

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

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Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Getty acquires Ed Ruscha photos -- some famous, some hidden

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The Getty Museum and Getty Research Institute have acquired two troves of photographs by Ed Ruscha that the Getty says will make its Brentwood campus a key repository for viewers and scholars to consider how photography -- much of it showing grittier L.A. precincts -- has fed the artist's *oeuvre*.

"I am humbled and elated to have my work go to the top of the hill," Ruscha said in a statement released by the Getty.

The museum, which previously had no Ruscha photographs, bought 74 prints and two contact sheets from Gagosian Gallery for an undisclosed price; many of those images are street-level or overhead views of Los Angeles that Ruscha incorporated in a series of books he self-published starting in 1962. Some of the shots became source material for signature Ruscha paintings, including his renderings of a Standard gas station in Amarillo, Texas (photograph pictured), and three mid-1960s Polaroids of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art that became studies for his iconic "The Los Angeles County Museum on Fire."

The other acquisition is Ruscha's personal archive, "The Streets of Los Angeles," which the Getty Research Institute will house. The Getty paid the artist for materials relating to Ruscha's 1966 book, "Every Building on the Sunset Strip," which is considered a breakthrough -- and a sort of precursor of the Google Maps "Street View" feature -- because the pictures were drive-by images, shot with an automatic camera mounted in the bed of a moving pickup truck.

Ruscha has continued to photograph L.A.'s streets and is donating more recent unpublished prints, negatives and film reels to the Getty.



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The archive spans more than 40 years. Thomas Gaetgens, director of the research institute, said its contents are “virtually unknown” and open “entirely new avenues for scholarship” of both Ruscha’s art and the evolution of L.A.’s urban landscape.

Some of the photographs will be displayed in the spring of 2013 in two planned concurrent shows at the Getty Museum -- one a broader survey, “Los Angeles Architecture, 1940 to 1990,” and the other focusing more narrowly on Ruscha’s photography.

The Los Angeles County Museum of Art owns a 30-picture set of Ruscha photographs from 1967, “Parking Lots,” and the Museum of Contemporary Art has 10 prints from his 1962 series on gas stations, according to their online collection archives.

-- Mike Boehm

Photos: Ed Ruscha's "Standard, Amarillo, Texas" from 1962; Ed Ruscha in 2011. Credits: Ed Ruscha / J. Paul Getty Museum; Jay L. Clendenin / Los Angeles Times