

## The Front Room

Running parallel to the Main Galleries, the Front Room operates at a different rhythm, featuring focused exhibitions of work by emerging and well-known artists.

## Gallery Guide

Contemporary Art  
Museum St. Louis

November 1–  
December 29, 2013



# Ed Ruscha:

# Miracle

Since the 1960s, Ed Ruscha has received extensive critical acclaim for his paintings, prints, photographs, drawings, and books exploring the geographical and commercial vernacular of Los Angeles, particularly its architecture, graphic signage, and car culture, including street names, parking lots, and gas stations. A particularly iconic image for Ruscha was that of the Standard Oil station, which was found not just in Los Angeles but throughout the United States. Frequently associated with the Los Angeles Pop art movement, Ruscha often combines typographical treatments of words and short phrases—‘Spam,’ ‘Hollywood,’ ‘Quit,’ ‘The End,’ the colloquial expression ‘Oof’—with banal imagery of urban or abstract landscapes. While his works may at first appear simple, they employ a sardonic wit to comment on America’s cultural and socioeconomic evolution over the last half-century. Ruscha remains best known for his objects, but he also made two short experimental films in the 1970s, *Premium* (1971) and *Miracle* (1975). Together, they function as extensions of his studio practice and his interest in geography, consumerism, and popular culture, while also placing greater emphasis on narrative and duration.

This rare presentation of *Miracle* centers on a day in the life of an auto mechanic, Jimmy (played by visual artist Jim Ganzer). In the film, we find him repairing the engine of his 1965 Ford Mustang hours before a planned evening out with his love interest, Trixie (played by actress and singer Michelle Phillips of the band the Mamas and the Papas). Jimmy becomes so consumed by the process of working on the car that he soon forgets about the date. The story, though pithy and languidly paced, is tinged with humor and wisdom.

Essentially, the car functions as a metaphor for the work of the artist—the object of labor and care demanding such commitment that all else pales in significance, even our personal relationships.

Ruscha’s treatment of the car is part of a larger tradition among contemporary artists of exploring the physical and psychological impact of the automobile in the 1960s and '70s. Contemporaries such as John Chamberlain (1927–2011) and James Rosenquist (b. 1933) were interested in the car’s materiality and consumer image, respectively, while fellow Los Angeles artists Kenneth Anger (b. 1927) and Ed Kienholz (1927–94) focused on the social implications of car culture. Ruscha, however, concentrates on the car’s singular ability to both connect and distance us from one another during a time in which the rapid developments of the American highway system would forever change the country’s landscape.

At CAM, *Miracle* is installed directly on Thomas Bayrle’s wallpaper work *Chrysler Tapete* (1970). As they are likeminded in subject and contemporary to one another in their moment of production, the resulting presentation creates a dynamic conversation across mediums and cultures.



## Audio Tour

Download the CAM app at [camstl.org/app](http://camstl.org/app) or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the artists and curators on the audio tour.



Ed Ruscha, *Miracle*, 1975  
16mm, color, 29:39 minutes  
Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery  
© Ed Ruscha

**Ed Ruscha** (b. 1937, Omaha, Nebraska) lives and works in Los Angeles. Recent major solo exhibitions include *Ed Ruscha: Standard* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2012); *Ed Ruscha: Fifty Years of Painting* at the Hayward Gallery, London; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and Haus der Kunst, Munich (2009); *Ed Ruscha: Photographer* at Jeu de Paume, Paris; Kunsthaus Zurich; and Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany (2006); and *Cotton Puffs, Q-Tips®, Smoke and Mirrors: The Drawings of Ed Ruscha* at The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; and National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. (2004). He has participated in numerous international exhibitions, including the 51st Venice Biennale (2005); the Whitney Biennial, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (1997, 1989, 1987); and Documenta IX, VII, and V, Kassel, Germany (1992, 1982, and 1972), among many others.

*Ed Ruscha: Miracle* is organized for the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Kelly Shindler, Associate Curator.

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