

**ROY
LICHTENSTEIN**

Exhibition Facts

Duration	8. March – 14. July 2024
Opening	7. March 2024 6.30 pm
Venue	Bastion Hall The ALBERTINA Museum
Curator	Gunhild Bauer
Assistant	Serena Ligas
Works	89
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ROY LICHTENSTEIN

A Centennial Exhibition

8. March – 14. July 2024

The ALBERTINA Museum is celebrating what would have been the 100th birthday of pop art master Roy Lichtenstein (New York, 1923–1997) with a major retrospective. On exhibit are 100 of the most striking and significant paintings, sculptures, and works on paper ranging all the way from pop art's beginnings in the 1960s to the artist's late oeuvre, including generous loans from the most important European and US private collections and museums such as the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., the Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum in New York City, and the Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven.

Pop Art: An Assault on Convention

It was during the 1960s, with abstract expressionism still in full bloom, that Roy Lichtenstein initiated a return to a mode of art that was representational and self-reflective—as part of which he set about tearing down the walls between high art and everyday culture with ironic abandon. *Look Mickey* is representative of this assault on convention, in which simple comic images and advertisements were cast in the monumental form of history paintings—an act tantamount to a violation of art's dignity. Comics, to say nothing of product advertisements in newspapers and telephone books, are generally considered unworthy of the status of art. Lichtenstein isolated and monumentalized comics, porting them into a museum setting—an absurd and ironic gesture with which he countered consumer society's prejudicial notion of modern art's general aloofness: *“Taking a discredited subject matter like Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse and making it into a work of art was absurd or humorous, whereas the preceding period had been more serious-minded,”* Lichtenstein remarked.

In 1963, Lichtenstein—asked just what pop art is—defined it as follows:

“The use of commercial art as a subject for painting. It was hard to find a painting that was disgusting enough to me to deal with the most shameless and threatening features of our culture: things that we reject, but that are overpowering, like advertising signs and comics.”

Despite more or less seriously leveled accusations of plagiarism and vigorous protests on the part of visitors, Lichtenstein's first exhibition—held in 1962 at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York—sold out

before it had even opened. The artist became famous quasi-overnight, thereby helping American pop art achieve its breakthrough. Today, Roy Lichtenstein is regarded as one of the United States' three most popular and famous artists alongside Andy Warhol and Jackson Pollock. Moreover, he became an influential forerunner of appropriation art and pioneered the melding of high and low art in contemporary artistic output.

Lichtenstein's art is in no way moralizing, but by the same token, it also refrains from any affirmation. It reflects the 1960s' already ambivalent attitude toward the advertising industry's image machine, whose aesthetics Lichtenstein brought to art and into the museum.

*"I am interested in portraying a kind of anti-sensibility that pervades society. Much of our communication is dominated by advertising. Our entire environment seems to be governed by the desire to sell products. This is the landscape I want to portray. But I am not interested in this topic to teach society anything or to improve our world,"*said Lichtenstein.

The End of Pathos in Art

Preventing the reflection of any temperament or any statement of political positioning is part and parcel of this highly formalist concept: Lichtenstein's images are meant to appear as if machine-made. He set about imitating the appearance of cheap and fast bulk printing processes, which indeed eventually became his trademark: his pictorial language features just a few outlines and primary colors as well as the monotonous matrix dots that he made famous—the so-called Ben Day Dots, named for their inventor Ben Day, which served to create tonal values in images to be printed. Lichtenstein applied these to his canvases using stencils, a process that he delegated to assistants from 1963 onward. The reason why the first pop art exhibitions also included minimalist works despite all the differences in terms of *what* was depicted in the images was their common denominator: anti-subjectivism, serialism, and industrial production. Such works no longer put any faith in the pathos of subjective expression, of the artist's emotionality, or of emotional authenticity.

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Following his transferal of comics into the artistic realm, the mid-1960s saw Lichtenstein begin painting minimalist landscapes on panels made of enamel, a dirt-repellant and weather-resistant material used for commercial and subway system signage. The selection of such a glossy and reflective

material as the substrate of an artwork intended for display indoors is hence thoroughly absurd and grotesque.

Lichtenstein plays with the power inherent in clichés of masculinity and femininity as well as clichés of art itself. He takes up the visual language of popular mass culture's advertisements and graphic novels, a language that lives from repetition of the ever-same standardized stereotypes, and makes it his own. Upon migration into the realm of art, such motifs are utterly transformed. Enlargement, isolation, objectification, and anti-subjectivism have the effect of abstracting them, with subjects unworthy of art thus transformed into artworks full of harmony and beauty—an overall process by which Lichtenstein broke a taboo by violating clichéd expectations of art. He would later on apply his by-then trademark comic book style to the appropriation of works by canonical artists ranging from Picasso to Dalí or cast brushstrokes reminiscent of Jackson Pollock in bronze, leaving them wide open to ridicule.

The Exhibition

The present *Centennial Exhibition* offers a comprehensive impression of Roy Lichtenstein's oeuvre, drawing an arc from his early pop paintings of the 1960s (including the pop art icon *Look Mickey*) to works from his later years.

This exhibition also covers the black-and-white paintings of objects taken by Lichtenstein from product advertising, paintings that include *Large Spool* and *Ball of Twine* (both from 1963), as well as landscapes painted on enamel signs. His art-after-art paintings of works by Picasso, Dalí, and Pollock as well as the late interiors, female nudes, and still little-known sculptures can likewise be seen in this exhibition.

The world's most important museums as well as numerous international private collectors have favored this Centennial Exhibition with their generous support: major works have been contributed by New York's Museum of Modern Art and Whitney Museum, the National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), the Yale University Art Gallery (New Haven), Museum Ludwig (Cologne), the Louisiana Museum (Humlebæk), the Tate (London), the Moderna Museet (Stockholm), the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza (Madrid), and many others.

Donation by the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation

Director General Klaus Albrecht Schröder: *“I am particularly grateful that the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation selected the ALBERTINA Museum as the third museum alongside the Whitney Museum in New York and the Nasher Sculpture Center in Dallas to be donated a significant part of the Foundation’s holdings. This donation, transferred to the ALBERTINA Museum in 2023, encompasses 95 objects including brushstroke sculptures and sculptural models for public space projects, preliminary sketches and collages, and carpets and ceramics. I would also like to thank Dorothy Lichtenstein from the bottom of my heart for her tremendous support of this exhibition.”*

The present exhibition has been realized with support from and in collaboration with the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and the Roy Lichtenstein Estate.

Biography

- 1923
Roy Lichtenstein is born a son to German-Jewish parents in New York City on October 27. His father works in real estate.
- 1937–1940
In addition to high school, Lichtenstein attends the New York School of Fine and Applied Art.
- 1941–1948
After a summer course at the Art Students League of New York he takes up his studies at the College of Education at Ohio State University. He visits the exhibition *Picasso: Forty Years of His Art*.
In 1943, Lichtenstein is drafted and serves as a soldier in England, France, Belgium, and Germany. He visits the museums in London and Paris and attends courses at the Sorbonne. In 1945 he returns to the United States, where his father is dying.
He paints in a naïve Cubist style.
- 1949–1958
In 1949, Lichtenstein completes his studies at Ohio State University, where he holds a teaching position until 1951. He marries Isabel Wilson. The couple moves to Cleveland.
From 1951/52 on, he has first solo exhibitions at galleries. He works as a drawing teacher, jewelry and furniture designer, technical draftsman, and model maker.
His sons David and Mitchell are born in 1954 and 1956 respectively.
In 1958, the first comic book motifs, such as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, begin to appear in his work, the style of which is still gestural and expressive at the time.
- 1959–1960
Lichtenstein creates abstract paintings. In 1959 he accepts a position at the State University of New York and in 1960 is appointed assistant professor of art at the women's college of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey. The family moves to New Jersey.

Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg are major influences on Lichtenstein's development, as are the happenings, performances, environments, and assemblages of Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Lucas Samaras, and Allan Kaprow; all of them deal with the subjects of industrial mass production and advertising.
- 1961–1965
In the early summer of 1961, Lichtenstein paints *Look Mickey*, his first picture to imitate comic book printing techniques. The renowned gallery owner Leo Castelli offers Lichtenstein a contract. The first solo exhibition at Castelli's gallery in 1962 means Lichtenstein's breakthrough.

In 1963 the artist separates from Isabel Wilson and moves to New York. First exhibitions in Los Angeles and Europe follow.

First accusations of plagiarism are addressed in the magazines Time, Artnews, and Artforum. In 1964, Life publishes the article “Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?”

Lichtenstein meets Dorothy Herzka in New York City and marries her in 1968.

Together with Warhol, Lichtenstein is now one of the internationally most renowned Pop artists. The architect Philip Johnson commissions him to paint a mural for the 1964/65 New York World’s Fair. His first Pop silkscreen, Sandwich and Soda, is published.

- 1966–1979

At the Venice Biennale 1966, a special room is dedicated to Lichtenstein. The Cleveland Museum of Art is the first museum to present a solo exhibition of his art. This is followed by retrospectives in Los Angeles and Amsterdam in 1967, with further venues in Europe, including Tate in London in 1968. In 1969 he has his first retrospective at the New York Guggenheim Museum.

He purchases a piece of land on Long Island, where he builds a house and studio in 1971 that become his permanent residence.

In 1979 he is admitted to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His first outdoor public sculpture is installed in Miami.

- 1980–1996

In 1984, Lichtenstein moves back to a studio in New York City, which he uses in addition to his permanent residence in Southampton.

In 1988 he buys an old brick building in Chelsea, now home to the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation.

In 1990, Lichtenstein is at the center of the legendary exhibition *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Major successful exhibitions at the most prominent museums in the USA and Europe culminate in the Kyoto Prize, the highest award given to visual artists, in 1995.

- 1997

On September 29, Roy Lichtenstein dies prematurely in New York City of complications from pneumonia at the age of seventy-three.

Exhibition Texts

Introduction

To mark his 100th birthday, the ALBERTINA Museum dedicates a retrospective to Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997), the pioneering father of American Pop Art, spanning from the artist's early Pop paintings of the 1960s to his late work.

When the international scene was still dominated by Abstract Expressionism, artists in Great Britain and the USA returned to a figurative and self-reflexive art, tearing down the traditional boundaries between high and low art while adding a good pinch of irony. Following a democratic ideal, they took an interest in the everyday imagery of the industrial, urban, and commercialized society at the time of the postwar years' economic upswing. With his groundbreaking invention in the form the appropriation of the new and aggressive visual language of popular culture, advertisements, and cartoons, Lichtenstein helped American Pop Art to its breakthrough in 1961.

Embracing a meticulous manner of painting based on trivial comic book motifs, including the enlarged Ben Day dots borrowed from inexpensive mass printing and the speech bubbles accompanying the image, Lichtenstein turned away from the pathos of subjective expression in the visual arts. For Lichtenstein, a flood of images that was subject to purely commercial considerations, directed at the taste of the masses, and optimized by graphic designers, advertising specialists, executive managers, and perceptual psychologists perfectly embodied the essence of his age. Throughout his artistic career, he pursued the exploration of aesthetic values and established clichés of the imagery of a contemporary culture informed by commercialization and industrialization—always with loving irony and, over the years, increasingly critically. The ambivalence between high and low art, between artist and machine, between originality and copy, between work of art and reproduction is the core theme of his art.

This exhibition was realized with the support of and in collaboration with the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and the Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

Early Pop Art

In the early 1960s, Lichtenstein elevated the comic strip to the status of high art. He appropriated the motifs of comic-strip panels and in his painting also imitated the simplified graphic style of inexpensive mass printing: he composed his images in a cold, impersonal, and mechanical style of enlarged 'Ben-Day-dots', black outlines, and few of primary colors. If initially he was still interested in such famous cartoon characters as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck, his choice of motifs would soon be determined by the sentimental faces of war and love-story comics that had become a new market for adolescents after World War II.

With the standardized aesthetics of comics, Lichtenstein introduced a contemporary symbolism and universal language into art. Similar to Minimal Art, he challenged the common idea that art reflected the artist's expressive individualism, declaring it an illusion. The uninhibited sexual allusions were

considered revolutionary at the time. It was in a mostly ironic fashion that he exhibited the clichés of masculinity and femininity that Betty Friedan had been the first to criticize in her influential book *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963. Similarly, he negotiated the obtrusiveness, conformity, and emptiness of the mass media, their lack of deeper meaning.

Despite accusations of plagiarism and public outrage at his assault on the aura of the work of art, Lichtenstein soon became a leading artist of Pop Art.

Copy or Appropriation

Feigning commercial art imagery was part of Lichtenstein's ironic and provocative concept. With his monumental paintings based on cheap comics, Lichtenstein committed a twofold sacrilege: he used visual material alien to art and edification, stereotypes of the entertainment industry, and brought them to galleries and museums; and he renounced the artist's unique and unmistakable hand, accurately imitating the mechanic raster of the cheap printing technique of comics instead: the Ben Day dots (named after their inventor, Benjamin Day) would become his trademark.

Lichtenstein's means of provocation only seems to be a mere copy; when looked at more closely, it turns out to be an ironically critical appropriation. It is a transformation of the model: Lichtenstein enlarges, isolates, stylizes, and de-emotionalizes it, deprives it of any perspectival depth while emphasizing the machine character of its fabrication, thereby elevating it to the realm of art. Sentimental motifs from love stories—kisses, thoughts of upcoming rendezvous, drowning in the sea, or tears after breaking up—are rendered with deliberate emotional coldness. The radical flatness of the subject matter was wrongly regarded as the artist's incapability of truthfully copying the works of the comic-strip artists, which were mostly more dynamic and expressive. Lichtenstein introduced a new topos: that of the artist as a machine — his response to the aggressiveness, the individual sentiment, and expansive force of the works of Abstract Expressionists like Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, and Willem de Kooning. He fully exploited the possibilities and variations of stereotypes and the aesthetics of mass printing, exploring the power of words and typography in speech bubbles. Lichtenstein would hold on to the visual language of comics throughout his life.

Lichtenstein Black & White

In addition to comic-book illustrations, Roy Lichtenstein chose advertisements from telephone directories or newspapers as a repertoire of motifs, thus mocking the sublimity of art. Everyday, mass-produced consumer goods representing the lifestyle of the new middle class were given the status of monumentality through magnification and isolation. He reduced them to simple forms and signs, different from Andy Warhol, who emphasized the standardization of mass products through the principle of repetition. Neither did Lichtenstein go in search of ubiquitous icons as Warhol did. In his art, figuration and abstraction overlap. Allusions to Piet Mondrian, Minimal Art, or the geometric abstraction of Op Art can be found throughout Lichtenstein's early work. Instead of the abstraction of form, he celebrated the anti-content of the motifs. Lichtenstein shares the deliberate lack of content with Minimal Artists: a work of art does not require an object.

The economic use of color and reduced visual language are due to his “shoddy” sources: the mechanical reproduction on low-quality newsprint called for strongly simplified outline drawings, and the goal of attracting attention in advertising required a focus on signs. More than any other Pop artist, Lichtenstein was thus not only a painter but also a draftsman of basic signs. His black and white drawings contradict everything one expects of an original drawing: the artist’s subjectivism, temperament, technical brilliance, and intuitive understanding of the motif. By contrast, Lichtenstein resorted to cheap sources of inspiration using a construction draftsman’s controlled and obsessively cold stroke. Lichtenstein breaks away from the Abstract Expressionists’ individualism and gestural act of painting.

Meticulous Preliminary Work

Roy Lichtenstein saw the essence of his age in the inexpensive and rapid printing technique of comics, which was based on commercial criteria. He deliberately imitated the anonymous, mechanical style of comic books that would become his trademark. Similar to a technical draftsman, he approached his final product, the painting, in meticulously prepared steps, slowly and impassionately. He spoke of himself as an “image duplicator.”

Unlike Andy Warhol’s Factory, Roy Lichtenstein’s studio was an austere work place where he painted on several canvases simultaneously, from morning to evening. All of the works were prepared with a multitude of (colored) pencil sketches and collages. He projected the sketches onto the canvas with the aid of an episcopes and then retraced them. Using toothbrushes, he transferred the regular pattern of dots—the so-called Ben Day dots—through hole templates, perforated metal plates of various sizes, for which he would soon rely on assistants. Afterwards, he applied the areas of color and the outlines. The sketches and comic panels were always attached next to the respective easels. In the end, he viewed the picture in a mirror from a distance. Initially, the trickling of the oil paint and the shifting or misplacing of the stencils still ensured a lively structure of dots and lines. In order to eliminate visible traces of the working process, in 1962 Lichtenstein began using acrylic instead of oil paint, because it would completely dissolve in turpentine. This allowed him to correct mistakes and arrive at a completely even, smooth and shining surface. He was eager to preserve the inartistic appearance of commercial imagery. The slick technique was all the more shocking as the messages often were highly emotional. It was practically overnight that Lichtenstein became one of the most coveted contemporary artists.

Landscapes

From the mid-1960s, Roy Lichtenstein devoted himself to the unrealistic, deserted landscape inspired by standardized motifs found in the background of comic strips, on flip image postcards, airplane wallpaper, and paint-by-numbers sets. They mark the transition to more personal, freer pictorial inventions that did not rely on a concrete model. However, Lichtenstein always retained the comic-book style, which had become his trademark.

Lichtenstein reduced the landscape motifs to their essential elements—a few black contours and colored areas. They do not reproduce reality, but are abstract signs symbolizing mountains and lakes. The artificial, garish colors, which still suggest a certain degree of spatial depth, are due to the technical limits of high-speed printing on newsprint. Lichtenstein retraced the upright-down images of colored pencil drawings he had projected onto the canvas, stenciling overlapping layers of Ben Day dots, a variation of halftone printing to generate new colors and grid patterns. He exploited the entire spectrum of motifs, painting landscapes and seascapes with and without sunsets: nature as clichéd as we know it from his depictions of lover's grief and kissing couples.

Lichtenstein's search for materials led him to glittering air bubble films, printed packing boards, and reflective enamel grids used in industry, the latter of which he employed to imitate Ben Day dots. In 1968 these works resulted in a silent film project of animated landscapes with Universal Studios in Los Angeles. Lichtenstein arranged these inartistic materials to create collages. Like other Pop artists, he wished to create "beautiful kitsch." His pictures were meant to be deliberately "vulgar"—and thus new and contemporary, different from traditional art.

Art Based on Art

As his career proceeded, Roy Lichtenstein left the terrain of so-called "low art," commercial art, reproducing works of fine art, "high art"—an academic exercise per se. More than any other Pop artist, Lichtenstein integrated art history into his oeuvre, which he had studied and taught before his breakthrough in 1961. Nevertheless he retained his "American" pseudo-comic-book style while he now copied primarily works from the European history of art. None of these works' honorable creators considered this a case of plagiarism. Lichtenstein caused the respective artists' hands to disappear, similar to how he had done with his own, merely imitating the essential formal features of the style in question, transforming it into a sign.

With his Americanizing appropriation, he reminds us of the established, clichéd ideas we have developed about familiar styles of modernism, like Art Déco, Impressionism, Fauvism, Expressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, or Abstract Expressionism. Doing so, he inflects such specifics as decorative art, woodcut, still life, series, stylistic pluralism, interior, monumental painting, or pastiche. He frequently makes ironical reference to famous forerunners of his art, which places special emphasis on the outline or the dot.

With his personal ironical perspective of art history introducing postmodernism, Lichtenstein conserved all of the movements of modernism one after the other, thus compiling an entire museum over the years. Through his free handling of various styles and his ambition of formal innovation, he defied the artist's role as a provider of meaning and eluded the cliché of a purely subjective, emotional creative act.

Still Life

What resulted from Roy Lichtenstein's appropriation of high art in 1970 was a series of still lifes: a genre that had been a field of formal experimentation since Cubism, with newspaper clippings finding their way into painting.

Lichtenstein was predestined for this rather unemotional genre. He relied on models in the form of advertising brochures, products of the economic boom, industrially manufactured ceramic-, glass-, and crystal ware, as well as such exotic imports as bananas and citrus fruit. He reduced, isolated, and enlarged these motifs, which were known from painted signboards and advertising billboards lining the highways. Their scale was larger than life, their execution emphasizing the brilliant light reflections on mass-produced goods. The artist increasingly made reference to the more and more widespread use of photography in advertising. He adhered to commercial art's standardized images for the pieces of fruit so that the motifs could be taken in instantly and from a distance, while driving by. Lichtenstein imitates the loud and insensitive features of consumerism and the language of advertising: it is the essence of Pop Art, from Warhol to Wesselman. Lichtenstein did not comment upon, judge, or glorify things. Like Minimal Art, Pop Art distanced itself from the subjective and emotional dimension of the creative act. It was no coincidence that in the 1960s Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Tom Wesselman exhibited together with Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, or Carl Andre, Minimal Art's standard-bearers. Their common denominator was anti-subjectivism, a position on the opposite end of emotionally charged Abstract Expressionism.

Following art history's famous pictures of artists' studios, from Henri Matisse to Jasper Johns, Lichtenstein was the first to compose his monumental still lifes of motifs deriving from his own pictures, thus creating ever-new pastiches.

Mirrors and Reflections

In his late work, from 1970 onward, Roy Lichtenstein dealt with the deceiving images of illusionary advertising and the falsification of art through art reproductions in bad printing quality that had meanwhile become ubiquitous. He took to depicting subjects in a comic-book style that were not borrowed from comic books after all.

He depicted the plainest of motifs, which were frequently geometric and which he represented using illusionistic means: a series of mirrors inspired by mail-order catalogs and the artist's own photographs of magnifying mirrors alludes to René Magritte and Alfred Hitchcock. The crescendo and decrescendo of dots simulates the tone values within the mirrors, while the canvases as such imitate the forms and formats of the mirrors: they are subject and object at the same time, "shaped canvases" reflecting nothing.

In a series entitled *Reflections* from the late 1980s, Lichtenstein placed his focus in works after famous masters of modernism like Picasso on the sometimes irritating reflections in the paintings, which museums often present behind glass.

Surrealism

In the mid-1960s, Roy Lichtenstein began paraphrasing famous styles of art history; from 1977 on, he did so with the visual language of Surrealism. He did not “copy” specific works, but rephrased the Surrealist motifs, formal idioms, and compositional strategies of Magritte, Hans Arp, Miró, or Dalí while resorting to his characteristic comic-book style.

Lichtenstein brought together Surrealism’s conventions to create virtuoso showpieces: a combination of unconnected motifs typical of Surrealism within an illusionistic landscape. At his point, Lichtenstein enriched his comic-book style with parallel hatching as one of multiple raster variants of mass printing. Similar to a collage, the monumental seascape combines a giant deformed girl’s head and a pre-Columbian wooden object with an advertisement of a dry-cleaner service for ties. With her biomorphic holes, the reclining blonde, melting away, alludes to the sculptures of Henry Moore. A mirror collides with an antique column. All motifs go back to the artist’s own early Pop Art works, which thus gather on the stage of this picture for the grand finale.

Instead of depicting Surrealist dream images, the picture has turned into a parody of Surrealism. Lichtenstein did not carry forward the history of art, but quoted styles of the past: in this way, he became the trailblazer of postmodernism and the most important forerunner of appropriation.

The Sculptures

As had been Picasso’s, Roy Lichtenstein’s sculptural oeuvre was long eclipsed by his painting, to which it is most closely connected. He made occasional sculptures as early as the 1960s: the artist painted the busts of mannequins in his comic-book style, by which he imitated mass printing. In the 1970s, first bronze sculptures of flat, overdimensioned mirrors, glasses, and coffee cups, which he painted with few primary colors, were created in the context of his still lifes, which Lichtenstein had carried to monumental dimensions, and objectified mirror images. These sculptures quote the “blow-up” of advertising. They do not offer multiple perspectives, but can only be viewed frontally, like paintings. Although made of the time-honored material of bronze, they look like mass-produced articles: forerunners and models of Jeff Koons’s polished Neo-Pop sculptures.

Lichtenstein made fun of Picasso’s absinth glasses, Giacometti’s ethereal statues, or the ready-mades of Duchamp and Jasper Johns, which were then in the focus of contemporary art discourse. Sometime later, Lichtenstein’s brushstrokes were similarly extracted from his pictures, becoming paradoxical, frozen objects.

Brushstrokes

In the mid-1960s, Roy Lichtenstein turned Abstract Expressionism’s spontaneous and impulsive brushstroke into an ironical—and eventually iconic—motif. Impetus came from a comic strip about a crazy painter who, followed by a demon, crosses out his persecutor with an expressive brushstroke. Lichtenstein deconstructs the expressive brushstrokes of De Kooning and Franz Kline, ironizing them as trompe l’œil in his distinctive comic-book style. In a deindividualized manner of lines, dots, and hatching, he disenchant the illusion of authenticity and immediacy of the Abstract Expressionists’ gestural brushwork as a merely simulated reflection of an artist’s temperament: the artist’s prominent

gesture is caricatured here as it has been repainted as if by a decorator. There can hardly be a greater difference between motif and style. The abstract brushstroke is not the result of an inner artistic process, but is unmasked as a conventional symbol that can be reproduced like a traffic sign. In response to Neo-Expressionism of the late 1970s, Lichtenstein revisited the theme of the expressive painterly brushstroke in the 1980s. This time, he painted freely invented landscapes using a bustle of small brushstrokes: Lichtenstein makes both his painted brushstrokes and the brushstroke objects dance rhythmically, as if they moved to the rhythm of the jazz music the artist listened to while working in his studio.

The Last Decade

A founding figure of Pop Art and an internationally successful artist, Roy Lichtenstein revisited the subject of the artist's studio in the 1990s in the form of giant interiors. He chose it as a theme for a series of prints for which he enlarged illustrations of furniture from mail-order catalogs and telephone directory advertisements he had collected in his sourcebooks with the aid of projectors. This series exhibited the standardized domestic American culture and contemporary everyday life. Modern bedroom and living room decorations, with their built-in cabinets, panorama windows, and contemporary art on the walls, monumentally unfold before the spectator's eye.

Here Lichtenstein has created the ideal ambience for self-reference, which goes back to his still lifes and Surrealist adaptations. His models were the studio paintings of Picasso and Matisse, but also Diego Velázquez' *Las Meninas*, which is also a studio painting. On the walls we can see some of Lichtenstein's earlier paintings, such as *Look Mickey* (1961), his own version of Monet's *Les Nymphéas* (1990s), or his *Pyramids* (1968/69).

In the final decade of his life, Lichtenstein also revisited the most important theme of his early comic pictures of the 1960s and of his Surrealist pictures of the 1970s: the woman. In the monumental masterpiece of those years, *Beach Scene with Starfish* (1995), Lichtenstein combines Picasso's erotic painting *Bathers Playing with a Ball* (1928) with the model of a comic-book love story from the 1960s. His style now shows a much richer surface design: a crescendo and decrescendo of halftone dots suggesting light and dark, hatching, homogeneously colored areas, and rubbing. This late monumental painting celebrates vitality and *joie de vivre*.

Quotes

“America was hit by industrialism and capitalism harder and sooner, and its values seem more askew than in the rest of the world. I think the meaning of my work is that it shows what the world will soon be like.”

“In contrast, Abstract Expressionism still seemed very human. My work is the opposite. It has a pseudo-mechanical look—as though it were done by a machine. I’m doing it in a style that seems to be completely insensitive.”

“I try not to show the traces of my work in the finished painting. This is in opposition to Abstract Expressionism.”

“I go through comic books looking for material which seems to hold possibilities for painting, both as to its visual impact and as to the impact of its written message, which I rarely make up. I don’t think I’d be capable of making it up. I try to take messages which are kind of universal, or completely meaningless or so involved that they become ludicrous.”

“Pop Art is based on the commercial illustration with which we have been corrupted. It drastically changed the landscape in the 1960s. The real architecture was no longer Le Corbusier, but McDonald’s hamburger stands. Everything new went through this filter of commercial art and had an impact that we tried to capture.”

“The kind of women I paint are made of black lines and red dots. It’s very hard for me to fall for one of these creatures, because they’re not really reality to me. When I was a child, I really thought these were very beautiful women. Now I see only the drawing.”

“Dots are a critical thing. Early on, they were handmade. At some point, the dots got better. At first, the work was done with dog brushes of evenly spread bristles. The next thing was a metal stencil I made myself. Then came stencils of perforated metal. Then I had paper stencils made and threw them away after they were used. Not only the size of the dots helps date the early works, but the angle of the dots, too. Earlier, this angle was more acute, approximately a 45-degree angle. Today they are maybe a 60-degree angle. Simply put, the larger the dot and the clearer, the later the paintings are.”

“Monet’s Rouen Cathedrals became meaningful to me when I realized that, using my dot stencils, I could make them look manufactured.”

“This work uses certain symbols for being hit or seeing stars or the movement of the arm. These signs for movement were of great interest to me, because they have no basis in reality: only in ideas.”

“I realize my paintings are provocative in that the Mondrian is such a seemingly simple painting. It can be described in words as simply black lines and primary colors, and, of course, the same describe my cartoons.”

“What can you paint that isn’t ridiculous from the outset?”

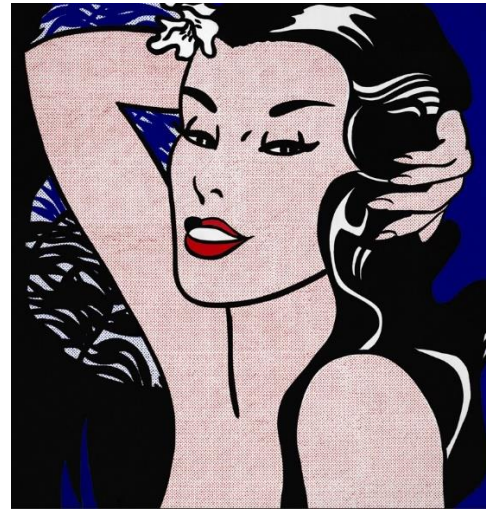
“My sculpture of a brushstroke is an attempt to give strong form to something that is a momentary occurrence: to solidify something ephemeral. The painter’s brushstroke in bronze! I like that idea. It thus becomes real and has weight and is absurd, contradictory, and funny.”

Press images

The following images are available free of charge in the Press section of www.albertina.at.
Legal notice: The images may only be used in connection with reporting on the exhibition.



Roy Lichtenstein
Knock Knock, 1961
India ink on paper
57 x 51 cm
The Sonnabend Home Collection, Courtesy of The
Sonnabend Collection
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
Little Aloha, 1962
Oil and graphite pencil on canvas
124 x 122 cm
The Sonnabend Collection Foundation
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
Spray, 1962
Oil and pencil on canvas
92 x 174 cm
Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, erworben mit Lotto-Mitteln 1977
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024/Photo:
bpk / Staatsgalerie Stuttgart



Roy Lichtenstein
Thinking of Him, 1963
Acrylic on canvas
170 x 170 cm
Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Gift of Richard Brown Baker
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024/Photo: Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven



Roy Lichtenstein
Woman in Bath, 1963
Oil and acrylic on canvas
173 x 173 cm
Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
Magnifying Glass, 1963
Oil on canvas
40 x 40 cm
Privatsammlung/Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein / Bildrecht, Vienna 2024 /Photo: Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zürich



Roy Lichtenstein
Drowning Girl, 1963
Oil and acrylic on canvas
170 x 170 cm
The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philip Johnson Fund (by exchange) and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024 Photo: The Museum of Modern Art, New York/Scala, Florence



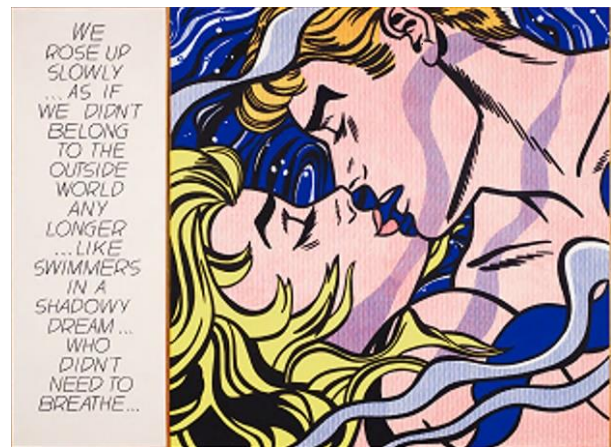
Roy Lichtenstein
Large Spool, 1963
Acrylic and pencil on canvas
173 x 143 cm
The Sonnabend Collection Foundation © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
I Know How You Must Feel, Brad ..., 1963
Oil, acrylic and pencil on canvas
169 x 96 cm
Ludwig Forum für Internationale Kunst Aachen, Leihgabe der Peter und Irene Ludwig Stiftung © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
Finger Pointing (poster design for the exhibition American Pop Art at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, 1964)
Indian ink on paper
99 x 71 cm
Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Donation 1977 from the artist © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
We Rose Up Slowly, 1964
Oil and acrylic on canvas
173 x 234 cm
MUSEUM MMK FÜR MODERNE KUNST, Frankfurt, Ehemalige Sammlung Karl Ströher, Darmstadt (DE)
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



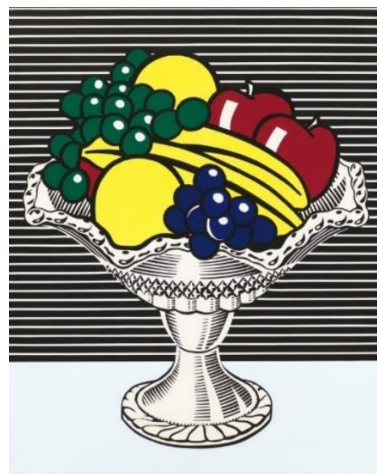
Roy Lichtenstein
Kiss with Cloud, 1964
Oil and acrylic on canvas
173 x 173 cm
Esther Grether Family Collection © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



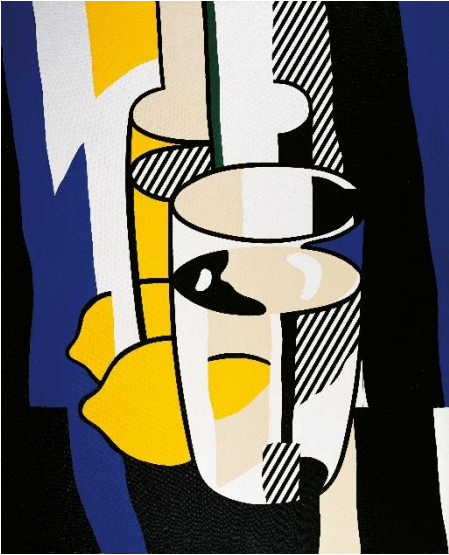
Roy Lichtenstein
Little Big Painting, 1965
Oil, acrylic and pencil on canvas
99 x 71 cm
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art 66.2 © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
Yellow Sky, 1966
Oil, acrylic and pencil on canvas
92 x 173 cm
Museum Ulm - Stiftung Sammlung Kurt Fried
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024
Photo: © Museum Ulm-Stiftung Sammlung Kurt Fried,
Fotograf: Oleg Kuchar, Ulm



Roy Lichtenstein
Still Life with Crystal Bowl, 1972
Oil, acrylic and pencil on canvas
132 x 107 cm
Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Purchase with funds from Frances and Sydney Lewis 77.64 © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024



Roy Lichtenstein
 Glass and Lemon before a Mirror, 1974
 Oil, acrylic and graphite pencil on canvas
 133 x 107 cm
 ALBERTINA, Wien - Sammlung Batliner © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024
 Photo: ALBERTINA, Vienna



Roy Lichtenstein
 Figures in Landscape, 1977
 Oil and acrylic on canvas
 58 x 71 cm
 Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humblebæk, Denmark
 Long-term loan: Museumsfonden © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024
 Photo: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humblebæk, Denmark



Roy Lichtenstein
 Wallpaper with blue Floor Interior, 1992
 Screen print on paper
 276 x 105 cm
 ALBERTINA, Wien © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Wien/Vienna 2023/Photo: Albertina, Vienna



Roy Lichtenstein
 Beach Scene with Starfish, 1995
 Oil and acrylic on canvas
 300 x 604 cm
 Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel, Sammlung Beyeler
 © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein/Bildrecht, Vienna 2024, Photo: Robert Bayer