



**Singing**

# Posters



11 NOVEMBER - 12 DECEMBER 2004

Rice Gallery

# Foreword

*The Singing Posters* is Allen Ruppersberg's homage to American poet Allen Ginsberg and his famous poem *Howl* (1955-56), which Ruppersberg considers to be the most significant poem of his generation. Ruppersberg translated Part I of the poem, the longest and most well known of its three sections, into phonetic spellings that he reintegrated into the original text. This "new" text is appears in an edition of approximately 200 multi-colored commercial advertising posters, which in *The Singing Posters* installation, are interspersed with "found" posters from the company where Ruppersberg's work was printed.

Ruppersberg determines the form *The Singing Posters* takes each time he installs it. At Rice, he used two adjoining walls, and working in a painterly fashion, chose posters from neat stacks lined up on the gallery floor. Each of the 100s of posters represented a precise and considered decision; as each color combination, breathing space of blank posters, or position of prominence (as with *NO WAR*), he looked, thought, adjusted, and changed. On one wall, Ruppersberg arranged the posters so that the lines of the poem could be read in order, while on the adjoining wall he disbursed them in a non-linear manner. He left one gallery wall blank, a dramatic counter to the throbbing rhythm of Ginsberg's words and mix of commercial come-ons.





Posters stretched into the small gallery, and wrapped around the space creating an intimate reading room. Here, viewers could sit and leaf through Ruppertsberg's new, six-volume photocopied book, *Haul or Wave Goodbye to Grandma* (Haul being a phonetic spelling of Howl). Composed of newspaper and magazine clippings, photographs, and other miscellany collected by the Ruppertsberg throughout his life. Ruppertsberg, younger than Ginsberg by almost a generation, views him as both colleague and mentor, and sees *Haul* as a piece of autobiography analogous to *Howl*.

Like the poem it pays tribute to, *The Singing Posters* was outspoken and not to be ignored. Dramatic during the day, at night, the gallery glowed, the psychedelic-colored sheets reflecting off the front glass and bouncing off the floors to fill the gallery space.

*The Singing Posters* is an ongoing project. To complete the poem, Ruppertsberg will present Parts II and III of *Howl*, printed on about 70 posters, together as one installation at the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf in December 2005.

— Kimberly Davenport

**Excerpts from a conversation between  
Allen Ruppersberg and Kim Davenport**

*What inspired you to do this piece?*

Ginsberg's part of the whole generation that inspires me — the Kerouac Beat people. Over the years I met him a number of times and we have various connections here and there through other people, so it was kind of an ongoing connection, personal and inspiration-wise. At one point when I was searching through thrift stores I found an old LP of his reading of *Howl* from 1959, right after he wrote it in San Francisco. I played it for years because it was such a fantastic reading — just the sound of his voice reading it. It was so fresh because he had just written it a couple of years ago, and because it was his hometown audience — all of it. It had this fantastic kind of resonance. I started to play it again at a certain point, and I happened to mention it to my students. Most of them had never heard of it. It just blows my mind, you know? Here it is, probably the most important poem of the post-war era for any number of reasons, and they don't know about it. So I decided to do a whole class based around that poem. It occurred to me that the sound of his voice and listening to him read it was what I wanted to pass on.

**HOWL**  
for Carl Solomon

PART 1

Y SAW thuh  
**BEST MYNDZ**  
uhv my  
je'nuh·RAY·shin  
**di-STROYD**  
**BY MAD-nis**

starving  
hysterical  
NAY-kid,

draging  
dhem-selvz  
thru

thuh NEE-gro  
**STREETS**  
**AT DAWN**

looking  
for an  
**ANG-gree**  
**FIKS,**

lisə·ning *tu* the crack  
uhv **DOOM** **AN** the  
hydrogen jukebox,

22 a

I have always used posters. Posters are such a public-address kind of system; they are on telephone poles; they announce rock and roll shows; people read them from a distance. I began to think about printing the poem on the posters, and then the phonetic idea came to me because people would have to say it out loud. They would be confronted with all of these posters that they read for other reasons, but there would be this strange language to be read out loud. It would be a way of getting people to *hear* the poem.

***The poem is just as fresh now as it was then, if not more so.***

It's so relevant at this moment, with these people that we live under now. It's more relevant than it was in the *Eisenhower* era. It has just gotten worse. So that was also part of it, that it would expose this poem to a new generation that didn't know it, but also for them to realize how relevant it is. And it is. It's just as fresh today as ever.

But the thing you can't convey to them is the experience of the cultural connection. I would go to be-ins or love-ins, or those kinds of things, and they were all there, and they were all participating. It was the counterculture; those people were not some far away thing, they **were** right there at this event with you: leading it, participating in it, believing in it, pushing it along. They came right along with that culture. There's nothing like that now, and you can't pass that on to the kids in any kind of way.

***How did you transcribe the poem?***

If you are familiar with *The New York Times*, you know they always have those things about how say someone's name phonetically — Ed Ruscha — REW-SHAY — and they will spell it out a certain way. I always liked that. So when I decided to try and break the poem down into phonetics I had to figure out how to do this. I had an assistant who researched it on the Internet and found a company that produces software that breaks things down into the different phonetic methods. I took two of them, the one that they use for *The New York Times*, and

another that is a little more complex. I wanted it to be visual and easy for people to do. I had the whole poem translated into the two different phonetic forms by one company. Then I had the two manuscripts, and I began to mix them along with “straight” sections of the poem, so that you read some phonetics, then you'll come to some words. Some of the language **is** so fantastic that you just want to leave it.

***So you gave the text over to the printing company?***

I have twenty years of working with these people and there is one typesetter who has done almost everything of mine. He sets it in the way that he likes, and it's the way that I like. I trust them to do it.

***What company is it?***

It's the Colby Poster Printing Company in downtown LA. It's one of the few typeset companies left in the country. Everything used to be typeset, where you had the blocks of wood with the raised letters and you set the words, then you inked them and printed them. They still do that process, and I have always used them because it is a beautiful process. The ink sits on the paper, and it looks different than silkscreen or other methods. I let them do it because of their method of setting the type, and their sense of design over the years setting these posters for every kind of person who comes in there, from political signs to church bazaars to rock and roll shows to whatever. I go in and check every once in a while to make sure that it is coming out the way I like. It took them about 7 or 8 months to do Part I.

The thing that worked out so well was studying how Ginsberg writes and how he constructs his poetry. It's done on the breath, which he gets from Walt Whitman. A line of poetry is what your own body, your own self, can say in a breath, so the poem is broken down that way. Some of the longer lines are *really* long breaths. It turned out that one breath line went to each poster, so when you read it, it's his breath, in a way.

who studied  
**Plotinus Poe**  
St. John of the  
**Cross**  
telephathy  
and bop  
**K**abbalah

who lounged  
hungry and lonesome  
through **HOUSTON**  
**SEE-king JAZ**  
**OR SEKS OR SOOP,**

***What about NO WAR?***

That's mine. It's a reading of the poem, of course, but it is also a part of the current culture. That poster and all the other "normal" posters that I incorporate with it come from the company, the leftovers from all their other jobs. I incorporate them, so that the poem is woven together with contemporary stuff. Because of the Iraq war there have been people printing posters for rallies and everything, so there it was, along with the poster for the carnival for St. Basil's. If you get the scheme right, things fit. The NO WAR is perfect; it is a big bold poster and I put it so that your eye went right to it, almost in the middle of the wall.

***What about your own book?***

The Xeroxed autobiography is called *Haul*, which is another phonetic spelling of *Howl*. It's called *Haul or Wave Goodbye to Grandma*. *Wave Goodbye to Grandma*<sup>2</sup> is a piece I did around 1969, and I like that phrase for a number of reasons. You can think about waving goodbye to grandma, which everyone does, but waving goodbye to grandma is also waving goodbye to the past. This is an autobiography done with memorabilia, images, and everything that I have from my past. That was all this period, from the 60s. It's all part of Allen Ginsberg, and all part of the counterculture and everything else. I was starting that when I read the annotated version of *Howl*. There's a big book with photographs of the early manuscript copies of *Howl*, how he rewrote it, and parts he marked out. He personally annotated every line. In the back are all the annotations, so you know who all the references are, and you realize that it's a piece of autobiography — unbelievable. So that's why I combined my own *Haul* with that, because they are parallel, and yet they intermix. Ginsberg's the inspiration and also the colleague; it's all intermixed. There are six volumes, a hundred pages each, of the beginning of this autobiography, which will go on in how many ways, I don't know. It was my own version of *Howl* that I was living out, whether I knew it or not. Now I know it.

*How do you feel The Singing Posters fits with your work, and your interest in books as ideas or objects?*

There was a piece where I rewrote *Walden*.<sup>3</sup> I sat in my studio for three months, all summer, and just recopied the whole thing on 8" x 11" pieces of typing paper. I essentially turned it back into a manuscript, then had it bound by an old German bookbinder. So I had a conversation with Thoreau by going so slowly and rewriting.

In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,<sup>4</sup> I copied the entire book onto the twenty canvases. Those are the two pieces that are most closely aligned with *Haul*, because it is another rewriting of a work. You get off on tangents, and then you go back to something that has been there since 1973, and it just comes up in another way. You begin to have bookends.

1. In 1968, fellow Los Angeles artist Billy Al Bengston designed a business card for Ruscha, which simply read:

EDWARD RUSCHA  
(ED - WERD REW - SHAY)  
YOUNG ARTIST

2. *Wave Goodbye to Grandma*, 1970. Paint on fabric. 2.5 feet x 34.5 feet. Collection of the artist.

3. *Henry David Thoreau's Walden by Allen Ruppersberg*, 1973. Pen and typing paper, leather binding. Collection of Yvon Lambert, Paris.

4. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1974. Pen on canvas. Twenty canvases, 6 feet x 6 feet each. Collection of Stuart and Judy Spence, Los Angeles.

and followed thuh  
**BRIL** -yuhnt  
**SPAN**-yerd TOO  
converse about ə-meri-ke and  
i-turni-te, a hopeless task, and SO TUUK  
**SHIP TOO A**-fri-kuh,

not  
**Even**  
one  
**free**  
**beer,**

**WAWAER**

**QUESTION MOTIVATION**

# Howl

*For Carl Solomon*

I

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving  
hysterical naked,  
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an  
angry fix,  
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to  
the starry dynamo in the machinery of night,  
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in  
the supernatural darkness of cold-water flats floating across the  
tops of cities contemplating jazz,  
who bared their brains to Heaven under the El and saw Mohammedan  
angels staggering on tenement roofs illuminated,  
who passed through universities with radiant cool eyes hallucinating  
Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war,  
who were expelled from the academies for crazy & publishing obscene  
odes on the windows of the skull,  
who covered in unshaven rooms in underwear, burning their money in  
wastebaskets and listening to the Terror through the wall,  
who got busted in their pubic beards returning through Laredo with a  
belt of marijuana for New York,  
who ate fire in paint hotels or drank turpentine in Paradise Alley, death,  
or purgatoried their torsos night after night  
with dreams, with drugs, with waking nightmares, alcohol and cock and  
endless balls,

incomparable blind streets of shuddering cloud and lightning in the  
mind leaping toward poles of Canada & Paterson, illuminating  
all the motionless world of Time between,  
Peyote solidities of halls, backyard green tree cemetery dawns, wine  
drunkenness over the rooftops, storefront boroughs of teahead  
joyride neon blinking traffic light, sun and moon and tree  
vibrations in the roaring winter dusks of Brooklyn, ashcan  
rantings and kind king light of mind,  
who chained themselves to subways for the endless ride from Battery to  
holy Bronx on benzedrine until the noise of wheels and children  
brought them down shuddering mouth-wracked and battered  
bleak of brain all drained of brilliance in the drear light of Zoo,  
who sank all night in submarine light of Bickford's floated out and sat  
through the stale beer afternoon in desolate Fugazzi's, listening to  
the crack of doom on the hydrogen jukebox,  
who talked continuously seventy hours from park to pad to bar to  
Bellevue to museum to the Brooklyn Bridge,  
a lost battalion of platonic conversationalists jumping down the stoops  
off fire escapes off windowsills off Empire State out of the moon,  
yacketayakking screaming vomiting whispering facts and memories and  
anecdotes and eyeball kicks and shocks of hospitals and jails and  
wars,  
whole intellects disgorged in total recall for seven days and nights with  
brilliant eyes, meat for the Synagogue cast on the pavement,  
who vanished into nowhere Zen New Jersey leaving a trail of ambiguous  
picture postcards of Atlantic City Hall,  
suffering Eastern sweats and Tangerian bone-grindings and migraines  
of China under junk-withdrawal in Newark's bleak furnished  
room,  
who wandered around and around at midnight in the railroad yard  
wondering where to go, and went, leaving no broken hearts,  
who lit cigarettes in boxcars boxcars boxcars racketing through snow  
toward lonesome farms in grandfather night,

who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop  
kabbalah because the cosmos instinctively vibrated at their feet  
in Kansas,  
who loned it through the streets of Idaho seeking visionary indian angels  
who were visionary indian angels,  
who thought they were only mad when Baltimore gleamed in supernatural  
ecstasy,  
who jumped in limousines with the Chinaman of Oklahoma on the  
impulse of winter midnight streetlight smalltown rain,  
who lounged hungry and lonesome through Houston seeking jazz or sex  
or soup, and followed the brilliant Spaniard to converse about  
America and Eternity, a hopeless task, and so took ship to Africa,  
who disappeared into the volcanoes of Mexico leaving behind nothing  
but the shadow of dungarees and the lava and ash of poetry scattered  
in fireplace Chicago,  
who reappeared on the West Coast investigating the F.B.I. in beards and  
shorts with big pacifist eyes sexy in their dark skin passing out  
incomprehensible leaflets,  
who burned cigarette holes in their arms protesting the narcotic tobacco  
haze of Capitalism,  
who distributed Supercommunist pamphlets in Union Square weeping  
and undressing while the sirens of Los Alamos wailed them down,  
and wailed down Wall, and the Staten Island ferry also wailed,  
who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling  
before the machinery of other skeletons,  
who bit detectives in the neck and shrieked with delight in policecars for  
committing no crime but their own wild cooking pederasty and  
intoxication,  
who howled on their knees in the subway and were dragged off the roof  
waving genitals and manuscripts,  
who let themselves be fucked in the ass by saintly motorcyclists, and  
screamed with joy,  
who blew and were blown by those human seraphim, the sailors, caresses

of Atlantic and Caribbean love,  
who balled in the morning in the evenings in rosegardens and the grass  
of public parks and cemeteries scattering their semen freely to  
whomever come who may,  
who hiccuped endlessly trying to giggle but wound up with a sob behind  
a partition in a Turkish Bath when the blond & naked angel came  
to pierce them with a sword,  
who lost their loveboys to the three old shrews of fate the one eyed shrew  
of the heterosexual dollar the one eyed shrew that winks out of  
the womb and the one eyed shrew that does nothing but sit on  
her ass and snip the intellectual golden threads of the craftsman's  
loom,  
who copulated ecstatic and insatiate with a bottle of beer a sweetheart a  
package of cigarettes a candle and fell off the bed, and continued  
along the floor and down the hall and ended fainting on the wall  
with a vision of ultimate cunt and come eluding the last gyzym  
of consciousness,  
who sweetened the snatches of a million girls trembling in the sunset,  
and were red eyed in the morning but prepared to sweeten the  
snatch of the sunrise, flashing buttocks under barns and naked  
in the lake,  
who went out whoring through Colorado in myriad stolen night-cars,  
N.C., secret hero of these poems, cocksman and Adonis of  
Denver—joy to the memory of his innumerable lays of girls in  
empty lots & diner backyards, moviehouses' rickety rows, on  
mountaintops in caves or with gaunt waitresses in familiar roadside  
lonely petticoat upliftings & especially secret gas-station solipsisms  
of johns, & hometown alleys too,  
who faded out in vast sordid movies, were shifted in dreams, woke on a  
sudden Manhattan, and picked themselves up out of basements  
hungover with heartless Tokay and horrors of Third Avenue iron  
dreams & stumbled to unemployment offices,  
who walked all night with their shoes full of blood on the snowbank



docks waiting for a door in the East River to open to a room full of steamheat and opium,  
who created great suicidal dramas on the apartment cliff-banks of the Hudson under the wartime blue floodlight of the moon & their heads shall be crowned with laurel in oblivion,  
who ate the lamb stew of the imagination or digested the crab at the muddy bottom of the rivers of Bowery,  
who wept at the romance of the streets with their pushcarts full of onions and bad music,  
who sat in boxes breathing in the darkness under the bridge, and rose up to build harpsichords in their lofts,  
who coughed on the sixth floor of Harlem crowned with flame under the tubercular sky surrounded by orange crates of theology,  
who scribbled all night rocking and rolling over lofty incantations which in the yellow morning were stanzas of gibberish,  
who cooked rotten animals lung heart feet tail borsht & tortillas dreaming of the pure vegetable kingdom,  
who plunged themselves under meat trucks looking for an egg,  
who threw their watches off the roof to cast their ballot for Eternity outside of Time, & alarm clocks fell on their heads every day for the next decade,  
who cut their wrists three times successively unsuccessfully, gave up and were forced to open antique stores where they thought they were growing old and cried,  
who were burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue amid blasts of leaden verse & the tanked-up clatter of the iron regiments of fashion & the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of advertising & the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors, or were run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality,  
who jumped off the Brooklyn Bridge this actually happened and walked away unknown and forgotten into the ghostly daze of Chinatown soup alleyways & firetrucks, not even one free beer,

who sang out of their windows in despair, fell out of the subway window, jumped in the filthy Passaic, leaped on negroes, cried all over the street, danced on broken wineglasses barefoot smashed phonograph records of nostalgic European 1930s German jazz finished the whiskey and threw up groaning into the bloody toilet, moans in their ears and the blast of colossal steamwhistles,  
who barreled down the highways of the past journeying to each other's hotrod-Golgotha jail-solitude watch or Birmingham jazz incarnation,  
who drove crosscountry seventytwo hours to find out if I had a vision or you had a vision or he had a vision to find out Eternity,  
who journeyed to Denver, who died in Denver, who came back to Denver & waited in vain, who watched over Denver & brooded & loned in Denver and finally went away to find out the Time, & now Denver is lonesome for her heroes,  
who fell on their knees in hopeless cathedrals praying for each other's salvation and light and breasts, until the soul illuminated its hair for a second,  
who crashed through their minds in jail waiting for impossible criminals with golden heads and the charm of reality in their hearts who sang sweet blues to Alcatraz,  
who retired to Mexico to cultivate a habit, or Rocky Mount to tender Buddha or Tangiers to boys or Southern Pacific to the black locomotive or Harvard to Narcissus to Woodlawn to the daisy chain or grave,  
who demanded sanity trials accusing the radio of hypnotism & were left with their insanity & their hands & a hung jury,  
who threw potato salad at CCNY lecturers on Dadaism and subsequently presented themselves on the granite steps of the madhouse with shaven heads and harlequin speech of suicide, demanding instantaneous lobotomy,  
and who were given instead the concrete void of insulin Metrazol

electricity hydrotherapy psychotherapy occupational therapy  
pingpong & amnesia,  
who in humorless protest overturned only one symbolic pingpong table,  
resting briefly in catatonia,  
returning years later truly bald except for a wig of blood, and tears and  
fingers, to the visible madman doom of the wards of the madtowns  
of the East,  
Pilgrim State's Rockland's and Greystone's foetid halls, bickering with  
the echoes of the soul, rocking and rolling in the midnight  
solitude-bench dolmen-realms of love, dream of life a nightmare,  
bodies turned to stone as heavy as the moon,  
with mother finally \*\*\*\*\*, and the last fantastic book flung out of the  
tenement window, and the last door closed at 4 A.M. and the last  
telephone slammed at the wall in reply and the last furnished  
room emptied down to the last piece of mental furniture, a yellow  
paper rose twisted on a wire hanger in the closet, and even that  
imaginary, nothing but a hopeful little bit of hallucination—  
ah, Carl, while you are not safe I am not safe, and now you're really in  
the total animal soup of time—  
and who therefore ran through the icy streets obsessed with a sudden  
flash of the alchemy of the use of the ellipse the catalog the meter  
& the vibrating plane,  
who dreamt and made incarnate gaps in Time & Space through images  
juxtaposed, and trapped the archangel of the soul between 2  
visual images and joined the elemental verbs and set the noun  
and dash of consciousness together jumping with sensation of  
Pater Omnipotens Aeterna Deus  
to recreate the syntax and measure of poor human prose and stand before  
you speechless and intelligent and shaking with shame, rejected  
yet confessing out the soul to conform to the rhythm of thought  
in his naked and endless head,  
the madman bum and angel beat in Time, unknown, yet putting down  
here what might be left to say in time come after death,

and rose reincarnate in the ghostly clothes of jazz in the goldhorn  
shadow of the band and blew the suffering of America's naked  
mind for love into an eli eli lamma lamma sabacthani saxophone  
cry that shivered the cities down to the last radio  
with the absolute heart of the poem of life butchered out of their own  
bodies good to eat a thousand years.

This is Part I of *Howl*, a three-part poem. It is reproduced here in the format in which  
it first appeared in 1956 in *Howl and Other Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights Books)







## About The Artist

Born in 1944 in Cleveland, Ohio, Allen Ruppberg is one of the first generation of Conceptual artists that changed the way art was thought about and made. He graduated with a BFA from the Chouinard Art Institute in Los Angeles (now California Institute of the Arts), in 1967. Ruppberg is recognized as a seminal practitioner of installation art, and in 2005, the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle, Germany will mount a retrospective of his work that will travel internationally to other venues. Allen Ruppberg divides his time between New York and Los Angeles, where he teaches at U.C.L.A.

# Credits

Allen Ruppersberg, *The Singing Posters*, 2004  
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Rice University Art Gallery is located in Sewall Hall on the campus of Rice University, 6100 Main Street, Houston, Texas 77005, and on the web at [ricegallery.org](http://ricegallery.org).

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