

WHITNEY

Whitney Museum of American Art

PRESS RELEASE

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WHITNEY ANNOUNCES MAJOR ACQUISITION OF ED RUSCHA PHOTOGRAPHS

NEW YORK, NY – March 5, 2004 – Adam D. Weinberg, Alice Pratt Brown Director, today announced that the Whitney Museum of American Art has acquired a major body of original photographic works from American artist Ed Ruscha through the generosity of The Leonard and Evelyn Lauder Foundation, with additional support from Tom and Diane Tuft, and through a significant gift of unique early works from the artist. This acquisition of 456 objects makes the Whitney the principal repository of Ruscha's photographic works and an essential resource for the study and appreciation of the art of Ruscha, a key figure in American Conceptual art and a significant influence on international artists in all media for over forty years.

Sylvia Wolf, Sondra Gilman Curator of Photography, who initiated the acquisition, remarked, "Ed Ruscha's books are among the most original achievements in the art of the 1960s and 1970s, and are the photographic works he is most known for. There have, however, been pictures tucked away in boxes in his studio and photographs that are unpublished or rarely seen, which shed light on Ruscha's career as a whole."

The Acquisition

The Whitney acquisition of 456 objects represents all facets of Ruscha's photographic work. Mr. Weinberg remarked, "In the scope and rarity of the material, this acquisition is unparalleled. It exemplifies the Whitney's goal to acquire defining works by contemporary American artists." Included are original prints from his photographic books *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963); *Various Small Fires and Milk* (1964); *Some Los Angeles Apartments* (1965); *Thirty-Four Parking Lots in Los Angeles* (1967); *Royal Road Test* (1967); *Babycakes with Weights* (1970) and *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970). Also in this acquisition are several photographs Ruscha never published, in particular 16 images from *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1963) that were not included in the book.

In addition, the acquisition contains over 300 unique vintage photographs from a seven-month tour of Europe in 1961. Photographs from Austria, England, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, and Yugoslavia feature many motifs and stylistic elements that have marked Ruscha's work over the past 40 years, in particular his interest in typography and signage, and his strong graphic sensibility. They also show him experimenting with the camera. Ms. Wolf observes, "The lack of self-consciousness and intense curiosity reflected in these early photographs makes them both refreshing and revelatory of a fertile time in a young artist's career. Ruscha's use of photography would later develop into a systematic inquiry with clarity of purpose, but during his months in Europe his pictures suggest spontaneity, playfulness, and a pure delight in seeing."

The Whitney is planning a publication of works from this acquisition and an exhibition to open on June 24, 2004, concurrent with a landmark exhibition of Ruscha's drawings that is being organized by the Whitney. The acquisition is a partial purchase from and partial donation by the artist.

The Artist

Born in 1937 in Omaha, Nebraska, and raised in Oklahoma City, Ruscha moved to Los Angeles when he was 18. He attended the Chouinard Art Institute until 1960, before working briefly in commercial advertising. 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, vacant lots, and Los Angeles's famous "Hollywood" sign. His works were often drawn from photographs of mundane subjects shot from a distance. The irony and objective stance of his works from this period placed him in the context of Pop art and Conceptualism, but Ruscha consistently defies categorization. Now 66, Ruscha is recognized as one of our most important and influential contemporary American artists.

Ruscha's photographic books of the 1960s and 1970s have come to embody the Conceptualists's embrace of serial imaging and photographic documentation. The books have also had an impact on the art and careers of many American artists, including Lewis Baltz, Dan Graham, and Robert Venturi. German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher enthusiastically presented Ruscha's work to their students, including Thomas Struth and Andreas Gursky, whose own work incorporates a similar dry documentary aesthetic. And Canadian artist Jeff Wall has called Ruscha the "American Everyman." Ruscha, in turn, identifies photographers Walker Evans and Robert Frank as influential to his art.

Whitney Holdings and Exhibitions

The Whitney first exhibited Ed Ruscha's work in the 1967 Annual Exhibition of Contemporary Painting. It has since collected his art and exhibited it in several group exhibitions. In 1982, the Whitney was the New York venue for an SFMoMA retrospective. Among the Whitney's holdings are two master paintings, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights* (1962) and *Hollywood to Pico* (1998), two portfolios of prints, eight individual prints, and three drawings. This initiative extends a vigorous program of acquisitions in contemporary photography that began with the formation of the Photography Collection Committee in 1991.

The Whitney Museum of American Art is the leading advocate of 20th and 21st-century American art. Founded in 1930, the Museum is widely regarded as the preeminent collection of 20th-century 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 Arshile Gorky, 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.

About the Whitney

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Current and Upcoming Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art:

New Additions: Prints Through April 2004
Inside Out: Portrait Photographs Through May 23, 2004
2004 Biennial March 11-May 30, 2004

The museum is located at 945 Madison Avenue, New York City. Museum hours are: Wednesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday from 1 p.m. to 9 p.m., closed Monday and Tuesday. For information, please call 1-800 WHITNEY or visit www.whitney.org.

Current Exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of American Art at Altria:
Luis Gispert Through March 12, 2004
Architecture by Numbers March 25-July 2, 2004