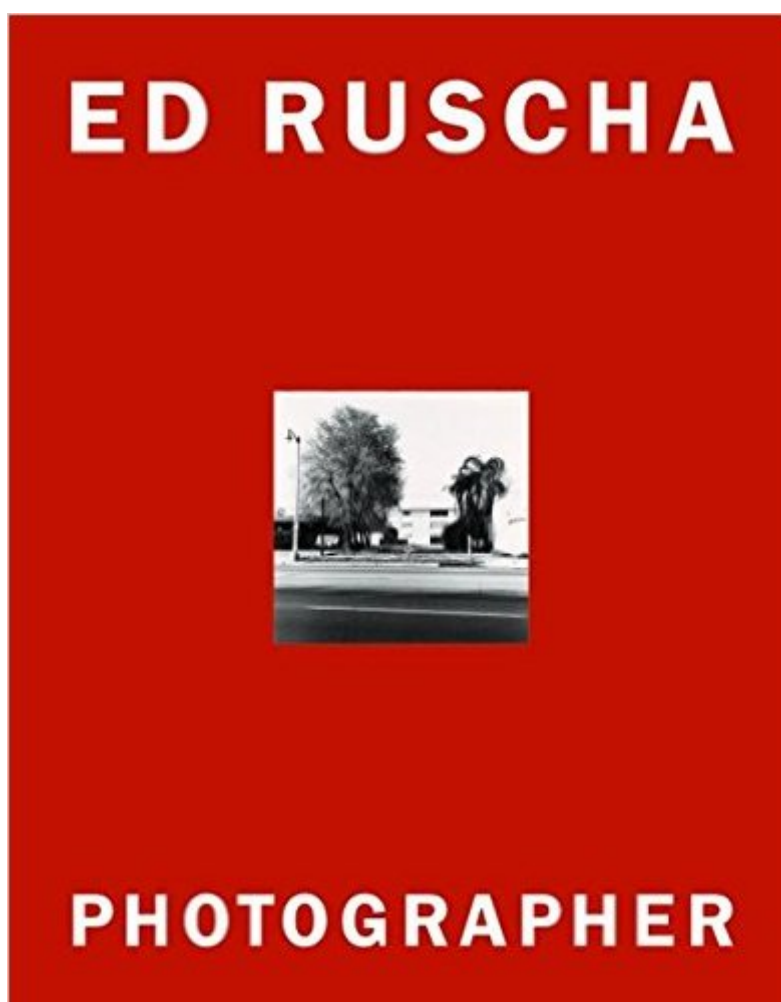


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Ed Ruscha: Photographer



Synopsis

Ed Ruscha's relationship to photography is complex and ambivalent. The world-class painter--and author of a 1972 New York Times article called "'I'm Not Really a Photographer'"--has been known to refer to his work in this second medium as a "hobby," despite considerable, persistent critical interest. Whether he likes it or not, the small albums of plainly-shot, snapshot-sized images he produced in the 1960s and 70s, including *Twenty-Six Gasoline Stations*, intrigued his contemporaries and earned him an unshakable reputation. How? His subject matter was neither purely documentary nor solely artistic, in fact it was stereotypical and banal, with motifs drawn from the car-dominated western landscape. That rebellious material, along with his serial presentation, made for a mythical road-movie or photo-novel effect with Beat Generation overtones. The combination attracted artists and critics both, especially while serial logic was prominent in Pop art and Minimalism, and then retained that interest later as serial work became prominent in Conceptual art. Critics have remained attentive for decades, and Ruscha's influence remains apparent in new work in Europe and North America. *Ed Ruscha, Photographer* departs from earlier collections to explore how these images--and all of Ruscha's work in disciplines including painting, drawing, printmaking and photography--are guided and shaped by a single vision.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A well-produced book of Ruscha's photo work to coincide with his Whitney Museum exhibition. In the first forty pages Margit Rowell (who organized the exhibition) writes about Ruscha's life and

influences: an intriguing mixture of European commonplace; culture and heavy doses of American commercialism and print pop culture. I thought, though that she found it hard going to explain some of his work within the context of fine art. Ruscha doesn't easily fit into a high culture setting and to my mind some of his endeavors are just plain mundane, the 'Babycakes' book for instance (I fancy Ed might well agree with me, too) but he is prepared to have a go at anything: painting, drawing, screen-printing, photography, publishing, films and clearly some great art has come out of all these different mediums. The photo section of the book (114 pages and beautifully printed in 175 screen) runs from some of his first photo works in the late fifties, his European trip in 1961 to the last one, a color print presciently titled The End#4 from 1998. Annoyingly some of the images in this section could have been larger on the page, frequently the white space overpowers a photo that has plenty of detail. Included are eleven of my favorites, his aerial shots of LA parking lots, actually taken by photographer Art Alanis one Sunday in 1967, when the lots were empty. Not having seen any of Ruscha's famous self-published books I was surprised to read in Rowell's essay that some of them have many blank pages. Ruscha's creative ideas only stretched to so many single images but a book has many pages, so why not just leave some of them blank and maintain the medium of a book. Apart from blank pages there was always the option of just changing the subject.

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