

WORDS WITH RUSCHA

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and bolder than Goya's norm; the drawing, more jerky and harsh, emphasizing what Malraux terms the "breaking of the arabesque." Thus, we get a direct and forceful treatment, vulgar or primitive, both in the sense of lacking aesthetic refinement or beauty, and in the sense of recalling the untutored efforts of popular artists. All of this for a vulgar, direct, and forceful subject: the ordinary man caught in the social machine of war, a machine for destruction.

At the end, what can be said of any "purpose" or concluding intent of Goya's *Disasters of War*? Analysis of earlier plate numbers, plate sizes, etc., shows several stages in the growth of the series. In Goya's first conception, the etchings concerned the horrors of war, to which he appropriately added the horrors of war-caused famine. The final plate in this conception of the series (69) asserts that at the end of war, the end of life, or the end of life in war, *there is no justice*. This reading is confirmed by a proof of the first state in the Biblioteca Nacional. Through explicit wiping, Goya there contrasts the yet uncovered allegorical figure of Justice with the terrible skeleton rising from the grave. That blank corpse has passed the bounds and knows the truth of what he returns—in spite of screaming demons of the supernatural—to tell us with his simple but shattering inscription: "Nothing." The difference between that proof and the finished etching is Goya's typical insight that the point could be made more effectively by graphic means than by words. So he obliterated the allegorical figure with layers of his harsh acid, leaving only her emblematic scales as an unmistakable indication of the message.

In the second stage, Goya added: a few more action and famine scenes; several scenes showing the foolishness of traditional religious forms, interpolated before plate 69, thus emphasizing the total lack of justice or hope for justice even after death; and, finally, his "caprichos enfáticos," which presently complete the series. These additions through plate 78 symbolize the war's political aftermath and disappointment (75,77). Besides the deceits of the leaders of church and state, the reason for the failure of free and democratic government is clear in Goya's terrible inscription on plate 74: "miserable humanity, the fault is your own." The reason lies in human nature, for Goya, in the new understanding of the possibility of man as more thoroughly brutal and incompetent.

Goya's final ending is plates 79-82. Plate 79 shows the result, or the problem, with war and its political vultures: "Truth is dead," and the established social officials only preside over his demise. Plate 80 raises the question: "Will she rise again?" though menaced by those same

official powers? But who is she anyway? What is "truth" for Goya here? Well, what is clear is the danger, plate 81: the monster of war which gobbles men. With that horrific danger, only a hope remains for the truth. Plate 82: "This is the truth": a simple man, a peasant, peacefully surrounded by the fruits of his labor. This is Goya's only lyricism in the series; and in spite of his new awareness of man's possibilities for stupidity and evil brutality, Goya draws specifically a lyricism of the common man.

While most of the *Disasters* points forward to the *Disparates*, this last plate points forward to Goya's magnificent late paintings of peasants and laborers. Beyond that, and with a deeper sense of man than they will have, Goya's last plate points forward from 18th-century enlightenment ideas of liberty, to the 19th- and 20th-centuries' romanticisms of democracy. It is a hope for peace which has yet to be fulfilled, not least of all by our own country.

Andrew Robison teaches philosophy at the University of Illinois; he also lectures and writes on the graphic arts.

¹ Goya's prints are my point, so the essay is best "read" side by side with them. Plate numbers are referred to in parentheses, and good reproductions are available in the Abrams book or the Dover paperbacks. Further particularities of history and techniques may be found, for example, in F. D. Klingender's *Goya in the Democratic Tradition* and Tomás Harris' *Goya: Engravings and Lithographs*. For their kind encouragement and helpful criticisms, I owe deep thanks to Philip Hofer and A. Hyatt Mayor.

² From the *Caprichos* to the *Disasters* (and then the *Disparates*), a human face becomes even less a type of "face" which can be repeated throughout many compositional placements, and more a definite personality caught at a definite emotional moment of portrayal.

³ To interpret plates 39 and 37, note that Goya's French soldiers always wear mustaches or beards; his Spaniards, almost never. Compare Goya's other pairings: the Spanish execution of French sympathizers (14) with the French execution of Spanish patriots (15); the dead and wounded aftermath of battle for the French (20) with "the same" for the Spanish (21).

⁴ Compare the Boston proof of one of the most horrific plates (37), bearing Goya's manuscript notation of where he saw the mutilated body.

WORDS WITH RUSCHA by Howardena Pindell

Ed Ruscha is thirty-four and lives in Hollywood, California. He has completed sixty-two individual prints, one print environment, sixteen books, and one movie. The interview is compiled from a taped telephone conversation the morning of July 22, 1972, between Oklahoma City and New York and special and not so special delivery letters covering the complete range of his work.

What made you work out your ideas through prints and not paintings—or have you been painting all along?

No. No. I haven't painted for about two years and, I guess, you know, the brush is too heavy.

The brush is too heavy!

Right. I couldn't pick it up. And the canvas was too light. I couldn't get them together.

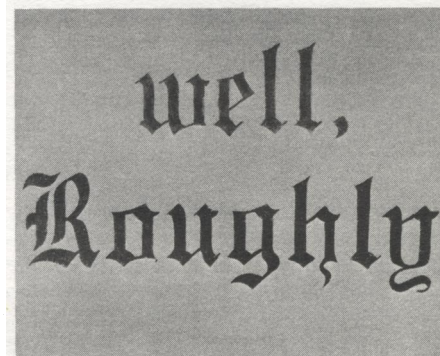
And the stone was heavy. Is there any particular process in printmaking you like?

I've never made an etching. I think I just got into the habit of making prints in the past two-three years. Printmaking is glorified as a great art at the expense of people knowing it's a fantastic marketable item. But it produces some of the best results in any form of making any-

thing a multiple—my books included because they are printed offset.

Are you in it for the money?

No, but if you make prints, you're around people—artists who make prints and people who buy prints. It confuses me how prints can be whipped around and turned over so quickly. You know, they literally sell like pancakes. They're so marketable it's confusing, but I've always liked it. I've always had a good time making prints, and the people I've worked with have always been very interesting. I'm just frankly tired of doing it. Tired of the whole act, so I don't consider myself a printmaker with a capital P. I like Artist with an A.



Ed Ruscha, *Well, Roughly*, rose petals and chocolate syrup on linen (20x24 in.), 1971. Courtesy Ultra Violet.

Why did you start making organic prints and does it bother you that the prints decompose?

It was a spinoff of my *Stains* book, an edition of boxed sheets of 100% rag bond paper, each containing a single stain dropped at random, middle of each sheet. In the prints, instead of using ink, I filled the empty shape areas with organics or anything that would allow itself to print. There's been no decomposing of my prints, but two failed the "100-year-total-sunlight-absorption test" and this produced some insignificant color-fading.

I noticed in the catalogue for your exhibition in Minneapolis last spring a list of words. Do you keep lists of words?

No, the curator Gus Foster and I thought of listing all the words I've used since I started working while doing the catalogue. So I had to go back and dig out the records. I had to get out all my old diaries and look up all the words.

You keep diaries?

Yeah. I had to go back and compile all that stuff. It's just possible there are one or two words that are left out, but I doubt it.

I can't imagine having time to keep a diary.

Well, it's not a diary where I say, "July 40, 1972. Today I"... It's things that strike me funny. You know, like I heard somebody say, "It's your baby. You rock it." Well I just ran to my book with that.

Do you play scrabble?

Scrabble? Scrabble intrigues me. Here's what I thought—sooner or later I can take all my words and maybe make a sentence, except that I don't have any contractions with the exception of "won't."

Why don't you like contractions?

I like "Crescent Technology" better than "Crestek." But I did the word "won't" once. "Won't" just seemed tighter packed than "will not."

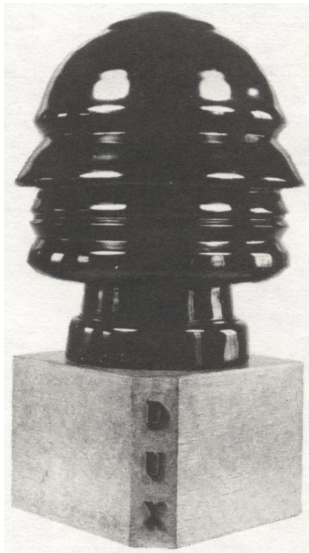
Why are you attracted to specific words like "Annie," "carp," "lisp," "sing"?

Because I love the language. Words have temperatures to me. When they reach a certain point and become hot words, then they appeal to me. "Synthetic" is a very hot word. Sometimes I have a dream that if a word gets too hot and too appealing, it will boil apart, and I won't be able to read or think of it. Usually I catch them before they get too hot. I have, though,

caught words in the dictionary instead of had them come to me via flashes.

How do you decide to render a word in liquid or ribbon letters?

I move with the particular mood I'm in rather than the word I happen to choose. But there are, for reasons of classical painting, yes's and no's. I can't do a painting of a ribbon word, because ribbons belong only with drawings. Liquids have not been used in my drawings for a long time—liquids are for prints and paintings only. These media are good for only certain techniques.



R.A. Bertelli, *Head of Mussolini*, black pottery (19¼ in.). Courtesy Imperial War Museum, London.

Why do you use insects in your work? They're repulsive.

Because I had a jillion cockroaches around my studio. I love them but I don't want them around.

I recently saw photographs of two 1959 Duchamps in a Paris publication—a plaster cast of a foot with flies and a marzipan sculpture of vegetables with flies.

Of all the work I've seen of Duchamp, I've never seen those.

Did you see the Duchamp exhibition at the Pasadena Museum in 1964?

Oh sure, I met him when he came there. His work influenced me much before I met him or actually saw his work. See, it's the kind that can be transmitted through the media, through magazines. His work goes very well that way. Most artists' don't. . . . People will say it's better to see their work than it is pictures of their work. I don't believe this. He's really influenced me.

Any specific work?

The Chocolate Grinder . . . and some other things I could never figure out.

Did Magritte influence you?

Yes, Magritte did influence me, but it came the other way around—what I call 360-degree influence. That's influence from a person's thoughts and force and not from his pictures, which the person being influenced has not seen, until later on. The same with Dali. I've been influenced by Dali, but it's been through other sources. Because I'll go back, and I'll be working on something and I'll see a picture of Dali's I've never seen before, and there is my work. Jasper Johns is the person who actually got me working as an artist.

What was it that influenced you? Johns' recognizable subject matter or his words?

It was the fact his paintings did not look like paintings. I saw *American Flag* and *Targets*. Those two paintings were the reason for my being an artist.

Did any other artists or friends influence you?

Yes, but less what my work is like and more the kind of person I am.

Why have you confined your documentation to the West?

Oh, for no particular reason. I think if I lived in New York I'd do things about New York. I'm sure it would work that way.

What about the trips you've been taking? You go back and forth to Oklahoma . . . and your trip to Paris? Do you pull information from these experiences?

I traveled to Europe in 1961, and I really learned nothing. I thought I was going to, you know, the History of Art. . . . I just yawned a lot.

The reason I asked—the catalogue for your Minneapolis exhibition reproduces a head of Mussolini by Bertelli.

Oh yes, that's the one piece that affected me while I was in Europe . . . more than any piece in the Louvre or the Prado or any museum I went to. That's the piece that sort of popped the top off of the can. I've never seen another by him. An artist should be lucky to have done one piece like that in his entire life. It's one of the greatest works of art in the 20th century.

Was it the lettering?

No, I just liked the piece itself, and the

method, you know, the method of doing it . . . I guess he spun it out on a potter's wheel.

But you haven't brought anything from your travels into your work in terms of documenting where you have been or are.

Now you're talking like you read a book on concept art. You're talking like there are thousands of artists who do that and it's a kind of style. You're talking about a kind of style, and you're asking me why I haven't done that style. You've seen my *Royal Road Test*? I guess you could say it is the closest thing to documenting something that happened, you know, in a 1-2-3 fashion; on the desert, etc.

I don't really mean it in terms of concept art at all. I think destroying a typewriter in the desert is storytelling anyway. I mean, you use the Standard Oil station and the Hollywood real estate sign, but there hasn't been another "monument" that's seemed important enough to you to use it in your work.

Oh, I see what you mean by document. No, I don't think there is, but there are other things that worked their way into being documents, monuments, like the swarm of ants could be a monument. I also did a painting of the 20th Century-Fox trademark and after that a painting of the Los Angeles County Museum.

Burning?

Yes.

Why did you select small fires, swimming pools, and parking lots as subjects for your books?

Purely for areas of concentration in my life. *Small Fires* came at a time when I needed to come inside. It's my only interior book. The rest are all exteriors, with the exception of *Records*, which is neuter. Pools came when I was swimming every day and *Parking Lots* when I felt like being aerial.

I noticed in Banks, Tanks, Ranks a photograph of Captain Medina. Was there a reason?

No. It was just a quick way of saying "rank," but no political note intended. I don't care what he did, as far as my art goes. Again it was a photo of a photo and not a photo of a person which is important.

But Medina's the only person in your work with the exception of your friends in Royal Road Test. You use banal monuments, the swimming pool, the gas station, parking lots, whatever is used and

left behind by humanity, but not people themselves. People are incidental.

Oh yeah, people *are* incidental. I've avoided having people in the pictures in all my books, because they're . . . because that's not the subject. Very distracting. People are very distracting anyway. Once, though, I painted a picture of a dead man, but it was actually a magazine cover with a painting of a dead man on it. So I not only painted a person who was not alive, but it was a painting of a painting. But you have to know when to say, "OK, no people." And so I had to do that in my books, too.



Ed Ruscha, photograph from *Colored People* (7x5½ in.), 1972. Courtesy Castelli Gallery, New York.

What about your new book Colored People?

I did say people were distracting but this is the first time that I've used the word "people" in anything. The objects in the book were affectionately called people—people "in color." The title was a primary motivation in the creation of the book. I have blind faith in the title and blind faith in the pictures, and the two seemed to come together so compatibly in this instance. The plants may appear to be more Mexican than Negro but they *are* colored people, yes?

Why photographs of parking lots or palm trees and not prints?

I could never make a drawing of a palm tree and I could never paint a picture of a palm tree, and I don't know why I can't but I can tell you that I absolutely could never do this. For the same reason I could never mix media. I could never use a photograph, say, in making a lithograph or a silkscreen print. I could never do a collage with photographs or a montage with photographs of my book in a print

or a painting. I have special reservations about the limits of the photograph, and I couldn't cross it into any other medium. People have asked me if I would sell photographs as a limited edition, or buy a print of my photographs, and I've never done that. I've tried to explain that's not my art. I would never frame one of my photographs and put it in an art exhibit. The book is the look, not the photograph.

I think some people may get confused though; for example, Camera magazine did an article on you in their June, 1972, issue.

Oh, I'll always give people photographs if they want to run a reproduction in the magazine. That's fine. But anytime someone wants to take one of my photographs, buy it or frame it, or something like that, that's not . . . that's outside the limits of my art. If they're going to show my photographs, they're going to have to show the whole book.

Do you take your own photographs and does it matter to you whether or not you do?

No, it doesn't matter, and I think sometimes it's even better not to, to avoid becoming too personal with the photographs. In other words, if I have to do a book of palm trees, I think anyone that can snap a camera can do a job as good as I can. And I mean that . . . with the camera it is so simple that anyone can take photographs. I have someone taking photographs for me now.

You just send someone out to take photographs of X?

Yes, the photographs are very simple things. They don't really mean that much to me. It's the making of the entire book that's important—the collecting of all those things.

What do you consider to be the limits of photography?

There are no limits to anything. If some photographers said photography should be limited to fine art and others said it should be limited to functional or commercial art, then it would naturally be both. But the master of the issue should be the person doing it, not the critics or the public. Artists will tell people about art, not the other way around.

Do you think you will do any more movies?

I'd like to do a feature if I could, but I have no idea what I'd make it on. I should have an idea before I make a movie, shouldn't I?

You don't have to. I would think so many things would strike you as you work.

Have you seen my movie *Premium*?

Yes.

It's a pretty hard movie to distribute, and it doesn't fit any categories. If it was a movie of me standing against the wall or doing push-ups or doing concept art things, it would be one thing. But it doesn't fit the artist-statement category. Some artists make films that are an end in themselves, you know, they're statements. Mine's not like that. I don't want people to look at the film like it's a deep statement on my part. It's just an excuse, the story, to make a movie. I wanted to be able to tell a story. I don't know where the movie fits in anywhere, and I can't place it in my art at all.

How do you react if people place you in a category—Pop or any category that delineates your work?

No category fully encompasses someone's art. They're all outside what the artist does anyway—they're after the fact. All categories are made for the convenience of people to delineate someone's work. It shouldn't make that much difference, but it can affect someone's career more than it can someone's work . . . because it's on the street level, it's the business side of things, it's the desire to wrap someone up. All I know is I've kind of escaped all the labels because I started painting in 1961 . . . and my work wasn't in any of the Pop Art shows, with the exception of one. That was the *New Painting of Common Objects* at the Pasadena Museum in 1962. I wasn't even called a Pop artist until lately, and I'm sure that's because I live on the West Coast. Some people have put my work in with Conceptual Art. But I think anybody's out of Conceptual Art who makes any kind of image in his work, which I do. I'm surprised I've gotten as much mileage out of my work as I have. I've been working for ten years now. A lot of artists don't stay around that long. Artists are getting more like athletes. . . . Their production is limited to a shot, to a real quick shot. They don't like to look at it that way—painters become old and they still work. But I've always questioned that. I've left it open. If it happens I ever run out of work to do or the desire to do it, even though I'm making a good living, I always think of the possibility of just dropping art, of going on with something else . . . like working in a restaurant.

Working in a restaurant? I did it the other way around.

Howardena Pindell, an artist, is Assistant Curator of Prints at the Museum of Modern Art.

DIANE ARBUS by Peter C. Bunnell



Diane Arbus, *A Young Man in Curlers at Home on West 20th Street, N.Y.C.*, photograph, 1966. Courtesy Museum of Modern Art.

The careers of artists do not always end with their lives. The posthumous fate of Diane Arbus exemplifies the way in which posterity can transform the artist's stature and the significance of his work. Prior to her suicide in the summer of 1971, Arbus was not what could be termed a well-known photographer. She had a certain reputation, which in terms of the profession of photography, was based in part on her commercial work. In the late sixties, she had published pictures, sometimes representative of her best and most serious work, in such publications as *Esquire*, *New York Magazine*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Show*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. However, she was reluctant to contribute to photography journals or to participate in exhibitions; most people, including even her friends and colleagues, knew only a fraction of her total output. She was also loath to become a professional talker (teacher) about photography. Since her death, her work has been included in the 1972 Venice Biennale—the first American photographer to be so honored—she has been given a retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, and a stunning monograph, published by Aperture,

has been devoted to her photographs. It is questionable whether she would have participated in any of these endeavors had she lived.

Diane Arbus was a photographer of great originality and even greater purity who steadfastly refused to make any concessions whatsoever to her public. Clearly, she must be considered among the two or three major photographers of the last decade, and it may be said that the character of photography has been changed by her photographs. The influence of her work though most likely not the understanding of it, will increase each year hence. The young photographer of the future will find in her work the sources of a new modernism as well as the portents of a personality cult. But as with the photographs of Alfred Stieglitz and Edward Weston, her photographs can withstand such markings.

When her photographs were first exhibited in New York in 1967, Diane Arbus was forty-four. She was not born into the world she photographed. She came from a comfortable New York Jewish family headed by David Nemerov, who owned a once successful Fifth Avenue store. Her brother is the poet and