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Archives of American Art

Oral history interview with Edward Ruscha

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Archives of American Art
750 9th Street, NW
Victor Building, Suite 2200
Washington, D.C. 20001
<https://www.aaa.si.edu/services/questions>
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	Oral history interview with Edward Ruscha
Identifier:	AAA.ruscha80
Date:	1980 October 29-1981 October 2
Creator:	Ruscha, Edward (Interviewee) Karlstrom, Paul J. (Interviewer)
Extent:	128 Pages (Transcript)
Language:	English .
Digital Content:	Digital Content: Oral history interview with Edward Ruscha, 1980 October 29-1981 October 2, Transcript Audio: Oral history interview with Edward Ruscha, 1980 October 29-1981 October 2, Digital Sound Recording (Excerpt)

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

These interviews are part of the Archives' Oral History Program, started in 1958 to document the history of the visual arts in the United States, primarily through interviews with artists, historians, dealers, critics and others.

Biographical / Historical

Edward Ruscha (1937-) is a painter from Los Angeles, Calif.

Scope and Contents

An interview of Edward Ruscha conducted 1980 October 29-1981 October 2, by Paul Karlstrom, for the Archives of American Art.

Scope and Contents

Ruscha speaks of his strong Catholic upbringing; his move to Oklahoma in 1941; schooling; early interest in art, encouraged by his mother; interest in cartoons; initial art lessons with Richard Getz, Oklahoma City are unsuccessful; discussion on cartoonists; visits his sister in Mexico City in high school, first introduction to a cosmopolitan city and to modern architecture; moves to Los Angeles in 1956; enrolls in Chouinard Art Institute; the influence of Robert Irwin as professor of life drawing; his change and growth in attitude and lifestyle while at Chouinard; apprentices at Plantin Press and becomes interested in book printing; influence of John Altoon; his interest in the work of Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Jasper Johns, and Robert

Rauchenberg; after art school he visits New York and Europe in 1961; feels that in the 1960s art was burgeoning in America; his meeting in New York with Leo Castelli and Ivan Karp, shows them first of his serious work; is shown, and is impressed by, Roy Lichtenstein's early Pop Art; his feelings about the new museum of contemporary art in Los Angeles and his return there; the first Pop Art exhibition, "New Painting of Common Objects," at the Pasadena Museum; develops contacts with the Ferus Group; a solo exhibit at Ferus in 1963; Ruscha considered part of initial Pop Art scene; the importance of subject matter and the serial image in Pop Art.

Scope and Contents

He discusses Pop Art's place in art history; his initial feelings about being considered a Pop artist; the influence of Los Angeles and its environment on his work; his feelings about English awareness of America; a discussion of his use of words as images; a discussion of the Standard Station as an American icon; a discussion of the notion of freedom as it is perceived as a Southern California phenomenon; how he sees himself in relation to the Los Angeles mural movement (L.A. Fine Arts Squad); the importance of communication to him; his relationship with the entertainment world in Los Angeles and its misinterpretation of him; his books; collaboration with Mason Williams on "Crackers;" his approach toward conceiving an idea for paintings; personal feelings about the books that he has done; the importance of motion in his work; a discussion of the movies "Miracle" and "Premium;" his friendship with Joe Goode; his return from Europe and his studio in Glassell Park; his move to Hollywood in 1965; the problems of balancing the domestic life and the artistic life; his stain paintings and what he hopes to learn from using stains; a discussion of bicentennial exhibition at the L.A. County Museum: "Art in Los Angeles: Seventeen Artists in the Sixties," 1981; a discussion of the origin of L.A. Pop as an off shoot from the American realist tradition; his feelings about being considered a realist; the importance for him of elevating humble objects onto the canvas; a discussion on how he chooses the words he uses in his paintings; and his feelings about the future direction of his work. Ruscha also recalls Bob Bonaparte, Mason Williams, Munro Leaf, Norman Rockwell, Basil Wolverton, Robert Crumb, David Hockney, Jerry McMillan, Pat Blackwell, Don Graham, Bud Coleman, Emerson Woelffer, Herbert Jepson, Richards Rubin, Billy Al Bengston, Larry Bell, Leo Monahan, Ed Keinholz, Aaron Cohen, Saul Marks, Jack Kerouac, Wally Berman, George Herms, Clyfford Still, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Kenneth Price, Peter Voulkos, Renato Bertelli, Guillaume Apollinaire, Pablo Picasso, Francis Picabia, Stuart Davis, John Sloan, Andrew Wyeth, Winslow Homer, Charles Sheeler, Walker Evans, Johannes Baargeld [Alfred Grünwald], Walter Hopps, Pontus Hulten, Henry Hopkins, Ronny Miyashiro, Eddie Bereal, Henry Geldzahler, Craig Kauffman, Ed Moses, Irving Blum, Jan Stussy, Andy Warhol, Phillip Hefferton, Richard Hamilton, Wayne Thiebaud, John Coplans, Jack Quinn, Nick Wilder, De Wain Valentine, Candy Clark, Laddie John Dill, Martial Raysse, Peter Alexander, Norman Zammitt, Ron Davis, H.C. Westermann, Claes Oldeburg, and Frank Zappa.

General

Originally recorded on 9 sound cassettes. Reformatted in 2010 as 17 digital wav files. Duration is 8 hr., 16 min.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Painters -- California -- Los Angeles -- Interviews
Pop art

Types of Materials:

Interviews

Sound recordings