

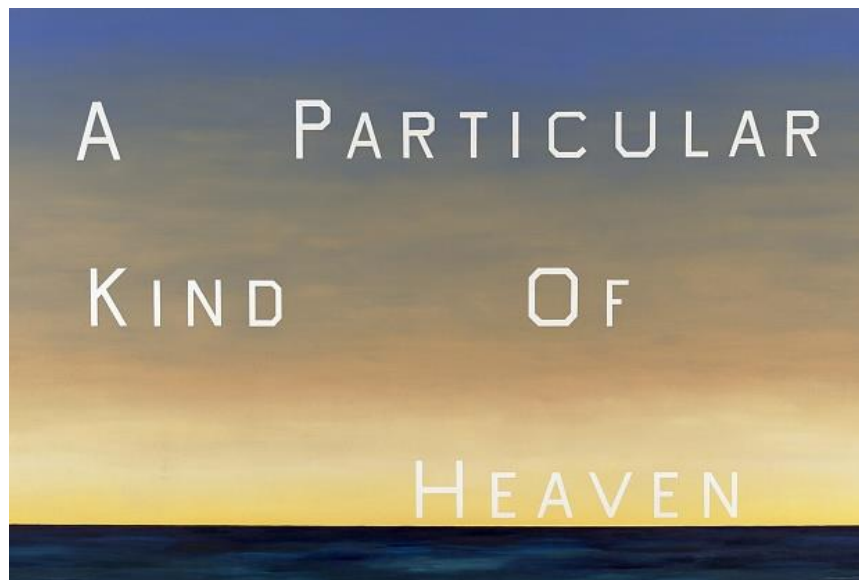
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THE ART NEWSPAPER

Ed Ruscha: ‘All artists want to open the gates to heaven’

US artist recalls Dutch road trip, the basis of his latest works on show in London—and says retirement is not an option

Gareth Harris



Ed Ruscha, A Particular Kind of Heaven (1983). Photo: Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco

The influential US artist Ed Ruscha, who was in London last week for a show of his latest works at Gagosian Grosvenor Hill in Mayfair (Extremes and In-Betweens, until 17 December), tells The Art Newspaper that the art world has changed beyond recognition—and that he has no plans just yet to stop making art.

His new series of paintings include text rendered in a typeface of his own design that goes from big to little (*Galaxy-USA-Dot*, 2016), focusing on our lonely existence. Ruscha has been using words and phrases in his paintings since the 1950s. “Text came out of my interest in books,” he says. “I started looking at books and the printing of books, so I learned how to set type with a printer: clean presses did the dirty work early on, and it just sort of evolved. I began to look at printed words, and words, and saw them as potential for pictures made with paint, I guess.” At Frieze Masters, Gagosian’s stand was a monographic display of Ruscha’s paintings, photographs and photobooks, including a copy of the accordion-folded *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, which he self-published in 1966.

The paintings in his show at Gagosian’s Mayfair gallery are inspired by a book Ruscha produced in 1971 entitled *Dutch Details*. “It was a book of photographs, showing buildings across the canals in the Netherlands. I photographed across canals. I immediately connected with canals, I started looking at them like crazy,” he says, adding that the stops along the way were “in-

between; it became a theme that I started investigating in various ways, whether it's time or distance or anything else."

At the weekend in San Francisco his major retrospective, *Ed Ruscha and the Great American West*, closed at the De Young Museum. We asked the West Coast pioneer if he still felt pressure to produce game-changing bodies of work. "I think all artists want to open the gates to heaven in their own way. When I first started out, there was no promise of any kind of future. The idea of selling an art work was kind of crazy. We basically did all our stuff just for sport; you know, make art 'til your nose bleeds," the 78-year-old says.

Ruscha is on the board of the forthcoming Desert X biennial, which is due to open in Southern California's Coachella Valley early next year. In August, he donated 30 works, including 13 of his own pieces, to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma. "I love what I do, I don't see any retirement around any corner. I can look back on it and call it a diary—or a diuretic," he says.