

THE ARTIST'S FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION IN HIS HOME STATE

ARTDESK

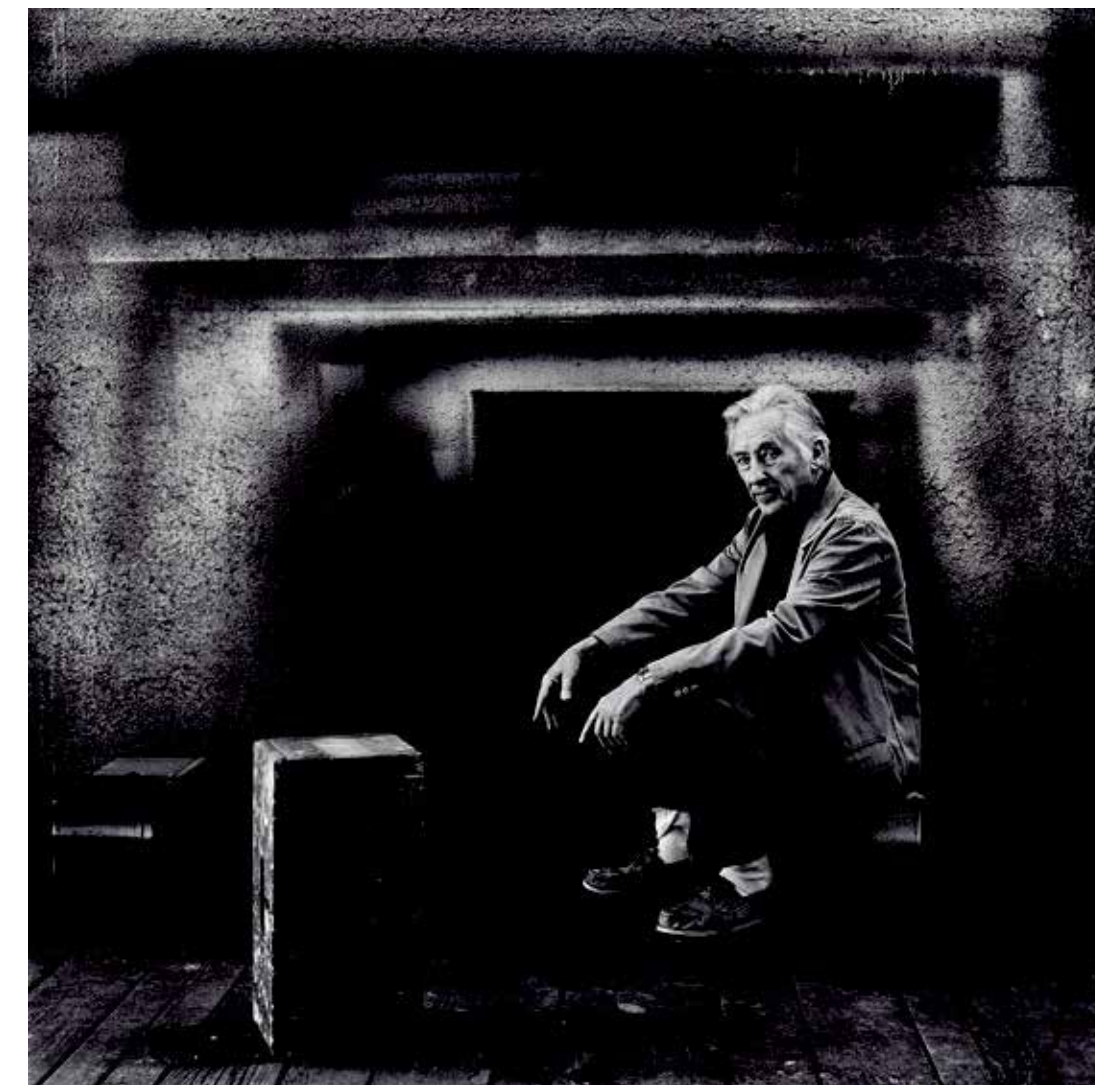
CONTEMPORARY ARTS, PERFORMANCE, LIGHT

Ed Ruscha: OKLA

“To return to my place of origin, especially while carrying a truckload of art I made while away, is bound to be fulfilling.”

ROOTS

AFTER THE GOLD RUSH



ANTON CORBIN/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES

America's greatest living artist, **ED RUSCHA**, makes his return to Oklahoma City.

BY RYAN STEADMAN WITH LOUISA MCCUNE

FOR MANY ARTISTS, it is a rite of passage to leave their hometown in search of a greater audience, a bigger footprint, and a broader source of inspiration. Leonardo da Vinci departed his tiny hamlet of Anchiano to seek his fortune in Rome. Pablo Picasso bolted from his Spanish coastal home of Málaga to find fame in Paris.

No matter how far one travels, the mental imprint of an artist's place of origin—particularly on their creative output—is, in a word, massive. We could call it the *muse*.

That influence quickly becomes evident when looking at the body of work of one of the world's greatest art stars, former Oklahoma City resident Edward Joseph Ruscha IV (roo-SHAY), or, as he is known simply in contemporary art circles, Ed.

Ed Ruscha was born in Omaha, Nebraska, but his family soon relocated to Oklahoma's capital city, where he lived, by most accounts, an idyllic 1950s American childhood. An ambitious young man with an all-consuming itch for art, Ed headed west after graduating high school in 1956 to attend Chouinard Art Institute.

◀ Ed Ruscha in California in 1985

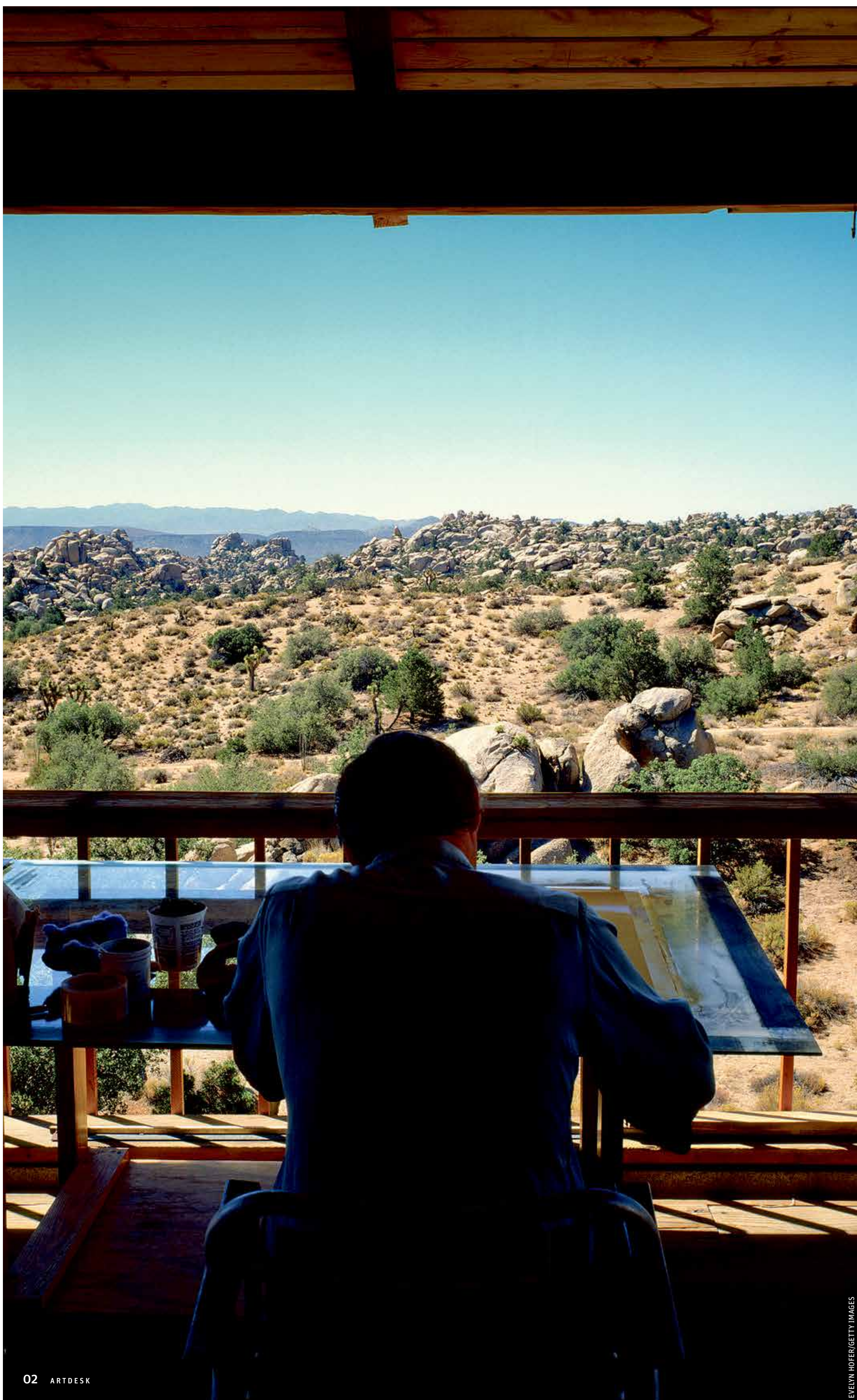
“Ed was part of a group of Oklahoma artist friends, including Jerry McMillan, Joe Goode, Patrick Blackwell, Mason Williams, and Ed's younger brother Paul, who came to Los Angeles before LA became a main influencer of the global art world,” says Ravi Rajan, president of CalArts. Rajan himself is an Oklahoman, raised in Norman, and is an established academic leader in the contemporary arts.

“Many of these artists studied at the Chouinard Art Institute, the forebear school that turned into CalArts. Even before the turbulent 1960s, and the transition to CalArts, Chouinard was a place that focused on developing an artist's unique voice. Other schools in L.A. then were much more corporate and conservative and required students to wear suits, prohibited open-toed shoes, and didn't welcome women. Chouinard was more of a 'free' place where none of these restrictions existed. This place for originality attracted innovative voices like Ed, Larry Bell, Terry Allen, and Allen Ruppersberg, who worked together, lived together, and supported each other during school—and after—something Mr. Ruscha has spoken of strongly, and the strong bonds which continue to this day.”

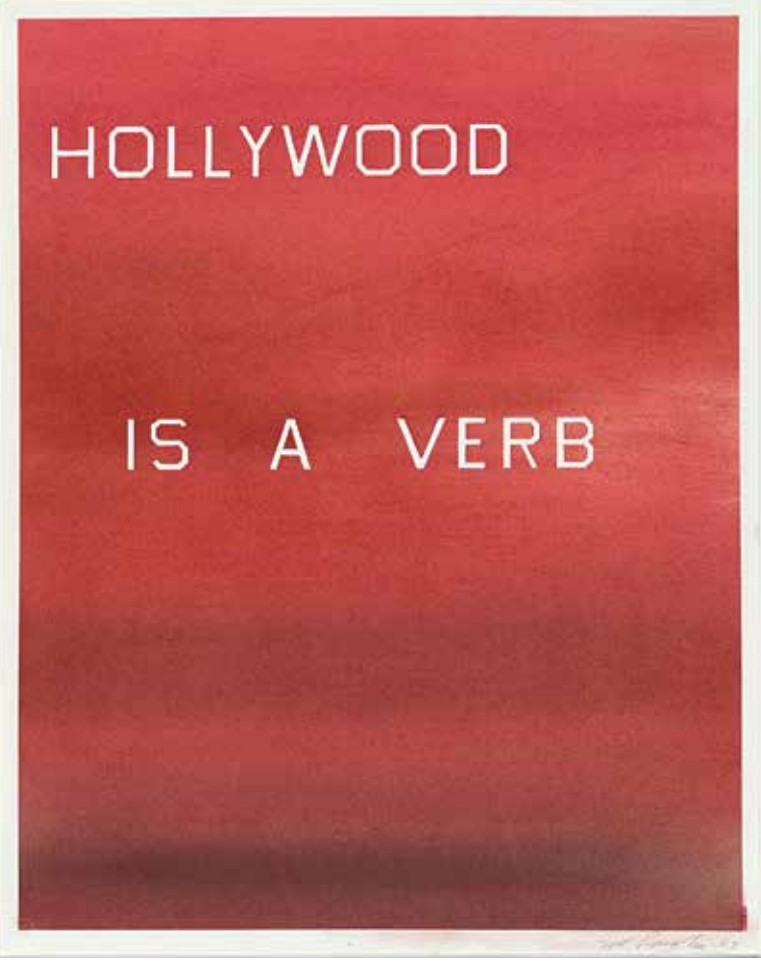
The short version of Ruscha's story is that he went on to become one of the most revered artists of the twentieth century. It's not an overestimation to say that anyone who is anyone in the art world loves his sophisticated Okie-ness, his genuine sense of humility, and his work ethic. A prima donna Ed is not. And despite his hundreds of accolades, retrospectives, and career accomplishments, Ruscha has yet to mount a one-man exhibition at an Oklahoma-based art institution. Until now.

“To return to my place of origin, especially while carrying a truckload of art I made while away, is bound to be fulfilling,” Ruscha said in a brief, three-sentence email. It was enough. “I can only look forward to it. This show is a true return to roots.”

Leaders at the new contemporary arts center are thrilled. “Considering the artist's influence and strong ties to Oklahoma, we were surprised to learn that no institution in the state had previously organized an Ed Ruscha solo exhibition,” says Jeremiah Matthew Davis, artistic director. “He is the perfect artist to serve as the subject of Oklahoma Contemporary's first solo show in the new building.”

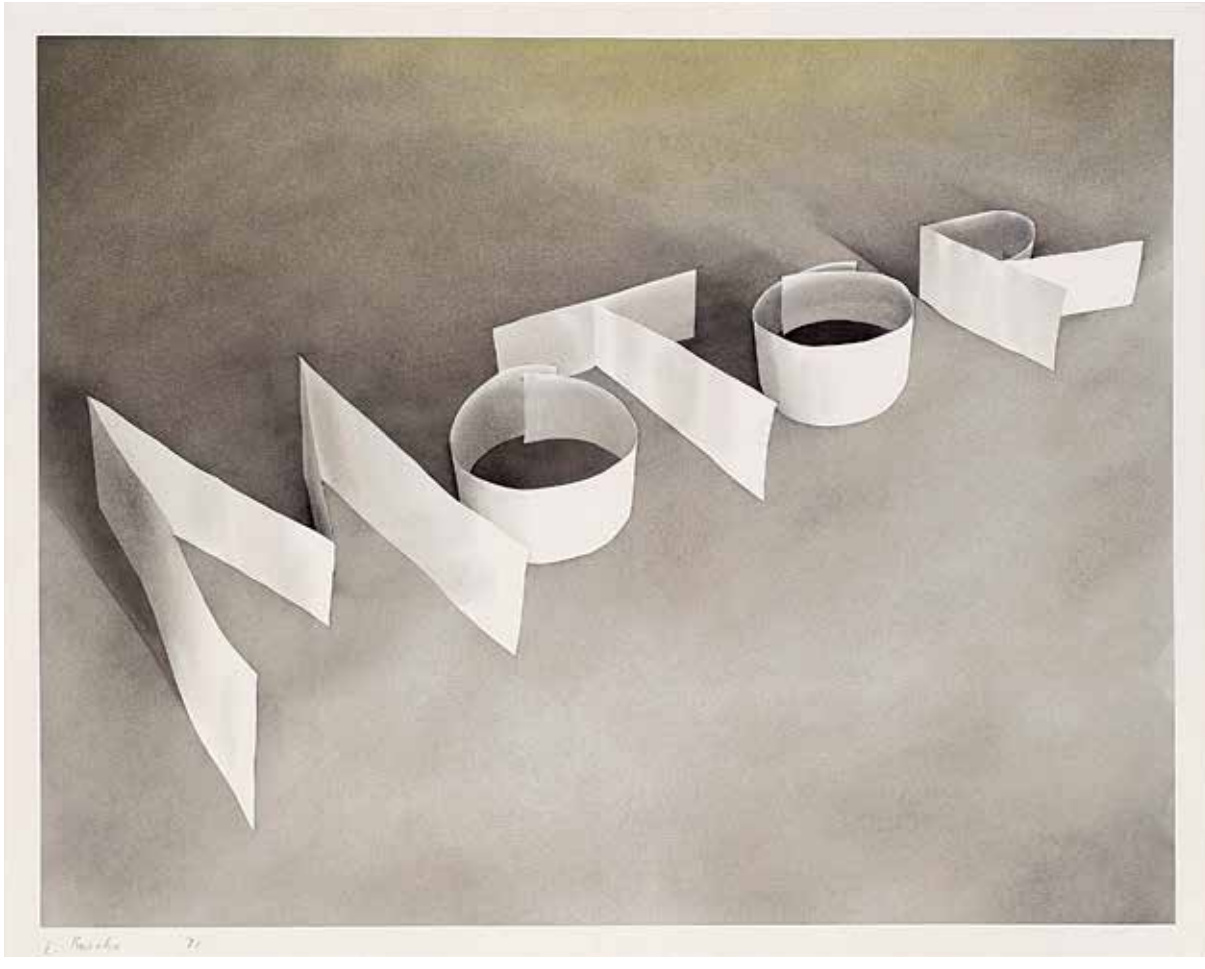


EVELYN HOFER/GETTY IMAGES

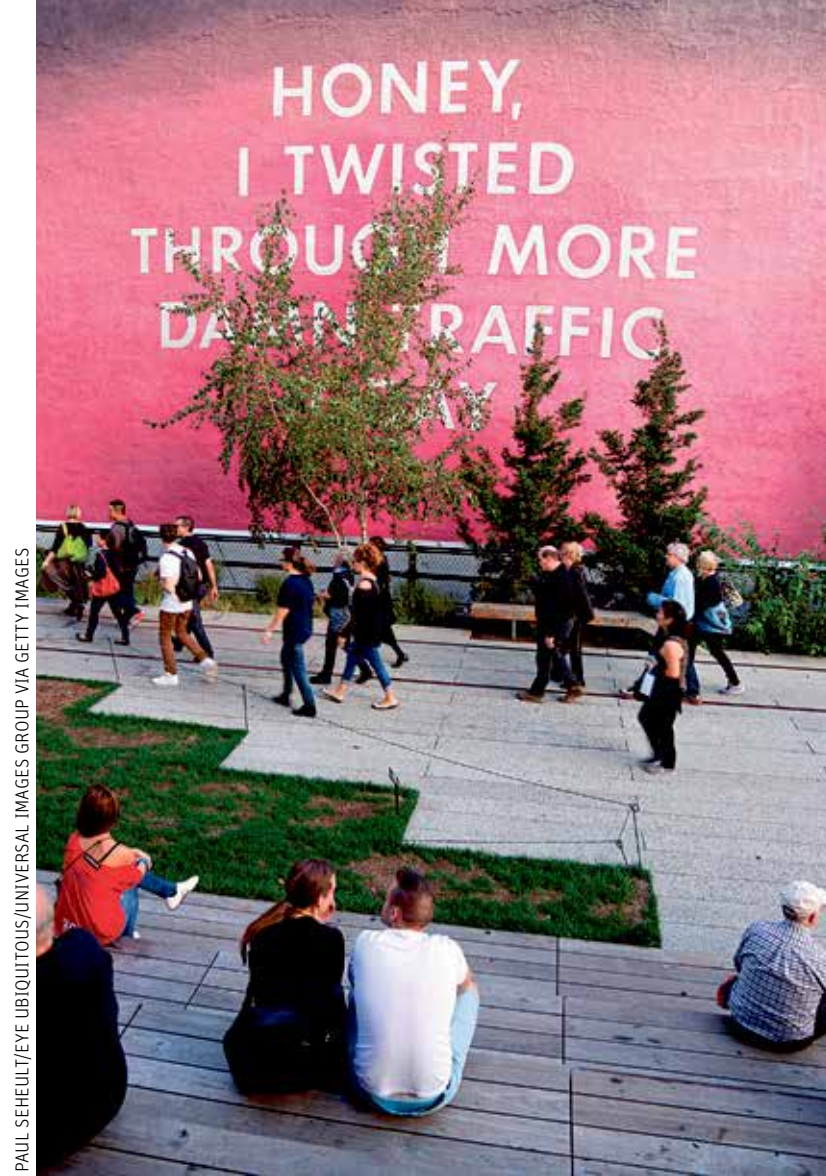


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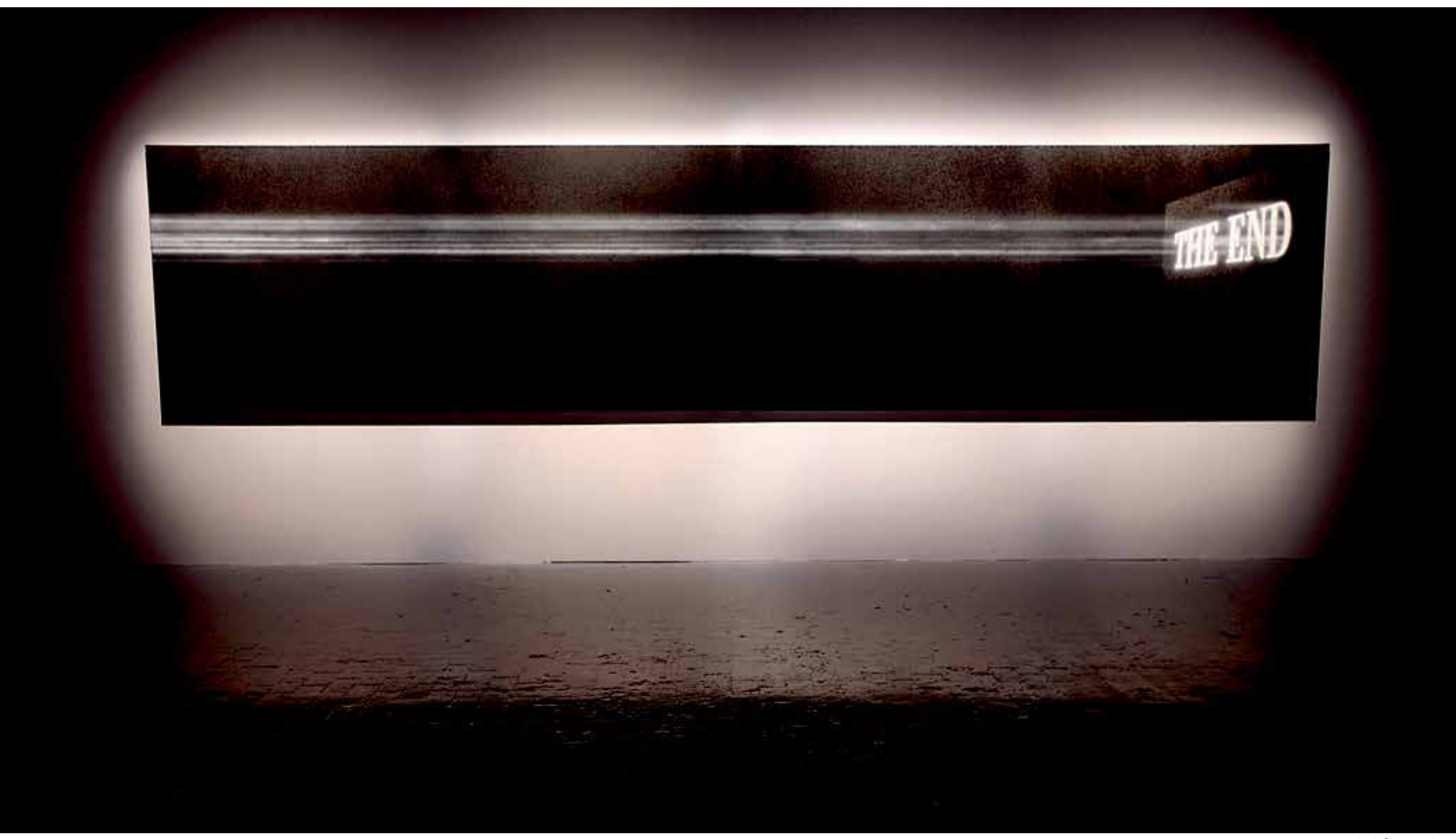
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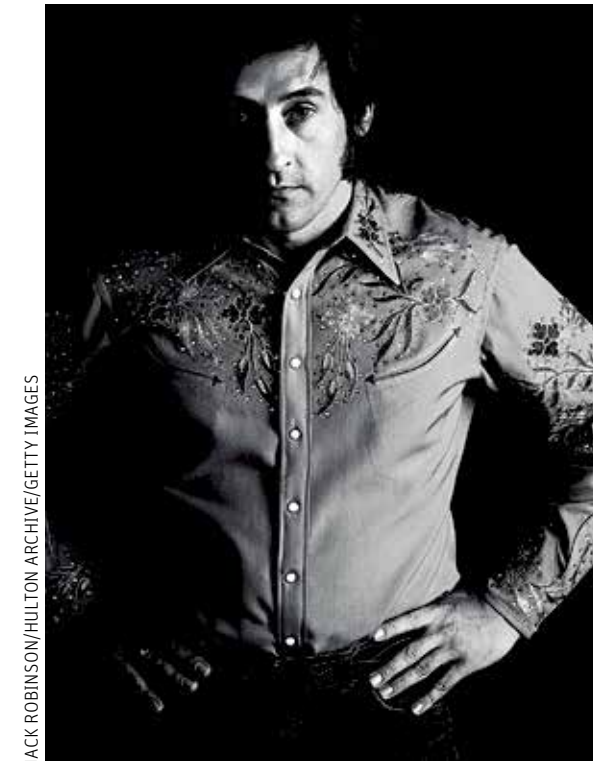
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PHILIPPE HUGUEN/GETTY IMAGES

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ROOTS



JACK ROBINSON/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES



EVELYN HOFER/GETTY IMAGES

“WHILE HIS WORK does show a great sense of humor, it’s also extremely smart, with a subtle social commentary that feels very relevant today.”



TONY EVANS/GETTY IMAGES

Ruscha’s connection to the territory is much deeper than a simple biographical note. That’s because Ruscha’s artistic output embodies a range of characteristics unique to the state and pivotal in America’s past. “The show examines Ruscha’s formative years in Oklahoma within the context of his broader observations about American life and culture, particularly during the mid-twentieth century, when he was growing up,” says Alexandra Schwartz, who co-curated Ed Ruscha: OKLA. The artistic themes echoing Ruscha’s childhood are so prevalent and numerous that the curators decided to structure the exhibition around them. “In addition to works that relate directly to Oklahoma, we are also looking broadly at [Ruscha’s] views of American identity and industry; the popular culture of his youth, including movies, comic strips, slang, and advertising; his Catholic upbringing;

◀ OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP LEFT: Hollywood is a Verb (1983), Motor (1970), Pay Nothing Until April (2003), Honey I Twisted Through More Damn Traffic Today (2014), and Untitled (2003). These images appear courtesy of the artist and Gagosian Gallery and may not be included in the Ed Ruscha: OKLA exhibition.

and driving, car culture, and the American West,” Schwartz says. Adds Rajan of CalArts: “Ed took his graphic-and commercial-art study and turned it into his innovative, unique voice as an artist, one that—with his peers from that time at Chouinard—worked together to turn Los Angeles into one of the most important cultural creation centers of the US. It’s another way that Oklahoma has had an outsized influence on the truly original art from this continent.” The exhibition will undoubtedly be a treat for hard-core Ruscha fans. Ed Ruscha: OKLA will feature works spanning the artist’s nearly seven-decade career. Iconic pieces such as Twentysix Gasoline Stations and Chocolate Room will be on view, as will recent and rarely seen artworks, including two of the artist’s new Drum Skins paintings. In all, more than seventy artworks—ranging from paintings, drawings, and a large-scale installation to prints, books, photographs, and film—will make up the exhibition at the newly opened arts center, each gallery echoing the Ruscha vision of the American West as seen through the lens of an Oklahoman. Though Ruscha is one of the state’s most

famous products, will his artwork—some of it created more than fifty-five years ago—connect with the youth of an Oklahoma different from the one he had known? Both Schwartz and Davis offer an emphatic yes. “Immersive installations have gained popularity over the past decade,” Davis says. “Chocolate Room will seem fresh, new, and irrepressibly fun, even though Ed first developed the work in 1970. For younger people, Ed’s use of text as image and text juxtaposed with subject matter may recall their interactions with contemporary memes and internet culture. It’s an approach the artist began exploring in the late 1950s and continues today.” Ruscha’s work also offers a contemporary feel that’s absent from most older artists’ work. “A lot of it has to do with his humor,” Schwartz says. “While his work does show a great sense of humor, it’s also extremely smart, with a subtle social commentary that feels very relevant today.”

Ed Ruscha: OKLA will be on view at Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center in Oklahoma City from February 18, 2021, to July 5, 2021. ▶ oklahomaccontemporary.org

WINTER 2021

Necessities

WHAT TO SEE, WHAT TO READ, AND WHAT'S HAPPENING WHERE

TEAMLAB
Universe of Water Particles,
Transcending Boundaries (2017)

Deep Blue

Experiential art installations have been increasingly popular in the art world, popping up as stand-alone happenings or special exhibitions. **Superblue**, the first-ever venue dedicated to large-scale experiential works, will open in Miami this spring. The inaugural program centers around the work of immersive artists Es Devlin, teamLab, and James Turrell. Devlin's *Forest of Us* takes viewers through

a maze resembling the human respiratory system and its parallels to nature; teamLab's *Between Life and Non-Life* presents artworks that rely on the chance of audience interaction, opening the possibility for unique experiences that cannot be repeated; and Turrell's iconic use of monochromatic light grounds the inaugural program with an environment titled *Ganzfeld*. —KELLY ROGERS

TEAMLAB, COURTESY PACE GALLERY



CARMEN HERRERA: *Estructuras Monumentales* ▲
Buffalo Bayou Park / Houston, Texas

SCULPTURE

The art world has been slow to recognize the dynamic work of Carmen Herrera, who at the age of 101 finally got a solo show at the Whitney Museum of American Art, in 2016. Now a presentation of the Cuban-American artist's large-scale sculptures—based on the geometric shapes in her paintings and which she designed five decades ago but never realized—has arrived in Houston as part of the five-year anniversary celebration for Buffalo Bayou Park. Standing seven feet in height and twelve feet wide on the Fondren Foundation Meadow, the monumental sculptures feature interconnected abstract forms, contrasting their bold colors with the green space and the skyline. Through April 23, 2021 ▶ buffalobayou.org

WEAVING HISTORY INTO ART: *The Enduring Legacy of Shan Goshorn*
Gilcrease Museum / Tulsa, Oklahoma

EXHIBITION

Artist Shan Goshorn used traditional Cherokee weaving to reflect on indigenous history, making baskets from reproductions of archival documents like maps, treaties, and photographs to physically dismantle the oppression of the past and commemorate endurance and self-representation. The impact of the Tulsa-based artist, who died in 2018, is highlighted in this exhibition that joins her work with four contemporary Native American women artists. A catalogue and online videos further delve into her powerful practice, from her last piece (which wove the names of murdered and missing women into a female form) to vessels made from tribal prayers of healing for the children forcibly assimilated in Indian boarding schools. Through March 28, 2021 ▶ gilcrease.org

THE SALEM WITCH TRIALS 1692
Peabody Essex Museum / Salem, Massachusetts

EXHIBITION

It took until 2001 for the Massachusetts legislature to absolve all the victims of the Salem witch trials. Still, centuries after the episode of hysteria that resulted in the deaths of twenty-five people between June 1692 and March 1693, we are grappling with its legacy of injustice, intolerance, and violence in the name of religion. The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem is reexamining this complex history through original witch-trial documents which are rarely on view, as well as contextual materials revealing the origins of Puritan witch hunts, personal belongings from victims and perpetrators, and even a piece of the old Salem jail. Blog posts and an episode of the museum's ongoing podcast further investigate how these prosecutions based on divisiveness and fear resonate today. Through April 4, 2021 ▶ pem.org

SPIRO AND THE ART OF THE MISSISSIPPIAN WORLD ▶
National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum / Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

EXHIBITION

The twelve earthen mounds in Spiro, Oklahoma, are among the most significant sites of early civilization in the United States. This first major exhibition to examine the Spiro Mounds brings together around 200 objects, from engraved shells and effigy pipes to pearl bead necklaces and embossed copper sheets, to survey Spiro's role in one of the most advanced prehistoric cultures. Excavated—or looted—in the early twentieth century, the reunited works reveal the daily life, ceremonies, and beliefs of the Mississippian people, who established themselves in Oklahoma more than a thousand

MOVING VISION: *Op and Kinetic Art from the Sixties and Seventies* ▶
Oklahoma City Museum of Art / Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

EXHIBITION

In the 1960s and 1970s, artists used geometric forms and motion to create surprising and disorienting effects. The Oklahoma City Museum of Art has a strong representation of op (optical) and kinetic art in its permanent collection and now unites those holdings with major loans to explore how these two art movements challenged perception through real and perceived motion. An accompanying catalogue further explores this work, like paintings by Richard Anuszkiewicz (who employed contrasting intense colors for shimmering effects) the pioneering mobiles and kinetic sculptures of Alexander Calder, and the hallucinatory optical illusions painted by Victor Vasarely. February 20–May 16, 2021 ▶ okcmoa.com

RAY JOHNSON C/O
The Art Institute of Chicago / Chicago, Illinois

EXHIBITION

With lockdowns and recent calls to action to support the postal service, mail art has experienced a resurgence in popularity. In an extensive exhibition, the Art Institute of Chicago is revisiting the career of "New York's most famous unknown artist," as the late Ray Johnson

HAPPENINGS

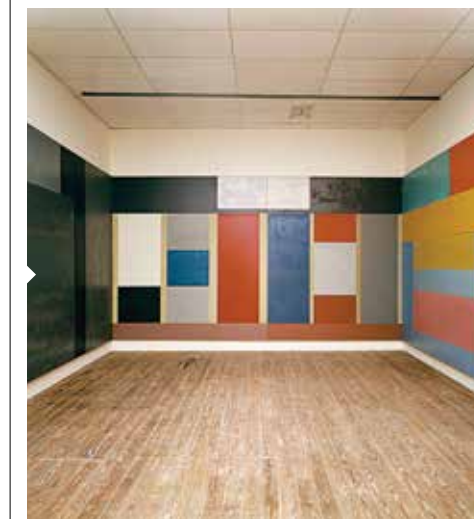
NEW AND NOW IN ART & PERFORMANCE | BY ALLISON MEIER

years ago. Contemporary indigenous art reflects on this past, including the possibility that Spiro was abandoned due to ecological change, and how that history can resonate with the present. Through May 9, 2021 ▶ nationalcowboymuseum.org

ARTISTS AND THE ROTHKO CHAPEL: *50 Years of Inspiration* ▶
Moody Center for the Arts at Rice University / Houston, Texas

EXHIBITION

When the Rothko Chapel opened in February 1971, it was a sacred space like none that had come before, with fourteen huge paintings in varying shades of black arranged in an octagonal room illuminated by a skylight. It was one of the last works completed by artist Mark Rothko, who considered how abstraction combined with careful attention to architecture could instill a meditative calm without a humanistic focus. This year the Moody Center for the Arts is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary by re-staging *1975 Marden, Novros, Rothko: Painting in the Age of Actuality*, originally supported by Dominique de Menil, who commissioned the chapel. The new show also presents contemporary art reflecting on the groundbreaking non-denominational chapel and its immersive encounter with art. January 22–May 15, 2021 ▶ moody.rice.edu



was once declared. Through his 1960s New York Correspondence School he mailed artworks around the world, using collage and text, and frequently accompanied them with guidance for the recipients to add their own contributions and keep sending them along. Joined with his performative pieces and other work, the retrospective recognizes his influence on twentieth-century art and offers inspiration for novel ways to creatively connect at a distance. Dates will be announced ▶ artice.edu

GRIEF AND GRIEVANCE: *Art and Mourning in America*
New Museum / New York, New York



EXHIBITION

Before his death in 2019, Okwui Enwezor envisioned this exhibition on Black grief. To honor the global curator and critic, Enwezor's friends and colleagues worked to posthumously realize his most political project yet: a timely recognition of the crisis and pain in the United States over systemic racism. The thirty-seven artists working across media in this exhibition represent some of the country's major contemporary voices, including Mark Bradford, LaToya Ruby Frazier, Theaster Gates, Arthur Jafa, Simone Leigh, Glenn Ligon, Kerry James Marshall, Julie Mehretu, Hank Willis Thomas, Nari Ward, and Carrie Mae Weems, all grappling with the emotional and intergenerational toll of historic and contemporary oppression. January 27–June 13, 2021 ▶ newmuseum.org

2021 DIGITAL SEASON
San Francisco Ballet / San Francisco, California

DANCE

The San Francisco Ballet was one performance into its production of George Balanchine's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* before it closed last March during the pandemic lockdown. Now the performance is available to stream as part of the company's entirely virtual 2021 season. Complementing archival versions of classics like artistic director Heigi Tomasson's *Romeo & Juliet* and Balanchine's *Jewels* is a new film version of *Swan Lake*, as well as world premieres of work by Cathy Marston, Danielle Rowe, and Myles Thatcher, all staged specifically for both the screen and social distancing. Audiences will also have an inside look at the dancers' process through behind-the-scenes material and interviews. Through June 9, 2021 ▶ sfballet.org

DEBORAH ROBERTS: *I'm*
The Contemporary Austin / Austin, Texas

EXHIBITION

This first major Texas museum show for the Austin-based Deborah Roberts explores her portraits of Black children that incorporate collage and other media to consider identity, race, and beauty. Reminiscent of the art of Romare Bearden, the works use photographs and images from magazines, and the internet, remixed with painting, to celebrate some of the country's most vulnerable young people. A large-scale mural on the exterior of the Jones Center has vinyl figures expressing a Black boy's joy while, as Roberts puts it, "he tries to make his way into adulthood without being targeted or criminalized." January 23–August 15, 2021 ▶ thecontemporaryaustin.org

THE LONELY PALETTE
Hub & Spoke Audio

PODCAST

Hosted by Tamar Avishai, the *Lonely Palette* is an accessible dive into some of the world's most important works of art. The podcast mixes casual interviews with museum visitors on their impressions of how, where, why, and when the art was made. From a close look at why the pointillist dots of George Seurat's *A Sunday on La Grande Jatte* (1884-86) were so innovative, to the way Claes Oldenburg's 1964 *Giant Toothpaste Tube* elevates the ordinary, each episode makes art history approachable by highlighting the human experience behind every creative expression. Episodes are ongoing and can be found on all audio streaming platforms. ▶ theloneypalette.com



Café Contemporary's Mushroom Reuben (right) and a selection of cookies (above) from the revolving menu of daily baked goods (below) Avery Cannon, Neely Hopper, and Kristen Steimer



Café of the Artists

WHERE COOKIES, REUBENS, AND CONTEMPORARY ART GO HAND IN HAND



AS CAFÉ CONTEMPORARY owner Avery Cannon talks about the influence of popular culture on the menu at his space inside Oklahoma Contemporary, he crosses his left leg over his right, revealing *The Legend of Zelda* socks. For an interview, it's a near-perfect moment, when the subject accidentally engages in show-and-tell simultaneously. As chef and restaurateur, he combines his creative instincts with his business sense, a difficult enough task when creating a stand-alone restaurant, but much more complex when opening a restaurant inside an art space dedicated to contemporary art and community building.

“The goal here is to create a community of people who want to progress our city.”

Cannon is a restaurant veteran, having helped start Empire Slice House in 2013, a popular pizza-by-the-slice concept, before moving on to open his own juice and smoothie bar Wheeze the Juice in the Deep Deuce District. He brims with energy, generated by his brain processing multiple ideas at once, creating a kind of hum when you're talking to him.

“The menu came from a ton of trial and error,” he says. “Neely Hopper is an outstanding chef, and we worked to create dishes that have familiar flavors that people love with different emphases.”

That was the challenge: to be creative without leaving diners lost in experimental food. The arts center demands a level of sophistication, play, complexity, and whimsy from the menu, but people still want to eat what they know and love.

“I don't eat very much meat, but I love a good Reuben,” Cannon says. “I've had them everywhere. We wanted the café to be a place where we could convert foods to vegan or vegetarian with very little effort. The Reuben is baked mushrooms with a Reuben rub, and it relies on vegan mayo. There are lots of little things you can hide in dishes like that to help people expand their palates.”

The menu includes baked goods by Kristen Steimer, whose apricot-Earl Grey cookie is a perfect example of what Café Contemporary is trying to do: comfort you with the familiar

and then surprise you with clever, delicious twists.

“We have spaces to bring food and conversation together, but Covid-19 has gotten in the way for now.”

Those spaces include the learning library across the lobby from the café, a beautiful deck that overlooks the community lawn, and the lawn itself, where guests can take food for a picnic and conversation.

Cannon believes the mission is more than creative, innovative food, he says. “Long term, the goal here is to create a community of people who want to progress our city.”

—GREG HORTON with photography by BRANDON SMITH

Café Contemporary at Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center is open daily, except Tuesdays, from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. ▶ oklahomacontemporary.org



EVERY CANNON



BARBARA KASTEN
Scenarios (2020)

After more than four decades of multidisciplinary art, Barbara Kasten continues to push the boundaries of perception through abstraction. *Scenarios* features the artist's recent sculptural installations, which are inspired by the modernist architecture in her hometown of Chicago and the interdisciplinary spirit of the Bauhaus. Fluorescent acrylic shapes, video projections, painting, and photography are joined by a site-specific intervention that plays with the architecture of the Aspen Art Museum itself, giving its Shigeru Ban-designed exterior a rosy new glow.—ALLISON MEIER

Barbara Kasten: *Scenarios* is on view at the Aspen Art Museum through April 4, 2021 ▶ aspenartmuseum.org

The BOOK REPORT

By ALANA RUIZ DE LA PEÑA

Photography by STEVEN WALKER



Abstract Art: A Global History

Pepe Karmel / \$85
Karmel, an art historian and NYU professor, structures *Abstract Art* around five themes: body, landscape, cosmology, architecture, and man-made signs and patterns. This new and accessible approach on the study of abstract art—a relatively new movement in art history—creates an enjoyable and educational journey through what could otherwise be a heavy lift.

Bridget Riley: The Complete Prints, 1962-2020

Lynn MacRitchie, Craig Hartley, and Robert Kudielka; foreword by Bridget Riley / \$60
Bridget Riley's exciting op-art paintings and prints have been featured on walls at hospitals and museums alike. This full-color, oversized catalogue raisonné is focused on Riley's entire inventory of print works—of

which there are many. The real treat is a foreword by the artist, creating rich context and a chronicle of her nearly sixty-year career.

The V&A Book of Color in Design

Edited by Tim Travis / \$40
This is a compendium of the objects housed in the collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the world's largest institution of applied and decorative arts and design. Part history lesson, part exploration in color theory, *Color in Design* is a visual feast for both design aficionados and color-lovers.

Hokusai Manga

Katsushika Hokusai / \$35
This three-volume set that makes the old new again, with the now ubiquitous waves and Japanese illustrations of the 1800s by Katsushika Hokusai presented in a way

that illustrates his influence on the manga comics of our time.

Mid-Century Modern Design: A Complete Sourcebook

Dominic Bradbury / \$50
Rare is the reference book that is suitable for both research and display. This beautiful chronicle is perfect for mid-mod enthusiasts, interior designers, and antique dealers. *Mid-Century Modern Design* includes commonplace objects like kitchenware and posters, architectural marvels, and rare items from one of the most beloved periods of post-war design.

Dieter Rams: The Complete Works

Klaus Kemp; foreword by Dieter Rams / \$60
In the days before you could carry a phone in your pocket, Dieter Rams designed a world of modern electronics. In addition to shavers, toothbrushes, and digital alarm clocks, Rams crafted furniture and shelving that are still made today. Not to be missed in this masterpiece of a book, the foreword by Rams discusses the future of design in the face of capitalism and disposable consumerism.

Shaping the World: Sculpture from Prehistory to Now

Antony Gormley and Martin Gayford / \$60
This book serves as a reflection on quite possibly the oldest form of art: sculpture. Martin Gayford, noted art writer and critic, and Anthony Gormley, an artist known for his own sculptural works, discuss sculpture from prehistoric relics to modern installations.

Letterform



ANDY WARHOL
Campbell's Soup II: Vegetarian Vegetable Soup (The Alphabet Soup) (1969)

THE ARTDESK ALPHABET

Inspired by Papa Ed, Twenty-Six Artists Who Use Words in Their Works of Art

RESEARCH BY ALANA RUIZ DE LA PEÑA

THE ARTIST'S WORD



DUST
"I've been watching *His Dark Materials*, and in the story the word **dust** is a representation of dark matter, something scientists know very little about yet it makes up about 27 percent of the universe. The idea of not knowing is fascinating. Knowing I don't know, in a way, is very liberating."
MATT GOAD



ACCLIMATE
"When traveling, you become accustomed to new surroundings and the life that buzzes around you. Becoming a mother, you are constantly learning something new, but it takes some time to get used to this huge new part of your life. Of course with the pandemic, it's either be able to **acclimate** or lose your mind."
DENISE DUONG



POUTINE
"I can't say it without smiling—and I don't even like gravy."
CASSIE STOVER



YOUTHINESS
"I read it in an interview with the former manager of the Ramones, who described the band that way. Ever since then, it's become an internal philosophy for what I shoot for in my work: goofy, made-up, and with some magic to it."
SARAH SULLIVAN



SUSURRUS
"I see it as a kind of shibboleth."
SARAH ATLEE



FORTUITOUS
"**Fortuitous** for me describes pleasant coincidences, unplanned connections, and reminds me to look for the good fortune when I am least expecting it."
MOLLY MURPHY ADAMS



CATHARSIS
"I like using this word because it is flexible and emotionally specific. Schadenfreude can be cathartic but so can supporting others. It feels good, but **catharsis** itself isn't good or bad. It just is."
LAWRENCE NAFF



CHUMP
"Once you realize that you are a **chump**, your eyes will be opened to realizing that, deep down, we are all chumps. Not one chump is more important than the other. To me, it's a term of endearment."
DUSTY GILPIN

The 2021 banished words and phrases, from the keeper of such things (Lake Superior State University), are COVID-19 (COVID, coronavirus, Rona); social distancing; We're all in this together; In an abundance of caution (various phrasings); In these uncertain times (various phrasings); pivot; unprecedented; Karen; sus; I know, right?



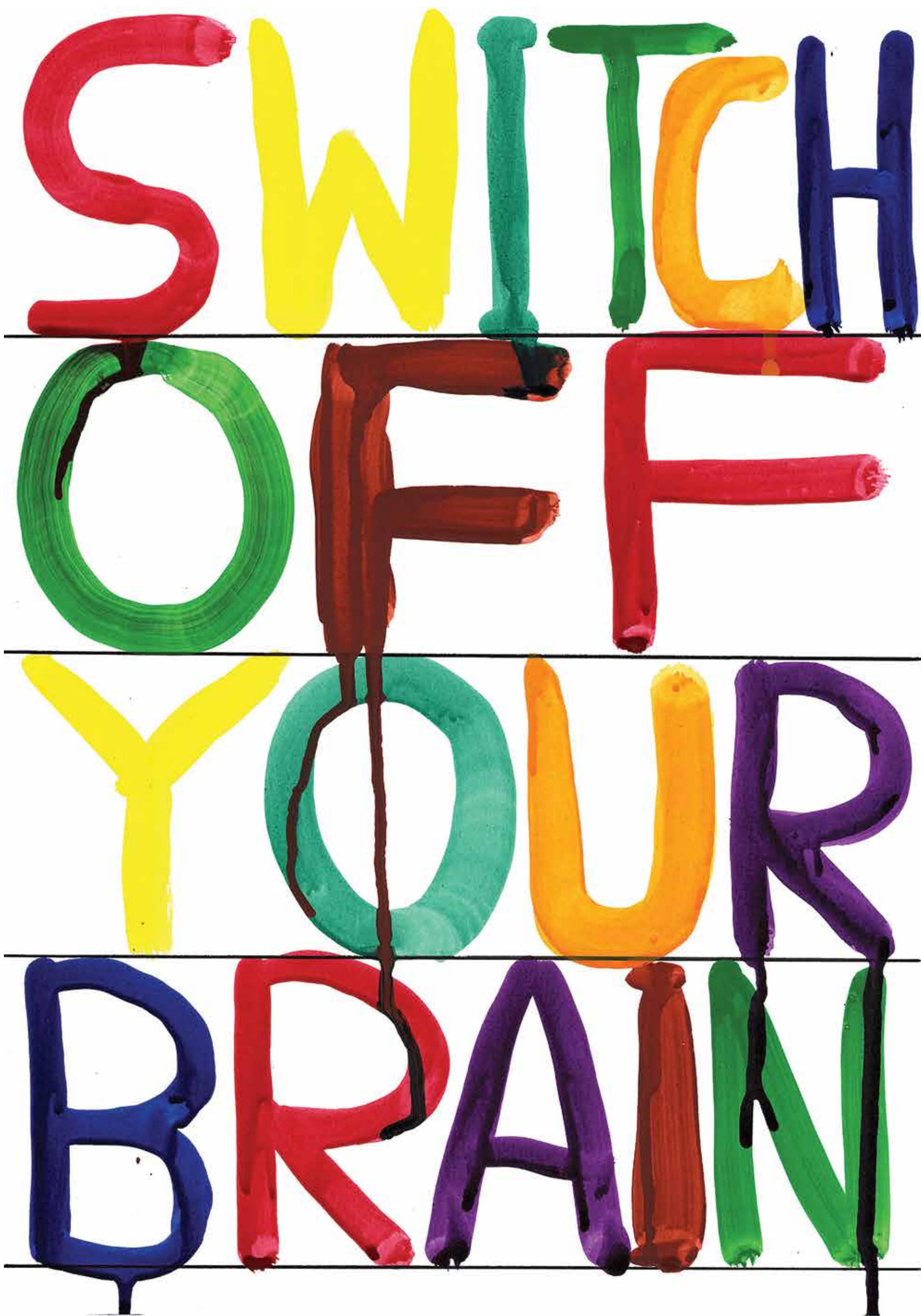
ANDY WARHOL
Untitled (City Text) (1962)



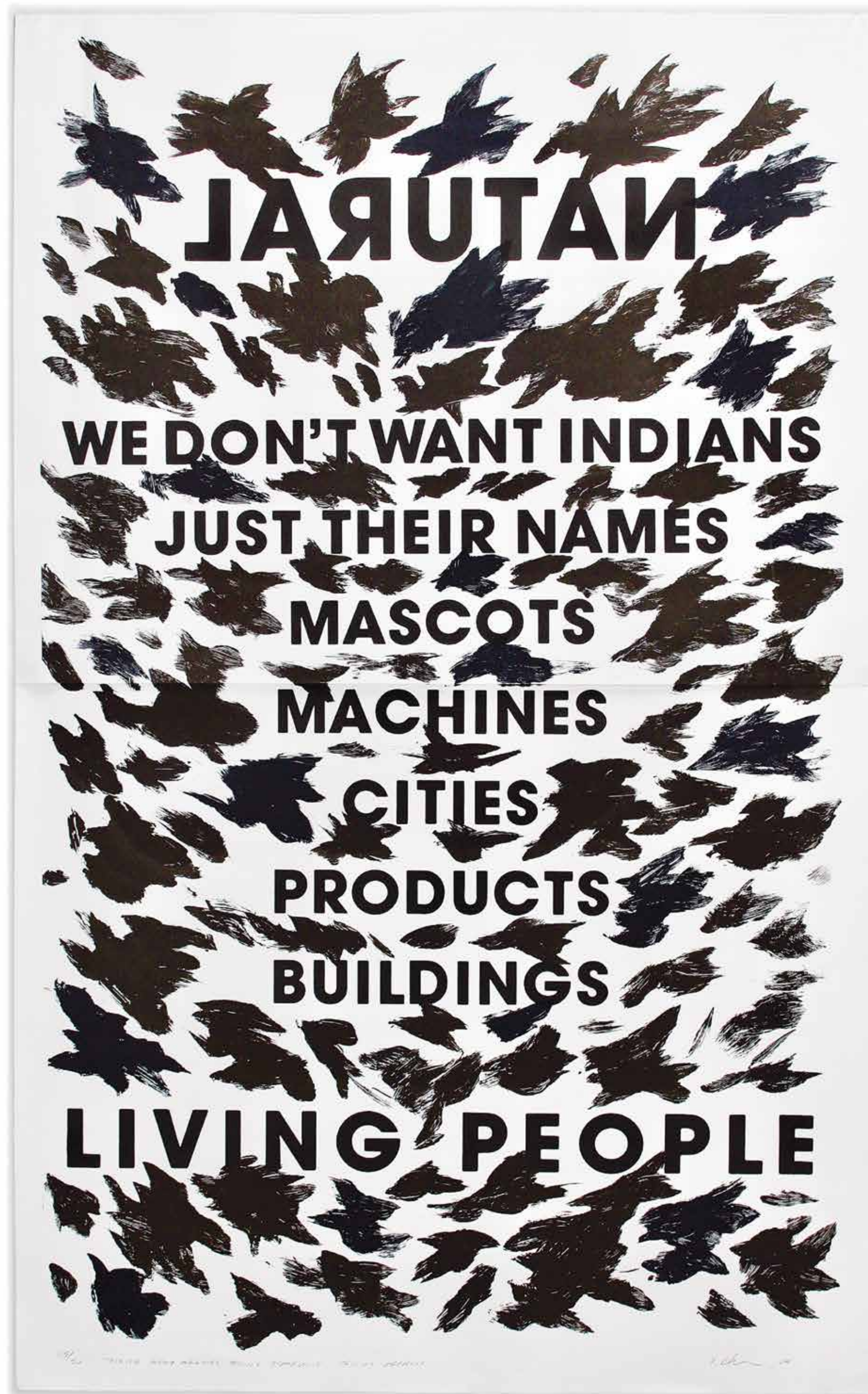
BARBARA KRUGER
Untitled (Your body is a battleground) (1989)



CHRISTOPHER WOOL
Untitled (1990)



DAVID SHRIGLEY
Untitled (Switch off your brain), (2009)



HOCKE AYE VI EDGAR HEAP OF BIRDS
Telling many Magpies, Telling Black Wolf, Telling Hachivi (1989)

Sign of the Times

ARTIST ROBERT MONTGOMERY combines prose and large-scale installation to create his signature “light poems,” pieces around the globe that challenge typical pedestrian experience. In 2015, Montgomery made his Seattle debut with *The Stars Pulled Down for Real*, a twenty-foot-tall sculpture made of LED lights and material typically used for scaffolding and billboards. The same piece marks the artist’s introduction to Oklahoma and the latest outdoor installation at Oklahoma Contemporary Arts Center. The grandeur of Montgomery’s readable work comes partly from scale and partly from the spectacle of an illuminated message floating in air or affixed to the side of a building. Born in Scotland and residing in London, Montgomery shape-shifts with an environmental context, bold sans-serif typography, sharp letterform ascenders, and a natural gift for language.

Of this particular work, Montgomery says the text nods to modernist poet Ezra Pound, who wrote about his view from a New York City window: “Squares after squares of flame, set and cut into the Aether. Here is our poetry, for we have pulled down the stars to our will.” The allure of Montgomery’s literary cheekiness and affection for the impact of all caps seem to connect to viewers, whether the context is clear or not—like the universal but eerily specific advice from a palm reader. In a found-poetry approach, Montgomery writes messages into our environment that seem personal, inviting us to affirm that, yes, this is a sign.

Robert Montgomery’s *The Stars Pulled Down for Real* (2015) is on view at Campbell Art Park through April 12, 2021.

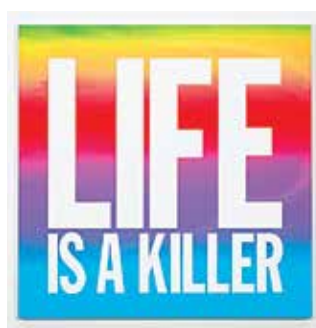


ANN SHERMAN

Letterform



FALSE START
Painting by Jasper Johns (1959)



GIORNO, JOHN
Life Is a Killer (2018)



HOLZER, JENNY
From *Truisms* (1982)



INDIANA, ROBERT
LOVE (1966-1999)



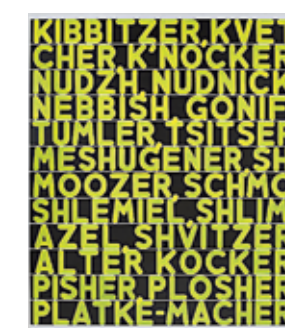
JEFFREY GIBSON
I Put a Spell on You (2015)



ON KAWARA
NOV. 3. 1996 from *Today* series (1966-2013)



LIGON, GLENN
Rückenfigur (2009)



MEL BOCHNER
The Joys of Yiddish (2012)

Comfort and Joy

In more than four decades of choreography, **JANE COMFORT** has used movement and language to tackle complex social issues with fearless wit. Drawing on her Southern upbringing in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and her long involvement with the New York City art scene—going back to her early years studying with Merce Cunningham—she has created works of dance and theater that boldly grapple with sexism, racism, abuses of power, and other timely reflections on American life. Whether satirizing the testimony of the Anita Hill–Clarence Thomas hearings for *S/He* (1995) or reckoning with MAGA anger in *Amazing Grace* (2018), Comfort has explored how performance can be a platform of activism and dissent. While dance has always been at the core of Comfort's more than sixty works, she pushes the boundaries of her practice through collaborations with puppeteers, DJs, percussionists, and opera singers. —ALLISON MEIER

In a conversation with dance editor **LARRY KEIGWIN**, Jane Comfort discusses her influential career, from her first minimalist solo in 1978 to large-scale pieces like the choreography for the 1994 Stephen Sondheim–James Lapine Broadway musical, *Passion*.

LARRY KEIGWIN: When I think of choreography, it's making things and organizing things. I remember putting together gymnastics routines on the front lawn for passing cars. What is your earliest recollection of choreographing, putting things together?

JANE COMFORT: I'm glad you said that about putting on shows for the cars. I think kids just do it. You make little shows. I don't remember having a show and having people come, but my parents have a home video of me in my squirrel costume from when I was four. I was doing the routine in the backyard.

LK: And then you studied painting at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

JC: I studied dance in high school first. In those days, if you were female, you couldn't go to Chapel Hill unless you were a pharmacist or nursing student. I went to Greensboro the first two years, which had an incredible dance department. Then I transferred from a girl's school over to Chapel Hill, which is a great school, but it had no dance and it still has no dance.

Then I went to San Francisco for a year and worked in advertising, of all things, and moved to New York and studied at Merce [Cunningham's] studio for one summer. Then [my husband and I] went into the Peace Corps because of the draft. We went to Venezuela and came back to New York. I had studied at the Art Students League, so I went straight back to Cunningham.

LK: When did you start making dances or dance theater?

JC: In the seventies, we had Judson [Dance Theater] and Grand Union to look up to and see all of their work. You could rent space like Eden's Expressway for fifty dollars and make little postcards to give to your friends. They'd show up, and you'd do a little concert.

LK: It seems like it was very fertile ground to be creative.

JC: It was incredible. You're a freelancer dancing with all these people, but then you would do your thing. [At] my first concert, I looked out, and I'm like, "Oh, God. There's Trisha [Brown]. There's David [Thomson]. Oh, okay. Lucinda [Childs]. Oh, oh." [David]

was afraid I was going to turn around and run back into the dressing room.

LK: What were you doing? What was your show?

JC: I had three little pieces, but the first was a piece called *Steady Shift*. I was standing in parallel [position], shifting my weight from right to left, back and forth, and then I started touching my head, one hand and then the other, and making an arch going around. Then I'd touch my shoulder and arch out, and I'd touch my hips and arch out. I started combining them, and it was this very rhythmic touching of the body, and then it stopped. I never asked what it was about. It felt right. It was actually a big success. I found the, quote unquote, "press release" for that recently. It was handwritten, and somebody had edited it for me. I assume it got typed up and then given to the *SoHo Weekly News*. That's probably the only place it went, but the room was full.

In the next piece, I started working with text. I had decided to make this piece just for hands, and my torso would be the backdrop, and it would be this gesture piece while Marjorie Gamso read edited sections of a Gertrude Stein story. I've always dealt with gesture.

I happened to be in San Francisco at the time of Harvey Milk's memorial service, and they had American Sign Language [ASL] interpreters, and I had actually never seen that. I thought, Oh, God, that's my piece. It already exists. Okay. Forget it. I won't do that.

I'm on the plane going back to New York, and I say, No, I'm going to school, and I'm going to learn sign language. And I did. I went to NYU Continuing Education and learned ASL, and did that piece. American Sign Language is its own grammatical form, its own language. This performance was a direct translation of Stein's "Many, Many Women," which would be called Signed English. That's how language crept into the work.

LK: When did actual text or words come into the performance?

JC: In the early eighties, I started going to Afro-Brazilian [dance] classes where polyrhythmic drummers would show up. I met a woman in the class whose boyfriend was a drummer, Auchoe Lee, and I told her I was thinking about making a piece with drumming. Auchoe worked with us and toured with us those early years. He came back for the fortieth [anniversary] and played, and it was as if no time had passed. At the time, I was working with David Thomson, Donald Mouton, Ann Papoulis,

Chris Burnside, and I was transfixed with those rhythms and using the physical steps of Afro-Brazilian. Then I worked text into the piece.

The [spoken parts] may have happened one after the other or on top of each other, but only in one voice: "Is it real? Yes, it's real. Is it real? Yes, it's real. Is it real? Yes, it's real." And in its own rhythm underneath that "It's going to happen, going to happen to you. It's going to happen, going to happen to you. It's going to happen, going to happen to you. Right? Right? That's right," and it goes on.

It was complicated [creating choreography with the counter rhythms from the drummers]. At one point I thought, Jane, why are you doing this to yourself? Why? But it was very satisfying, and people loved it. We got great reviews. The polyrhythms gave me such a wealth to play with.

LK: Can you talk about the difference of working in a show that's being produced by a producer versus a show that you're building in a living room?

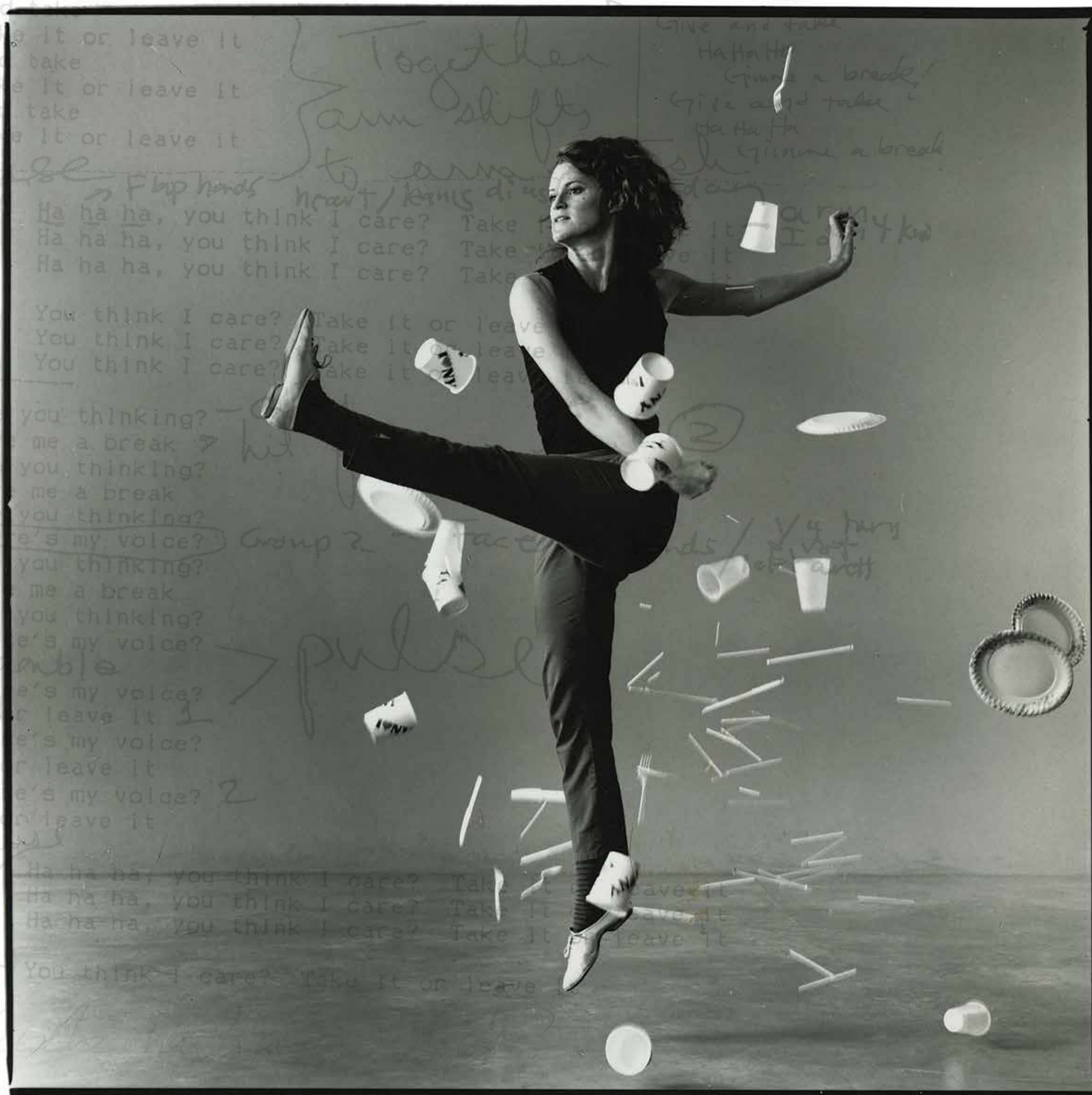
JC: You're building everything yourself, and not only are you the producer but you're the writer. You're the choreographer, you're the rehearsal director. You're the laundress. You're the wardrobe assistant. You're the fundraiser.

LK: Exactly. What was it like when you went into *Passion*?

JC: Unbelievable. All they needed me to do was movement. I didn't have to direct. It was incredible. It's such a huge machine and such an expensive machine. It's terrifying. I have nothing but admiration for Broadway directors.

LK: It seems like you have a knack for successful collaborations. Can you attribute that to something?

JC: I couldn't stand being alone in the studio and making work that I then taught to people. It felt so lonely. I love being in the room with people, the experience with Jamie Cunningham sort of set me up for it, too, because even though Jamie would come in with very strong ideas or we'd learn work that already exists—and he was a really strong director—there was so much room in the room for us. If something popped out of your mouth and he thought it was funny, there was space for it. The minute I started getting people in the room, it felt so comfortable, and I would kind of bring everybody into the room. I'm trying to think—which is an invitation for them to think with me. ✕



Letterform



NAUMAN, BRUCE
Human Nature/Life Death/Knows Doesn't Know (1983)



OY/YO
Sculpture by Deborah Kass (2015)



PETTIBON, RAYMOND
No Title (Self-portrait, Richer) (2001)



QUALITY MATERIAL
Painting by John Baldessari (1966–68)



ROSEN, KAY
Blurred (2004)



SCHOOL OF FONTAINEBLEAU
Painting by Cy Twombly (1960)



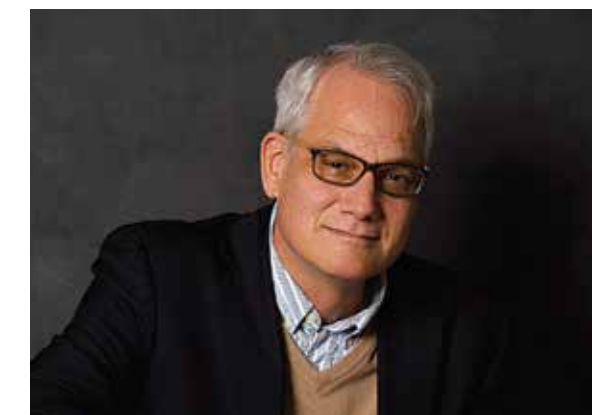
"Everyone becomes a part of history whether they like it or not and whether they know it or not."

PHILIP ROTH (1933–2018)



"The need to write comes from the need to make sense of one's life and discover one's usefulness."

JOHN CHEEVER (1912–1982)



On the eve of publishing his Philip Roth biography, Oklahoma City native **Blake Bailey** talks to *ArtDesk* about authors, alcohol, and fellow Oklahoma native Brad Pitt.

WRITER of WRITERS

ARTDESK: Hi, Blake! We are so proud of all of your literary accomplishments. You have what we consider an opus coming out soon, your fifth book, Philip Roth: The Biography. It's been called the most anticipated book of 2021 by many entities, including Literary Hub and the Oprah Magazine. What is your favorite Roth book?

BLAKE BAILEY: Hard to say. He was such a protean writer over the course of his fifty-five-year career that comparing certain of his novels is really a matter of apples and oranges. I'll give you five titles (bearing in mind that he published thirty-one books in all, and a lot more than five are wonderful): Goodbye, Columbus; Portnoy's Complaint; The Ghost Writer; Patrimony; and American Pastoral.

AD: Among others, you've written about John Cheever and now Philip Roth. In what ways did you find them to be alike? Did you find yourself able to relate to them?

BB: Fun fact: Cheever and Roth knew and liked each other, and both had what is commonly called an addictive personality. (Roth would have dismissed that as psychobabble.) Cheever was addicted to alcohol, however, and Roth was a nice Jewish boy who hardly touched the stuff. So I'll let you guess his addiction.

AD: What is the most unusual source you used for the Roth biography?

BB: One of Roth's longtime mistresses (the model for the insatiable Drenka in Sabbath's Theater) composed a 101-page remembrance of their affair for my eyes

only. I wasn't allowed to copy it or take it out of the room but had to read it in her presence and leave it in my chair when I went to the bathroom.

AD: During the writing process, have you ever felt as if you are taking on the persona of the author you are writing about?

BB: That would be exhausting in Roth's case. No, not exactly, though I think I have an affinity (albeit in different ways) for each of my subjects. While working on Roth, I often consulted a photo of him with a fish head over his nose, the better to remind me that he was, after all, a funny guy.

AD: Do you have any desire to psychologically analyze or evaluate the life choices and trajectory of your subjects?

BB: I would say my default mode—at least toward their worst behavior—is a kind of deploring amusement. For the most part, though, the behavior speaks for itself without my pontificating too much about it.

AD: While writing about Cheever or Roth, did you ever hate your subjects? Did you love them?

BB: Let's say I'm fond of them, and no, I never hate them. I was fond enough of Philip Roth to visit him when he was dying.

AD: Who would play you in a movie?

BB: I'd like to say Brad Pitt—we're almost exact contemporaries after all—but probably a younger Steve Martin would be nearer the mark. ❧

Philip Roth: The Biography will be published on April 6, 2021. In addition to his books about Roth and Cheever, Bailey has also published biographies of Richard Yates and Charles Jackson. Philip Roth personally appointed Bailey as his biographer and provided full access to archives and extensive interviews, including with himself and his closest friends, family, and colleagues.

Letterform



TRACEY EMIN
I Loved You More Than I Can Love (2009)

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING A WOMAN ARTIST:

Working without the presence of men
Not having to be in a dress with men
Having no corpse form (or not) to be in your 4-hour show job
Knowing your career might end up after you're eighty
Being concerned that someone else will do it for you
Not being stuck in a forced teaching position
Being able to have sex for the rest of your life
Having the opportunity to choose between career and motherhood
Not having to work on those tiny gaps or push to finish early
Having more time to work when your artist damn goes for someone younger
Being invited to a national museum of art history
Not having to endure the embarrassment of being called a genius
Getting your picture in the art magazines every so often and

GUERRILLA GIRLS
The Advantages of Being a Woman Artist (1988)



VIOLIN AND NEWSPAPER
Painting by Georges Braque (1912–13)



WEINER, LAWRENCE
Earth to Earth, Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust (1970)



FELIX GONZALEZ-TORRES
Untitled (Portrait of Jennifer Flay) (1992)



YOKO ONO
PEACE IS POWER (2019)



EL LISSITZKY
Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge (1920)

ArtSociety

SEEN + SCENE

Dancing in December

American Ballet Theatre soloist **Gabe Stone Shayer** is among the many dancers taking movement outside during quarantine. Shayer's piece *The Ritual* is part of a larger choreographed work titled *Good Moon*, which explores questions of human behavior and our draw to repetition. Shayer combined themes from tribal dance with his ballet vocabulary to create this duet with ABT principal dancer **Cassandra Trenary**. **Simon J. Plant** photographed the dancers as they perform around Lincoln Center's campus. The dance premiered in December as part of Lincoln Center at Home.



The *Nutcracker* ballet meets hip-hop in this new film directed by **Lance McDaniel**. *Finding Carlos* is an adaptation of **RACE (Radical Application of Creative Energy)** dance collective's *Hip Hop Nutcracker*, co-produced with RACE founder **Hui Cha Poo** and co-written by Oklahoma Contemporary trustee **Melissa Scaramucci**. The film version gives fans of the story another way to enjoy dance on film while live performances are on hold. A contemporary twist follows the life of Carlos (played by Classen School of Advanced Studies student **Maximus White**), a young man searching for purpose and family.

A Holiday Toast

Green Box Arts co-founders **Christian Keese** and **Larry Keigwin** hosted a virtual holiday party via Zoom to celebrate the upcoming summer 2021 Colorado festival. The next installation of the annual arts festival includes exciting new works, like a permanent James Turrell *Skyspace*, visiting dancers from the American Ballet Theatre, and arts education programming for all ages.



Around 300 viewers logged on for the virtual happy hour to watch performances by dance duo **Denys Drozdyuk** and **Antonina Skobina**, a tamale-making demonstration by **Barbara Santos**, and an introduction to the family of board member **Elizabeth Mee Payne**.

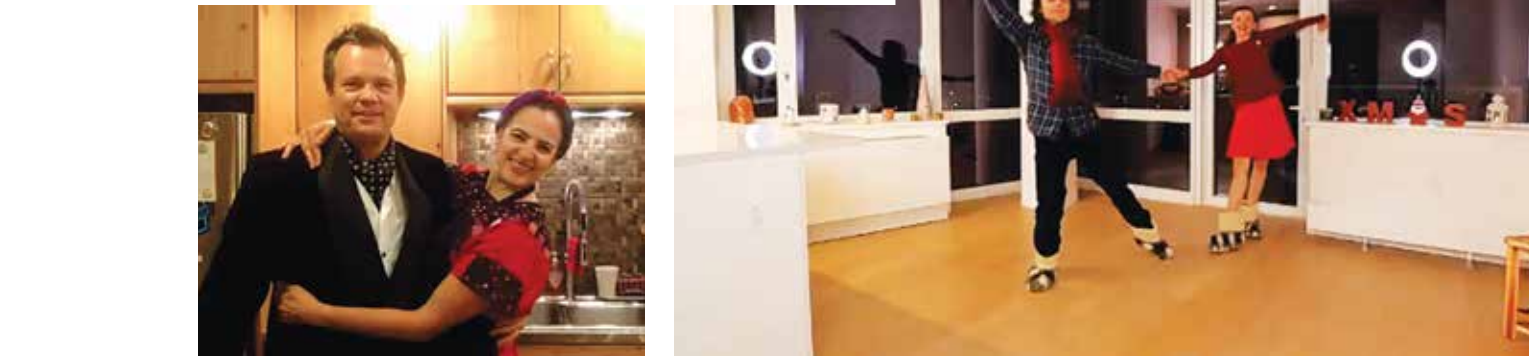


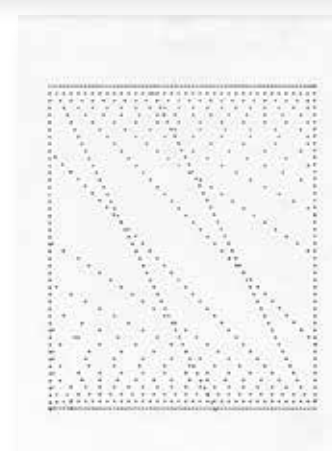
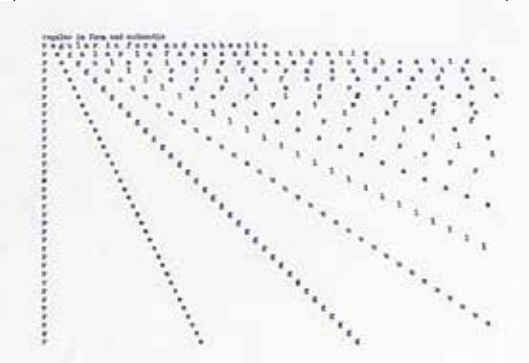
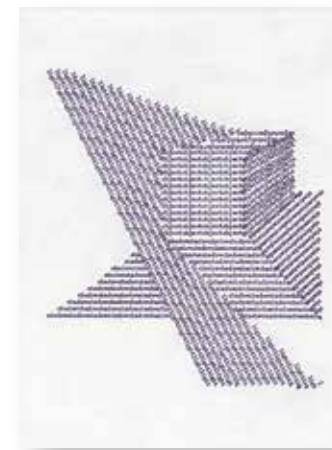
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THE HERMES 3000

Named for the fleet-footed messenger to the Greek gods, the **Hermes 3000** is considered one of the finest portable typewriters ever produced. With its sea-foam-green color and curvy shape, it is an icon of midcentury design, while its Swiss-made mechanics are celebrated for their smoothness and precision. It debuted in 1958, a successor to the Hermes 2000, which Paillard Inc. had introduced in 1933. Lightweight and with slightly rounded keys that cradle the fingertips, the Hermes 3000 has been especially beloved by authors. **Jack Kerouac** finished his last novel on one; **Sylvia Plath** wrote *The Bell Jar* (1962) on hers. **Larry McMurtry** thanked his Hermes 3000 at the 2006 Golden Globes, and typewriter aficionado **Tom Hanks** considers his model to be among his most prized possessions.

— ALLISON MEIER



ON ASSIGNMENT for ArtDesk, typewriter artist and poet **Chad Reynolds** made these alternative versions for the inside covers of this issue. We liked them so much that we wanted to share them here.



Doing The Undoing

Premiering in October 2020, *The Undoing* treated pandemic TV audiences to on-screen father-daughter conversations in the magnificent galleries of the Frick, a museum on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. **Donald Sutherland** and **Nicole Kidman** portrayed a family in turmoil in the six-episode HBO series which also features **Hugh Grant**. The Frick temporarily moved its collection to the **Frick Madison** in early 2021.

On Screens Near You

We're still limited with what we can share in person, but social media keeps us gathered with an unlimited amount of social distance, and maybe even keeps us closer to the contemporary artists of the moment than before. **Yoko Ono** and **Cindy Sherman** look to the future in their signature aesthetics, while **Mark Mothersbaugh** and **Catherine Opie** share new quarantine work. **Marilyn Minter** seeks comfort from animal friends, and **Ai Weiwei** looks to nature, too, for an artist's well-being. **Yayoi Kusama** wastes no time for art, and doesn't spare any points for style, either. Even **Amy Sherald's** throw-back post makes us want to dress up just to work from home.



IN MEMORY



Marvin Sackner (1932–2020)

COLLECTOR OF CONTEMPORARY WORD ART
With a focus on work at the intersection between language and visual expression, Marvin and Ruth Sackner collected more than 75,000 objects that range from artist's books and typewriter art to picture poems and mail art. Marvin, who was also a leading pulmonologist and medical-device inventor, died on September 29, 2020, preceded by his wife, Ruth, who died on October 11, 2015, and the legacy of their decades-long passion for word-based art includes the Sackner Archive of Concrete and Visual Poetry, which relocated from their Miami Beach home to the University of Iowa in 2019 (selections of which are available to explore at lib.uiowa.edu). Whether Guillaume Apollinaire's 1917 poems that appear as horses and flowers, the experimental Fluxus writing of the 1970s, the 1980s LED scrolls of text by Jenny Holzer, or Tom Phillips's *A Humument* alteration of a Victorian novel completed in 1916, the Sackners' interests spanned the breadth of twentieth- and twenty-first-century artistic movements. They did not follow collecting trends and often were acquiring work others overlooked. Their partnership has indelibly enhanced appreciation for the creative spark that comes from the joining of art and words.

by ALLISON MEIER

Whale Tale

For the land-locked and the ocean-going, whales never go out of style. Representatives from Oklahoma's Kirkpatrick Foundation, Save the Illinois River, and the City of Tahlequah, Oklahoma, as well as Washington's SR3—Sealife Response, Rehabilitation and Research—and the city leaders of Des Moines, Washington (pictured below) joined forces to announce a new partnership. The **Oklahoma Killer Whale Project** honors the connection between Oklahoma and Tahlequah, aka J35, and her new calf, Phoenix (I57); the two whales are members of the protected Southern Resident killer whale community. The collaborative effort forms a "Sister Community" to support SR3's Southern Resident health assessment research and connects Oklahoma-based conservationists to the Pacific Northwest. To donate or for more information: sealifer3.org/tahlequah





Photograph by Jerry Saltz

WHAT IS AND WAS

The beautiful, mystical, freeing experience of being Jerry, a critic for all critics, loving and living life in New York, for New York.

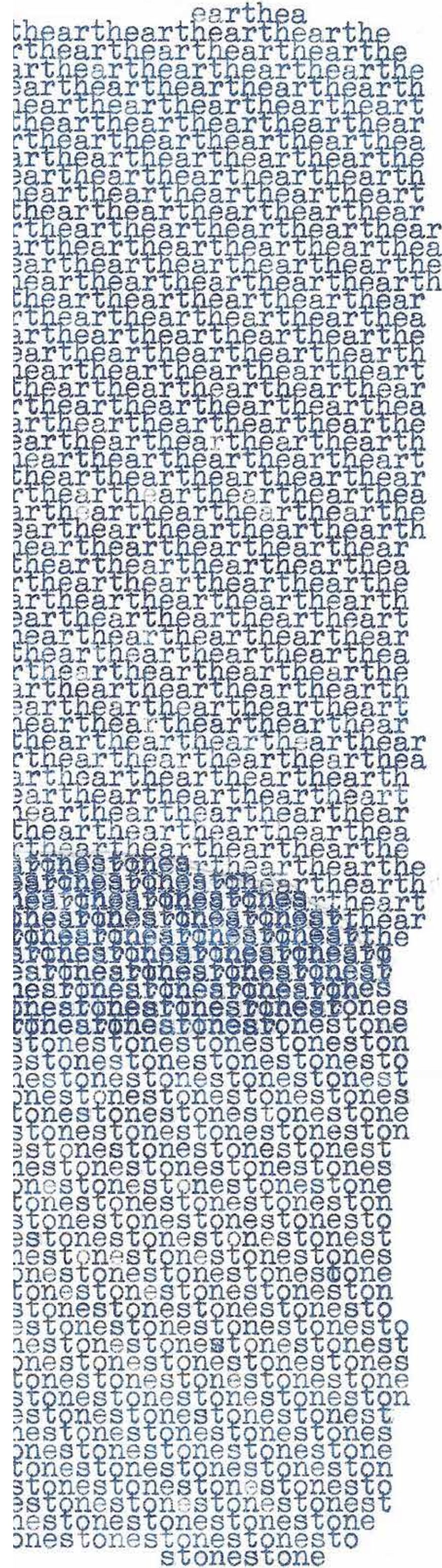
BY JERRY SALTZ

A DESK IS an operating system, a deeper well, a magic lantern, and a place to weaponize chance—a place to pay attention to every passing fancy, listen to everything around me, to leave notes everywhere that might trigger things that I didn't know I needed to know until I know them. Those notes are gathered from everything I've seen, thought, done, read—anything. I leave them spread out and changing like atmosphere; they are the air that I breathe.

My desk is a bareness, a bottomless source, and a beast with a thousand eyes. It knows what I am doing. I have no degrees; I never went to school. I was a long-distance driver until I was forty. But I loved art; I had to be in the art world. One day I decided to be an art critic. I had never written a word in my life. I knew I had to create a kind of organism that would help me traverse the distances I had already lost and inch me to invisible destiny. Our desks and studios are places between what is and was. The wild beasts that live within us range free while we work.

The window next to my desk is the only reality I know. When I look out it I am like a drunk in a midnight choir—trying to be free.

Starting so late, having so much ground to cover and make up, not knowing anything about writing, and becoming a weekly art critic means that I have no life other than seeing twenty-five to thirty shows a week in New York and then coming home, fighting my inner demons, and then writing. I am not part of society. I am ecstatic. X



earth tones / hearth stones

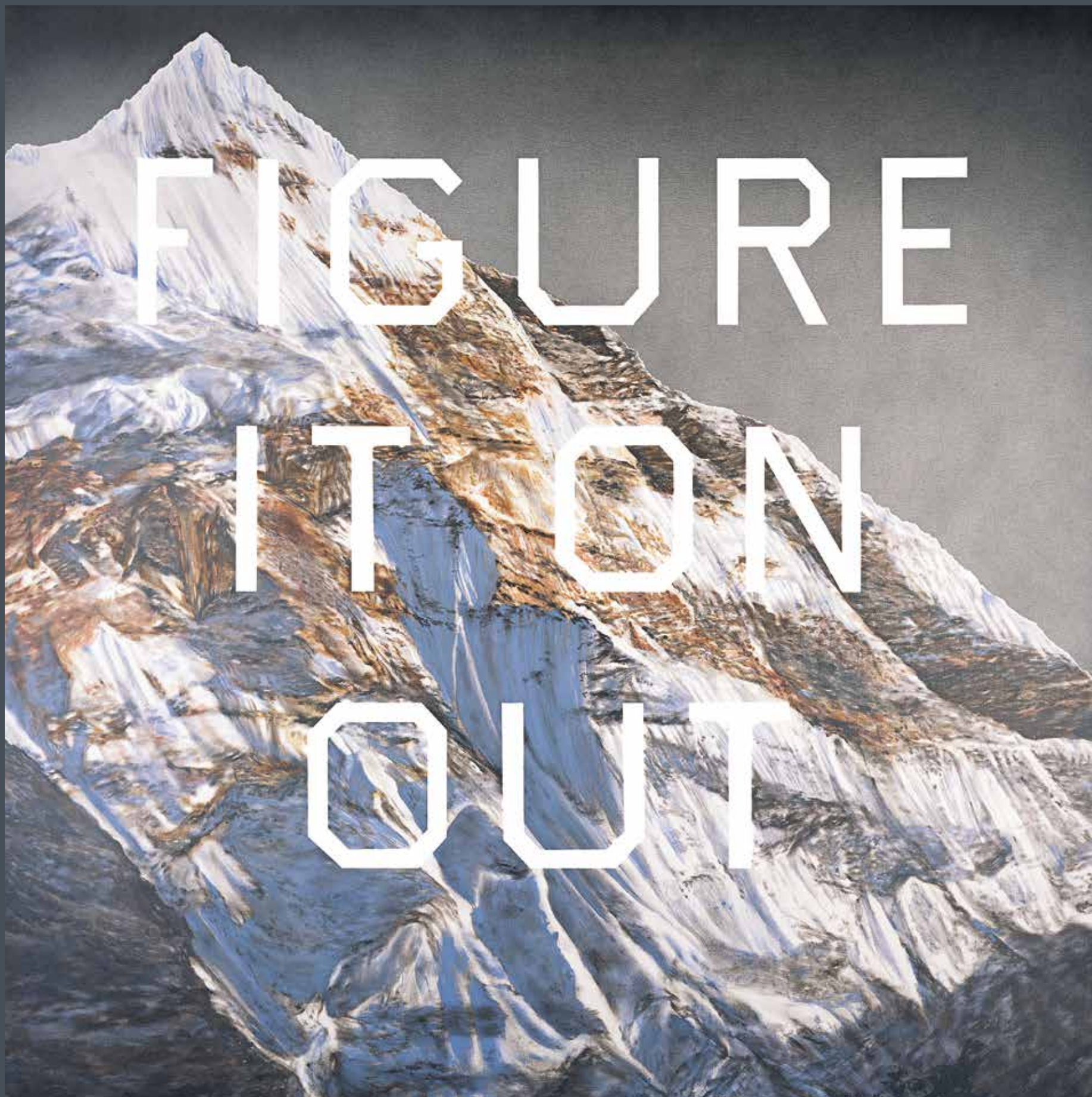


Figure It On Out (2017). © Ed Ruscha. Courtesy of Ed Ruscha Studio

ED RUSCHA: *OKLA*

FEB. 18 -
JULY 5

Examine works from one of America's most important artists through the lens of his childhood in Oklahoma City. **Tickets: okcontemp.org.**

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