

SCHOLASTIC

ART<sup>®</sup>

ROY

LICHTENSTEIN

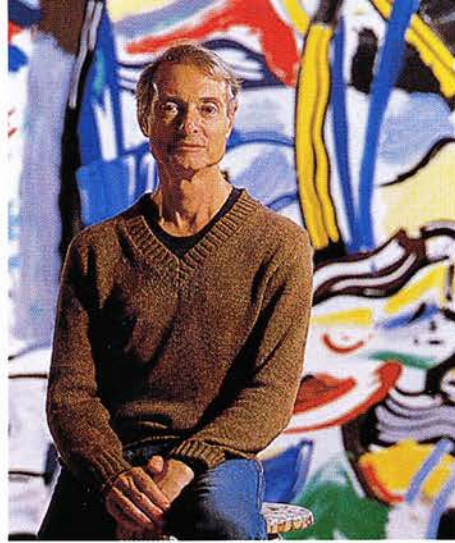
Working with Pop Art

MARCH 1999  
VOL. 29, No. 5  
ISSN 1060-832X.  
PUBLISHED IN  
COOPERATION  
WITH THE NATIONAL  
GALLERY OF ART.  
FORMERLY ART & MAN





**COVER:** Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997). *Oh, Jeff ... I Love You, Too ... But ...*, 1964. Oil. 48" x 48". Private Collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein



# Roy Lichtenstein "THE IN A

**"I want to make art so awful no one will hang it." —Roy Lichtenstein**

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### POSTAL INFORMATION

Scholastic Art® (ISSN 1060-832X; in Canada, 2-c no. 9360) is published six times during the school year, Sept./Oct., Nov., Dec./Jan., Feb., Mar., Apr./May, by Scholastic Inc. Office of Publication: 2931 E. McCarty Street, P.O. Box 3710, Jefferson City, MO 65102-3710. Periodical postage paid at Jefferson City, MO 65101 and at additional offices. Postmasters: Send notice of address changes to SCHOLASTIC ART, 2931 East McCarty St., P.O. Box 3710 Jefferson City, MO 65102-3710.

### PUBLISHING INFORMATION

U.S. prices: \$8.45 each per school year, for 10 or more subscriptions to the same address. 1-9 subscriptions, each: \$19.00 student, \$34.00 Teacher's Edition, per school year. Single copy: \$5.50 student, \$6.50 Teacher's. (For Canadian pricing, visit our Canadian office, address below.) Subscription communications should be addressed to SCHOLASTIC ART, Scholastic Inc., 2931 East McCarty Street, P.O. Box 3710, Jefferson City, MO 65102-3710 or by calling 1-800-631-1586. Communications relating to editorial matter should be addressed to Margaret Howlett, SCHOLASTIC ART, 555 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10012-3999. Art@Scholastic.com. Canadian address: Scholastic-TAB Publications, Ltd., 123 Newkirk Rd., Richmond Hill, Ontario L4C 3G5. Available on microfilm through Xerox University Microfilms, Inc. 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Also available on microfiche through Bell & Howell Micro Photo Division, Old Mansfield Rd., Wooster, OH 44691. Copyright © 1999 by Scholastic Inc. All Rights Reserved. Material in this issue may not be reproduced in whole or in part in any form or format without special permission from the publisher.

Printed in U.S.A.

In 1962, *Life* magazine published an article about an artist whose work was just becoming popular: It was titled *Roy Lichtenstein: Is He the Worst Artist in America?* One art critic wrote, "Roy Lichtenstein makes sows' ears out of sows' ears."\* Another said, "I go to art galleries to escape supermarkets and comic strips. I don't go there to repeat the experience."\*\* Why were these critics so outraged?

Today, these comic strip paintings are regarded as classic examples of *Pop Art*. But there was a time when they were not considered art at all. During the 1940s and '50s, advertisements, billboards, and cartoons were part of American life. But they weren't thought to be a fit subject for art. Most artists worked abstractly. Their thickly painted canvases and expressive brushstrokes represented fine art. So in the 1960s, when Andy Warhol's images of soup cans, Claes Oldenburg's hamburger sculptures, and Roy Lichtenstein's comic-strip paintings appeared in art galleries, critics were furious.

The creators of *Pop Art* believed that *Abstract Expressionism*, the non-representational art that had dominated museums for years, had become tired and empty. They felt this type of art had nothing to do with real life. *Pop* artists admired the energy and simplicity of the commercial images around them. They isolated and enlarged these images

to comment on the media's growing influence on American life. By transforming objects from popular culture, Roy Lichtenstein and the other *Pop* artists were able to revitalize modern art. They helped us see the world around us with fresh eyes.

Born in 1923, Lichtenstein was the son of a New York City real estate agent. While growing up, the artist remembered listening to radio serials and reading comic books. He began studying art at 16. After high school, he went to Ohio State University. In the 1950s, the artist taught while painting and showing his work in New York City.

Early in 1962, Lichtenstein exhibited his comic-strip paintings for the first time. Many of the works in that show have since become some of the most important images in 20th-century art. Lichtenstein did many paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and murals, all inventive variations inspired by his early comic-strip style. The artist died in 1997.



\* Brian O'Dougherty, *New York Times*, 1962.

\*\* Barbara Rose, 1963.

# Lichtenstein: WORST ARTIST "AMERICA"



Lichtenstein's comic-strip paintings featured two kinds of subjects: scenes of violent action (below) or sentimental romance (right).

RIGHT: *Drowning Girl*, 1963. Oil. 67 5/8" x 66 3/4". Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., N.Y. Philip Johnson Fund and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.  
BELOW: *Flatten Sand Fleas*, 1962. Oil. 34" x 47". © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein



# COMICS in

Roy Lichtenstein's interest in using comic book imagery began in the 1950s as "I was drawing little Mickey Mouses for my children, working from bubble-gum wrappers. I thought I'd do one of the comics as is, large, just to see what it would look like." He began to realize that exaggerating the techniques used to print the comics and including text balloons strengthened the images.

When Lichtenstein began to create his giant comic-book paintings, he was not criticizing popular culture. But he knew that by showing consumer culture the way it was, it would end up parodying itself. Comics represented fantasies popular in the 1950s after the end of World War II. The heroine would find everlasting love with her hero. When the war was over, America would be safe forever for the perfect couple and their ideal American family. The women are based on two stereotypes; the "housewife" and the "girl" in distress. The men are all heroic. By taking a comic panel out of its original setting, enlarging it, and putting it into a new context, the artist was able to question these stereotypes.

When you compare the original comic strip (above) with Lichtenstein's painting *Takka Takka* (right), do the two look very different? The artist has changed only a few things, but the alterations are vital. Mainly he has exaggerated what is already there. By making the printing process part of his composition, Lichtenstein reminds us that much of our experience is secondhand and based on reproductions. He parodies the "Benday" screen printing process that breaks images down into dots. He uses basic shapes, thick contour lines, text balloons, and primary colors—red, yellow, blue—to create powerful designs.



The composition of *Takka Takka* has been **simplified** and **abstracted**. The type block takes up more of the picture than it does in the original. This **condenses** the visual below the type so the scene appears to be bursting out of its frame. The weapon has been made **horizontal**. It has been **simplified** to look more machinelike. The human hand has been taken out; the frame is filled with weapons that appear to be operating by themselves. The letters are **enlarged** and seem to resemble machine-gun sounds. **Jagged, repeated diagonal lines** and **explosion shapes** suggest the noise, smoke, light, impact, and smell of war.

The work on pages 8-9 was also taken directly from a comic strip about war. To create *Whaam*, the artist has used a **balanced symmetrical composition**. The two panels are linked together by the **narrow, horizontal line of fire**. To heighten its dynamic feeling, the work is presented as two parts of a sequence—an action and the result of that action.

**"A minor purpose of my war paintings is to put military aggressiveness in an absurd light."** —Roy Lichtenstein

*Takka, Takka*. 1962. Oil. 56" x 68". Museum Ludwig, Cologne. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

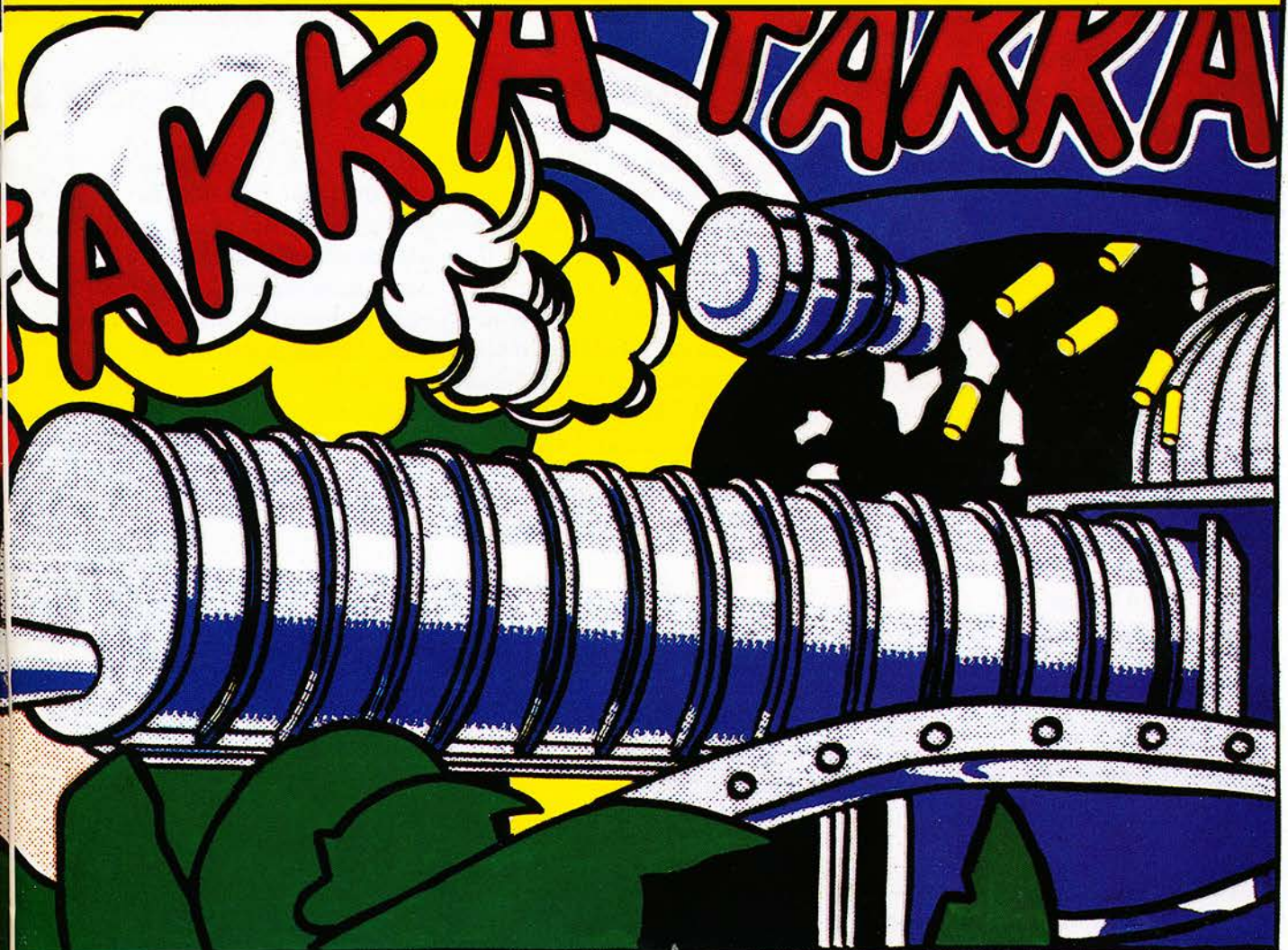


# to Art

“Stereotypes must be rearranged so the image is brought to the highest visual intensity without losing the stereotype itself.”

—Roy Lichtenstein

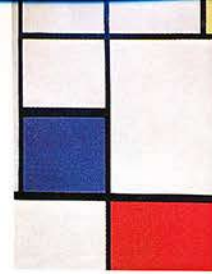
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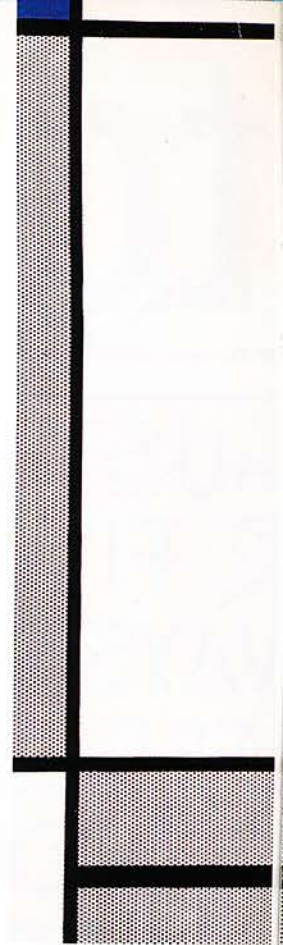
LEFT: Roy Lichtenstein. *Woman with Flowered Hat*, 1963. Oil, 50"x40". Private Collection.

BELOW: Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). *Woman with Flowered Hat*, 1939-40. 28"x23". Private Collection.



ABOVE: Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). *Composition (Blue, Red, Yellow)*, 1930. Sidney Janis Gallery, NY.

RIGHT: Roy Lichtenstein. *Non-objective I*, 1964. Oil, 56"x48". Collection Eli and Edythe Broad.



Later in his career, Roy Lichtenstein began turning other artists' works into Lichtensteins. Through these "takeoffs," the artist comments on the values of today's consumer society. Most of us know great paintings mainly through reproductions. And these copies of great masterpieces have been further commercialized. They appear on shopping bags, T-shirts, jewelry, and greeting cards.

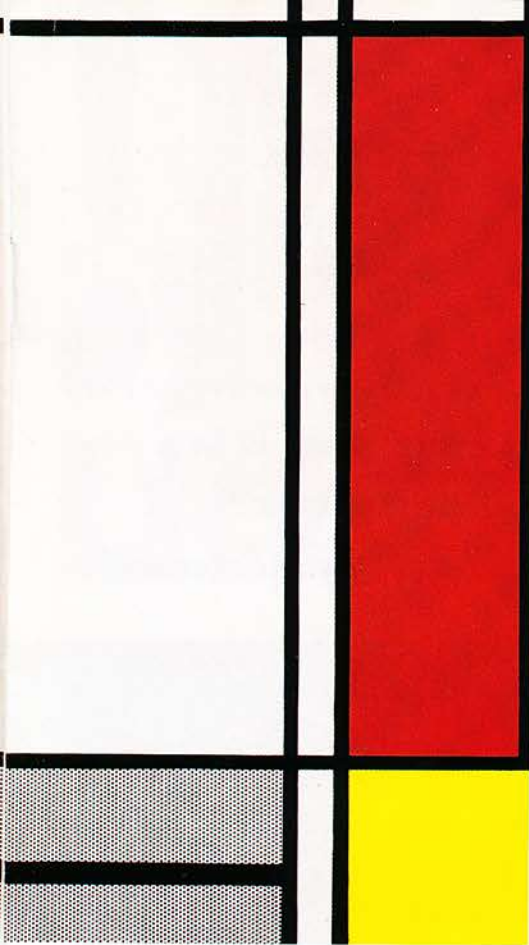
In the works shown here, Lichtenstein has reduced the styles of a number of famous artists to comiclike images. The artist's personal life is as much Lichtenstein's subject as the painting. The distinct style for which each artist is famous has become a brand name or a standardized pattern of reproduction techniques.

## ▲ A Picasso Parody

All throughout most of the 20th century, Pablo Picasso was known as the most famous artist in the world. His colorful life, his many wives, his great wealth were as well-known to most people as his art. Even the smallest scribble by the artist was considered a great masterpiece. Picasso was known especially for his distorted portraits of women. Lichtenstein said, "One has the feeling there should be a reproduction of Picasso in every home." So he created his version (above left) of a cheap reproduction of a Picasso. Lichtenstein translated Picasso's slashing brushstrokes into lines, Benday dots, and flat, primary colors.

"I want to create a new work of art which

# Masterpiece



RIGHT: Roy Lichtenstein, *Still Life with Goldfish Bowl*, 1972. 52" x 42". Private collection.

BELOW: Henri Matisse (1869-1954), *Goldfish*, 1912. Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts, Moscow.



### ▲ Reproducing Mondrian

**T**wentieth-century Dutch artist Piet (Peet) Mondrian was known for his minimal abstractions. In his paintings, Mondrian used only straight black lines and flat red, yellow, or blue rectangles on a white background. Since Lichtenstein felt that an original Mondrian was almost identical to a reproduction, he has merely added his own **screen dot motif** to an exact replica of one of Mondrian's paintings.

### ▲ Imitating Matisse

**M**odern French artist Henri Matisse painted richly colored scenes of the people and objects surrounding him. The goldfish bowl (above left) appeared in many of his works. Matisse's lush color and loose brushstrokes are warm and intimate. Lichtenstein's exaggerated reproduction techniques purposely make the same subject seem **flat, distant, and impersonal**. Matisse sometimes featured his own works in many of his paintings. So Lichtenstein has also included one of his own paintings, *Golf Ball*.

has qualities different from the original.”—Roy Lichtenstein

# TRANSFORMED