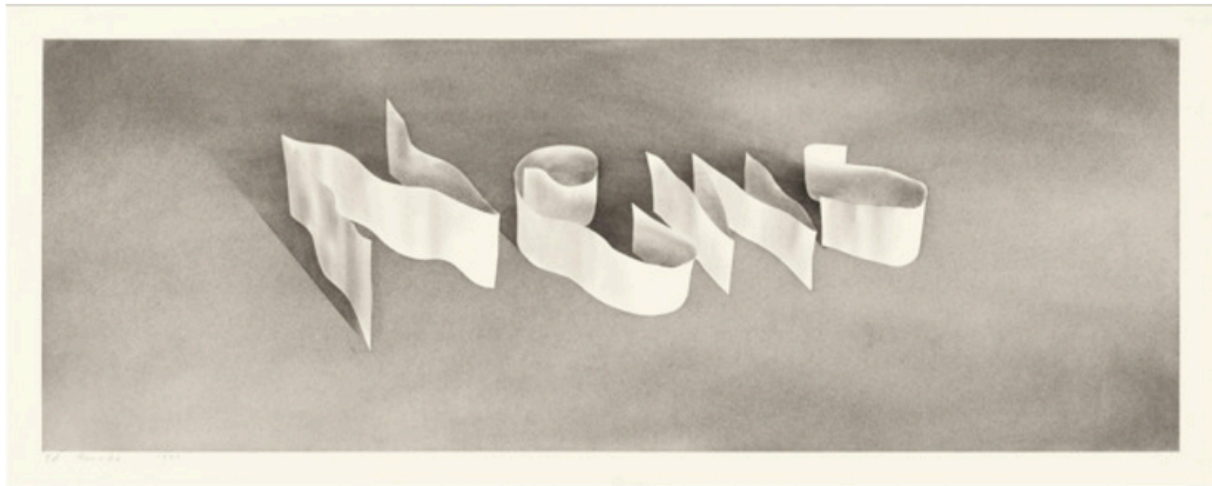


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## Gunpowder on Paper: Looking Back at Ed Ruscha's "Ribbon Words"

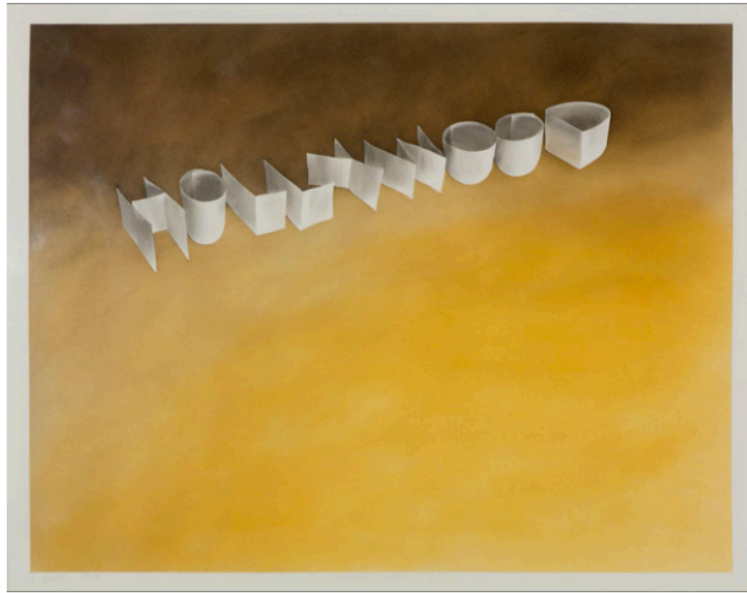
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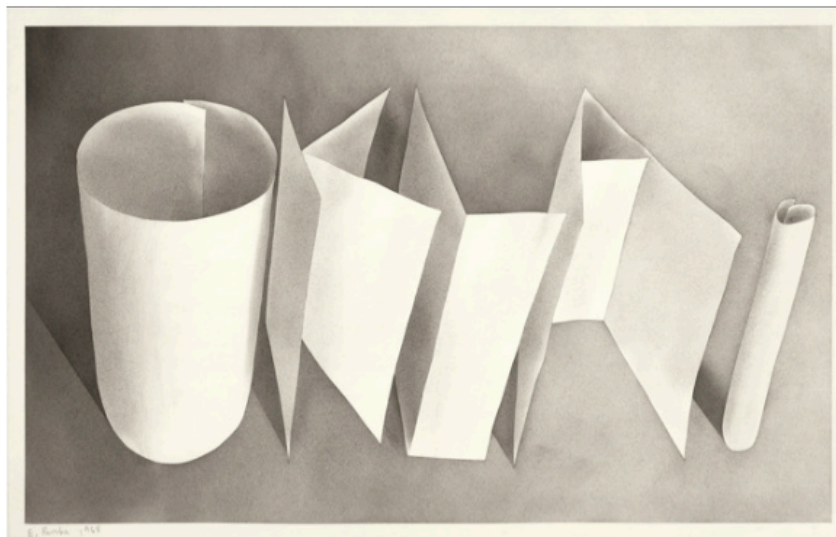
Ed Ruscha  
*News*, 1970  
Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art LLC

Ed Ruscha may be best known for documenting 1960s Americana, as in his photographic series "Twentysix Gasoline Stations" (1963) and "Some Los Angeles Apartments" (1965), but a new exhibition at Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art in New York focuses on a separate series created just a few years later. Curated by Dieter Buchhart, "Ribbon Words" puts the spotlight on Ruscha's simple yet seductive word drawings.



Ed Ruscha  
*Hollywood*, 1970  
Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art LLC

In these works, Ruscha used a complex trompe l'oeil technique involving graphite, stencils, tape, pastels, and gunpowder, which, after accidentally discovering its artistic use, he applied to paper using cotton balls and Q-tips. Gunpowder was just one of many unconventional materials (Pepto Bismol, anyone?) Ruscha employed over the years.



Ed Ruscha  
*Okla.*, 1968  
Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art LLC

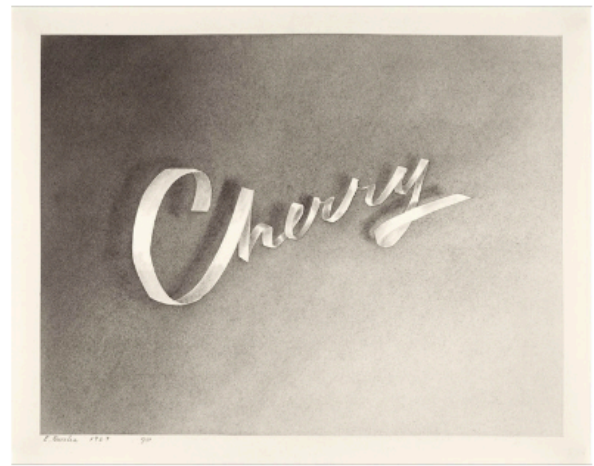


Ed Ruscha  
*Sin*, 1968  
Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art LLC

The results were images both glamorous and mysterious, featuring words that seem to hover in space. Evocative of old films or classic neon signs, some words are easy to read; others, darker in nature, read like warning labels or require a moment to decipher, like the ominous *Sin* (1968). Even though the drawings contain familiar words, the works are vaguely puzzling and open to interpretation. The experience of looking at them hinges on the viewer's personal associations with the word or concept.



Ed Ruscha  
*Music*, 1969  
Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art LLC



Ed Ruscha  
*Cherry*, 1967  
Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art LLC

Ruscha—a painter, printmaker, photographer, and filmmaker—is an artist who defies categorization. He has drawn from a variety of inspirations, including architecture, signage and billboards, pop culture, and the idiosyncrasies of daily life in his adopted city of Los Angeles. On first look, the ribbon words might seem like a creative departure from the snapshot-style photo series Ruscha had been working on years earlier. But a wider consideration of his work shows that these beguiling word-objects fit comfortably within his eclectic oeuvre.

“I like the idea of a word becoming a picture, almost leaving its body,” Ruscha has said, “then coming back and becoming a word again.”

—Bridget Gleeson

*“Ed Ruscha: Ribbon Words” is on view at Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art, New York, May 6–Jul. 1, 2016.*

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