

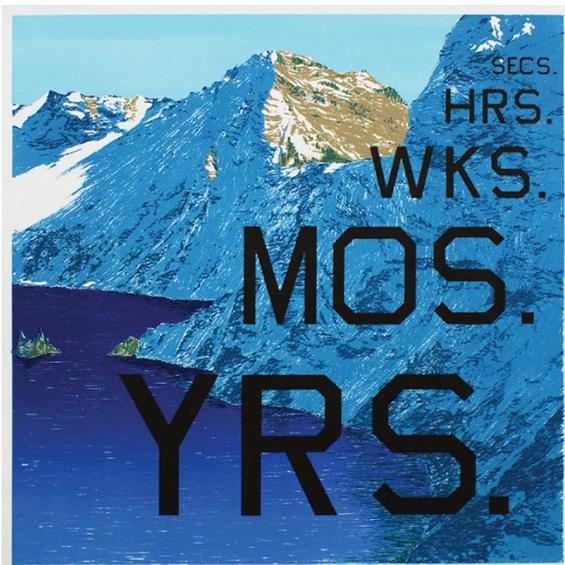


NEWS RELEASE

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WORD/PLAY

Prints, Photographs, and Paintings by Ed Ruscha

February 3–May 6, 2018 at Joslyn Art Museum;

Ruscha is Special Guest at the Members Preview February 2

(Omaha, NE) – *Word/Play* is the first major exhibition to feature internationally-renowned artist Ed Ruscha in his home state of Nebraska. Born in Omaha in 1937, Ruscha lived in the city for several years before his family moved to Oklahoma City. In 1956, he relocated to Los Angeles to study commercial art at the Chouinard Art Institute (now called CalArts), and quickly became a fixture in the highly energized West Coast art scene. *Word/Play* traces some of the most important developments in Ruscha’s career over the last sixty years, bringing together prints, photographs, and artist books dating from the 1960s through 2015, accompanied by a selection of major paintings. *Word/Play* opens to the public on Saturday, February 3, and continues at Joslyn through Sunday, May 6.

Mining Ruscha’s incisive reading of the physical and social landscapes of Southern California and the American West, the exhibition highlights his capacity to ennoble the mundane and cleverly transform it into the extraordinary. Central to this

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Word/Play at Joslyn Art Museum

theme is the artist's rigorous engagement with language. An important early figure in Conceptual Art, Ruscha demonstrated a talent for deftly combining imagery and text during his student years. At turns poignant, provocative, humorous, and confounding, Ruscha's use of the written word has remained a signature element of his work throughout his career.

More About Ruscha and *Word/Play*

The earliest works in *Word/Play*, rarely seen black-and-white snapshots from the 1960s, reveal the realities of urban living in Southern California as Ruscha saw them while driving the streets of Los Angeles. Nondescript apartment buildings, parking lots, gasoline stations, road signs, and other seemingly mundane scenes became central to his artistic vocabulary as his commitment to examining the world around him – in all its glories and banalities – crystallized.



Ruscha became increasingly attuned to words – their shapes, sounds, and assumed meanings – while in school and later, during a brief stint as a graphic designer. Fodder for his growing fascination with language seemed to be everywhere. Words filled the billboards that punctuated his road trips and appeared in the films he voraciously consumed. They towered over sleek gasoline stations and were scrawled in faux-elegant script on apartment buildings. For sixty years Ruscha has been giving viewers phrases to chew on—"wall rocket," "hot rip stop," "never odd or even," "sponge puddle" – even as they wonder what exactly they mean. Ambiguity has long been one of Ruscha's most important creative tools, leading to what has been called the "huh?" effect of his work. By generating more questions than answers, Ruscha challenges viewers to question relationships between language and images.

In the 1980s, Ruscha took a step back from examining Los Angeles to engage the wide-open spaces and majestic panoramas of the heroic American West. He spent five years painting vast skiescapes with low, sometimes indiscernible horizon lines – conveniently proportioned for the longer phrases and sentences that had found their way into his work. Ruscha began using mountains as backdrops for slogan-like words and phrases in the 1990s. Depicted as if seen from below so that they tower over the viewer, these icy peaks appear dramatic, yet for Ruscha they are merely pictorial clichés. Several of the phrases in this series are palindromes, meaning that they read the same forward and backward, such as "Lion in Oil" and "Never Odd or Even." The textual palindromes in these mirror paintings are echoed in the background imagery, with the left and right halves of the mountains emulating each other exactly.

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Word/Play at Joslyn Art Museum

In a series from the early 2000s, Ruscha again uses mountain as backdrops, this time for the names and occupations of traditional laborers, such as Clarence Jones, who "really knew how to sharpen knives," and Darlene Phipps, an employee at a plastic salvage yard. In this case, the text in these paintings and prints is entirely unrelated to the sublime topographies that the artist so carefully renders.

For over six decades, Ruscha has documented his rapidly changing surroundings with a critical eye and a dose of deadpan humor. While his commitment to the here and the now often earns him the label of "Pop Artist," the driving forces behind his work reflect a more nuanced perspective on the current moment. Ruscha brings what is often overlooked into sharp focus, and invites the viewer to look at a common world in an uncommon way.

IMAGES: (PAGE 1) Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937), *Periods*, 2013, lithograph, 31 5/8 x 30 1/2 in.; Edition of 60, © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian. (PAGE 2) Ed Ruscha (American, b. 1937), *Standard Station, Amarillo, Texas*, 1962, silver gelatin print, 10 3/4 x 10 1/8 in., © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of the artist and Gagosian.

In the Shop

Visit the Hitchcock Museum Shop for exhibition-related books including *Ed Ruscha* by Richard D. Marshall, the first monograph on the artist's many-faceted career (paperback \$49.95; Member price: \$44.96), and *They Called Her Styrene*, the only book devoted solely to Ruscha's 'word' prints, drawings, and paintings (hardback \$19.95; Member price: \$17.96). The Shop is open during all regular Museum hours.

Exhibition Tickets and Tours

Word/Play is a ticketed exhibition: \$10 for general public adults; \$5 college students with ID (tickets for those with a UNMC student ID are free); free for members and youth ages 17 and younger. Special Thursday pricing (4–8 pm): \$5 for general public adults. All visitors, including members, must obtain a ticket at the admissions desk for entrance to the exhibition. Programs with visits to the exhibition will be priced accordingly for general public adults. Docent-guided tours of the exhibition are offered weekly (ticket pricing applies; view the calendar of events at www.joslyn.org for tour offerings).

Exhibition Mobile Tour

Free Wi-Fi is available in all Joslyn galleries. Guests may use their own web-enabled mobile device or borrow one of Joslyn's to access the dual language *Word/Play* mobile tour. Dial (402) 881-3601 for English or (402) 972-4031 for Spanish; or visit www.joslyn.org > Education > Multimedia; or scan the QR code at the entrance to the exhibition; or read the audio script, available for hearing impaired visitors (access it through the web app). Presented by Joslyn and OnCell with special thanks to 91.5 KIOS FM.

Exhibition Programs & Events

Friday, February 2

Members Preview Reception with Special Guest Ed Ruscha; 5:30–8 pm

On Friday, February 2, Joslyn members are invited to public discussion and reception celebrating *Word/Play*.

At 6 pm, in the concert hall, members will enjoy a public conversation with the artist Ed Ruscha, Executive Director & CEO Jack Becker, and Phil Willson Curator of Contemporary Art Karin Campbell. The conversation will be followed by exhibition viewing in the Pavilion galleries and complimentary light hors d'oeuvres and a cash bar in the fountain court. Joslyn members receive invitations (admits 2; additional guests \$10 each). To join Joslyn, visit www.joslyn.org.

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Word/Play at Joslyn Art Museum

Monday, February 5

Word/Play Members Day; Noon–3 pm

On Monday, February 5, the Museum will open the *Word/Play* exhibition exclusively for Joslyn members. From noon until 3 pm, members show their membership card at the admissions desk for tickets to the exhibition (reservations not required during the day). At 12:30 pm and 2:30 pm, Karin Campbell, Phil Willson Curator of Contemporary Art, will present talks for members in the exhibition galleries. Each talk is limited to 30 people on a first come, first served basis (participants will be asked to sign up upon arrival on February 5 as no reservations will be taken ahead of time for tours). Joslyn members receive invitations. To join Joslyn, visit www.joslyn.org.

Thursday, February 22 @ 6:30 pm (cash bar @ 5 pm)

Curator Gallery Talk

Free with regular exhibition admission (special Thursday evening pricing of \$5 per ticket for general public adults).

Join Karin Campbell, Phil Willson Curator of Contemporary Art, for a look at the *Word/Play* exhibition. During this 45-minute walking tour, Campbell will highlight key works of art and interpret the significance of Ruscha's work.

Saturday & Sunday, February 24 & 25

Free College Weekend

During regular public hours (10 am to 4 pm) on Saturday and Sunday, February 24 and 25, anyone with a valid college ID will receive free tickets to *Word/Play!* Regular ticket price for college students is \$5 (tickets for those with a UNMC student ID are always free).

Thursdays, March 8, 15, 22, 29 @ 6 pm

Ekphrasis Workshop: Writing Inspired by Paintings

Space is limited to a maximum enrollment of 10 participants; advanced reservation and full payment are required: Joslyn Members \$42 for the series; General Public \$52 for the series. Register online at www.joslyn.org > Education > Adult & Teen Classes.

This workshop for adults is about writing poems inspired by art. Novice and experienced writers are equally welcome! Participants are encouraged to bring to the first class an ekphrastic poem (theirs or someone else's) and a picture of the artwork it is based upon. Subsequent sessions will be dedicated to writing poetry in the Museum's permanent collection galleries and in the exhibition *Word/Play* and to sharing and critiquing work with the group. Workshop instructor Robert Klein Engler has published poems online and in print. Most recently, his work appears in *The Flat Water Stirs: An Anthology of Emerging Nebraska Poets*. Paper and pencil will be provided, or bring your own notebook/electronic device.

Thursday, March 22 @ 6:30 pm (cash bar @ 5 pm)

Framing the Flame: Art That Ignites

This event is free with regular exhibition admission (special Thursday evening pricing of \$5 per ticket for general public adults). Space is limited and reservations are strongly encouraged at www.joslyn.org or by calling (402) 661-3862. Walk-in guests will be admitted only as space permits.

Join Justin Kemerling, Peter Fankhauser, and Laurie Victor Kay for this program inspired by *Word/Play*. Each guest will speak for ten minutes about a work in the show that "lights their fire," exploring how art inspires, engages, and impacts their own work. Following the program, continue the conversation with the speakers and Karin Campbell, Joslyn's Phil Willson Curator of Contemporary Art, in the galleries or over drinks in Joslyn's atrium.

Justin Kemerling is an independent designer, activist, and collaborator living in Omaha and focused on making it beautiful, moving people to action, and getting good things done. He works primarily with community organizations, political campaigns, and change-making startups in need of branding, graphic and web design, and art direction.

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Word/Play at Joslyn Art Museum

Peter Fankhauser is an artist and educator who has exhibited at independent and alternative spaces nationally and abroad. Narrative's mutation across different media platforms has become a recurring theme in his work and a primary preoccupation. Fankhauser is programs manager at Omaha Creative Institute and teaches courses in photography and visual literacy at the University of Nebraska Omaha.

Laurie Victor Kay has been interpreting her surroundings through the lens of a camera since the age of 14. After studying painting, art history, and photography in Chicago, Italy, and France, Kay settled in Omaha, yet she continues to produce work through extensive international travel. For the past decade she has focused on photographing public places and the people in them. A past winner of the Prix de la Photographie, Kay and her husband, Charles, own Laurie and Charles Photographs in Omaha.

Thursday, April 5 @ 6:30 pm (cash bar @ 5 pm)

4th Annual Graham and Sally Lusk Lecture – 'Words without thoughts never to heaven go': The Art of Ed Ruscha with Christopher Knight, *Los Angeles Times* art critic

This talk is free, however, those wishing to see the *Word/Play* exhibition must obtain an exhibition ticket.

Guest speaker for the 4th annual Lusk Lecture is Christopher Knight, art critic for the *Los Angeles Times*. His talk, 'Words without thoughts never to heaven go': *The Art of Ed Ruscha*, is free and open to the public. Language has been integral to Ruscha's work since the late 1950s, and Knight's talk will address that among other aspects of the artist's work.

Knight is a three-time finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in criticism (1991, 2001, and 2007). He received the 1997 Frank Jewett Mather Award for distinction in art criticism from the College Art Association, becoming the first journalist to win the award in more than 25 years. He has appeared on CBS's "60 Minutes," PBS's "NewsHour," NPR's "Morning Edition" and "All Things Considered," and CNN. Knight was also featured in the 2009 documentary film about the controversial relocation of the Barnes Foundation's art collection, "The Art of the Steal."

The **Graham and Sally Lusk Lecture** invites acclaimed artists, scholars, and visionary thinkers in the field of art and creativity to engage and inspire audiences who wish to better understand and appreciate art from around the world and throughout time. The series was created through an estate gift from Graham Lusk, Ph.D., and honors both Graham and Sally's (a former Joslyn docent) commitment to the Museum.

Thursday, April 12 @ 6 pm (cash bar @ 5 pm)

Word as Image / Image as Word

This is a free program, however, those wishing to see the *Word/Play* exhibition must obtain an exhibition ticket.

This April event is a celebration of letterpress poetry. Inspired by the text-driven work of Ed Ruscha and National Poetry Month, Joslyn welcomes Omaha's Gibraltar Editions, an independent press founded by Denise Brady and Guy Duncan. Dedicated to printing contemporary poetry in the fine press tradition, Gibraltar Editions uses handset type, relief blocks, and a Vandercook proof press to print by hand beautiful limited edition books. Learn about the collaborative process involved in letterpress poetry production, and enjoy listening to readings by some of the creative writers and artists represented by the press.

Saturday, April 14; 1–4 pm

Nature/Play @ Joslyn

This is a free program, however, those wishing to see the *Word/Play* exhibition must obtain an exhibition ticket (\$5 discounted ticket admission for general public adults during this event; member and youth tickets are always free).

This event allows guests to explore art and nature in playful ways! Presented in partnership with Omaha's Henry Doorly Zoo and Aquarium, this free event will feature gallery and garden activities highlighting plants, animals, and natural habitats. Activities include a scavenger hunt, with animal artifacts and a live animal or two, and nature-inspired artmaking.

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Word/Play at Joslyn Art Museum

Friday, April 27; 7–10 pm

Tipsy Doodle!

For ages 21 and up. This drop-in event is free, however, those wishing to see the *Word/Play* exhibition must obtain an exhibition ticket. Group drawing games, facilitated by comedian and storyteller Rita Paskowitz, begin at 7:45 pm.

Drawing on a variety of creative prompts inspired by *Word/Play*, guests will enjoy a casual atmosphere of drawing games and prizes. Artists of all skill levels welcome! Bring your sketchbooks and pencils, or, for the less artistically-inclined, Joslyn will have drawing materials and supplies on hand. *Tipsy Doodle* encourages participants to talk to each other, motivate each other, and maybe even collaborate with each other. Joslyn provides the rules to the games and a cash bar – guests provide the creativity!!

Thursday, May 3 @ 6:30 pm

The Moving Company

The Moving Company, University of Nebraska Omaha's modern dance group, will perform a piece choreographed especially for *Word/Play*. Driven by Ruscha's most iconic subjects (gas stations, street signs), The Moving Company takes the audience on a road trip like no other!

Other Programs at Joslyn

Many of Joslyn's regularly scheduled programs will feature *Word/Play*-inspired themes this spring. Visit www.joslyn.org for complete details.

- **Art Encounters** (Thursday, February 15; 10:30 am): Art lovers, from the well-seasoned to the amateur, will enjoy a docent-guided tour of the *Word/Play* exhibition. \$10 general public adults; \$5 college students with valid ID.
- **Story Adventures** (Tuesday, February 20): Preschoolers and young readers, accompanied by an adult, are invited to this artful reading program presented by Joslyn and Omaha Public Library on selected Tuesdays at 10:30 am. On February 20, stories will be read in the *Word/Play* exhibition. Admission is free, including time spent in the exhibition galleries.
- **Stroller Tours** (Wednesday, February 21): Joslyn offers docent-guided tours designed for moms, dads, and caregivers to look at and talk about art with other adults, while being mindful of young ones in arms and strollers. Guests gather on the atrium bridge at 9:30 am for complimentary refreshments, then head to the galleries at 10 am for the tour. Crying babies welcome! On February 21, the tour will feature the *Word/Play* exhibition. Free for Joslyn members and infants/toddlers; \$10 for general public adults (includes exhibition ticket). Space is limited; reservations are requested. Sign-up at least one week in advance at www.joslyn.org > Visit > Kids Programs.
- **Art Camps and Classes**
More than a dozen studio classes devoted to printing, painting, photography, and more will give students ages five and up an opportunity to view Ed Ruscha's work for inspiration in their own art-making. Registration and payment details at www.joslyn.org > Education > Classes.



JOSLYN
Art Museum

Our Mission – Joslyn Art Museum collects, preserves, and interprets the visual arts of the highest quality, fostering appreciation and enjoyment of art for the benefit of a diverse audience.

Our Vision – To be cherished and respected as a premier art museum.

Joslyn Art Museum showcases art from ancient times to the present. The Museum was a gift to the people of Omaha from Sarah Joslyn in memory of her husband, George, who made his fortune as president of the Western Newspaper Union. The Museum's original 1931 building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco architecture in the nation, with 38 types of marble from seven countries. The Walter and Suzanne Scott Pavilion, a 58,000-square-foot addition built in 1994, was designed by renowned British architect Norman Foster as his first U.S. commission. The Museum features galleries, a 1,000-seat concert hall, fountain court, education technology gallery, lecture hall, classrooms, sculpture garden, café, shop, and Art Works, an interactive space for art exploration.

General Museum Admission: Free (additional charge for general public adult tickets to *Word/Play*; see page 3). **Regular Museum Hours:** Tuesday through Sunday, 10 am–4 pm; late 'til 8 pm on Thursday; closed Monday and major holidays.

www.joslyn.org | (402) 342-3300 | 2200 Dodge Street | Omaha, NE 68102