



ICE
PRINCESS

I've always been dead serious about being nonsensical.

EDWARD RUSCHA

Edward Ruscha

Ice Princess, 1990

Acrylic on canvas

68 1/8 x 68 inches

Collection of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth,

Museum purchase made possible by a grant from The Burnett Foundation

Acquired in 1990

In the late 1960s, Edward Ruscha gained attention for his pieces that juxtaposed text and images. His work used the attitudes, imagery, and style of Pop, Surrealism, Dada, and Conceptual art, but combined them in a way that was new and relevant to the times. These works contain what would become his signature motif – words as objects. An angular font announces “Ice Princess” across an aerial view of Los Angeles in his work of the same name. Ruscha airbrushed the painting, and the technique, long associated with commercial graphics, gives the work the flattened look of a sign. The blocky letters look either quickly taped on, or reminiscent of the edges that appear on some LED or computer displays. The exact meaning of the piece is ambiguous, and Ruscha plays on the power of ambiguity in much of his work. “Ice Princess” is a powerful phrase, not only in what it might mean, but also visually. It looks like a title, and the word “princess” contains the letters in “ice.” The text will certainly evoke different meanings and associations for each viewer. Laid out over the distant, nighttime landscape, the words might refer to something or someone far away, or perhaps they were seen on a billboard by drivers moving quietly down the road at night. It is this odd combination of potency and ambiguous distance that has made Ruscha’s work resonate so strongly with viewers for more than forty years.