

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

*Ed Ruscha: Gumbo of Gravel*

September 15 – November 3, 2018

Opening reception: Saturday, September 15, 6–8 pm

Lora Reynolds is pleased to announce *Gumbo of Gravel*, an exhibition of lithographs and sculpture by Ed Ruscha.

Single words and short phrases—the way they look when written, sound when spoken, their power in one’s imagination—have been a primary medium for Ed Ruscha’s reflections on American culture for nearly 60 years. He considers them found objects, and they come from everywhere: overheard conversations, cans of food from the supermarket, movies and books, billboard copy, the radio in a passing car. They might be palindromes, non sequiturs, double entendres, brand names, onomatopoeias, or solitary conjunctions.

Although Ruscha’s choices of words sometimes seem inexplicable, they are all rooted in personal experience. The pieces in this exhibition, like much of his work, point to Middle America (where he grew up, in Oklahoma City), his Catholic upbringing, his love of women, and the pleasure and delight he finds in language. “Paradox and absurdity have just always been really delicious to me,” he says. “I’ve always been dead serious about being nonsensical.”

The blocky, all-caps typeface Ruscha often uses is one he developed himself and dubbed Boy Scout Utility Modern. He says he designed it by “imagining a lettering style that might be used for the poster of the telephone company’s annual picnic.” It looks homemade and utilitarian, like something an auto mechanic might have drawn—as in “CASH FOR TOOLS.”

Ruscha’s words float—centered and evenly spaced—over sunsets, mountain-scapes, vast stretches of flatland, and fields of even color: images that provide anonymous backgrounds for his lexical acrobatics. “In a way they’re words in front of the old Paramount mountain. You don’t have to have the mountain back there—you could have a landscape, a farm. I have background, foreground. It’s so simple. And the backgrounds are of no particular character. They’re just meant to support the drama.” Despite this downplay, Ruscha’s backgrounds (smoldering reds and oranges, stark black and white, epic cloud formations) work in tandem with the words in the foreground to emphasize some essence the two components share. The backgrounds are anonymous because Ruscha is less interested in any specific mountain than he is in the *idea* of a mountain. His sunsets could be from anywhere.

The artist wryly describes himself as a landscape painter, but the horizontality of much of his work also connects it to the movie screen, to the cinema. He has lived in Los Angeles since he was 19; this city, and Hollywood in particular (the metonym more than the neighborhood), has been a constant source of inspiration. “If I’m influenced by the movies,” he says, “it’s from way down underneath, not just on the surface.” The writer Arthur Schlesinger Jr. expands on

Ruscha's brevity: "Movies work their magic through suggestion and subliminal infiltration...The unique technical triumph of film is verisimilitude—the capacity to reproduce the physical surfaces of life. Yet the cultural function of film has been to serve as the instrument, not of realism, but of dream and myth."

Ruscha's work comes from, wrestles with, and transcends daily life. Ultimately, the work is about the stories—the legends—we tell ourselves about what it means to be American. Leaving home at 19 and heading west on Route 66 for LA, after all, is how the best American epics begin—including Ruscha's own.

Ed Ruscha, born in 1937 in Omaha, lives and works in Los Angeles. He is one of the most celebrated artists of the 20th century, having mounted exhibitions in the last twenty years at the Art Institute of Chicago, Getty Museum (Los Angeles), Kunstmuseum Basel (Switzerland), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Museo Reina Sofia (Madrid), Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney), and Tate London. Among the museums that own his work are the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington DC), Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), Museum of Modern Art (New York), National Gallery of Art (Washington DC), Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), Tate Gallery (London), Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), and Whitney Museum of American Art (New York).