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Archives of American Art

Interview with Ed Ruscha, circa 1981

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<i>Ed Ruscha</i>: Trying to present myself with things that I didn't quite understand and then I knew that maybe I would have some voice to the public and even though I expected the public not to understand, but it was just part of it.

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: And indeed in the beginning, I don't think they did.

<i>Ed Ruscha</i>: No, and I didn't think they should have. See, I mean, I didn't really understand what I was doing. I never understand what I'm doing because then that denotes that your course is already set before you and it's a matter of sort of filling the time gap in order to accomplish the things that are in that time gap.

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: And then there aren't any surprises either in that, you know.

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<i>Ed Ruscha</i>: And ah, so it was, it was a strange kind of vocabulary that I wanted to...with each book maybe some sort of quotation in its own language and ah the fact that it was done in a more or less traditional manner, it was what I was after. I wanted it to be a book with flipping pages.

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I didn't want it to be a cock-eyed book, I didn't want it to be a hand down book, I wanted it to be more or less a traditional approach but yet with subject matter that was slightly off and maybe a few frames out of sync.

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<i>Jan Butterfield</i>: And that pain you know, was always to have [[laughter]] the back and there was that kind of perceptual,

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to which

<i>Ed Ruscha</i>: Yeah and I then I saw that um one book would be a real head scratcher for people and yet if I presented someone with say ten of my books like I have 12, 15 books now, I mean if I presented an entire collection then it becomes a little more sense oriented, it makes more sense, even to people



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