

## POP ART

Think about how many advertisements you see everyday. Visual images designed to persuade us to buy products saturate our environment. They reach us through television, magazines and newspapers, billboards, public benches, sides of buses, storefronts, and they even show up in our mailboxes. If we noticed and thought about each advertisement presented to us, we would have little time to do anything else. In order to make life tolerable, we learn to ignore most of the visual images that are out there competing with each other for our attention. Another way of putting this is to say that we become *desensitized* to them. The goal of Pop artists is to make us notice and think about these images that we manage to suppress from our consciousness on a daily basis.

Why would an artist want to do this? Most critics agree that one of the aims of most Pop art is to make people think about how dependent Americans are on material goods. In order to make us "see" the elements that make up our modern environment, Pop art often represents advertising images or brand names in a repetitive fashion and on a large scale. One of Andy Warhol's most famous works, for example, consists of hundreds of Campbell's Soup labels. It is difficult to decide what this means — is he disgusted with commercialism and intending to make fun of it, or is he demonstrating an admiring fascination for it?

Some Pop artists chose to focus on one particular type of mass culture image. Roy Lichtenstein, for example, filled huge canvases with depictions of comic-book scenes, usually relating to love or violence. By doing so, Lichtenstein seem to be criticizing the "simplistic and exploitive way contemporary culture depicts these themes."

The mechanical repetition that characterizes much Pop art gives it an anonymous quality. In

other words, it doesn't give us an impression of an artist's unique style or personality. In this way, the Pop artist is making a comment about the impersonal nature of modern, mechanized society. Mass-produced images are replacing the creations of imaginative and skilled individual folk and fine artists; Pop art tends not to look "hand-painted." Individualism is shown to be on the decline in twentieth-century American culture.

### Facts About POP ART

#### Leading artists:

Andy Warhol (*United States*)  
 Roy Lichtenstein (*United States*)  
 Robert Indiana (*United States*)  
 Jasper Johns (*United States*)  
 Wayne Theibaud (*United States*)  
 Tom Wesselmann (*United States*)

#### Prominent works:

*Marilyn Monroe*. Andy Warhol, 1962.  
*Little Big Painting*. Roy Lichtenstein, 1965.  
*The Beware-Danger American Dream #4*.  
 Robert Indiana, 1963.  
*Three Flags*. Jasper Johns, 1958.

Approximate Time Period: 1955-1970

Countries Originated in: England and the United States

Preceded by: *Abstract Expressionism*

Followed by: *Op art*

Influence on Music:

John Cage (*United States*)