

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Los Angeles Times



Culture Monster

ALL THE ARTS, ALL THE TIME

Art review: Ed Ruscha at Gagosian Gallery

March 10, 2011 | 5:45 pm

Nine of Ed Ruscha's 10 new paintings at Gagosian Gallery don't look like anything he has made over his prolific, 50-year career. The single canvas that most closely resembles any of the 73-year-old's previous works — a panoramic image of snow-capped mountains rising up behind a crumpled Bud Lite beer carton — lacks the uncanny magic that is Ruscha's trademark.



This paradox goes to the heart of his art, which is all about stripped-down simplicity, intangible atmosphere and the tendency for appearances to deceive yet still tell the truth.

Ruscha specializes in Minimalist enigmas,

humble conundrums both frustrating and fascinating. Think of his works as the visual equivalent of those maddening moments when speech comes up short and all you are able to say is that a word got stuck on the tip of your tongue — where it remains out of reach.

The nine knockout paintings in "Psycho Spaghetti Westerns" are long horizontals: 9-, 10- and 11-foot-long canvases that depict roadside trash. In most, the horizon line is low, often angled at a steep pitch. Tire treads, plastic bottles, cardboard boxes, mattresses and broken signs perch perfectly on the border between earth and sky.

Strict Realism gives way to loose drama. The horizons seem to list, like sea-going vessels in distress. Strange tales spin free as the various bits of litter seem to teeter-totter, their weight and volume driving home the point that these unresolved compositions are part of unsolved mysteries.

456 NORTH CAMDEN DRIVE BEVERLY HILLS CA 90210 T. 310.271.9400 F. 310.271.9420

LOSANGELES@GAGOSIAN.COM WWW.GAGOSIAN.COM

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

One of Ruscha's favorite tricks is to make things so obvious that viewers don't notice them. That happens in this quietly confounding series of extremely abbreviated landscapes when Realism comes back into focus.

The world only looks like it does in these paintings when you're flat on your face on the side of the road, too weary or knocked out of your senses to raise your head to get a level perspective.

That's a lot to take in, especially at a show that's as attractive as this one. Ruscha makes it work by not forcing the issue and leaving everything to the power of suggestion.

-- David Pagel

Gagosian Gallery, 456 N. Camden Drive, Beverly Hills, (310) 271-9400, through April 9. Closed Sundays and Mondays. www.gagosian.com.

Image: Ed Ruscha, "Psycho Spaghetti Western #5." Credit: From Gagosian Gallery.