



Robert Cottingham
(American, born 1935)

Biography

Robert Cottingham is best known for his paintings and prints that depict the urban American landscape, building facades, neon signs, movie marquees, and storefronts. His work explores the visual language of commercial signage, often highlighting isolated words or letters with psychological or humorous resonance.

Cottingham served in the U.S. Army (1955–1958) before studying advertising and graphic design at Pratt Institute in New York (1959–1963). After graduating, he worked as an art director in advertising agencies in New York and Los Angeles, where he was deeply involved in design and production. Influenced by Pop Art and eager to pursue his passion for painting, he began painting daily after work and eventually transitioned fully to art in 1968.

His advertising background heavily shaped his artistic style, particularly his use of typography, cropping, and scale. Cottingham often credits Pop artists like Andy Warhol, who also came from advertising, as key inspirations. His interest in text reflects the influence of artists such as Robert Indiana and Jasper Johns, while his monumental scale recalls the work of James Rosenquist. In 1964, Cottingham moved to Los Angeles, where the distinct urban environment inspired him to commit seriously to painting. A later stint in London (1972–1976) left him disconnected from his American-centric subject matter, prompting a return to the U.S., where he settled in rural Connecticut.

During the late 1970s and 1980s, his compositions became more expansive, capturing broader urban vistas and entire neighborhoods. By the late 1980s and early 1990s, his focus shifted to include trains and railroad imagery, further expanding his visual exploration of American vernacular culture. Since the late 1990s, he has turned his attention to vintage typewriters, drawn by their design and nostalgic associations.

Cottingham has taught at the Art Center College of Design in Los Angeles and the National Academy of Design in New York. His work has been featured in major exhibitions, including *Documenta* (Kassel), the Centre national d'art contemporain (Paris), the Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), the Samsung Museum of Modern Art (Seoul), and the Deutsche Guggenheim (Berlin). A solo presentation of his prints was held at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American Art in 1998–99.

He currently lives and works on a farm in western Connecticut.

Selected Collections

Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., USA
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA
Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut, USA
Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois, USA
Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, Ohio, USA
Cincinnati Art Museum, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA
High Museum of Art, Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C., USA
Baltimore Museum of Art, Baltimore, Maryland, USA
Tampa Museum of Art, Tampa, Florida, USA
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, Virginia, USA
Hunter Museum of American Art, Chattanooga, Tennessee, USA
Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, Arkansas, USA
La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, La Jolla, California, USA
Tate Gallery, London, United Kingdom
Ludwig Museum, Cologne, Germany
National Museum in Krakow, Krakow, Poland

Selected Literature

Meisel, Louis K. *Photorealism in the Digital Age*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2013.
Pg. 87-92. *Arte Contemporanea*. Milano: Electa, 2008.

Chalumeau, Jean-Luc. *Peinture Et Photographie: Pop-art, Figuration Narrative, Hyperréalisme, Nouveaux Pop*. Paris: Chêne, 2007.

Skolnick, Arnold ed., *Paintings of California*. New York: Chameleon Books.

Meisel, Louis K. *Photorealism Since 1980*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980.

Meisel, Louis K. *Photorealism*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1980. Springfield, MO: Springfield Art Museum, (catalogue raisonné), 1986.

Arthur, John. Robert Cottingham – A Print Retrospective 1972-1986.

Selected Exhibitions

2018

Solo: *Robert Cottingham: An American Alphabet*, Tandem Press, University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, USA

2016/17

Solo: *Components: The Art of Robert Cottingham*, Mattatuck Museum, Waterbury, USA

2010/11

Solo: *Robert Cottingham: Twenty Ways to See a Star*, Boca Raton Museum of Art, Boca Raton, USA

2009

Solo: *Robert Cottingham*, Deutsche Guggenheim, Berlin, Germany

2001

Group Exhibition, Samsung Museum of Modern Art, Seoul, South Korea

1998/99

Solo: *Eyeing America: Robert Cottingham Prints*, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA

1997

Solo: *Robert Cottingham: An American Alphabet*, The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, USA

Solo: *Hollywood Stills: House Portraits by Robert Cottingham*, Long Beach Museum of Art, Long Beach, USA

1996

Solo: *Robert Cottingham: An American Alphabet*, Forum Gallery, New York, USA

1993

Solo: *Robert Cottingham: Rolling Stock Series, Paintings, Prints*, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, USA

1992

Solo: *Robert Cottingham: Rolling Stock Series*, Butler Institute of American Art, Youngstown, USA

1989

Coming of Age: Twenty-one Years of Collecting, Madison Arts Center, USA



1987

Close Focus: Prints, Drawings and Photographs, National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., USA

1986/90

Solo: *Robert Cottingham: A Print Retrospective*, Traveling exhibition Springfield Art Museum, Missouri, Hunter Museum of Art, Tennessee, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Missouri, Museum of Art at the University of Oklahoma, Center Gallery at Bucknell University, Pennsylvania, Davison Art Center at Wesleyan University, Connecticut, Muscarelle Museum of Art at the College of William and Mary, Virginia; Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, New York, USA

1985/86

Solo: *Barrera-Rosa's: Robert Cottingham*, The Arkansas Arts Center, Little Rock, Arkansas, USA; traveled to Fendrick Gallery, Washington, D.C., and Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, USA

1983

Solo: *The Photo-Realist Statement: Recent Paintings by Robert Cottingham*, Wichita Art Museum, Wichita, USA

1981/83

Contemporary American Realism Since 1960, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA, USA; traveled to Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond, USA; and venues in Germany and the Netherlands

1978

Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA

1974

Hyperréalistes Américains, Centre national d'art contemporain, Paris, France

1972

Documenta 5, Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, Germany