The Big Interview

'In the Art World, Revolution Is in the Air': Artist Ed Ruscha and Music Legend Jimmy Iovine on How Art Guides Political Change

Iovine commissioned Ruscha to paint a tattered American flag in 2017

Andrew Goldstein, November 3, 2020

Ed Ruscha on the set of Jimmy Iovine's new show *Changing Hands*. Courtesy of Beats 1/Apple Music.

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Right now, thousands of voters are casting their ballots for the 2020 US presidential election not in a closed basement or school gymnasium, but in the Brooklyn Museum, which has transformed its lobby into a polling place.

As these people vote, they may look up to see a harrowing image: a six-by-10 foot painting of a tattered American flag that seems to be disintegrating in the wind, its stripes and stars fading into the apocalyptic confetti. Titled *Flat Flag*, the painting is a vivid representation of the battered state of the nation, and it is the work of one of the most iconic artist Ed Ruscha, a towering figure in American art who is best known for his pop-inflected canvases of words and landscapes that have influenced a generation of pop and Abstraction groups at a Renaissance Medicine. What he is not known for, however, is getting political.

Ruscha's work was commissioned by the music mogul Jimmy Iovine, who is a longtime friend of the artist whose son Christopher attended school with Iovine's son Reeve Carney who starred out existing roles for Jaime Lannister, Dorian Gyringiphers, and Patch Darkness, the then seen on so found Broadway in the musical *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*. Iovine's friend Ruscha, who has since gone on to found Beats with Dr. Dre, sold it to Apple for $3 billion, and Apple Music is now the world's largest music streaming service, up all kinds of good results in the education sector.

So what is the story behind this flag painting, and why does it matter so incredibly much today? We spoke to the two giants of creative industry to find out.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

Jimmy Iovine: Well, I don't remember exactly how we met. Maybe Ed remembers how, but my dad was a longshoreman, and I grew up in Long Beach, and I used a truck. And I was really working to get that truck incorporated into a painting to represent him. And Ed said, "Well, I don't know how to do that, but I've never really interested me." And now I have an incredible Ed Ruscha painting of my dad's truck, and we developed a relationship, and I'm very, very, very, very, very.

Ed Ruscha: Very accurate. Jimmy. It's quite a tribute to your father, too.

Can I ask you, Jimmy, how did you first get interested in collecting art, coming from the Hip-hop music industry?

JI: I'm interested in great artists of all kinds. I'm actually as interested if not more in the actual people that make the art. I'm interested in Ed because he's a great artist, fascinate me, and because of great artists, I'm an incredible life. I'm not an artist myself. I'm made a lot of music, but I'm not an artist. I'm interested in Ed Ruscha Springsteen or John Lennon, or of course, Dr.

I've always been able to develop really great relationships and support those artists and help advantage I can.

Artist Ed Ruscha in his studio. Photo by Richard Harbaugh courtesy of the artist.

Now Ed, you are "Mr. LA." You're basically the poet laureate of Los Angeles. How do you navigate this shifting landscape. What exactly did you make of this fact taking Brooklyn where you first met him?

ER: Dangerous Work. I know that he was in the music business and he said a lot to say. We became in the same, we became friends, we became very close, and we recognized, and a lot of stuff which around Jimmy and his creations. Plus, on top of that I could see he was interested in the arts, and I'm interested in, so there was a connection there.

JI: I moved out, David Geffen has really influenced me and helped me a lot. He's been, he's been, he's been a mentor of my career. He's been a friend of mine for 40 years, and he's such a great collector, and has such great taste. And I've learned from him, and I've learned my arts and I really being our collection to the next level.

David Geffen. Artwork Wayne Thiebaud Flying Cities, Estimated $1 million-$2 million.

Of course, David Geffen is a powerful collector of both sides of the country since it rarely known for being an exemplar of art patronage. So going back, you mentioned that you first met Ed Ruscha. Tell me the story of this painting and how did it come into being?

JI: I'm very fortunate in that one of the first works I ever purchased was a painting by Ed Ruscha called *Flat Flag*. I'm very engaged in Black America and what is happening within African American culture has been very important to me my whole life, and I've been, I've, I've about life, and I feel that African American culture is the most under-recognized and under-appreciated asset that we have in our country. And I've been very, very, very, very,

Pasternak has done there is just extraordinary.

It's amazing that the work will have such an impact on all of the people who are going there to vote. When they walk in to cast their ballots, they're worried about the future, and they can look up at the flag and know they are not alone. How do you see the legacy of this painting? How do you think people are going to be looking at it 10 years from now?

ER: Maybe 20 years from now, people will say "Oh that painting looks like it represents something that happened decades ago," and that's fine with me.

JI: Again, it's like a song. It captures the moment, and Ed Ruscha has captured this moment in my opinion, better than any other art form has. I'm looking for Trey Parker to write the Trump Broadway play—I think that will also capture the moment, but as of now, Ed Ruscha owns it.

So I want to ask, if there is one message that you could put out into the world right now, what would that be?

ER: There are a lot of question marks out there in the future, and I always look for things that are out in the future, because heck, that's where we're going to spend the rest of our lives.

JI: My biggest problem with this administration is what is going on with race. It's the most important thing in my life right now. I would say simply that prejudice is absurd and ignorant, and why we can't swallow that and take it in is mind boggling to me. So if I had one wish right now, I wish that racism would end.

ER: Amen.

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