

GAGOSIAN

Gagosian Paris to Present New Paintings by Ed Ruscha

Tom Sawyer Paintings Opens October 19, 2022

Exhibition Presented Alongside Installation of Work by James Turrell, and Concurrently with Exhibitions at Other Gagosian Paris Locations of Work by Jenny Saville and Richard Serra



Ed Ruscha, *TOM SAWYER #3*, 2022, acrylic on canvas, 28 × 39 inches (71.1 × 99.1 cm) © Ed Ruscha

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I was born to watch paint dry.

—Ed Ruscha

PARIS, October 10, 2022—Gagosian is pleased to present ten new paintings and a new hologram by Ed Ruscha. *Tom Sawyer Paintings*, the artist’s first ever solo exhibition of paintings at the gallery in Paris, will open alongside a presentation of new work by James Turrell in the gallery’s upstairs space, as well as exhibitions at Gagosian’s other Paris locations of new paintings by Jenny Saville (rue de Castiglione), and a sculpture by Richard Serra (Le Bourget). Concurrently, Gagosian will participate in the inaugural edition of Paris+ par Art Basel at the Grand Palais Éphémère from October 20 to 23.

In his new paintings, Ruscha takes inspiration from Mark Twain’s American classic *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). Eschewing the gnomic texts for which he is best known, Ruscha here focuses instead on naturalistic images of simple wooden slats. These familiar surfaces, with their distinctive grain, allude to an incident in Twain’s novel in which Sawyer, depressed by the thought of having to spend a Saturday whitewashing a fence, cons his friends into completing the chore for him.

Wood appears throughout Ruscha’s oeuvre as image, subject, support, and container, as well as in miscellaneous projects such as the *Artforum* “Surrealism” cover of 1966, which shows letters carved from balsa wood. “When I do a plank of wood,” Ruscha comments on the paintings *Plank* (1979) and *Plank in Decline* (2007), “I’m painting a horizontal landscape, or I might be painting a picture of wood

that I see when I go to the desert. The idea of deterioration and age and all that.” Art historian Briony Fer has suggested that the planks in these works also function as “a kind of blank, an obdurate piece of matter that obscures the view. It is a gap in the picture and a block on its fictional transparency.”

The new series’ references to Twain recall those of Ruscha’s *Sayings (from Mark Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson)* (1996), a series of lithographs in which he renders the lines (in dialect) of one of the novel’s characters on wood-grain backgrounds, and *Mark Twain Quote* (2012), a print in which he reproduces the author’s phrase “the ancients stole all our great ideas” in English and German (the latter to correspond with an eponymous exhibition of old master paintings and objects from the collection of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, that Ruscha curated there in 2012). The project is also consistent with the artist’s long-standing absorption in Americana, which has famously found expression in his images of gasoline stations, the Sunset Strip, and the Hollywood sign. The fact that *Tom Sawyer* was one of the first novels written on a typewriter is also significant to Ruscha, whose book *Royal Road Test* (1967) documents the artist tossing a vintage typewriter from a speeding Buick.

While *Tom Sawyer Paintings* may not, then, incorporate text (aside from the subtle rubber stamp reproduced in a few works), the series alludes nonetheless to the potential for and of verbal expression; the wooden slats might even be thought of as suggestive of type in their regular horizontal, vertical, and diagonal configurations. These robust graphic compositions, in which the planks are depicted abutting or overlapping one another (occasionally revealing broken or missing sections) and echoing the concealed structural forms of the canvases’ stretcher bars, exhibit a heraldic quality that recalls designs by other artists including Frank Stella and Jasper Johns, as well as Ruscha’s own numerous images of the Stars and Stripes.

Accompanying the seven *Tom Sawyer* paintings are *Guardrail* (2021), an extended horizontal canvas depicting the eponymous traffic barrier; *Metro Petro Neuro Psycho* and *Tilted Metro Petro* (both 2022), two paintings on raw linen that riff on the words of their titles; and a new hologram also featuring the *Metro Petro* text.

Ed Ruscha was born in Omaha, Nebraska, and lives and works in Los Angeles. His work is collected by museums worldwide. Exhibitions include *Fifty Years of Painting*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2010, traveled to Moderna Museet, Stockholm, through 2010); *Standard*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (2012–13, traveled to Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Waltham, Massachusetts, through 2013); *Los Angeles Apartments*, Kunstmuseum Basel (2013); *In Focus: Ed Ruscha*, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles (2013); 13th Biennale de Lyon, France (2015); *Ed Ruscha and the Great American West*, de Young Museum, San Francisco (2016); *Course of Empire*, National Gallery, London (2018); *Double Americanisms*, Secession, Vienna (2018–19); *Tate ARTIST ROOMS: Ed Ruscha*, Tate Modern, London (2019–21), and *OKLA*, Oklahoma Contemporary, Oklahoma City (2021).

#EdRuscha

ED RUSCHA

Tom Sawyer Paintings

Opening reception: Wednesday, October 19, 6–8pm

October 19–December 22, 2022

4 rue de Ponthieu, Paris

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