

Ed Ruscha

Atomic Princess

1990

Acrylic on canvas

Private Collection

The nuclear legacy of the Greater West unites the entire super-region, and artworks related to the topic fall under the thematic grouping, “Shifting Ground.” Ed Ruscha’s 1990 painting *Atomic Princess* exemplified this category while using a clever combination of words to tell a story. The word “princess” suggests wealth, power, privilege, and girlishness, and seems to lessen the destructive Cold War implications of the word “atomic” by enhancing a sense of postwar optimism. The two words together evoke pop cultural icons such as the well-known 1957 image of Miss Atomic Bomb, the apocalyptic pinup girl attired in a mushroom cloud. As is common in Ruscha’s work, there is no prescribed meaning, and multiple readings are possible depending on the viewer’s perspective.



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