

Ed Ruscha



Biography

Edward Ruscha is perhaps best recognized for his *Hurting the Word Radio #2* (1964) which Jeff Bezos purchased in 2019 for a record-breaking \$52.5 million.

Born in 1937 in Omaha, Nebraska, and raised in Oklahoma City, his interest in art was nurtured by a neighbor who was a cartoonist. After studying art, he developed an interest in the Dada movement and in the commercial printing process. In 1956, he took Route 66 to California, which would become a central part of his story as an artist. After settling in Los Angeles, he studied art at what is now California Institute of the Arts and took a job as a commercial illustrator, working for ad agencies, honing his skills in schematic design and considering questions of scale, abstraction, and viewpoint, which became integral to his painting and photography.

Ruscha describes a pivotal point in his career, when he came across a reproduction of Jasper Johns's *Target with Four Faces* (1955). Fascinated by Johns's use of readymade images, Ruscha began experimenting with the use of graphics to explore painting's identity as both an object and an illusion. Words and the ever-changing nature of language is central to Ruscha's work. He often

repeats the same phrase or word in artworks over many years. Often, his words and phrases have a vernacular, familiar tone but are juxtaposed with an unfamiliar reference. The phrases he incorporates into his language are frequently coupled with landscapes of the American west. His words appear on road signs, buildings, mountains, and across open skies and horizons. In early photographic work, Ruscha created documentary images and books full of swimming pools, parking lots, buildings on Sunset Boulevard, gas stations, and many other features of L.A. life.

In 2004, the Whitney Museum of American Art held the first Ruscha retrospective. The next year, Ruscha represented the United States at the 51st Venice Biennale (in Italy) with an installation of ten paintings. In 2016, he was the subject of a sprawling exhibition at the de Young Museum in San Francisco, titled "Ed Ruscha and the Great American West," which included 99 works that dealt with America's captivity with the western landscape and manifest destiny.

Through his innovative approach to painting, drawing, and photography, Ruscha has influenced artists worldwide and is considered one of the most influential figures in contemporary art today.

Market

After his premier at the Venice Biennale in 2005 and other blockbuster shows, Ruscha's market experienced an astronomical rise. In November 2014, *Smash* (1963), quite literally, smashed all previous records, selling for \$30.4 million, blasting past its pre-sale estimate of \$15 million to \$20 million. *Smash* marked the beginning of Ruscha as a worthy market rival to his contemporaries Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol. In 2019, Ruscha garnered even more attention from the press when Jeff Bezos purchased *Hurting the Word Radio #2* (1964) at Christie's for a record-breaking \$52.5 million.

Between 2007 and 2021, 207 of Ruscha's paintings sold for \$325 million. In the same period, the value of these artworks increased at a compound annual growth rate of 14.6% annually, according to Athena's analysis.

Career Highlights

Solo Shows at Major Institutions
Centre Pompidou, Whitney Museum of American Art, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and more.

Group Shows at Major Institutions
MoMA, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, Kunstmuseum Basel, Dallas Museum of Art, and more.

Collected by Major Institutions
The National Gallery of Art (Washington D.C.), Glenstone, Tate Modern, and more.

Included in a Major Biennials
The Venice Biennale International Exhibition & National Pavillion, documenta, and more.

Selected Works



Hurting the Word Radio #2, 1964, Collection of Jeff Bezos.



Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights, 1964, Collection of the Whitney Museum of American Art.



Faster Than A Speeding Beanstalk, 1986, Collection of Museum of Contemporary Art Los Angeles

Market Snapshot

