

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum of American Art

PRESS PREVIEW

Wednesday, June 23

10am-12pm

RSVP: (212) 570-3633

PRESS RELEASE

Contact:

Whitney Museum of American Art

Jan Rothschild, Stephen Soba, Meghan Bullock, Nathan Davis

(212) 570-3633

April 2004

FIRST RETROSPECTIVE OF ED RUSCHA'S DRAWINGS TO OPEN AT WHITNEY,
JUNE 24-SEPTEMBER 26, 2004

Long regarded as an American master, Ed Ruscha has redefined the way we see the urban landscape of Los Angeles, and, for that matter, the American landscape as a whole. ***Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha***, the first museum retrospective of Ruscha's drawings, highlights Ruscha's genius for the deadpan and wry juxtaposition of words and objects. Featuring more than 200 works from the past four decades, the exhibition is on view at the Whitney, June 24 through September 26, 2004, before traveling to Los Angeles and Washington, DC.

"No American artist has a more singular vision of the American landscape, especially the impassive iconography of the road, than Ruscha," notes Adam D. Weinberg, the Whitney's Alice Pratt Brown Director. "Often disconcerting in the way he links the verbal and the visual, Ruscha forces us to examine the place of words in our world and the strangeness of the ordinary, compelling us to look anew at the astonishing things we ignore on a daily basis."

The exhibition is curated by independent curator Margit Rowell, formerly a curator at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The title of the exhibition derives from a series of conversations Rowell had with Ruscha during the preparation of the show. Ruscha described his work by stating, "You know, it's just cotton puffs, *Q-tips*, smoke and mirrors." "Cotton puffs" and "*Q-tips*" swabs refer to the tools Ruscha often uses in creating his drawings, while "smoke and mirrors" can be seen as references to the illusionary quality of his work, as well as an allusion to photography. Ruscha has admitted that "seeing things photographically" has influenced the way he sees as an artist.

Rowell notes, "Ruscha's work includes paintings, photographs, prints, books and films, but his works on paper are perhaps his richest vein. Through his interpretation of cultural icons and vernacular subjects, such as the Hollywood sign, trademarks, and gas stations, as well as his renderings of words and phrases in countless stylistic variations, Ruscha proposes a modern landscape based on keen observation and wry humor."

The exhibition includes work created since the end of the 1950s, made with both manufactured and organic materials, such as gunpowder, blood, fruit and vegetable juices, grass stains, and over-the-counter pharmaceuticals, all applied with equally imaginative tools. Ruscha's

straightforward depiction of common objects has earned him a reputation as a Pop artist, yet his interest in and use of language have aligned him with Conceptualism. The words and phrases found in the drawings often give the impression that they were extracted from billboard advertisements or movie dialogues. Examples include *Standard* (1966), *City* (1967), and *Dirty Baby* (1977), among others, and they reflect pop culture and familiar phrases found in the vernacular of the fifties, sixties and seventies.

THE ARTIST

Born in 1937 in Omaha, Nebraska, and raised in Oklahoma City, Ruscha moved to Los Angeles in 1956. He attended the Chouinard Art Institute (now Cal Arts) until 1960, studying painting, photography and the graphic arts. In 1961, Ruscha embarked on a career as an artist and produced enigmatic paintings, drawings and photographic books of gasoline stations, apartment buildings, palm trees and vacant lots. Ruscha is now recognized as one of our most important and influential contemporary American artists.

A CONCURRENT SHOW OF RUSCHA'S PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE WHITNEY

An exhibition of Ruscha's photographs runs concurrently with the display of the artist's drawings. Organized to celebrate the Whitney's recent acquisition of a remarkable group of Ruscha's photographs, ***Ed Ruscha and Photography***, curated by Sylvia Wolf, the Whitney's Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, includes more than seventy original prints, many of which have never been published or exhibited before. The photographs will hang in the Anne and Joel Ehrenkranz Lobby Gallery on the first floor while the drawings are on view in the Peter Norton Family Galleries on the third floor; both shows run from June 24 to September 26, 2004, and will be on view to the press at the media preview on June 23, from 10 to 12 AM.

TOUR

After the Whitney, ***Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha*** travels to The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (October 17, 2004 – January 17, 2005) and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (February 13 – May 30, 2005).

PROGRAMS

On Thursday, June 24 at 7 pm, in conjunction with the exhibitions ***Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha*** and ***Ed Ruscha and Photography***, the museum presents An Evening with Ed Ruscha, in which the artist discusses his process, influences, and relationship to photography, drawing, and popular culture.

On Thursday, July 1 at 7 pm, in ***Ruscha/Baldessari/Rauschenberg: The Artist and his Films***, Whitney curator Chrissie Iles highlights Ed Ruscha, John Baldessari, and Robert Rauschenberg and their films of the late 1960s and early 1970s with screenings of Ruscha's *Miracle* (1975) and *Premium* (1970), Baldessari's *Police Drawing* (1971), and Rauschenberg's *Linoleum* (1966).

SPONSORSHIP

Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha has been made possible by support from The Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation and the National Committee of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

CATALOGUE

Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha, published to accompany Ruscha's first museum retrospective of drawings, showcases his singular vision and his wide range of highly personal media and techniques. ***Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha*** includes essays by Margit Rowell and Cornelia Butler, curator at The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. With 251 illustrations, 204 in full color, the 260-page catalogue, will be published in June 2004 by the Whitney Museum of American Art and distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and Steidl.

WHITNEY HOLDINGS AND EXHIBITIONS

The Whitney first exhibited Ed Ruscha's work in the 1967 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Painting. The Museum has since collected his art and exhibited it in several group exhibitions, and in 1982, the Whitney was the New York venue for an SFMoMA retrospective. In addition to a major acquisition of 456 of the artist's original photographic works, the Whitney also has in its collection three major paintings, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights (1962)*, *The Act of Letting a Person into Your Home (1983)*, and *Hollywood to Pico (1998)*, two portfolios of prints, six individual prints, and three drawings.

ABOUT THE WHITNEY MUSEUM

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20th- and 21st-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is regarded as the preeminent collection of American art and includes the entire artistic estate of Edward Hopper, the largest public collection of works by Alexander Calder, Louise Nevelson, and Lucas Samaras, as well as significant works by Jasper Johns, Donald Judd, Agnes Martin, Bruce Nauman, Georgia O'Keeffe, Claes Oldenburg, Kiki Smith, and Andy Warhol, among other artists. With its history of exhibiting the most promising and influential American artists and provoking intense critical and public debate, the Whitney's signature show, the Biennial, has become a measure of the state of contemporary art in America today.

Q-tips is a registered trademark of Chesebrough-Pond's Inc..