Modern Art in Los Angeles: Okies Go West
An Evening with Jerry McMillan, Ed Ruscha, and Mason Williams

In the 1950s, Oklahoma City produced three young men who would go on to have a profound influence on American photography, art, and music: Jerry McMillan, Ed Ruscha, and Mason Williams. They were childhood friends, neighbors, and classmates who, fresh from high school, drove west on Route 66 toward the seductive allure of California in pursuit of their artistic goals.

Once in Los Angeles, McMillan and Ruscha lived together in an apartment in Hollywood, shared one car, and worked at Cassell’s Patio restaurant while studying commercial art at the Chouinard Art Institute. Although Williams’s stint in the U.S. Navy prevented him from being a housemate, they each began to develop the talents that would make them distinguished artists in their respective fields.

McMillan initially focused on design, advertising, and abstract painting; later he would become known for his ground-breaking use of photography, particularly in his “photoscuptures.” Ruscha, meanwhile, transitioned away from commercial art to a lifelong preoccupation with vernacular language and culture, which he explored in his paintings, books, and works on paper. While in the Navy, Williams began his recording career. Though later hired as a comedy writer for the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour, he continued as a songwriter and became an award-winning composer and recording artist. The three artists have continued their friendship and artistic dialogue for more than fifty years.

This panel discussion brings these friends together to discuss their transition from Oklahoma to the City of Angels, their early careers, and the formation of an art scene in Los Angeles. Join us after the discussion for a musical performance by Mason Williams.

Admission to this event is free. To attend, please make a reservation by visiting www.getty.edu or calling (310) 440-7300. Note, late arrivals cannot be guaranteed seating. Parking is $8.00 per car.

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