

POP Art History and Artist Roy Lichtenstein

Started: Mid 1950's Ended: Late 1970's

Pop Art is an art movement that emerged in the United Kingdom and United States that challenged traditional fine art by including imagery from popular and mass culture, such as advertising, comic books, and mass-produced cultural objects.

Beginnings of Pop Art

Great Britain: The Independent Group

In 1952, a gathering of artists in London calling themselves the Independent Group began meeting regularly to discuss topics such as mass culture's place in fine art, the found object, and science and technology. Members included [Eduardo Paolozzi](#), [Richard Hamilton](#), architects Alison and Peter Smithson, and critics Lawrence Alloway and Reyner Banham. Britain in the early 1950s was still emerging from the austerity of the post-war years, and its citizens were ambivalent about American popular culture. While the group was suspicious of its commercial character, they were enthusiastic about the rich world pop culture seemed to promise for the future. The imagery they discussed at length included that found in Western movies, science fiction, comic books, billboards, automobile design, and rock and roll music.

The actual term "Pop art" has several possible origins: the first use of the term in writing has been attributed to both Lawrence Alloway and Alison and Peter Smithson, and alternately to Richard Hamilton, who defined Pop in a letter, while the first artwork to incorporate the word "Pop" was produced by Paolozzi.

New York City: The Emergence of Neo-Dada

By the mid 1950s, the artists working in New York City faced a critical juncture in modern art: follow the Abstract Expressionists or rebel against the strict formalism advocated by many schools of modernism. By this time, [Jasper Johns](#) was already troubling conventions with abstract paintings that included references to: "things the mind already knows" - targets, flags, handprints, letters, and numbers. Meanwhile, [Robert Rauschenberg's](#) "combines" incorporated found objects and images, with more traditional materials like oil paint. Similarly, [Allan Kaprow's "Happenings"](#) and the [Fluxus](#) movements chose to incorporate aspects from the surrounding world into their art. These artists, along with others, later became grouped in the movement known as [Neo-Dada](#). The now classic New York Pop art of Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol emerged in the 1960 in the footsteps of the Neo-Dadaists.

Pop Art: Concepts, Styles, and Trends

Once the transition from the found-object constructions of the Neo-Dada artists to the Pop movement was complete, there was widespread interest on the part of artists in the incorporation of popular culture into their work. Although artists in the Independent Group in London initiated the use of "pop" in reference to art, American artists soon followed suit and incorporated popular culture into their artwork as well. Although the individual styles vary widely, all of the artists maintain a commonality in their choice of popular culture imagery as their fundamental subject.

American Pop Art Artist:

Roy Lichtenstein and Pulp Culture

Lichtenstein proved that he could fulfill demands for a "great" composition even though his subject matter derived from comic books. In addition to using the imagery from these mass-produced picture books, Lichtenstein appropriated the techniques used to create the images in comic books to create his paintings. He not only adopted the same bright colors and clear outlines as popular art, his most innovative contribution was his use of Ben-Day dots: small dots used to render color in mass-manufactured comics. Focusing on a single panel within a comic strip, Lichtenstein's canvases are not an exact facsimile, but are rather the artist's creative re-imagining of the composition in which elements may have been added or eliminated, scale could shift, and text might be edited. By hand-painting the usually machine-generated dots, and recreating comic book scenes, Lichtenstein blurred the distinction between mass reproduction and high art.

Roy Lichtenstein was one of the most influential and innovative artists of the second half of the twentieth century. He is preeminently identified with Pop Art, a movement he helped originate, and his first fully achieved paintings were based on imagery from comic strips and advertisements and rendered in a style mimicking the crude printing processes of newspaper reproduction. These paintings reinvigorated the American art scene and altered the history of modern art. Lichtenstein's success was matched by his focus and energy, and after his initial triumph in the early 1960s, he went on to create an oeuvre of more than 5,000 paintings, prints, drawings, sculptures, murals and other objects celebrated for their wit and invention.

Another entire panoply of works produced during the 1970s were complex encounters with Cubism, Futurism, Purism, Surrealism and Expressionism. Lichtenstein expanded his palette beyond red, blue, yellow, black, white and green, and invented and combined forms. He was not merely isolating found images, but juxtaposing, overlapping, fragmenting and recomposing them. In the words of art historian Jack Cowart, Lichtenstein's virtuosic compositions were "a rich dialogue of forms—all intuitively modified and released from their nominal sources." In the early 1980s, which coincided with re-establishing a studio in New York City, Lichtenstein was also at the apex of a busy mural career. In the 1960s and 1970s,

he had completed four murals; between 1983 and 1990, he created five. He also completed major commissions for public sculptures in Miami Beach, Columbus, Minneapolis, Paris, Barcelona and Singapore.

Assignment 1: Art Reflection

Please choose one of the pictures below and answer the following questions in one to three paragraphs. Please make sure you write the Title, Artist and number on your answer sheet.

- 1) Describe: List and describe everything you see in the piece.
- 2) Analyze: How is the work organized? Describe how the elements and principles are used in the artwork.
Elements: color, form, line, shape, space, texture, and value
Principles: balance, emphasis, harmony, movement, pattern, proportion, repetition, rhythm, unity, and variety.
- 3) Interpret: Make inferences about the messages in the art. What's the art saying to you? What's the purpose? How does this art make you feel? And Why?
- 4) Judgment/Critique: Is this work successful? Do you like the artwork? Or do you not like the artwork. WHY? Please explain why you do or don't like the piece, be specific, emphasis the design qualities and use of elements and principles in your answer.

#1 Roy Lichtenstein: "POP"



#2 Roy Lichtenstein: Girl with Hair Ribbon 1965

