

Roy  
**LICHTENSTEIN**



# Roy LICHTENSTEIN

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and Klaus Albrecht Schröder

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# FOREWORD

After the Roy Lichtenstein exhibition in 2011, which focused on the artist's radical black-and-white paintings and drawings, the Albertina is now—thirteen years later—presenting the “Centennial Exhibition” of an artist who, along with Andy Warhol, is probably the most important and best-known representative of Pop Art.

As one of the leading progenitors of appropriation art and a pioneer in the fusion of high and low culture, this founding father of Pop Art is not only one of the most influential figures in American art: Lichtenstein is, along with Warhol and Jackson Pollock, one of America's most beloved artists. This exhibition, held on the occasion of his 100th birthday, underscores the close relationship between the Albertina and Roy Lichtenstein.

Thanks to the generous donation of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, the Albertina now possesses one of the most comprehensive collections of Lichtenstein's sculptures—a side of his work that is still too little known—along with several paintings, tapestries, and an extensive collection of prints.

The retrospective, conceived in close collaboration with the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and its director Jack Cowart, is under the patronage of Dorothy Lichtenstein. We are very grateful to both of them, not only for their extensive support of the exhibition, but also for the donation of more than 120 sculptures, tapestries, models, and drawings by Lichtenstein: with this gift, the Albertina, together with the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Nasher Sculpture Garden in Dallas, possesses one of the largest Lichtenstein collections.

Lichtenstein's paintings have inspired generations of artists with their meticulous execution of simple comic book motifs, including the enlarged Ben Day dots borrowed from cheap mass printing and the speech bubbles that accompany the image.

Our exhibition ranges from the earliest Pop paintings—a resolute affirmation of 1960s clichés, with stereotyped blondes and Hollywood-style romances that Lichtenstein monumentalized through the filter of comic-book imagery—to the revival of the still life genre, which owes its existence to the economic boom of the prosperous postwar period, to the landscapes and interiors of the 1970s to the 1990s. The retrospective also includes Roy Lichtenstein's sculpture for the first time, with the important “Brushstrokes” series represented in both paintings and sculptures.

In 1992, Roy Lichtenstein visited Vienna together with Leo Castelli to study the Victor Vasarely retrospective that I had organized at the Kunstforum. Although Vasarely had long since passed the zenith of his fame at this point, Roy Lichtenstein was then particularly interested in Op Art effects, as evidenced by the large landscape *Treetops Through the Fog* in our exhibition (pp. 216–17).

With his complex oeuvre, Lichtenstein brought about a paradigm shift in art: he established a new understanding of the image that radically challenged individual expression in art and the gestural painting of the Abstract Expressionists. His art is highly reflexive and self-referential: Lichtenstein's paintings refer to existing images, not to reality. His visual program draws equally from high and low art. From his early work to his later work, he staged stereotypical images of women from advertising and comics in larger-than-life paintings. With biting irony, he rejected the pathos of subjective expression and the grand gestures of artistic temperament by removing the brushstrokes

of the painter-princes from their pictorial context in his so-called “Brushstrokes” and quoting them like a trophy: in a de-individualized manner of lines, dots, grids, and hatchings that immobilizes the frenzy of an expressive brushstroke and deciphers its appearance of authenticity and immediacy as merely a “simulated reflection of temperament.” By imitating industrial printing techniques, the artist emphasized the anonymity and seriality of his work. Lichtenstein’s paintings make no claim to exclusivity or originality in style or aesthetics—yet he created unique masterpieces of unparalleled recognizability.

I am deeply grateful to Dorothy Lichtenstein and Jack Cowart, Director of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, for the Foundation’s generous donation to the Albertina and for their active support of our anniversary exhibition. Without Jack Cowart’s constant advice and his contacts to private lenders, this exhibition would not have been possible in this form.

My very special thanks also go to Andrea Theil, the author of the catalogue raisonné published online in 2023. Andrea Theil has generously shared her knowledge with us at all times. I would also like to thank Frank Avila-Goldman of the Estate of Roy Lichtenstein and Allison Chomet of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation for generously providing the photographic material.

I would also like to thank the authors Avis Berman of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and once again Jack Cowart, the intimate connoisseur of Roy Lichtenstein’s sculptural work. Thomas Hecken, a literary and cultural scholar specializing in pop culture, and Michel Thévoz, an expert on Art Brut and founding director of the Collection de l’Art Brut in Lausanne, have provided us with invaluable contributions on the work of Roy Lichtenstein.

We are grateful to Barbara Bertozzi-Castelli, Thaddaeus Ropac, Stefan Ratibor, and Antonio Homem for their mediation of precious and indispensable private loans.

This “Centennial Exhibition” was conceived and organized by Gunhild Bauer, curator of modern art at the Albertina. My special thanks go to her and her assistant, Serena Ligas. I would also like to thank Kristin Jedlicka from Exhibition Management; Patrick Lichtenecker, the Albertina’s registrar; and Sandra Maria Rust, our head of publications; as well as our chief conservator, Eva Glück, and Magdalena Duftner, the conservator in charge of the fragile sculptures.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to the many institutional and private lenders who have parted with their major works for this retrospective on the occasion of Roy Lichtenstein’s 100th birthday. It is thanks to them that the exhibition has become the kind of anniversary show that is only dedicated to the greats of art history.

Prof. Dr. Klaus Albrecht Schröder  
Director General of the Albertina Museum





# ROY LICHTENSTEIN: IMPERSONAL PAINTING

Gunhild Bauer

In the 1960s, in the wake of Abstract Expressionism, Roy Lichtenstein embarked on a path of simple, impersonal visual language, drawing on the existing imagery of everyday and popular culture. Because of his artistic exploration of a mediatized reality, he is considered today to be the most important forerunner of the appropriation art of the 1970s and 1980s and the fusion of high and low culture in contemporary art. Together with Andy Warhol, he is one of the two best-known founding fathers of Pop Art and, along with Jackson Pollock and Warhol, one of the three greatest American artists of the twentieth century.

During the international triumph of Abstract Expressionism, various artists in Great Britain and the United States returned to a banal, figurative, self-reflexive art. Later subsumed under the term Pop Art, they ironically demolished the traditional boundaries between high art and consumer culture in the years of the postwar economic boom and assumed a leading role in the visual arts. Roy Lichtenstein's groundbreaking invention at the time, which not only helped him but also American Pop Art to achieve its breakthrough in 1961, was to appropriate for his painting the new, aggressive flood of images that dominated everyday American culture in those years. After the dominant years of Abstract Expressionism, he turned not to actual reality but to the secondhand reality of consumer society: the advertisements in the telephone book and the cartoons of that "Golden Age of Comics." In the relatively short span of just five years, from 1961 to about 1965, Lichtenstein stylized images from popular culture into iconic paintings that made him one of the most successful practitioners of Pop Art.

He was the first to adopt the powerful vocabulary of commercial artists and cartoonists, which is designed for profit or to catch the fleeting glance of passersby. They appeal to the masses with flat stereotypes. Roy Lichtenstein not only adopted the same patterns of the ever-attractive young women, their exuberant gestures, and the speech balloons of the comics, but also imitated the industrial printing technique, the black contours filled with Ben Day dots and fields of primary colors. In doing so, he radically challenged the Abstract Expressionists' idiosyncratic demonstration of the artistic individual.

These loud, commercial graphic images, controversial at the time, became ubiquitous in the United States during the economic boom of the Kennedy era. They graced gum wrappers and lined highways, flooded movie theaters, children's rooms, television, and newsstands. But it was Roy Lichtenstein who first discovered them as a major subject for painting and was the first to make them visible in this field. He explored the aggressive imagery of the postwar period in an ironic and provocative way, analogous to the protests of the women's movement and protests against the Vietnam War that were emerging at the time: "America was hit by industrialism and capitalism harder and sooner and its values seem more askew.... I think the meaning of my work is that it's industrial, it's what all the world will soon become."<sup>1</sup>

Lichtenstein was the first to copy the images of advertising and commercial art—and not the Old Masters or plaster casts of antique statues—seemingly one-to-one, and the first to seemingly

WHAT? WHY DID  
YOU ASK THAT?  
WHAT DO YOU KNOW  
ABOUT MY IMAGE  
DUPLICATOR?



copy a pictorial vocabulary generated by the tastes of the masses, rather than, like the Abstract Expressionists, expressing his personal emotion in the face of the world. This amounted to an unprecedented radicalism: "I knew people would take a large painting of a cartoon as being exactly the same as a cartoon. It just looked like the same thing, only bigger. I realized how people would react to that after Abstract Expressionism. [...] I was really changing it a lot."<sup>2</sup> Lichtenstein responded to the charge that Abstract Expressionism was out of touch with the reality of easily understood, everyday subjects.

The pretense of a copy is part of his ironic and provocative concept, which is why Lichtenstein, of all the Pop Art artists, had to deal with accusations of plagiarism from the very beginning. In 1963, the comic book artist William Overgard wrote a letter to the editor of *Time* magazine to point out in a friendly way that Lichtenstein had appropriated one of his panels. A few months later, Erle Loran, an art history professor at the University of California, Berkeley, accused him in *ARTnews* and *Artforum* of copying a diagram of the composition of a work by Paul Cézanne from an art history book. Lichtenstein responded to this criticism that same year with a self-portrait as a comic book villain entitled *Image Duplicator* (fig. 1). It was published in *Life* magazine in 1964 under the provocative headline "Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?"<sup>3</sup>—in contrast to the photographic staging of Jackson Pollock as an action painter in the article "Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" in a 1949 issue of *Life*, which had helped the Abstract Expressionist to make his breakthrough at the time.<sup>4</sup>

What at first glance appears to be a mere copy—a reaction that Lichtenstein intentionally provoked—reveals itself on closer inspection to be an appropriation, that is, a transformation. Lichtenstein enlarged his small, printed models to almost two-meter-high canvases; he isolated, stylized, and de-emotionalized the original image, depriving it of any depth and thus emphasizing the industrial, non-artistic appearance of the commercial models and the mechanical nature of their production. Above all, he elevated them to the realm of painting and high art. In contrast to the expansive and vital gesture of Abstract Expressionism, Lichtenstein transformed the emphatically emotional motifs of the love-story comics in a particularly unemotional and flat manner. He isolated and monumentalized the objects of the advertisements in front of an empty background. He adopted the reduction to outlines in black and white, transforming the objects into gigantic signs and icons. "The techniques I use are not commercial, they only appear to be commercial—and the ways of seeing, composing and unifying are different."<sup>5</sup>

Lichtenstein's Pop Art is a direct response to the aggressiveness, the large format, the all-over, and the expansive power of the works of the Abstract Expressionists Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline, and Willem de Kooning, which seem to reach beyond the edge of the canvas: "Abstract Expressionism was very human looking. My work is the opposite. It has a pseudomechanical look—as though it were done by a machine... that it was thoughtless. [...] It gives the sense of complete insensitivity... I'm doing it in a style that seems not to be [sensitive]."<sup>6</sup> Spirited but unrealistic, Action Painting came to symbolize the American concept of individual freedom. Lichtenstein's paintings were meant to stand alongside those of the Abstract Expressionists. When asked the famous question "What is Pop Art?" in November 1963, Lichtenstein responded as follows:

"The use of commercial art as subject matter in painting. It was hard to get a painting that was despicable enough. [...] It was almost acceptable to hang a dripping paint rag, everybody was

accustomed to this. The one thing everyone hated was commercial art. [...] It is an involvement with what I think to be the most brazen and threatening characteristics of our culture, things we hate, but which are also powerful. [...] Signs and comic strips are interesting as subject matter. There are certain things that are usable, forceful and vital about commercial art. We're using those things—but we're not really advocating stupidity, international teenagerness and terrorism. [...] Superficially, Pop Art seems to be all subject matter, whereas Abstract-Expressionism seems to be all esthetic. [...] It's said to be an exact copy, and not art. [...] The style is, as you said, cool!"<sup>7</sup>

Lichtenstein's decisive contribution to the birth of Pop Art was a result of his move back to the New York area in 1960. After years of wandering through the American provinces, he was offered a teaching position at Douglass College at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, in New Brunswick, where he came into the circle of his colleague Allan Kaprow. Through Kaprow, he met Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, as well as Claes Oldenburg, Jim Dine, Robert Whitman, George Segal, Robert Watts, George Brecht, and Lucas Samaras, whose happenings, performances, environments, and assemblages, known at the time as Neo-Dada, addressed industrial mass production and advertising.

Their engagement with the visual world of popular culture was not a new phenomenon; it had been going on since the late nineteenth century. The Expressionists, Cubists, and Dadaists reflected quite critically on the transformations of the industrial age and for the first time used existing visual material from popular culture in the form of collages, which was tantamount to questioning what constituted an artist, what he or she should actually be able to accomplish. Indeed, Pop and Dada, with their short and trivial-sounding onomatopoeic names, were considered by Andy Warhol to be synonymous.

Roy Lichtenstein, who was still painting abstractly in the late 1950s, now also turned to these contemporary themes and figuration. In 1958, he painted anthropomorphic comic figures such as Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck or Warner Brothers' Bugs Bunny for the first time in a gestural expressionist style (fig. 2). It is said that Jasper Johns then advised him to adopt not only the motifs but also the aesthetics of industrial printing technology in his paintings. This would



Fig. 1 Roy Lichtenstein, *Image Duplicator*, 1963, acrylic and graphite pencil on canvas, 61 × 50.8 cm, Private collection



Fig. 2 Roy Lichtenstein, *Mickey Mouse II*, 1958, india ink on paper, 53.8 × 48.4 cm, Private collection

heroes such as Mickey Mouse and Popeye. In the spring of 1961, Andy Warhol also created paintings based on comic book characters and advertising graphics. In April of that same year, four of these paintings were exhibited in the window of the New York department store Bonwit Teller, for which Warhol, then one of New York's most successful commercial artists, was working. In contrast to Lichtenstein, Warhol made his comic book characters appear particularly artistic and expressive. This overlap is generally considered a coincidence, but a certain rivalry developed between the two. It is said that Warhol first saw a painting by Lichtenstein, *Girl with Ball*, at Leo Castelli's gallery in 1961. Again, the question of plagiarism was briefly raised. Warhol then moved away from comic figures altogether and turned to everyday consumer products, such as the *Campbell's Soup Can* series and the photographic silkscreen process, with which he emphasized the seriality and conformity, the repetition and standardization of mass-produced goods. Lichtenstein continued to paint images based on comics but moved away from the famous American comic book characters of the early period (p. 86) and devoted himself to the anonymous men and women of war and love-story comics, as well as to the objects of product advertising.

In the aforementioned 1964 *Life* magazine article, "Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?", Lichtenstein deliberately staged himself as a technical draftsman in a photograph showing him copying a preliminary drawing projected onto canvas with the aid of a projector (p. 248).<sup>8</sup> The handwritten text in the speech balloon in Lichtenstein's self-portrait *Image Duplicator*, "What do you know about my image duplicator?," also alludes to a machine.

The "impersonal painting," the ambivalence between artist and machine, between originality and copy, between artwork and reproduction is the central theme of Lichtenstein's art. His graphic

bring them closer to the real object, would not be the representation of *something* but rather, trompe-l'oeil-like, the object itself, as in Jasper Johns's flag paintings of 1954–55.

By early 1961, Warhol's and Lichtenstein's work was so similar that the New York gallerist Leo Castelli—after seeing *Look Mickey*, the first painting in Lichtenstein's now impersonal, graphic comic-book style—helped Lichtenstein to make his great breakthrough, but at the same time refused to represent Warhol, which he eventually did beginning in 1964. For just a brief period, in the spring of 1961, Lichtenstein did paint famous American cartoon

style is inspired by the multistep reproduction technique: First, Lichtenstein made a drawing by copying a comic panel, perhaps combining several panels in the process. He then projected the drawing onto the canvas, tracing the main features of the composition in pencil. The almost square format, in which all pictorial elements appear equally weighted and equally valid, was dictated by the projector. Lichtenstein then used rulers to rework the underdrawing on the canvas (p. 219). Later, he used rotating easels to better position the rulers and not be too distracted by the motif. He then covered any areas that were not to be dotted and passed the Ben Day dots through hole templates, perforated metal plates of various sizes. In the early works, the trickling of the oil paint or the shifting or misplacing of the stencils created a lively structure. In the next step, he applied the monochrome areas of color and black outlines. Lichtenstein then finished the painting, taking care to leave no *pentamenti*, textures, or reliefs, so that the surface looked as smooth and effortless as if he had done nothing more than fill in the outline: “[The painting] looks as though this was only done once [...] and it was just sort of a question of filling in the lines.”<sup>9</sup> In 1962, Lichtenstein stopped using oil paint in order to avoid visible traces of reworking and thus any lively structure, and began using acrylic, which can be completely dissolved in turpentine and thus allows for corrections. He used oil paint only to trace the Ben Day dots, which he had his assistants do from 1963 on. The slick technique shocks and repels; the discrepancy with the often emotional content is intentional. In contrast to the expansive compositions of Abstract Expressionist paintings, he made the printed image appear even flatter than it already was: “[The composition] is fairly well worked out before it gets to the painting. [...] I do a lot with collage and try purposely not to show the tracks of my work in the finished painting. This is in opposition to Abstract Expressionism.”<sup>10</sup> “I’m trying to bring across [...] a hard, steely quality which seems to be an antiseptic quality.”<sup>11</sup>

When, in the mid-1960s, Lichtenstein turned away from appropriating comic panels and devoted himself to copying high art, he even reconstructed the gigantic brushstrokes of the Abstract Expressionists in his indirect, impersonal style—but only as motifs. He also composed them with black outlines, Ben Day dots, and homogeneous areas of color, which he meticulously prepared in numerous studies (pp. 145, 184–95). Full of irony, Lichtenstein mocked the Abstract Expressionists’ gestural act of painting. In his American and banal pseudo-comic style, he also reproduced other major works of European modernism, including works by Pablo Picasso and Claude Monet, Art Deco, and Japanese landscapes (pp. 138, 139, 140–43, 147, 216–17). His goal was to increase the contrast between the comic style and the motif. It became perfectly clear that his work was not just a copy of Picasso’s. In 1973, he satirized Picasso’s eclectic style with the comic-like animated series of *Bulls* (pp. 150–55), which is based on the famous Mourlot suite of 1946, in which Picasso depicted a bull in every style imaginable in art history.

Lichtenstein’s paintings are captivating not least for the irony inherent in his use of the Ben Day dots, his trademark, as he alludes to their proto-tradition in the history of modern art, from Impressionism to Fauvism to Pointillism and beyond. In this printing technique, invented by Benjamin Day in the 1930s, the dots are printed in only a few primary colors, overlapping or side by side, depending on the desired effect. Secondary colors are created by printing one on top of the other. The graphic artist provides a template, and the printer converts it into color plates with dot screens for offset printing, using rollers with a continuous ink feed to enable fast printing on inexpensive

paper and long runs. Lichtenstein's Ben Day dots are no longer used for conventional tonal value decomposition or color separation but are enlarged quotations of this printing technique. He combined them with areas of color and, later, with parallel hatching, as seen in other halftone reproduction techniques, as well as swelling and diminishing dots.

Lichtenstein's Ben Day dots seem like a parody of Monet's hastily applied dabs of paint. The founding father of Impressionism and painter of subjective perception was also a master at feigning a spontaneous act of painting. His loose brushwork paved the way for modernist painting, the emancipation of color from the object. When, in the late 1960s, Lichtenstein stopped appropriating comic images and began to copy paintings by the masters of modernism in his comic style, Monet was one of the first whose works he used to allude to his own technique (pp. 138, 139). In the wake of Impressionism, the Fauvists also further liberated the dot from the motif by intensifying the expression. The Pointillists then pioneered a style of painting based on scientific laws rather than arbitrariness and subjectivity. For the first time, their dot technique was applied to the canvas with a controlled hand and unmixed paint, apparently mechanically, but in fact going far beyond mechanical techniques. Photomechanical color printing and chromolithography, which enabled large print runs of illustrated magazines, were cited as sources of inspiration. They were based on Michel-Eugène Chevreul's theories of color, according to which the eye mixes closely juxtaposed dots of unmixed colors into a new color from a sufficient distance. It was Picasso who first used the dots as a sign in the works of his Synthetic Cubism, also known as "Confetti Cubism," using them evenly over a large surface to denote the different textures of his collages, even in the painted image. In 1963, Lichtenstein ironically painted an ordinary magnifying glass in the trompe l'oeil style (p. 101): even under the magnifying glass, one sees nothing but his trademark Ben Day dots, which become the subject here.

Lichtenstein's choice of source images is also explained by autobiographical motives. The model for *Look Mickey* was discovered only in recent years. For a long time, scholars believed the artist's story that it was a scene from a comic book from his childhood, when he listened to adventure, detective, and science fiction series on the radio. Contrary to this story, however, it was actually an illustration for a 1960 Walt Disney adventure story with Donald Duck entitled *Lost and Found*. According to the story Lichtenstein told Leo Castelli, his children had asked him if he could draw a cartoon or if he only painted abstractly because he could not draw. It was even suggested that the two initials of Donald and Mickey could refer to his two sons, David and Mitchell.<sup>12</sup> By appropriating the children's book illustrations by the Disney artists Bob Grant and Bob Totten, Lichtenstein depicted his own themes. To a certain extent, he also satirized the *trouvaille* in the sense of André Breton, for example, who selected objects at flea markets for their aesthetic qualities and imbued them with psychological meaning. Toward the end of the 1970s, in monumental paintings modeled on the Surrealism of Salvador Dalí, Lichtenstein arranged unrelated subjects from Picasso's or Dalí's paintings, as well as from his own, to create new pastiches (pp. 166–69). Lichtenstein's selections often have to do with the act of seeing or painting, as the title *Look Mickey* suggests: Donald looks at the reflective surface of the water and misinterprets what he sees. Mickey's sneering gesture and Donald's bent-over posture may also represent the art world's rejection of vulgar comic art.<sup>13</sup> Other examples of allusions to the act of painting include *Spray*, *Mail Order Foot*, and

*Bread and Jam* (pp. 92–93, 98, 105). He also chose witty “life hacks,” such as foot templates to determine shoe sizes (p. 98); status symbols of affluent society such as washing machines; well-shaped, sculptural, even hieratic objects such as spools of thread (pp. 102, 103); and the mass-produced notebooks in which he collected his comic clippings (p. 107), in which a fusion of painting and object occurs through the coincidence of subject edge and canvas edge. He also liked to use loud onomatopoeic words borrowed from comics to comment on his early Pop paintings (p. 95): “DYNAMIC: KPOW! WHUMP! TAKKA TAKKA!! VAROOM!”<sup>14</sup>



Fig. 3 Richard Hamilton, *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, 1956, collage on paper, 26 × 24.8 cm, Kunsthalle Tübingen

The anonymous girls and soldiers in the war and love-story comics of the well-known American comic book publisher DC Comics, which Lichtenstein favored for models after this initial phase, enjoyed great popularity from around 1950 among former soldiers and young adults who used them to come to terms with their war trauma. The love-story comics were aimed at adolescent girls. They were distributed commercially, with high sales figures and mass distribution, and were aimed at the average taste of the majority of the population, manipulated by the commercial entertainment sector. Lichtenstein's work is not a migration of well-known images from product design or press photography into art, as was the case with Warhol, but—much more provocatively—unknown images from so-called “trashy novels.” In 1962, Lichtenstein increasingly painted panels from war comics with titles such as *Our Fighting Forces*, *All American Men of War*, *Our Army at War*, *Star-Spangled War Stories*, *Battlefield Action*, and *G.I. Combat*; from 1963 on, he also turned increasingly to love-story comics with flowery titles such as *Heart Throbs*, *Secret Hearts*, *Girls' Romances*, *Private Secretary*, *Falling in Love*, and *Young Romance*, and less frequently to superheroes such as *The Atom*, *My Greatest Adventure*, and *Justice League of America*, as well as to cowboy stories such as *Billy the Kid*. Richard Hamilton had already captured the exotic opulence of his time in his small-format Pop Art “founding collage,” *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* from 1956: on the wall is a poster with the enlarged title page of the mainstream love-story comic *Young Romance* (fig. 3).

The comic strips published in newspapers during the first comic trend in New York from around 1907–8 were about fun city life and free people. Artistic references include Lyonel Feininger, Paul Klee, Fernand Léger, and Joan Miró. Lichtenstein may have seen Picasso's anti-fascist pictorial history *The Dream and Lie of Franco* along with the monumental antiwar painting *Guernica* when

he visited the Picasso exhibition in Cleveland in 1940. At the time, comics were experiencing a lull. They were no longer seen as supporters of democracy but rather as a threat to it. Walt Disney, who had no fear of contact with the Nazis, did not produce anti-Nazi films until after 1942.<sup>15</sup> Clement Greenberg's 1939 book *Avant-Garde and Kitsch* also includes comics. Shortly after the revival of comics around 1950, the unrealistic beauty ideals and glorification of violence, which the American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham analyzed in his 1954 book *Seduction of the Innocent*, were once again seen to have a negative influence on young people. Many comic book publishers, including DC Comics, voluntarily submitted to censorship of scenes of violence, drug use, and overly revealing depictions in order to receive the seal of approval of the newly formed Comic Code Authority. Finally, in her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*, the American feminist Betty Friedan described the frustration of women in traditional roles—roles which were reinforced by advertising and mass media.

Beginning in 1961, Lichtenstein compiled a collection of comic clippings and advertisements (pp. 219–39). He, or later his assistants, would glue the clippings into notebooks, either mixed up or arranged by subject. While painting, he would stick them next to the canvas (p. 219), and, when finished, he would usually return them to the notebook with the note “done.” The source images for the 1962 paintings can all be traced back to that year, while the later paintings also date from earlier years. Lichtenstein's choice of comic sources is not random or arbitrary. They are highly emotional motifs with a symbolism that we immediately understand, such as the lover sinking into the sea (p. 116) or the kiss (pp. 91, 118–19). In the notebooks, Lichtenstein collected a large number of lovers sinking into the sea or kissing (pp. 224, 225, 234; 232, 233), along with other popular, recurring motifs from the comic books:

“I go through comic books looking for material which seems to hold possibilities for painting, both its visual impact and the impact of its written message, which I rarely make up. I don't think I'd be capable of making them up, I try to take messages which are a little, kind of universal, or in a way, either completely meaningless or so involved that they become ludicrous [...] things that have impact in as many ways as I can think of.”<sup>16</sup>

He chose calculated, gender-specific role models, such as the always beautiful and seductive women in a mostly domestic environment, who are at the same time specialists for the household and always with their loved ones in their thoughts, as well as the weeping women who always remain beautiful and in control (pp. 92–93, 115–17, 121, 122). In this way, he renewed the classic themes of modernist painting, such as the loneliness of man—because the simple slogans of his protagonists are mostly in thought bubbles and not in speech balloons.

In the “post Pop” period of the 1970s to 1990s, inspired by Picasso and Henri Matisse, Lichtenstein looked back on his own work in monumental studio or interior paintings (pp. 158, 198–211). In these, in addition to his own paintings, such as *Look Mickey*, he also satirically quoted works by fellow artists such as Warhol (pp. 116, 207).

Lichtenstein's art is neither affirmative nor moralizing. It reflects an attitude toward consumer culture that was already ambivalent in the 1960s. He recognized the aesthetics and potential of this purely commercial pictorial machinery for his art, which enabled him to achieve a presence for his works on a par with Abstract Expressionism.

"[Pop Art] is based on commercial illustration... We were polluted by it. [...] It changed the landscape a lot, in the 1950s. You were aware that the real architecture was not Le Corbusier but McDonald's hamburger stands... [...] Whatever was new in environment went through this filter of commercial art and had a certain kind of appearance and feeling that we try to get."<sup>17</sup>

Every one of his paintings makes visible the aesthetics of consumption, a taste aimed at the masses and subject to the simple recipe for success in marketing: brutalization. In a 1964 interview, Lichtenstein tried to make it clear that he used the directness and lack of reflection of advertising as a stylistic device for his art, not to change society:

"I'm interested in portraying a sort of anti-sensibility that pervades the society and a kind of maybe gross over-simplification. I use that more as style than as actuality. I transform it into a component of style. [...] Pop deals with using commercial subject matter, and commercial subject matter seems to lack sensitivity usually. [...] I think it's the energy that the society has that is interesting. [...] most of our communication, somehow or other, is governed by advertising. [...] So that almost all of the landscape, all of our environment seems to be made up partially of a desire to sell products. This is the landscape that I'm interested in portraying. [...] I'm really interested in doing a painting [...] but I don't think I'm interested in the subject matter to try to teach society anything, or to try to better our world in any way. [...] I think it's probably this lack of sensibility appearance, a lack of refinement, lack of judgement, the kind of immediate, not contemplative answers that society keeps giving us. [...] I'm not interested in promoting that, but it's a stylistic appearance that I want my work to have. I think it gives it a kind of brutality and maybe hostility that is useful to me in an aesthetic way."<sup>18</sup>

His deliberately empty images, which have mutated into signs, are immediately comprehensible and have become instantly successful icons. They address the contemporary overload caused by the myriad of unfiltered images and information and the lack of substance in relationships, art, and thought. Lichtenstein's sensitivity to an ambiguous sign language becomes apparent only upon closer inspection. He used the aggressiveness of everyday culture for his art; he responded to the inflation of images by adopting the loudness and insensitivity of the mainstream, without, however, making a political statement.

<sup>1</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Gene R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from Eight Painters, Part I: Jim Dine, Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol," *ARTnews* 62, no. 7 (November 1963): 24–27, 59–64, here 63.

<sup>2</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in William Furlong, *Speaking of Art: Four Decades of Art in Conversation* (New York: Phaidon, 2010), 94–98.

<sup>3</sup> Dorothy Seiberling, "Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?" *Life* 56, no. 5 (January 31, 1964): 79–83.

<sup>4</sup> "Jackson Pollock: Is He the Greatest Living Painter in the United States?" *Life* 27, no. 6 (August 8, 1949): 42–45.

<sup>5</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?," 63 (see note 1).

<sup>6</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in John Gruen, *The Artist Observed: 28 Interviews with Contemporary Artists* (Atlanta: A Cappella Books, 1991), 222–26.

<sup>7</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?," 25, 63 (see note 1).

<sup>8</sup> See also Michael Lobel, *Image Duplicator: Roy Lichtenstein and the Emergence of Pop Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 12.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Simms, ed., *The New York Tapes: Alan Solomon's Interviews for Television,*

*1965–66* (Washington, DC: Archives of American Art – Smithsonian Institution and Circle Books, 2023), 276.

<sup>10</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Furlong, *Speaking of Art*, 94–98 (see note 2).

<sup>11</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Simms, *The New York Tapes*, 269 (see note 9).

<sup>12</sup> See Lobel, *Image Duplicator*, 31–39 (see note 8).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> A speech bubble drawn by Roy Lichtenstein, in Anice Kandell, *Art 1963: A New Vocabulary*, brochure of the Art Council of the YM/YWHA, Philadelphia, 1962.

<sup>15</sup> For more on this topic, see Rüdiger Suchsland, "Disney im Naziland," *Jüdische Allgemeine* (August 17, 2015), <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/kultur/disney-in-naziland/> (accessed January 8, 2023).

<sup>16</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Simms, *The New York Tapes*, 275 (see note 11).

<sup>17</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Furlong, *Speaking of Art*, 94–98 (see note 2).

<sup>18</sup> Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in Simms, *The New York Tapes*, 263–66 (see note 11). I thank Jack Cowart, Director of the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, for the reference to this publication.