OU Students Relive Ed Ruscha’s *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* Road Trip – 50 Years Later

NORMAN – In 1963, contemporary American pop artist Ed Ruscha published *Twentysix Gasoline Stations*, a visual documentary of a road trip from his home in Los Angeles to the stomping grounds of his youth, Oklahoma City. Fifty years later, 20 University of Oklahoma students are reenacting the journey in reverse order – and meeting the artist himself.

*Twentysix Gasoline Stations* is considered by many to be among the first modern artist’s books. The book was published in small numbers and is one of Ruscha’s highly collectible works. The idea to reproduce Ruscha’s landmark trip with students, lovingly titled *Road to Ruscha*, originated with Todd Stewart, associate professor of photography and associate director of the OU School of Art and Art History, and Ghislain d’Humières, the Wylodean and Bill Saxon Director of the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art on the OU Norman campus.

Since last fall, the museum has been raising money to purchase Ruscha’s painting, *No Man’s Land*. The 1990 work, which features the territory of Oklahoma prominently, has been on loan from the artist and on display at the museum since June 2011. It is part of the museum staff’s ongoing efforts to expose visitors to more contemporary art.

Throughout the painting’s display, the museum has held special events celebrating Ruscha, including a Family Day that featured live dance choreographed by the OU School of Dance and an original composition by an
OU School of Music student, both of which were performed live by OU students for the community.

Stewart’s plans for the student trip, scheduled May 15 through 24, include current technological components, including real-time GPS tracking and multimedia iPad reactions to the gas stations and the trip by the students, all of which will be viewable by visitors to the art museum as well as the museum’s website.

“Along the journey, participants will engage in a variety of collaborative projects and site visits derived from the works of Edward Ruscha and, specifically, from the original 26 gasoline stations pictured in the book,” Stewart said. “The project will exist in both physical and virtual space with real-time collaboration between those ‘on the road’ and visitors to the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art in Norman, Oklahoma.”

By the numbers, 20 OU students from multiple disciplines will travel 3,000 miles over 10 days, with stops scheduled at the sites of most of the 26 gas stations featured in Ruscha’s book. Participating students’ academic disciplines include art and art history, geography and meteorology, geology, film and media studies, and advertising.

The trip will culminate with a meeting in Ruscha’s studio, where participants will spend time with the artist. Additional activities include a visit to the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, where students can view a new exhibition, In Focus: Ed Ruscha, a photography exhibition that includes Twentysix Gasoline Stations.

D’Humières said the trip is very timely in the museum’s history.

“This is an extraordinary time for the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art to collaborate with university students and study the life and work of one of America’s greatest living artists,” d’Humières said. “In addition to raising money for Mr. Ruscha’s painting, we continue to raise awareness of the importance of contemporary art in the museum and the state of Oklahoma. Visitors to the museum during the length of the trip will be able to see how these students are reacting to contemporary art in their own language, with their own electronic media. It’s a very exciting process and we look forward to sharing their experiences with the public.”

The trip is supported by the Kirkpatrick Foundation, the OU College of Atmospheric and Geographic Sciences, and the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.

Born in Omaha, Neb., in 1937, Ruscha moved to Oklahoma City in 1941. He
moved to Los Angeles in 1956 with friend and aspiring musician Mason Williams, and enrolled at Chouinard Art Institute (now California Institute of the Arts). He has been credited by art critics and collectors as one of the most important living artists of the Pop art movement.

His painting, *No Man’s Land*, recollects the artist’s youth in Oklahoma and his perceptions of the world outside of the state. If acquired, *No Man’s Land* will be the first major Ruscha work held in a public collection in Oklahoma.

Additional information about the museum’s ongoing fundraiser to acquire *No Man’s Land* is available on the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art website at www.ou.edu/fjjma.

The Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art is located in the OU Arts District on the corner of Elm Avenue and Boyd Street, at 555 Elm Ave., on the OU Norman campus. Admission to the museum is complimentary to all visitors, thanks to the generosity of the OU Office of the President and the OU Athletics Department. The museum is closed on Mondays. Information and accommodations on the basis of disability are available by calling (405) 325-4938 or visiting www.ou.edu/fjjma.

###

**PHOTO CUTLINE**

Students from the University of Oklahoma School of Dance perform original choreography inspired by Pop artist Ed Ruscha’s *No Man’s Land*, shown in the background, at the Fred Jones Jr. Museum of Art.