

## Press Release

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## ICONIC WORK BY ED RUSCHA FROM THE COLLECTION OF AMERICAN ACTOR BUD CORT SELLS FOR \$3,961,000 IN SOTHEBY'S DAY SALE OF CONTEMPORARY ART IN NEW YORK



Pictured above: **Ed Ruscha's I Don't Want No Retro Spective**, 1979 (est. \$1/1.5 million), sold for \$3,961,000  
Courtesy: Richard Knapp

**New York, New York, May 15, 2008** – Today in Sotheby's spring Day sale of Contemporary Art, **Ed Ruscha's I Don't Want No Retro Spective**, 1979, an iconic work which recounts a fascinating story about the artist and the American actor, Bud Cort, sold for \$3,961,000, a record for a work on paper by the artist, exceeding expectations (pictured above, est. \$1/1.5 million\*). Mr. Cort is arguably best known for his iconic role in the 1971 American film classic *Harold and Maude* opposite Ruth Gordon.

Immortalized on the cover for Edward Ruscha's monumental 1982 retrospective, which originated at the San Francisco Museum of Art and later traveled to the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *I Don't Want No Retro Spective* will be the cover lot of the upcoming sale. Ruscha presented *I Don't Want No Retro Spective* to his friend Bud Cort following Cort's near-death accident on the Hollywood Freeway in 1979. Ruscha gave the work to the actor on his hospital

bed, yet the phrase depicted, 'I Don't Want No Retro Spective,' goes back several years earlier, when the pair was having dinner together at a Los Angeles restaurant. As Cort recalls, Ruscha had just returned from a show in Switzerland where he had mentioned that he had come across a theatre that was screening three of Bud's films - *Brewster McCloud*, *Harold and Maude* and *Why Shoot the Teacher?* - and referred to it as somewhat of a 'Cort retrospective'. In response, the actor paused then proclaimed, "I don't want no retro spective". Ruscha found this statement so amusing that he decided to memorialize it in one of his works, waiting for the appropriate moment to surprise Mr. Cort. *An essay by Bud Cort about the Ruscha is available upon request.*

**When asked why he sold the piece, Mr. Cort said: "Well, I've had too many retrospectives lately, and I've decided that I like them, so I can't really say that I don't want one anymore. I just thought it was the right time to release is onto another plane. It's brought me so much happiness, I know it will bring happiness to the person who ends up with it."**

*I Don't Want No Retro Spective* exhibits a bright, powdery surface in bright pink hues recalling a brilliant setting sun over the California landscape or the dawning of a new day. Meticulously executed, the bold, white lettering emerges from the backdrop in capital letters and reveals the sentimental phrase which links Cort to Ruscha in a tribute to their friendship. Ruscha's fascination for words in his art derived both from formative personal experience and a knowledge of art history. Growing up in Oklahoma, Ruscha saw very little fine art in the flesh and was much more influenced by the immediacy of



vernacular imagery: comic strips, typography, book design and vivid commercial advertising. When he first moved to LA in 1956, he worked as a sign painter and graphic designer, as well as hand-setting type and working the presses for art book publishers. Defining the West Coast Pop sensibility, Ruscha was among the stable of the legendary Ferus Gallery, the gallery that staged Warhol's breakthrough show of *Campbell's Soup Cans* in 1962. In this explosive creative environment, Ruscha fashioned an independent voice and line of pictorial enquiry that revolved around text.

Isolating his textual ready-mades against an empty horizon line, Ruscha exposes the strangeness of his words and forces a semantic re-examination of their meaning. It is this spirit of Duchampian intellectual inquiry which is the hallmark of his best work and which distinguishes him from the pop tendencies of his peers. This inquiry is nonetheless embedded in his vernacular culture. The motif of words floating in

emptiness is grounded in his personal experience, recalling the road journey west from his home town to LA along Route 66, a trip Ruscha later made frequently in both directions to visit his family. Along that road, the endlessly flat, featureless horizon line, so beautifully evoked in the soft pink hues of the present work, is only occasionally punctuated by the huge billboards which start as specs on the horizon and gradually get bigger until they slide past the window, contemporary signposts of modern America set against the limitless sky and setting sun of the mythical landscape of the Wild West.

\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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