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Ed Ruscha: Fifty Years of Painting

James Ellroy, Ralph Rugoff, Alexandra Schwartz, Bruce Wagner, Ulrich Wilmes

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Transforming words into icons and images into wide-screen epics, Ed Ruscha has wholly reconceived the terms of painting for our era. Tagged variously as a Conceptualist, Pop artist or latter-day Surrealist, Ruscha flouts category, or rather incorporates all categories, always surprising and experimenting with both subject and method. His paintings are steeped in our times: cinema, advertising, logos, late capitalism and the twists and turns of postwar art have all informed his iconography since the early 1960s, arriving on the cool surfaces of his canvases with magnetic detachment. Ruscha eschews process and focuses exclusively on the final product: “the means to the end has always been secondary in my art,” he has said. Ruscha has also reinvented the use of words in art, finding disquieting ways to invest language with a weird, throbbing, ambient static, never aspiring to what he calls “word gestures,” since “each word is an excursion unto itself.” *Fifty Years of Painting* focuses on Ruscha's majestic oeuvre of paintings. A magnificent publication, it comes housed in a slipcase that sports the artist's classic painting “Standard Station” (1966), and, alongside fantastic reproductions, it contains a preface by novelist James Ellroy, essays by Ralph Rugoff, Alexandra Schwartz and Ulrich Wilmes, a text by novelist Bruce Wagner, an interview with the artist by Kristine McKenna, an illustrated chronology and an exhibition history.
Ed Ruscha (born 1937) has made pioneering work in the media of painting, printmaking, drawing, bookmaking, photography and film since 1958. Associated in the early 1960s with the Ferus Gallery, Ruscha was included in Walter Hopps' landmark Pop art show *New Painting of Common Objects*, at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1962.

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