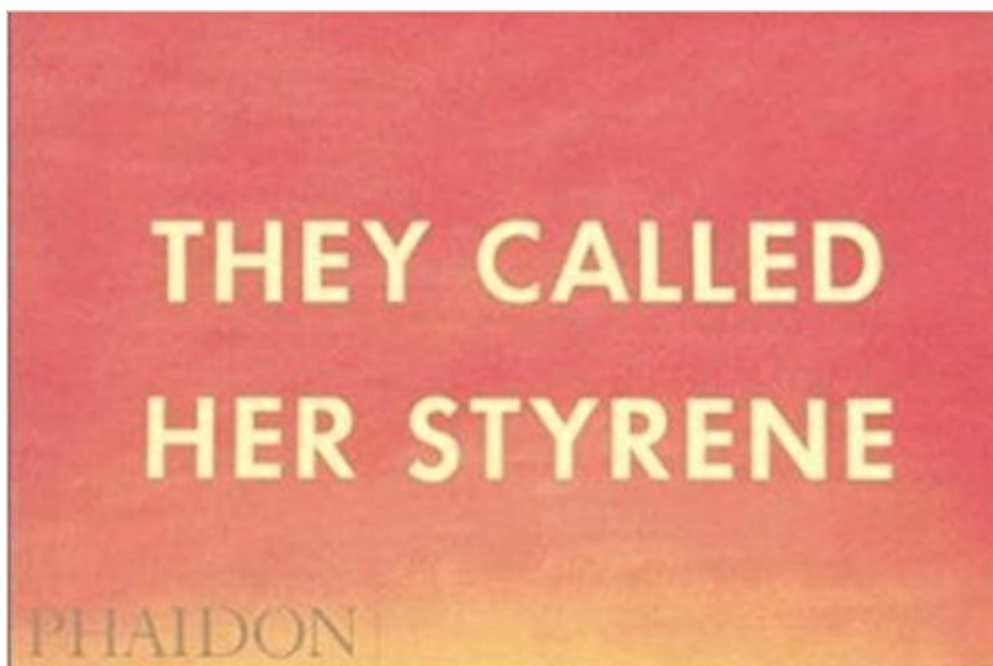


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They Called Her Styrene, Etc.



Synopsis

Assembled in the form of a thick block, this book reproduces approximately 600 word drawings, paintings and works on paper by the Los Angeles-based American artist Edward Ruscha (b. 1937). The result is a sort of novel without an obvious plot, a series of words with no narrative. monochromatic, abstract background in the late 1950s and has continued to explore the language-based imagery that has become a hallmark of his work. Pulling elements from the visual language of advertising and commercial art, he has made hundreds of word prints, drawings, and paintings that exhibit an interplay between bold letters and shaded backgrounds. Some of the works consist of only one word - great, mud, trust; others of short combinations or phrases - Indeed I do, She sure knew her devotionals and They called her Styrene.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"Ambiguous, often hilarious and with no narrative to explain their presence, the words become objects or landscapes all to themselves."-V magazine "...The size and shape of a small, thick block - perfect for stocking-stuffing."-New York Magazine

Ed Ruscha was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1937 and moved to Los Angeles in 1956, excited by the newness, mobility and freedom represented by the southern Californian landscape. He studied commercial art at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts) in Los Angeles from 1956 to 1960. Ruscha began making prints and drawings consisting of one word on an often monochromatic, abstract background in the late 1950s. Since then his work has been characterized by the

exploration of language-based imagery. Ruscha's style is characterized by deadpan wit and cool understatement, which were developed further in his language-based prints and paintings that mark an axis between audacious Pop Art and introspective Conceptualism. In the early 1970s, Ruscha began working with Cirrus Editions and Cirrus Gallery in Los Angeles, pursuing his interest in liquid words, unconventional ink substances (including chocolate, Pepto Bismol and caviar) and trompe l'oeil imagery. Throughout his career Ruscha has worked in a wide range of media - photography, graphic design, painting, drawing, printmaking and film. Ruscha's work continues to be exhibited at museums and galleries around the world.

Great size. Makes for a wonderful gift. I came across this book in Vegas and had to buy my own copy.

Fastest service. very satisfied

...because it is a nice object and very enjoyable to thumb through. The binding is failing a bit, but it is an essential in my library.

Funny, but it seems as though every time a new Ed Ruscha book gets released, it then becomes the standard "must-have" edition. In my opinion, this is an excellent book for the price, even if only for a single viewing. What I mean is this: it's more like an object than a book, due to its small area (but thick volume), and lack of publisher information distraction - the absolute first page blatantly plunges you into the art immediately. It will take the average art fan a good two hours alone viewing each plate at a contemplative pace. I have had two art shows myself, and Ed's work is by far my closest influence, so I am heavily biased. This book lacks the token interview with the artist, and also his other forms of work (notably the parking lot photography series, which is a sheer delight in its own right), but for the sake of the design, perhaps the book as it is says all it has to say (no pun intended, if you're familiar with his works). Part of the fun, though, with viewing these kinds of Ed's works, is reading his titles and materials used, as they are equally insightful; yes, I miss that. But the average or novice art buff wouldn't even notice it missing. All things considered, this is a great little form of entertainment all contemporary art lovers should own.

Bob Perelman was thumbing through my copy of Ed Ruscha's *They Call Her Styrene* (Phaidon, 2000) the other evening, which raises the question of intermedia from another angle. Ruscha, if you

don't know his work, is a painter and photographer associated with the 1960s Los Angeles scene that proved to be an intersection between Pop, Funk and Conceptual art. His work takes different forms, but Styrene is representative of the works that have most attracted me: prints, drawings and watercolors involving anything from a single word to short phrases, often against backgrounds that are close to monochromatic but which may suggest a picturesque element. Styrene collects some 600 of these works into a single, affordable volume - I've seen individual paintings priced as high as \$45,000. My question is this: fine as they are as visual works of art, are Ed Ruscha's text pieces also writing? Ruscha himself has a cryptic, but intriguing comment right at the end of the book:

"Sometimes found words are the most pure because they have nothing to do with you. I take things as I find them. A lot of these things come from the noise of everyday life." End of comment. So far as I know, Ruscha has not undertaken to publish these works as writing, nor in the context of writing.

As visual art, these works inhabit that territory that utilizes language for its own purposes. Its closest kin in that vein may be the signage of Jenny Holzer, the paintings of Lawrence Weiner, or the poster paintings of Barbara Krueger, but the more densely textual pseudo-philosophical musings of Joseph Kosuth and Art Language aren't entirely unrelated either. Ruscha's prints and paintings make use of color and the illusions of depth and texture in ways that Holzer's do not and his works often lack the overt political commentary one finds in her work and in that of Krueger's. At its most plain, a Ruscha work might consist of white sans serif letters centered against a black background: A

HEAVYSHOWEROFSCREWSorTHICKBLOCKSOFMUSICAL

FUDGEorWARMAUDITORIUMWhile Holzer has executed some pieces etched into benches, a form that has to recall the (literally) concrete poems of Scottish poet Ian Hamilton Finlay, Ruscha's droll texts strike me in many ways being better writing. If, that is, they are writing at all. The last text above, for example, makes great use of the recurrence of the a, r and m sounds (not to mention the echo of the w one hears in the two instances of the u), an attention to the smallest of details that might be more apt to associate with the poetry of Robert Grenier. Microwriting such as this can invoke every pleasure one expects from the best of poetry. The first two pieces above aren't bad either - both use the same strategy of invoking a single term that is "out of context" in its phrase (screws and musical), which functions to set the language around it into a kind of relief, classic demonstrations of what the Russian formalists called *ostrananie*, Brecht "the alienation effect," and which Pound characterized as "making it new." In addition to reminding me at moments of Grenier, some of the more visually complex of Ruscha's pieces, where richly textured "3D" words float in idealized pastel skies, remind me of how Hannah Weiner used to describe her visual hallucinations, words that would appear on people's foreheads that to her seemed to be composed in "dog fur" or

similar materials. Weiner used these messages to create her "clairvoyant" works, although that aspect of such found language is not carried through her writing - the closest she gets is to occasionally "erase" some lines of certain letters. All of which makes Ed Ruscha's texts function as an intriguing test of the boundaries of writing - how can a lone word such as "fud," written in what looks like white ribbon on an intense red surface (onto which the letters cast shadows) function as a poem? It can / It can't / It can / It can't - like a Necker cube or other optical illusions, the text strobes in and out of the realm of literature (though it always remains within the realm of the visual). It may be that this flicker effect is precisely Ed Ruscha's contribution to writing.

This book is as inspiring to look at closed as it is on every page. It is a "paper brick" and every page has an image. I will pick this book up for inspiration as well as simply look at it as an inspirational object. LOVE!!!!

I gave this one to a friend who never heard of Ruscha before. He loved it. It's a little unpretentious experience through Ruscha's world. It's not that kind of 7-colour-printed-on-coated-expensive-paper, but works very well as good entertainment and a valid introduction to west coast fine artists. Worth its price.

My adventures with *They Called Her Styrene* began on a subway ride in Boston earlier this month. I saw an older woman flipping through a book, each page containing a picture with a few words written on it. I started looking with her as she flipped through it. She flipped through it for about 20 minutes, and then my stop was next. I was worried I would never know the title of this book, and, being too shy to ask, would leave the train and be unsatisfied. Luckily, just as the train stopped, she closed the book and I saw the title. I bought it shortly afterwards. I already described it - it's a book of pictures with words across them. I enjoy it very much. As you sit and thumb through all of the pages, each word or group of words, combined with the colors on the background, conjure all sorts of thought and feelings inside you. For me, it serves very well to just sit and thumb through it, looking at all the pictures and letting my mind wander as the book prescribes. It's wonderful.

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