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## "COTTON PUFFS, Q-TIPS<sup>®</sup>, SMOKE AND MIRRORS: THE DRAWINGS OF ED RUSCHA" SHOWCASES THE ARTIST'S MATTER-OF FACT WIT AND DISTINCTIVE AMERICAN SENSIBILITY AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, FEBRUARY 13–MAY 30, 2005



Ed Ruscha , *The End #23*, 2002

Acrylic and ink on paper

On loan from The American Contemporary Art Foundation, Inc.,

Leonard A. Lauder, President

Photograph by Paul Ruscha

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Washington, DC—One of America's most important and influential contemporary artists and the U.S. representative to the 2005 Venice Biennale, artist Ed Ruscha (b. 1937) has cast a critical eye on American popular culture for over four decades.

**Cotton Puffs, Q-tips®**, **Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha** is the first museum retrospective of the artist's drawings. On view at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from February 13 through May 30, 2005, the exhibition features works from the past four decades, highlighting Ruscha's genius for the wry and deadpan juxtaposition of words and objects.

The exhibition was organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, where it was on view from June 24 through September 26, 2004, before traveling to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles from October 17, 2004, through January 17, 2005. Pared down to ninety-four works, the National Gallery of Art's presentation is a more condensed version of the original exhibition.

"Ruscha is a recognized master who has inspired many of today's young artists," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art. "We are grateful to our funders for their support of this exhibition, a particularly timely occurrence in light of Ruscha's selection as the featured U.S. artist at the Venice Biennale."

### **Exhibition Support**

This project is funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services by an Act of Congress. *Q-tips*® is a registered trademark of Chesebrough-Pond's Inc.

The exhibition in Washington is made possible by The Broad Art Foundation.

### **The Exhibition**

The title of the exhibition derives from a conversation between exhibition curator Margit Rowell and the artist, in which Ruscha stated, "You know, it's just cotton puffs, *Q-tips*®, smoke and mirrors." "Cotton puffs" and "*Q-tips*®" are items Ruscha regularly utilizes in the making of his drawings; "smoke and mirrors" refers to the illusory quality of the works.

Ranging in date from 1959 to 2002, the drawings in the exhibition are made with conventional materials such as graphite and pastel but also unorthodox ones, including gunpowder, vegetable juices, and tobacco stain.

As much a photorealist as a pop artist, a conceptualist as a minimalist, Ruscha defies easy categorization. He has recorded the shifting emblems of American life in the form of classic Hollywood logos and stylized gas stations. Examples include *Trademark #5* (1962), an image of the Twentieth Century Fox trademark complete with klieg lights and dramatically streamlined diagonals, as well as *Standard Study #2* (1962), a brightly colored study of a classic 1950s gas station in Amarillo, Texas.

Ruscha also embraces language as the very subject of his work, probing both its power and relativism as a means of communication. In a variety of scripts and styles—from gothic to longhand, from ribbonlike lettering to words that seem poured rather than printed—Ruscha gives words a physical voice. “They’re almost not words,” he remarks. “They are objects that become words.” Examples in the exhibition include *Pool* (1968), a so-called “liquid” drawing, *Dirty Baby* (1977), and *The End #23* (2002), a seemingly scratched image of that now virtually obsolete cinematic tag line.

### **About the Artist**

Born in 1937 in Omaha, Nebraska, and raised in Oklahoma City, Ruscha moved to Los Angeles in 1956. He attended the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts) until 1960, studying painting, photography, and the graphic arts. In 1961, Ruscha embarked on a career as an artist and produced enigmatic paintings, drawings, and photographic books of gasoline stations, apartment buildings, palm trees, and vacant lots. Ruscha was recently chosen by a committee of American museum curators to represent the United States at the 2005 Venice Biennale. His work will be featured in the U.S. pavilion at the prestigious art festival during June 2005.

### **Curators, Catalogue, and Lecture/Book Signing on February 13**

The exhibition is curated by independent curator Margit Rowell, formerly at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris, the Fundació Joan Miró, Barcelona, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. National Gallery curator of modern prints and drawings Judith Brodie is coordinating the Washington presentation.

The exhibition catalogue **Cotton Puffs, Q-tips<sup>®</sup>, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings**

**of Ed Ruscha** showcases the artist's singular vision and his wide range of highly personal media and techniques. The catalogue includes essays by Margit Rowell and Cornelia Butler, curator, the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. Published by the Whitney Museum of American Art and distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc. and Steidl, the catalogue is available for \$45/hardcover and can be ordered by calling (800) 697-9350, (202) 842-6002, or by emailing [mailorder@nga.gov](mailto:mailorder@nga.gov).

On Sunday, February 13, at 2:00 p.m., the artist will present the opening day lecture, "Ed Ruscha on Ed Ruscha," followed by a book signing. The lecture takes place in the East Building Auditorium.

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## General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit [www.nga.gov/renovation](http://www.nga.gov/renovation) (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [twitter.com/ngadc](http://twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

For additional press information please call or send inquiries to:

Press Office

National Gallery of Art

2000B South Club Drive

Landover, MD 20785

phone: (202) 842-6353 e-mail: [pressinfo@nga.gov](mailto:pressinfo@nga.gov)

Deborah Ziska

Chief of Press and Public Information

(202) 842-6353

ds-ziska@nga.gov