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RISE TO VOTE, SIR  
A SUN ON U.S.A.

ARTWORK LEVEL AS A LEVEL | DON'T NOD | I DID DID I | MAPS, DNA, AND SPAM

ARTIST EDWARD RUSCHA

INSTALLED 2007  
SAN FRANCISCO FEDERAL BUILDING  
SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Edward Ruscha's work explores the American commonplace: parking lots, city streets, movie screens, road signs, and—especially—words. As a teenager, Ruscha drove out Route 66 from his home in Oklahoma City to a new life in Los Angeles. This journey along America's iconic highway profoundly influenced Ruscha's future work, which exemplifies a unique aesthetic informed by his training as a commercial artist and his interest in the fragmented visual experience of automobile travel. In his early paintings, Ruscha juxtaposed comic-book covers, logos, and bold words—sometimes representing sounds, such as “OOF” and “HONK”—recombined into new and often humorous tableaux. Likewise, his landmark 1963 book *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* offers deadpan frontal images of Route 66's architectural standbys, inviting readers to contemplate these utilitarian constructions. We rarely stop to consider the ceaseless barrage of words, images, and ordinary objects encountered in our daily lives, but Ruscha's paintings, drawings, photographs, and prints defamiliarize them, prompting viewers to reassess their forms and meanings.

Such is the case with Ruscha's *LEVEL AS A LEVEL*; *DON'T NOD*; *I DID DID I*; and *MAPS, DNA, AND SPAM*—four related artworks, one located in each of the skip-stop elevator lobbies of the San Francisco Federal Building. The images feature palindromes—phrases that read the same forward and backward. Their verticality relates to the movement of the elevator cabs. Ruscha notes: “The idea of letting these statements run up and down on their sides seemed to support the notion of an elevator experience. The four images begin to ‘talk’ to one another.” While the scale and finish of the work recalls billboards, the upright orientation of the palindromes makes their forms less familiar, delaying the instant recognition that words usually trigger. Likewise, the enigmatic phrases, which hover on ghostly backgrounds like signs over a foggy San Francisco, elude easy interpretation. Thus, Ruscha gives pause to the habit of reading, making the words in these images appear fresh again. BG

RUSCHA



**Edward Ruscha** was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1937 and raised in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. Following his graduation from high school in 1956, Ruscha moved to Los Angeles to attend the Chouinard Art Institute. The first solo exhibition of his work was in 1963 at the pioneering Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles. Over the past forty-five years, Ruscha's art has been the subject of many exhibitions, including *Course of Empire* at the United States Pavilion of the 51st Venice Biennale in Venice, Italy, in 2005 and at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York in 2006; *Edward Ruscha* (2000), a retrospective exhibition organized jointly by the Smithsonian Institution's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., and the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, England; *I Don't Want No Retrospective—the Works of Edward Ruscha* (1982) organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; and *Edward Ruscha (Ed-werd Rew-shay) Young Artist* (1972) at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts in Minnesota. Ruscha's work has also been featured in hundreds of group exhibitions around the world since 1960. His public commissions include *Words Without Thoughts Never to Heaven Go* (1985) and a group of lunette murals (1987-89) for the Miami-Dade Public Library in Miami, another set of murals for the Denver Central Library in Colorado (1995), and *Picture Without Words* (1998) for the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles.

MEDIUM ARCHIVAL INK ON POLYMER SCRIMS  
DIMENSIONS FOUR PAIRS, EACH 24 FT X 24 FT

