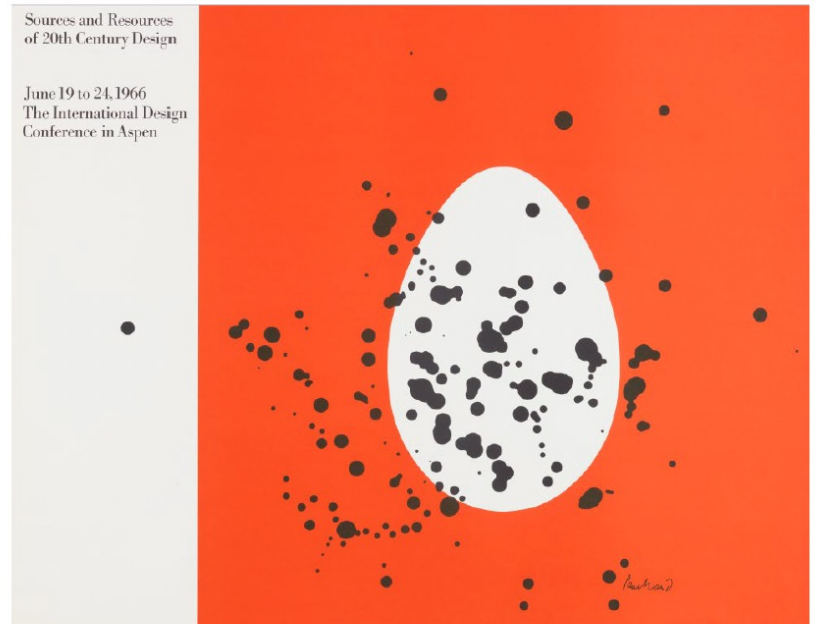


Fig. 22. Society of Graphic Designers, *Orb* (Chouinard Art Institute) 1, no. 2 (1959–60). Offset lithography, 22 × 17 in. (55.9 × 43.2 cm). Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, 2925–311

issue, a fellow student chided the editors for resorting to this “tired” gesture, and urged them to ban it from *Orb*’s lexicon. Perhaps the student recognized that the pointing hand had already been absorbed into the language of consumer culture, as demonstrated by its appearance in Ruscha’s student notebooks, where he used it in advertising designs. In the next issue the editors reassured their colleague that they would not draw upon this overused symbol again. Other motifs from avant-garde art and design, such as the ink splotch or splash, made frequent appearances, including in one instance as a combination talk bubble/ink spot, emerging from the mouth of a small cartoon figure next to the list of the journal’s staff and contributors (see fig. 5, lower right). By the 1960s the splash of ink, a motif that also appears in Dada works but also recalled the active, paint-flinging gestures of Abstract Expressionist painters, had also become folded into the visual rhetoric of design by designers such as Paul Rand (fig. 23). In Rand’s poster for the 1966 Aspen International Design Conference, the black pigment sprayed across the cleanly defined gestalt of the egg embodies one of design’s key sources, the history of avant-garde art and design.

Ruscha and his fellow students absorbed, imitated, and transformed these histories and styles in their early artworks. While his formal studies



were in advertising design, Ruscha began to paint more frequently during his Chouinard years. In these early works, looking to the example of other art students such as Billy Al Bengston, Ruscha filtered the legacies of abstraction through the techniques and structures of design. As he has acknowledged, this pathway opened up partially through his encounters with artists such as Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, whose work he saw in publications such as *Print* magazine.⁶³ In the 1959 painting *Sweetwater* (since destroyed; fig. 24), he combined what he called “real ambitious” Abstract Expressionism, embodied in paint swaths in the top register, with typographic design, represented in the serif type spelling out the painting’s title (and name of a southern town). While these two different visual models are mostly contained within their own portions of the painting, a few flecks of paint spill into the bottom register. With a comma hovering at the end, the word becomes less of a declaration and more of an invitation, a starting point for something else rather than a bluntly stated fact. Curator and gallerist Henry Hopkins, who was then running the Huysman Gallery on La Cienega Boulevard and befriended many of the Chouinard students, was immediately taken with *Sweetwater* and Ruscha’s pairing of a bright swath of thickly applied painting with a “pure and clean” typographical space.⁶⁴ Though

Fig. 23. Paul Rand, “Sources and Resources of 20th Century Design,” poster for Aspen International Design Conference, 1966. Offset lithography on white wove paper, 24 × 30⁷/₁₆ in. (61 × 77.3 cm). Cooper Hewitt/The Smithsonian Design Museum, Gift of various donors, 1981–29–227



Fig. 30. Ed Ruscha's design for a towel for Rose Marie Swimsuits, a client of Carson/Roberts Advertising Agency, 1961



Fig. 31. Ed Ruscha, *Falling but Frozen*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 72 x 67 in. (182.8 x 170.2 cm). Private collection, Los Angeles. [P1962.04]

Fig. 32. Ed Ruscha, *Box Smashed Flat*, 1961. Oil and ink on canvas, 70½ x 48 in. (179.1 x 121.9 cm). Private collection, Los Angeles. [P1961.02]



Fig. 33. Ed Ruscha, *Actual Size*, 1962. Oil on canvas, 71¾ x 67 in. (182.2 x 170.1 cm). Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Anonymous gift through the Contemporary Art Council, M.63.14. [P1962.06]

PASTEUP LAYOUT

Photographs and Books

In the early 1960s, as Ruscha was making paintings of Spam tins and typography, he was also embarking on a new venture: the self-publishing of books. While he used his camera to photograph commodities and his paintings in the studio, he also ventured outdoors to photograph the city, especially L.A.'s vernacular architecture and its streets. Beginning in the early 1960s, Ruscha began to photograph Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards in meticulously planned and executed shooting sessions, planned to coincide with low-traffic moments (fig. 59). Overseen by Ruscha and executed by a team of collaborators, including his brother Paul Ruscha, Susan Haller, and later Gary Regester, among others, these extensive and ongoing documentation projects have generated hundreds of thousands of images.¹ As Ruscha continued to photograph these areas of Los Angeles, he needed to have systems in place to organize his expanding archive. In 1974 he expanded his documentation to other L.A. streets, such as Santa Monica Boulevard, the Pacific Coast Highway, and La Cienega Boulevard. While the photographs printed in his books, many of which have been editioned as fine art prints, are widely familiar, the vast majority of his photographic output has only become known recently, as museums and research institutions have begun to acquire parts of the artist's archive. Many of these images have never been developed but remain as negatives, wound around film reels, a practice the studio began using to organize and store the film. All of these negatives are available as digital images, while the original film will be carefully preserved—thousands of latent images never to be developed into prints. As Ruscha once said when speaking of his photographs, "I just put them in a lab and salt them away. I just feel like sometime in the future I'll be able to do something with them, but I don't know."² The idea of photographs being "salted away" evokes the material weight of his archive, the literal heft of so many potential pictures. Later, as the project moved to digital photograph, this weight would become calculated in the storage units required for so many images.

In books, a venture that he began in the early 1960s, Ruscha grappled with the weight of these pictures. Since his student days, he had used the camera for different purposes: to study commodities, to photograph his finished work, to play with perspective and space. In his books he

images of gas stations, coffee shops, and apartments, all linked to his growing photographic archive of the city, Ruscha emphasized certain social and economic geographies of the city, emblematic of middle-class American experience of vernacular design.

While not exclusive to L.A., these structures had come to symbolize the city's driving culture and its particular version of the American Dream, characterized by social and geographic mobility, a temperate climate, and a relaxed lifestyle. Ruscha's trek from Oklahoma City to L.A., and his own retelling of that story, draws upon the classic American Dream narrative of westward expansion and progress. Yet his work, by implying that this narrative was in actuality less straightforward, and certainly more fragile, than popular images of L.A. suggested, also tells a slightly different story. As in the country more generally, the experience of the good life in L.A. was also a white, middle-class experience, in the face of segregation and racial disparities that plagued the city and erupted in the Watts uprising of the 1960s. The element of fire, which Ruscha introduced into some of these works, evokes but does not refer specifically to events such as the uprising. Though his flames sometimes blend with the modernist designs of the buildings, fire also introduces notes of ambivalence, even foreboding, in some of his works. In his painting of the newly opened Los Angeles County Museum of Art, flames hint at Ruscha's ambivalence toward L.A.'s arts institutions, but even more broadly at his speculation on the function and future of modernist design in the city's cultural sphere.

IMAGING THE GAS STATION

Ruscha took some of his earliest photographs of L.A. while working at Carson/Roberts. He used a 2 1/4-inch Yashica for these photographs, which allowed him to see the image projected on a glass plate (see fig. 1, fig. 84). Ruscha's rooftop images captured the buildings and billboards of West Hollywood, where the agency was located. A few years later, as he and his team were continuing to take pictures on Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards, Ruscha began to photograph apartments around the city, as well as palm trees, pools, and vacant lots. His use of modernist tropes such as the oblique angle and from-above perspective indicates his knowledge of photography's histories, with which he became familiar at Chouinard and also through the pages of photo books, such as Robert Frank's *The Americans*, found in local bookstores.³ His early photographs build on his knowledge of modernist photography, disseminated through his Chouinard education and through print publications such as Frank's book.

As Ruscha began to photograph Sunset and Hollywood Boulevards, and eventually other thoroughfares in the city, he also turned his camera to specific types of architecture. In the early 1960s he began to photograph



Fig. 84. Ed Ruscha, *Roof Top View #5*, from the series *Six Rooftops*, 1961/2003. Gelatin silver print, 14 x 11 in. (35.6 x 27.9 cm), edition of 8. Private collection, Los Angeles. [PE2003.46]



Fig. 92. Ed Ruscha, *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1963. Oil on canvas, 64 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 121 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (164.9 x 309.4 cm). Hood Museum, Dartmouth College, Gift of James Meeker, Class of 1958, in memory of Lee English, Class of 1958, scholar, poet, athlete and friend to all. [P1963.01]

logos on the pumps, he added more detail in the painting, including the word *Chevron*, capped off by a red pair of wings and with upside-down V shapes at the bottom. This anchors the building in a specific moment in history; Chevron was one of the spinoff companies of Standard Oil, still represented on the station's large sign. Three beams of yellow light, an element Ruscha had included in some of his drawings, emerge from behind the station. While he painted over some of the pencil lines of his drawing, Ruscha left others bare, especially toward the lower right corner, where the pencil lines delineating the windows trail off into a blank wedge of white. A relic of the perspectival system Ruscha used to create the image, this space anchors the Standard station in a paperscape—a world created on paper—rather than a landscape. Like a logo, this station is a highly legible, all-at-once image drafted on paper. Unlike with a logo, however, Ruscha left bare the apparatus by which the station came into being. The building is seemingly tethered down with perspectival projectors that merge with its dramatic lines.

While the Standard works suggest an equivalency between building and a logo, Ruscha had also represented logos, such as the famous 20th Century Fox letters, as architectonic structures (fig. 93). Though highly recognizable—the logo appeared at the beginning of every film made by the movie studio—Ruscha did not refer to the corporation name in his 1962 painting, which he titled *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*. For this work, he first primed the canvas, which he purchased from Sears Roebuck, with white gesso, then used the grid technique to enlarge and transfer the logo to the prepared surface (fig. 94).¹⁵ He elected to paint the characters red, instead of the gold of the original logo, which had been designed by prominent California watercolorist Emil Kosa Jr.¹⁶



Fig. 93. Ed Ruscha, *Large Trademark with Eight Spotlights*, 1962. Oil, house paint, ink, and graphite pencil on canvas, 66 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 133 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (170 x 338.1 cm). Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. [P1962.11]

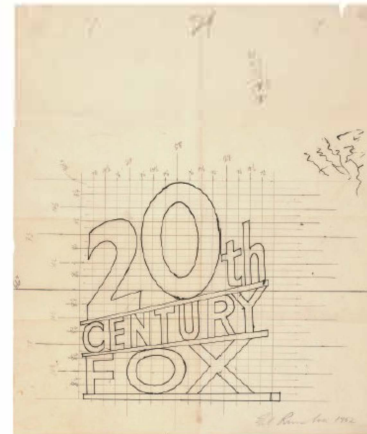


Fig. 94. Ed Ruscha, *Trademark Grid*, 1962. Ink and pencil on tracing paper, 13 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 11 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (35.1 x 30.2 cm). Private collection, Los Angeles. [D1962.34]

Seen from below and to the side, the logo towers over the background. Though artist Rocky Longo had reworked the logo in 1953, tilting the O so that it would look proportional in the widescreen format, Ruscha's rendition adheres to the earlier iteration of the logo, with the O appearing larger than the 2 because of the logo's rotation in space. Faint lines around the O suggest that Ruscha reworked the digit to give it its especially peculiar angling. An inky black background, bisected by the eight spotlights named in the title, fades to patchy dark blue, evocative of the original logo's cloudy skies. Both the diagonal format and the