

Pop art essay



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The Relevance of Pop Art to the Study of Postmodern Art

The term Postmodern Art is often used to describe art practice from the 1960s onwards. This covers art created from a wide range of medium and experimental forms and art practice which have gradually become mainstream and as a result, occupy a significant place in the art and art history of the twenty-first century. Examples of Postmodern Art are Land art, Performance work, Video, Light and Mechanical installations and Pop art. The cutting edge art of the early part of the twentieth century however, was Abstract Art. Abstract Art paved the way for movements including Expressionism ??“ 1905 to 1930, Cubism – 1907 to 1914, American Expressionism c.

1920, Surrealism ??“ 1920s and Abstract Expressionism (incl. Action painting and Colour field painting) ??“ 1940s. Although these art movements were often seen as radical in their approach to conventional subject matter, they still continued to use traditional painting media on a two dimensional surface. In the United States, up until the 1940s, modern art was for the most part, in the possession of the elite, estimated at being as few as a dozen collectors. During the forties the number of galleries specializing in the sale of American modern art was very small, only around twenty. Visitors to Peggy Guggenheims prestigious Art of this Century Gallery in New York, one of the first to exhibit the works of the Abstract Expressionists, were rare and art wasnt selling well.(see chapter 1, page 2 The Transformation of the Avant-Garde (The New York Art World 1940-1985) Diana Crane, The University of Chicago Press, London, 1987) American artist Stuart Davis (1892-1964), (See Fig1 and Fig 2) was probably one of the first artists to

emerge in the first half of the twentieth century with work which could be termed Pop Art.

In the 1930s his abstract paintings incorporated geometric areas of flat colour and advertising imagery which later became the trade mark of Pop artists (including Andy Warhol) work, in the mid 1960s. Fig 1. Stuart Davis, Lucky Strike, 1921.

Fig 2. Stuart Davis, Edison Mazda, 1924. In the mid 1950s Pop art first appeared when American artist Jasper Johns started incorporating everyday objects into his work (see Fig. 3.) But it was not until the mid 1960s and early 1970s that Pop art emerged as a dominant avant-garde movement.

Fig 3 Jasper Johns “Target with Plaster Casts 1955. Also in the late 1950s, Peter Blake (see fig. 4) and Richard Hamilton (see fig. 5) were part of a group of emerging British Pop artists, using imagery strongly influenced by graphic design and popular culture.

This sparked the emergence of an art form which was instantly more accessible to a wide audience because it relied on everyday objects as its subject matter and incorporated familiar iconography in a figurative style.

Fig. 4 Peter Blake, The First Real Target, 1961. Fig. 5 Richard Hamilton, “Just What Was it That Made Yesterdays Homes So Different So Appealing?”, 1959. From the early 1950s through the late 1960s in New York, which was then regarded as the hub of the Art world, many small galleries began to spring up as a result of an influx of young artists to the area of down town Manhattan. This area attracted many serious painters and sculptors as studio and living space could be found at a relatively inexpensive cost. Because the

audience for contemporary art was small and the venues in which to show few, artists began to band together to launch and maintain galleries as a solution to the lack of other exhibiting opportunities.

This evolved into a neighbourhood in which several co-operative galleries were formed, some now legendary, including the Tanager Gallery. Many of the artists who displayed their work in these galleries have since become well known. Artists who were part of this New York scene in the early 60s were Andy Warhol (see Fig. 6), Willem De Kooning and Roy Lichtenstein. Warhol established the famous Factory studio, which was the hip hangout for artists, recreational drug users, hangers-on, free-thinkers that became known as the Warhol superstars.

These “ art-workers” helped him create his paintings, starred in his films, and basically developed the atmosphere that the Factory has become legendary for. It was famed for its parties in the studio and Warhol and his workers make screen prints and lithographs. Another artists to emerge from the New York art scene were Jim Dine (see Fig. 10), a visual and performance artist, Edward Ruscha (see Fig. 7) and Robert Rauschenberg (see Fig.

8 & 9), painter and sculptor. In 1962 Dine and Ruscha's work was included, along with Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Robert Dowd, Phillip Hefferton, Joe Goode, and Wayne Thiebaud, in the historically important and ground-breaking New Paintings of Common Objects exhibition at the Norton Simon Museum located in Pasadena, California. This exhibition is historically considered one of the first ??? Pop Art??? exhibitions in America.

Robert Rauschenberg used materials including screen print, photographs, oil paints, pieces of wood, found objects and stuffed animals in his combines. His art, though sometimes described as Neo- Dadaist, a label he shared with the painter Jasper Johns, was however, always experimenting with the new, the untried. Rauschenberg, like the other Pop artists, found he could make a commentary on contemporary society using the very images that helped to create that society. The Pop artists started a movement, in a time of social unrest, which shocked America and the art world and changed modern art forever. Suddenly, art produced with items from the everyday environment drew attention to the aesthetic value of American mass produced goods ??“ cars, clothes, domestic appliances, magazines, comics, etc. and provided commercial as well as critical success. Pop art was certainly influenced by Dada and it explored some of the same subjects.

But, Pop art replaced the destructive, satirical, and anarchy of the Dada movement with a homage to the artefacts and icons of modern mass culture.

Fig. 6. Andy Warhol, Soup cans, 1968.

Fig. 7. Edward Ruscha, Standard Station 1966. Fig 8. Robert Rauschenberg, Riding bikes, Berlin, 1998. Fig.

9. Robert Rauschenberg, The Bed., 1955 Fig. 10. Jim Dine, Two Black Hearts 1985.. In the context of Postmodern Art, Pop Art, while emerging in the mid 1960s paved the way for the development of multimedia performance art and conceptual art. Examples of the influence of 60s Pop Art can be observed in successive decades when we view the work of Hannah Wilke (see Fig.

11), Jeff Koons (see Fig. 12.), Damien Hirst (see Fig. 13.), who uses a “factory” setup akin to Andy Warhols, Nan Goldin (see Fig.

14.), a photographer who records a true and compelling record of her life and painter Chuck Close who uses modern day icons as his subject matter. Postmodern art is a term that designates art that is neither painting nor sculpture, but art of the mind rather than art of the eye.

Viewing Pop Art in the context of Postmodern Art, it can be seen as having a profound influence on the dissolution of traditional categories of art and artworks, and encouraging the proliferation of new and hybrid forms of art that have broadened these categories to an unprecedented degree in our time and are likely to inspire generations of artists for generations to come.

Fig. 11. Hannah Wilke, SOS Starification Object Series, 1974-82. Fig.

12. Jeff Koons, Michael Jackson and Bubbles, 1988. Fig. 13. Damien Hirst, LSD, 1999 Fig. 14.

Nan Goldin, Misty and Jimmy Paulette in a Taxi, NYC, 1991 Fig. 15. Chuck Close, Bill Clinton 2007.

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