

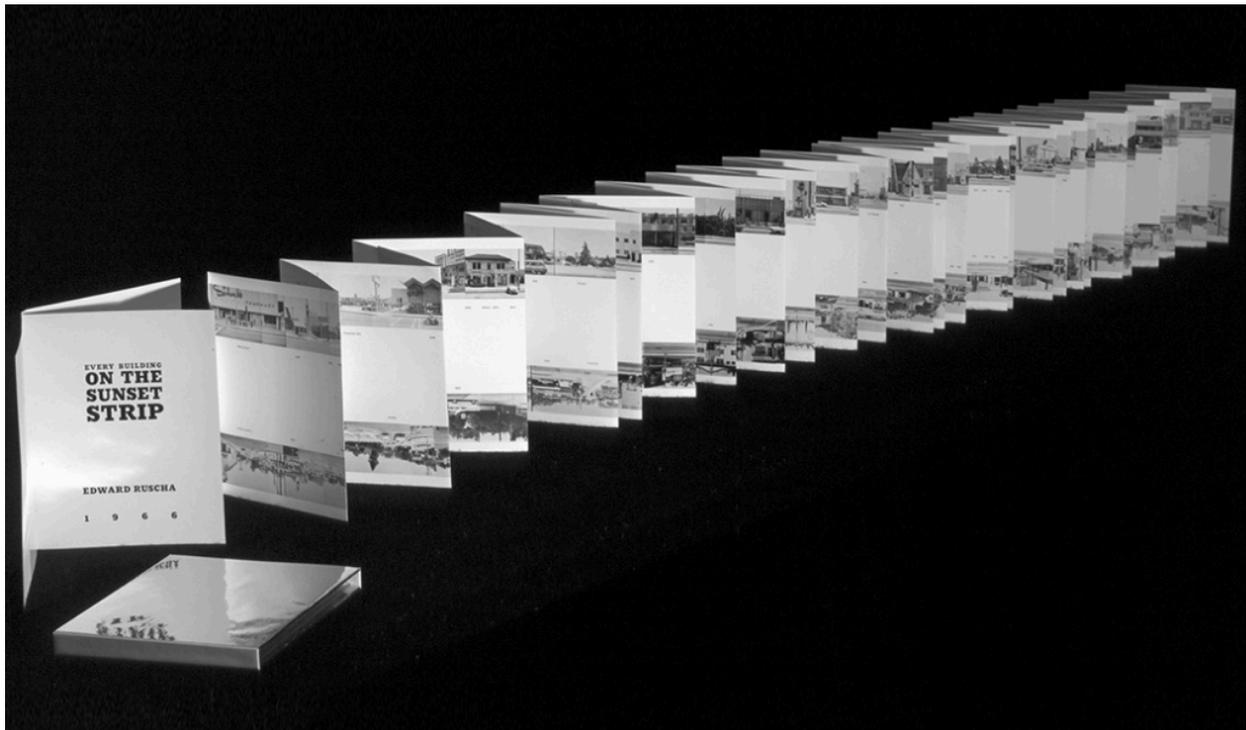
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BLOUINARTINFO

Ed Ruscha's Iconic 'Sunset Strip' Turns 50

BY BILL CLARKE, MODERN PAINTERS | MAY 23, 2016



Ed Ruscha's "Every Building on the Sunset Strip," 1966.
(© Ed Ruscha. Courtesy the artist and Gagosian Gallery)

Ed Ruscha's *Every Building on the Sunset Strip* possessed few hallmarks of an "important" publication when it first appeared in 1966. Books by artists were usually expensive and produced in small editions, whereas *Sunset Strip* had a large print run, was cheap, and was distributed by Ruscha himself. Today, however, the book, with its 27-foot-long accordion-folded black-and-white image of Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, is coveted by collectors and museums, and at the half-century mark has become a source of inspiration for contemporary artists.

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“There’s a mystery about Ruscha’s books that is fascinating,” says Clive Phillpot, director of the library at the Museum of Modern Art in New York from 1977 until 1994, and founder of its artist book collection. “They look simple, but they’re not.”

Phillpot credits Ruscha with causing a paradigm shift in artist-book production. “People didn’t see these books as art,” he explains. “In 1977 I came across Sunset Strip in boutiques, not bookstores, targeted at people looking for a memento of Los Angeles. But Ruscha’s accomplishment with Sunset Strip is remarkable. Taking in one long image requires a different approach to reading than does the immediacy of turning pages. It’s to his credit that other artists have taken the book in many different directions.”

Sunset Strip appeared at a pivotal moment in American art history. By 1966 Pop had peaked, and Sol LeWitt’s “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” appeared in *Artforum* the following year. Ruscha’s books are linked to both movements through their uniform design, serial imagery, the artist’s interest in the everyday, and their circulation outside art galleries. In addition, Ruscha’s photography—indexical and anonymous—aligns more with Bernd and Hilla Becher than with Walker Evans. Interest in Ruscha’s books grew from 1978 on, when he made his final artist book in collaboration with Lawrence Weiner, and with the founding of Printed Matter, Franklin Furnace, and Art Metropole in the 1970s—all dedicated to the promotion of artist books. In hindsight, Ruscha’s offers multiple entry points for artists.

In her latest paintings, for example, New York–based Amy Park emphasizes the book’s visual interruptions, noticeable where Ruscha spliced the film negative or adhered its sections together. “I wanted to capture this collaged quality,” she explains. “By translating Ruscha’s images into monochromatic watercolors, areas of pure abstraction are emphasized.” Park also plays with the idea that the entire book can’t be viewed at once. Scaled up and wrapped around the gallery walls, Park’s paintings are experienced in a linear and temporal fashion—“like strolling down the street,” she says.

The English artist Jonathan Monk, trained in Scotland, traded the “damp streets of Glasgow” and walked the “sundrenched avenues of Los Angeles” for three years, starting in 1997. “While there, I studied West Coast Conceptual art, including Ruscha,” he says. “It certainly affected my output.” Monk’s *None of the Buildings on the Sunset Strip, 1997–99*, comprises a suite of photographs and a book work. The artist walked the same blocks photographed by Ruscha, shooting pictures with his father’s old 35mm camera, without changing the aperture, at intersections with streets leading away from the Strip, ignoring the buildings altogether. As the sun sets on the Strip, the shadows in Monk’s photos lengthen, revisiting Ruscha’s work as a meditation on time. “Once finished, I took the bus home, listening to the Doors on repeat,” he recalls. “Ruscha is a master of deadpan humor. I follow the same path at times.”

Ruscha’s image of Sunset Boulevard also accrues meaning as new depictions of Los Angeles enter popular culture. For *Every Building In the Sunset Strip, 2015*, Toronto-based Dave Dymant researched the buildings pictured in Sunset Strip, compiling his findings into a publication and video. One story finds Joe DiMaggio and Frank Sinatra

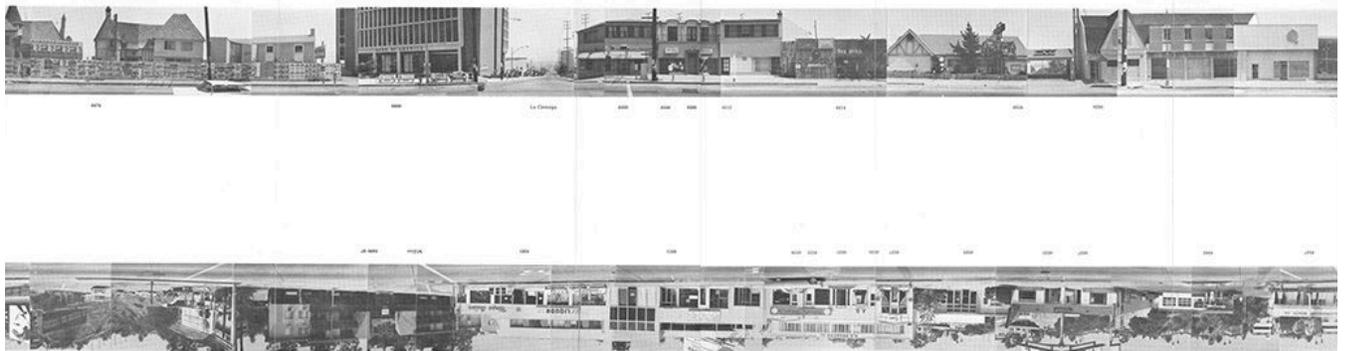
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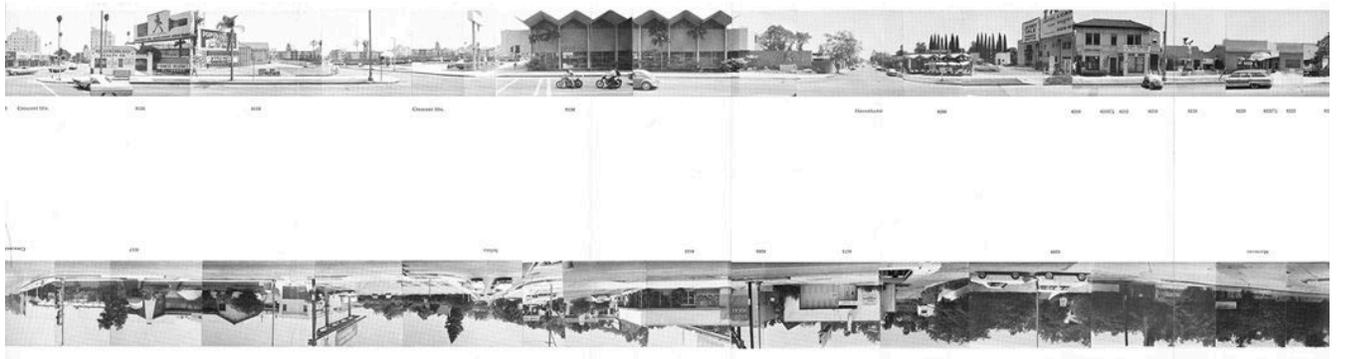
busting down the door of 8863 Sunset, expecting to find that Marilyn Monroe was having an affair. "But Monroe was next door, visiting a friend," says Dymant, who also produced 95 unique montages pairing scans of Sunset Strip with scenes from films in which the book's buildings are in the background. The films include *Annie Hall* (1977), *Scarface* (1983), and French director Jacques Demy's *Model Shop* (1969), which portrays Los Angeles as an in-between space inhabited by unmoored people.

"Being in Los Angeles felt like living at the end of the world," says Monk about his time there. Perhaps it's this liminal quality—the sense of constant change, its futurity—that spurs artists' interest in the city and, by extension, Ruscha's book. As folksinger Phil Ochs proclaims in "The World Began in Eden and Ended in Los Angeles": "Welcome to Los Angeles, city of tomorrow."

Amy Park's paintings based on Sunset Strip are on view at Kopeikin Gallery in Los Angeles through June 4. Booktrek, Clive Phillpot's collected writings on artist books, is available from JRP|Ringier



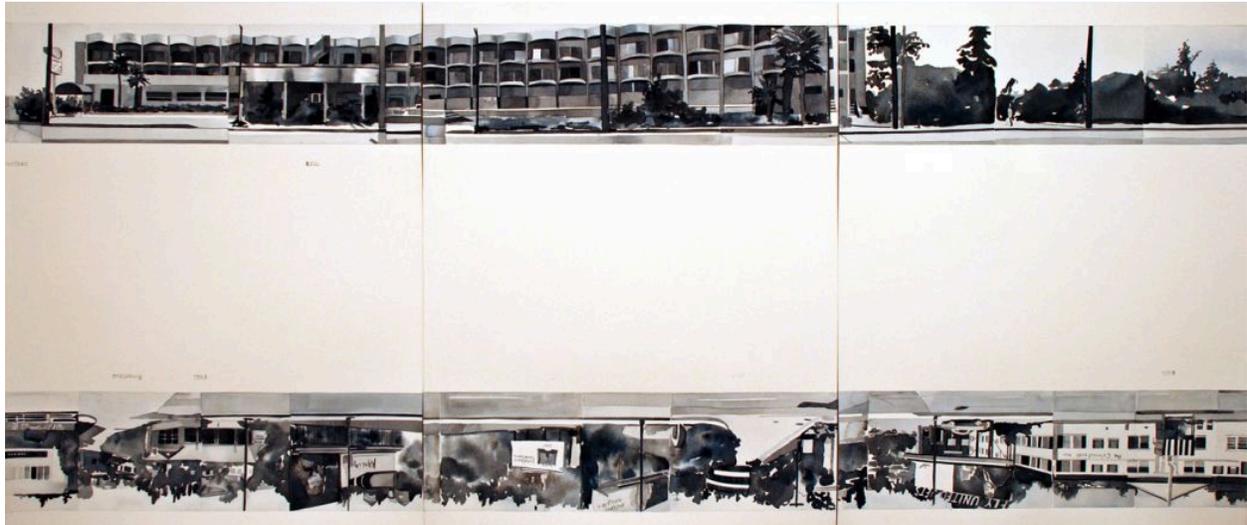
Ed Ruscha
Pages from "Every Building on the Sunset Strip," 1966
ED RUSCHA AND GAGOSIAN GALLERY



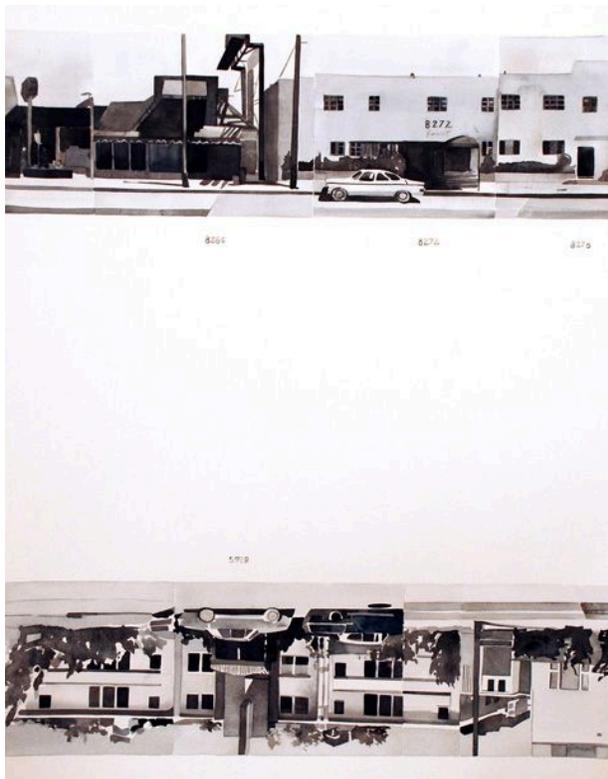
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Amy Park
Installation detail from "Sunset Strip #11 and #12," 2016
Watercolor on paper,
28 x 66 in.



Amy Park
Installation detail from "Sunset Strip #9," 2016