Ivy Cooper

“Trespassing: The Books of Ed Ruscha”

Between 1962 and 1978, conceptual artist Ed Ruscha produced 16 books that simultaneously transgress conventions of artmaking and bookmaking, and that to this day continue to confound both categories of practice. Typical examples are *Some Los Angeles Apartments*, *Various Small Fires*, and *Every Building on the Sunset Strip*, books whose deadpan titles encapsulate their subjects entirely: amateurish, “deskilled” photographs of the items they name along with minimal descriptive captions, presented in a strict serial sequence that offers no narrative arc, climax or resolution. The first of Ruscha’s books, *Twentysix Gasoline Stations* (1962), initially garnered little attention—as a commercial publication, it wasn’t immediately recognized as art; it was likewise rejected by the Library of Congress for its “unorthodox form and supposed lack of information.” Today, Ruscha is celebrated as an innovator of the artist’s book, and his publications from this period are considered masterful expressions of the 1960s California Pop Art aesthetic. Ruscha’s books are exhibited in major art galleries, but one is just as likely to come across a copy on the shelves of a public or college library, evidence that Ruscha (who once said “I want to be the Henry Ford of book making”) continues to operate between categorical conventions of art and bookmaking alike.