

# bernard jacobson gallery

Ed Ruscha

I'm Amazed

10<sup>th</sup> January – 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2013

Bernard Jacobson Graphics is pleased to announce its forthcoming exhibition of prints by the renowned American artist Ed Ruscha. *I'm Amazed* will provide unique insight into the celebrated graphic output of this important American artist, focusing on his world of words. Following in the tradition of artists who used words in their work, from the Dadaists and Surrealists who used them in a nonsensical way or as a psychological tool to the Conceptual artists who focused on the meaning of words, Ed Ruscha is part of the first generation of pop artists who explored words as a formal or aesthetic device. He uses words as abstract shapes, which don't necessarily have a literal meaning:

"They just occur to me, sometimes people say them and I write them down and then I paint them. Sometimes I use a dictionary."

The exhibition at Bernard Jacobson Graphics presents some of the most iconic images by Ruscha, beginning with the screenprint *Hollywood*. Ruscha was able to view the famous Hollywood sign from his studio, and painted it in different versions over the next twenty years. Even though these signs are an iconic symbol for the spirit of Southern California and the pop and celebrity culture of the United States, the artist uses them only as words. "Words are pattern-like, and in their horizontality they answer my investigation into landscape. They're almost not words - they are objects that become words."

Coming from the midwestern city of Oklahoma, Ruscha moved in his late teens to Los Angeles, which offered him a wealth of material for his artistic expressions. On his journeys home to Oklahoma he passed the petrol stations, which became the subject of a series of paintings and prints exhibited here. Ruscha included the photos from these trips to Oklahoma in his first artist's book; he later created a portfolio with prints of his artist's book covers, which also feature here.

In some of his later works, Ruscha became bored with the typographical restrictions of his words, and he began what he calls his "romance with liquids." The now free-floating letters written with spilled liquid gave Ruscha more freedom in his use of them, as for example with *Lisp*. He further extended his artistic experiments with what could be called his "romance

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with materials." Ruscha started to use organic materials and foodstuff for his prints, such as chocolate syrup, baked beans, and caviar, as in his London-inspired portfolio *News, Mews, Pews, Brews, Stews, Dues*. In his painting *Evil* he even used his own blood.

Surrealist ideas, especially from Magritte and Dali, were of great interest for Ruscha. The often-explored fears and fantasies in the Surrealist movement are to be found in his *Insect* portfolio, with ants and cockroaches which are reminiscent of Luis Bunuel's film *Un Chien Andalou*. The insects in Ruscha's portfolio are nevertheless shown as meticulously copied insects with detailed bodies and wings, rather than as frightening or threatening objects.

One of his oversized insect prints reads "I'm Amazed"; this was one of the first prints where the artist used sentences with a literal meaning in his work. Like many other works in the exhibition, it was published by Bernard Jacobson. Bernard Jacobson's portfolio *Man walking away from it all* was recently exhibited in a major show of Ed Ruscha's art at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. His work is exhibited worldwide, the latest instance being this past summer at the Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria. A forthcoming exhibition of prints and photographs opens in 2013 at the Kunstmuseum Basel.