincts and our own production.”

According to Ruscha, the process may be a painful and frustrating one, but it all works out in the end. “There’s a lot in my work that stems from my childhood and from ordinary thoughts and phrases. I feel that I make these things official by creating art about them. For instance, I recently made a piece called *Wen Out For Cigarettes N Never Came Back*.”

In addition to incorporating media elements in his pictures, Ruscha has made his own films. One of them is based on a story a friend of his wrote about a man who eats cookies. When Ruscha made this film, however, he felt like he had to spend half of his time on activities like writing checks and renting equipment.

"I haven't made a film in years, because it involved too much collaboration with other people," he explains. "I'm just not cut out for that."

Unlike many of his colleagues, Ruscha does most of his work himself—three part-time assistants provide all the help he needs. He still works in his studio almost every day, sometimes all the way into the wee hours.

"It's heavenly when I'm here all by myself, usually during the weekends," he says. "Just being here alone in the studio, amid the peace and quiet—that's not bad."

Negative Influences

When speaking with an American artist these days, politics is an unavoidable topic. Ruscha immediately declares that what has happened has led him into a "state of shock," even though he himself is not politically active, and adds that he hopes that the situation doesn't "spin out of control." In line with the field he usually works within, he compares the political situation to sitting in a stagecoach—the name of both a horse-drawn carriage and a classical western movie—that is hurtling straight toward Hell.

"I hope things turn around, but I don't see anything changing over the next four years."

"Will that affect your art?"

Ruscha chews on the answer.

"I don't know. My influences come from everything I see when I open my eyes. I'm sure that things will seep into my art that I don't even expect. Much of my art stems from things that come as a surprise to me, small things I read about in the paper or hear about on the radio."

Ruscha talks about being influenced by "what the world has to offer."

"Sometimes I say that what you need as an artist is a really negative influence. Something you can work against." He laughs briefly. "I mean, if we lived in meadows full of clovers and flowers, what would our art look like?"

At the exhibition in Oslo, Ruscha will be showing new works on paper. Does he want the audience to react in any particular way?

"I never predict what anyone will see when they come to one of my exhibitions," he replies. "The works spring forth from a host of irrational, bizarre, mystical sources. Trying to communicate with people is a mistake—thinking that you can do that. So in a way, I don't communicate. I don't even know who my audience is. All I know is that creating the work is the vital part of this process."

If people get something positive out of it, that's a good thing, Ruscha explains, before immediately adding:

"And if it makes them angry, well, that's also quite alright with me."

Cinematic Peaks

"Ed Ruscha: New Works on Paper"

Peder Lund

Tjuvholmen allé, Oslo,

Runs until September 9

Review

Art for the Information Age



PAINTED MOUNTAIN: Ed Ruscha continues his series of painted mountains. Here is his "Spied Upon Scene - One Liner".

Photo: ED RUSCHA, PEDER LUND

Nearly eighty years old, the American artist Ed Ruscha remains both active and interesting, and an exhibition of his new paintings on paper is currently being shown at Peder Lund. Running throughout all of his output is the leitmotif, scenically distilled, of Los Angeles as a fiction-driven city. Ruscha began his career as a commercial designer, though he soon made the jump to paintings, collages, and prints.

Ruscha has been associated with Pop Art, but it is in particular his slew of conceptual artist's books that have afforded him iconic status (not least *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* from 1963, featuring photographs of twenty-six gas stations, has proven influential). A recurring characteristic is his deft use of the urban buildings, signs, and ads that shape our surroundings and hence our concepts.

Peder Lund is showing nine new paintings, of which seven continue Ruscha's series of mountain imagery, initially from 1997, while two are so-called word paintings. When viewed from a distance, these painted mountaintops exhibit a photographic clarity, but upon closer inspection they seem more akin to Romantic paintings, featuring nuanced tones that play with clichés about subtlety.

At the same time, the paintings are audaciously well executed, and the emotive landscapes lay claim to being affective. But they are non-places—we see neither Galdhøpiggen [Norway's tallest mountain] nor the Alps, but rather the idea of a mountain landscape, and not least the idea of representing such a landscape. These painterly prototypes also allude to the symbols of the film industry, as the mountaintops may bring to mind the logo of Paramount Pictures.

The unspecified nature of these landscapes serves as the backdrop for short words, such as "yes" or "no." These words float inexplicably across the canvas or seem to whoosh their way across the mountain terrain at full speed. This is typical of Ruscha, who throughout his career has worked on the interactions and tensions between text and image. The context determines the message, which remains strangely and productively ambiguous. Ruscha treats these words as objects with an abstract form, with a non-existent size. The words are homeless and emphatically create an alienating effect that disrupts the unity of the illusion.

There is a consistency to Ruscha's oeuvre, one that he himself attributes to his origins as a sign painter and to his work on producing art for the Information Age. But in what sort of informational flow do we find ourselves now?

Line Ulekleiv

kunst@klassekampen.no

Previewed

Skulptur Projekte Münster
Various venues, Münster
through 1 October

Yokohama Triennale
Various venues, Yokohama
4 August – 5 November

Mondialité
Boghossian Foundation, Brussels
through 27 August

Ida Applebroog
Hauser & Wirth, London
through 29 July

Ed Ruscha
Peder Lund, Oslo
through 10 September

After the Fact
Lenbachhaus, Munich
through 17 September

Charlotte Prodger
Sculpture Center, New York
through 31 July

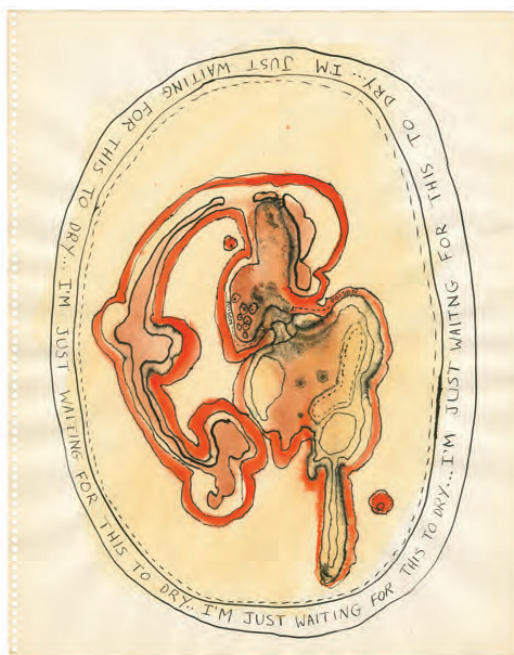
Kasia Fudakowski
Chert Lüdde, Berlin
through 17 June

Analia Saban
Praz-Delavallade, Paris
through 17 June

The Boat is Leaking. The Captain Lied.
Fondazione Prada, Venice
through 26 November



6 Coco Fusco, *A Room of One's Own: Women and Power in the New America*, 2008, performance. Photo: Eduardo Aparicio.
© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Courtesy the artist and Alexander Gray Associates, New York



4 Ida Applebroog, *Mercy Hospital*, 1969, ink and watercolour on paper, 36 × 28 cm. © the artist. Photo: Emily Poole. Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth, London



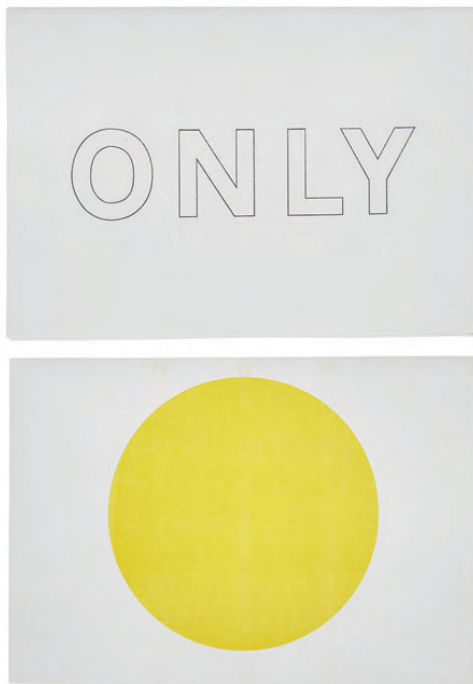
5 Ed Ruscha, *Spied Upon Scene – One Liner*, 2017. © the artist. Courtesy the artist; Gagosian, New York; and Peder Lund, Oslo

mansion home to the Boghossian Foundation that has formerly been a Soviet embassy, a TV-station HQ and a squat that hosted a Mike Kelley show, the organisers are presenting ‘artworks, environments, documentary film and songs, dramaturgical structures and archival material’ by artists including Etel Adnan, Steve McQueen, Alighiero Boetti, Raqs Media Collective, Simone Fattal and almost 20 others. Expect, too, a rolling live programme of ‘choreographic and discursive events’, which recently kicked off with a day of interviews – as one might expect from the ever-inquisitive Obrist – and performances.

4 **Ida Applebroog**, now eighty-seven, worked as an illustrator and jewellery-maker before turning to art, beginning in the late 1960s with drawings of her own genitals made with the help of a bathroom mirror before arriving, in her forties, at an almost cartoonish, thick-lined,

quotation-heavy aesthetic (she’s called herself an ‘image scavenger’) that couches a focus on human bodies and gendered power relations. Regularly, it’s the hard, affectless stances of her figures that underline the violence she’s pointing towards; the current show, *Mercy Hospital*, though, assumes we know all that, and digs into the archives. We’re whisked back towards the start, to 1969–70 and a disturbing suite of drawings, lesser known than her vaginal imagery (which Applebroog nevertheless didn’t show until 2009), of amputated breasts and psychedelic clusters of figures and bodily organs. Some of the latter spout lines of anxious, beseeching text (eg ‘hey, wait for me!’); the tension of the later work is all there, but literally embodied in the gut. In 1970 the artist was hospitalised for depression and you might almost guess it; these works, though, glow persistently, even in darkness.

When Applebroog made these drawings she was living in Southern California and her work involved language, but otherwise her art couldn’t have less in common with fellow SoCal resident **Ed Ruscha**’s analytic approach to word and image. Ruscha, eight years her junior and apparently tireless thanks to his laconism, still works on paper sometimes: see Peder Lund’s show of new works in the format. We might expect him to remain in the end-of-empire mode he’s assumed over the past decade or so, wherein (as in Ruscha’s show at this gallery five years ago) he’s been comparing Los Angeles now to how it was 50 years ago: a typically economical, compressive gambit that speaks eloquently about change and, implicitly, American decline. But, as usual, Ruscha – whose recent-ish London show was a frosty, text-driven meditation on scale, from the giant to the infinitesimal – appears to be dodging anticipations.



7 Charlotte Prodger, *Risograph for BRIDGIT*, 2016.
Photo: Kyle Knodell. Courtesy the artist; Hollybush Gardens,
London; and Koppe Astner, Glasgow



8 Kasia Fudakowski, *Cock Bait (11)*, 2017, stained and
waxed oak, painted steel, leather, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist and Chert Lüdde, Berlin

An advance image from this show, *Spied Upon Scene – One Liner* (2017), suggests he’s revisiting the mountain imagery he patented in the 90s, this time vignettted as if through a telescope and overlaid not by text but a ‘one-liner’ that is indeed a single slim horizontal line, conveying both abstraction and redaction. If, as seems likely, Ruscha is thinking about surveillance and secrecy right now – who isn’t? – then his characteristic fruitful obliqueness hasn’t deserted him.

Along with those dark arts of control, of course, there’s propaganda, the subject of *After the Fact* at Munich’s Lenbachhaus museum. This show and ‘events project’, though, isn’t a rollout of dusty old posters and re-screenings of Adam Curtis’s *The Century of the Self* (2002). (Though that influential tv series’ key figure, PR-man Edward Bernays, is mentioned pretty sharpish in the press text.) Featuring artists including Harun Farocki, Coco Fusco, Sean Snyder, Nancy Spero and Hannah Black, *After*

the Fact is a less doctrinaire, seemingly more hopeful look at how, in the face of ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts’ – and, generally, the way that news disseminated online blurs truth and fiction – propaganda might be reconsidered as a different kind of force, ‘an analytical framework that is as potentially problematic as it might be helpful’. If the art here doesn’t look like propaganda, maybe it’s just *extremely insidious* propaganda.

7 **Charlotte Prodger** has been a figure to watch for some years: now seems to be her moment. After an extended period of working primarily with old monitors and using loaded, found video and audio material – often re-deploying, with disconnected but associative voiceovers, special-interest and subcultural activity on YouTube, eg sportswear-fetish videos or footage of dogs being put into trances – the Bournemouth-born, Glasgow-based artist recently took a stylistic leap towards a more

mainstream format. It serves as a streamlining, a focusing: *BRIDGIT* (2016), a black-box projected-video installation, features discrete segments that each used up the memory on her iPhone: static shots of her trainer-clad feet in a tranquil domestic scene, hilly Scottish views that reference the Neolithic goddess called by many names including Bridget, disquisitions on the artist being mistaken for a man. As ever, fluidity of identity is at the work’s core, yet its own equivocation offsets any didacticism. At Sculpture Center, where the work is framed in terms of a Situationist *dérive*, *BRIDGIT* – note the title’s implicit pun – receives its US premiere.

8 Talking of divisions, visitors to **Kasia Fudakowski**’s show at Chert Lüdde are greeted with a choice and a restriction: enter the gallery via the left or right door, and don’t go in the other side. Once in one space, the show cleaves again. A series of wooden, wall-mounted sculptures are gendered either male or female, while a book