

CRASH  
Summer 2015

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

CRASH

# ON EXPERIMENT

by ed ruscha

INTERVIEW BY  
YAN CEEH

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ED RUSCHA: PRINTS  
AND PHOTOGRAPHS  
From March 12 to May 7, 2015.  
Gagosian Gallery, Paris

ED RUSCHA: BOOKS & CO.  
From March 12 to May 7, 2015.  
Gagosian Gallery, Paris



PHOTO BY GARY FROEGLER



**Do you think painting is still an interesting medium?**

I do. Nowadays, a lot of people say that everything has been done. I don't think it's true at all. All you have to do is look at what the artists are doing today. They're making paintings on rigid formats, rectangles, flat panels - like they always have. Like they did in the Renaissance. But they're still managing to make new imagery...

**What's your process when making a new painting today?**

I go to my studio every day. Sometimes I make no art. I just go to my studio, and I walk, from here to there, and to there, and to there... And I'm thinking... Then I go into an idea, and from that idea, to a drawing, a painting, something... The unknown is one facet of being an artist that has the most to offer to me. **Not knowing what's going to happen, what's in the future. I have always felt that way.** I have always wondered what direction I will take at some point in the future, or how will my future unfold itself. That is one thing I'm baffled by but also committed to. I have no plans. I'm most fascinated by that one idea of the things that are undone now, will be done in five years'time. Making art is a kind of curious individual enterprise. It all depends on me and not somebody else. I can't get fired from the job. I've felt like firing myself, but I know I am helpless.

**Are you listening to music when you're working?**

Sometimes. But I never know how much it takes me to do things. Sometimes I work on four things at once. I have no strategy. I've always felt like the number one rule is that there is no rule.

Well. I listen to rhythm & blues, and music from the Fifties... Doo wop music and also some Country Western music, and jazz... I like Country and Western songs mostly. I like music because there are thought patterns that those people put into their music. It is music but it is also words, and I'm involved in words, too. I guess they're artists on the same plan as I am, but in some funny way they're very distant from me. But close enough to me that I'm intrigued by it, and I'm also influenced by it. I find that some the musicians are making a more cohesive statement to me than many artists do, even artists who I admire. I think that some of the musicians are bridging many gaps that I'd like to see myself bridge. For that reason, music interests me. Frank Zappa will use some Tin Pan Alley music for few seconds to make a certain statement, whereas I don't go back and borrow things from the past like that. But musicians go back and use all kinds of things through history to make their statement cohesive...

**What about the Talking Heads? They did a record with one of your painting as cover and title – "Sand In the Vaseline", and it was a great hit.**

Right. I knew David Byrne. He takes photographs, I don't think he paints. He's doing art. He liked this painting and just asked me if he could use it. In the music business, they're not usually interested in understanding your art, they just want a picture to put on top of a record... So when Byrne asked me about "Sand In The Vaseline" I said they just couldn't write things on top of it, so they put things around it... (laughs)

**But they have respected the work.**

Yes, they have. Another person who is a movie director and has a very good eye, like Byrne, is Wim Wenders. He's a pretty good photographer...

**Can you tell us about the words you've been painting for so long now?**

Well... Some are found like this, readymade, some are dreams, some come from newspapers. I like to say they are finished by blind faith. My mind seems to wrap itself around that thing until it's done. It's strange and I don't know what motivates me. Each of the works is premeditated. I keep notebooks. The initial ideas are written out. I don't draw them, I just stage them onto canvas. I never stand in front of a blank canvas waiting for inspiration.

**Do you buy art?**

Sometimes. I sometimes trade for art too. Sometimes I buy photographs. A few years ago, I bought some pictures of Hiroshi Sugimoto. I have bought some photographs of the series about the movie theatres. I like the concept of what he did with the movie theatres: put a camera in an empty theatre and play the movie all through, the entire movie...

**Do you like William Eggleston?**

Of course, he's very good, I like him a lot... And Stephen Shore also. I really like his work too. Great pictures.

**There's a connection with your work in the pictures of Shore and Eggleston...**

Yes, completely... Talking about collecting, I collect books. I like books a lot. So many books. It's impossible to keep up with books... Novels, essays, pictures...

**There are also a lot of books about your work now. You're even on TV shows. I remember seeing you in a show on E! Television, talking about Lauren Hutton...**

Yes! (laughs). She's an old friend. She's a wonderful person. I'm lucky to know her, and when they asked me, I just accepted to talk about her and the way she's always doing great things. She's a great woman.

**Are you friends with other actors in Hollywood?**

I think just the fact that I'm living in California helps... You would think that the people in the movie business, just because of their interest in storytelling and art, would be buying or collecting art. But they don't. They don't really care about us so much. We know more about them than they know about us. We probably appreciate them more than they appreciate us. I think that's true.

**Did you ever meet people like David Lynch for example?**

I met him, I know him. He is a really nice guy. He's into movies of course, but he's an artist too. I know some paintings he did, with shadows, obscure things...

**Do you have an idea of what you would have done if you were not an artist?**

I thought maybe I wanted to be a weatherman. Study the weather...

**Present the weather on TV or radio, or just study it ?**

No, not presenting the weather on TV but being a meteorologist!

**I'm telling you that because I saw some pictures of you during your performances, or making your books, in the Sixties. And you're looking great, like an Hollywood actor.**

Well... (laughs) I did one piece of acting, in a movie. It was called "Choose Me". It was directed by Alan Rudolph. That was thirty years ago...

**You should have done something with Dennis Hopper. He's so into art also...**

Dennis! He used to shoot pictures all the time. He was crazy about photography.

**He was crazy about everything.**

Yes, he was a wild man for a while!

**What are you doing when you're not working in your studio ?**

I go to the desert. I like to hike in the desert. That's my big exercise. Desert and no people. That's good. I have a little place in the desert. It's a way to remove myself from the city. I used to motorcycle in Mexico, on dirt roads, not on the highway. I have not done that so much lately. I had a spinal operation and my balance is a little bit off. When I'm on my motorcycle I don't want to be a little bit off ! (laughs)

**Did you ever go for a motorcycle ride with Keanu Reeves? It is said that he's always on his motorcycle...**

Yes. That's right. I know him, I did a painting for him. I talked to him a few times. He's kind of mysterious anyway. But he's a cool guy.

**Which are your favorite movies?**

I think my favorite movie is "Cul-de-sac" by Roman Polanski. It's a great movie. I also like "Path of Glory" by Stanley Kubrick. I could also add some really old black and white movies like "Nosferatu", that's a good one. And "Un Chien Andalou"...

**It's a lot of European movies!**

There's also a B-movie, of 1947, "Try and Get Me"... I remember this peculiar movie. Not to forget "The Man who Fell to Earth" with David Bowie.

**What do you think of American culture today?**

American what? Torture?

**No, culture...**

Oh, "culture"! When I think about the United States, I almost get a patriotic heart pounding... I believe there is so much there that is vital, that I think I always wanted to be a part of it.



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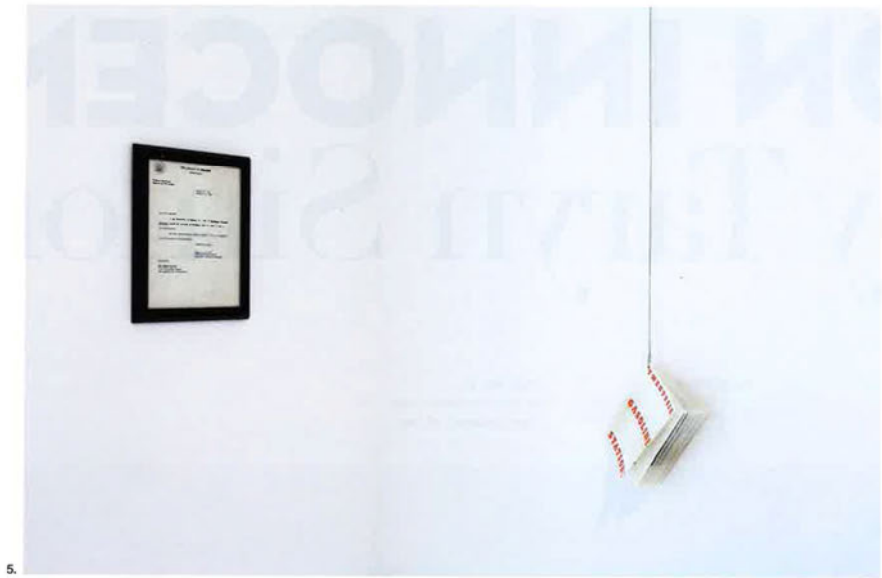
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**1. ED RUSCHA, PERIODS, 2013**  
Lithograph, 28 3/4 x 28 inches 73 x 71.1 cm  
©Ed Ruscha, Courtesy Gagosian Gallery,  
Photography by Robert McKeever

**2. ED RUSCHA, STANDARD STATION, MOCHA STANDARD, CHEESE MOLD STANDARD WITH OLIVE, AND DOUBLE STANDARD, 1969**  
Four screenprints on wove paper,  
25 3/4 x 50 inches, 65.4 x 127 cm  
©Ed Ruscha, Courtesy Gagosian Gallery,  
Photography by Robert McKeever

**3. ED RUSCHA, COLD BEER BEAUTIFUL GIRLS, 2009**  
Digital lithograph  
40 3/4 x 30 3/4 inches, 103.5 x 78.1 cm  
©Ed Ruscha, Courtesy Gagosian Gallery,  
Photography by Robert McKeever

**4. ED RUSCHA: PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS**  
©Ed Ruscha, Courtesy Gagosian Gallery,  
Photography Zarko Vijatovic



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5. ED RUSCHA: *BOOKS & CO.*  
©Ed Ruscha. Courtesy Gagosian Gallery.  
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6. ED RUSCHA: *PRINTS AND PHOTOGRAPHS*  
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