

Pop Art

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

Today's lesson is about pop art. By the end of the lesson today, you'll be able to identify and define today's key terms, describe the context that influenced the development of pop art, and identify examples of pop art. Pop art undermines the exclusive and elitist nature of high art by incorporating the imagery of popular culture. This lesson covers:

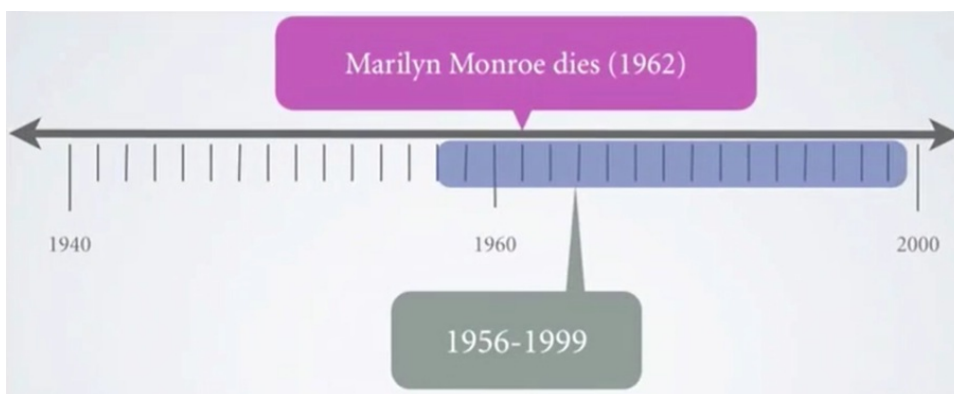


BIG IDEA

Pop art undermines the exclusive and elitist nature of high art by incorporating the imagery of popular culture.

1. Location and Time Period: Pop Art

The art that you're looking at today dates from between 1956 and 1999. This artwork focuses geographically on London, England, the home of Richard Hamilton, and New York City, where Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein worked and died, and where Claes Oldenburg currently lives and works.



2. Richard Hamilton

Pop art undermines the elitist nature of art, incorporating **cultural icon** depictions and elements from advertisements, cartoons, and comics, utilizing imagery from **mass media**. **Pop art** traces its origins back to the work of the Independent Group, which was a group of artists, architects, and writers in Great Britain in the 1950s, and the work of Richard Hamilton, who was also a member of that group.

Although primarily a painter, Hamilton is perhaps best remembered for his collage titled "Just What Is It That

Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?"



Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing? by Richard Hamilton

1956

Collage

Procuring the images from American magazines, Hamilton assembled this composition and displayed it at the art exhibition "This is Tomorrow," in England in 1956. It's a selection of magazine clippings that simultaneously acknowledge the **pop culture** and modernity of the time while departing from the Avant-Garde notions of art proposed by the art critic Clement Greenberg. The influence of Dada collage and Dada artist Marcel Duchamp's concept of the readymade, or **found objects** that are turned into a work of art, also cannot be overlooked.



TERMS TO KNOW

Cultural Icons

Objects or people important or considered valuable in a specific culture.

Mass Media

Any number of ways information is quickly transmitted to large numbers of people including through newspapers, television, internet, or radio.

Pop Art

An art movement where the artist uses common products and images that symbolically represent culture to create artwork.

Popular Culture

Fads, favorites, or well-known commercial objects or activities used by the general public.

Found Object

Everyday objects or materials not usually viewed in the context of fine art that are used by artists to create works of art.

3. Andy Warhol

Pop art and Andy Warhol are virtually synonymous. He is likely the most famous member of this genre and one of the most famous American artists of the 20th century. It is often argued that he is the most important American artist of the later 20th century. Like other pop artists, Warhol used art to undermine the exclusive and elitist nature of high art, especially Abstract Expressionism and the ideas of art critic Clement Greenberg regarding the Avant-Garde and **kitsch**.

Warhol did this by incorporating the imagery of popular culture. One of his favorite subjects was Marilyn Monroe, an enormously popular celebrity who died of a drug overdose in 1962. The following work of art was completed soon after her death.



Marilyn Diptych by Andy Warhol

1962

Acrylic on canvas

It portrays multiples of a single image of Marilyn Monroe, with the left side brightly colored and the right side black and white, eventually fading away. Given the timing of the artwork and knowledge of her personal life, it very well may be symbolic of the duality of her celebrity and personal lives, representing two sides of the same coin: one brightly colored and full of life, the other a monochromatic reality that slowly faded away.



Whereas British artists examined pop art from a more critical point of view, American artists created works that often incorporated parody and a point of view from within the phenomenon. To paraphrase a comment that Warhol once made, pop artists celebrated and portrayed the imagery that abstract expressionists spent their time trying to avoid.

Despite his popularity and status, Warhol seemed grounded in how his art made connections to the culture and values he had been exposed to growing up during the Great Depression. One of his most famous images is that of one of the most recognizable and iconic brands in America:



Campbell's Soup Can I by Andy Warhol

1962

Silkscreen

There are 32 different portraits, each corresponding to the 32 flavors of soup that existed at the time with the Campbell's Soup Company. When arranged for display, they were positioned with four rows of eight cans, as if on a shelf in a grocery store. There's an apparent fascination Warhol has with mass production and the iconic status of products within American culture. Like his painting of Coca Cola bottles, "Campbell's Soup Can" seems to function as both an homage to and recognition of the brand's ubiquity.



TERM TO KNOW

Kitsch

A term given to artwork that is characterized by exaggerated nostalgia or gaudy poor taste.

4. Roy Lichtenstein

Now, while Andy Warhol tended to depict and immortalize specific icons of American culture, such as products and people, the artist Roy Lichtenstein immortalized a particular genre of American consumption—that of comic books. His images were very faithful to their influence, using identical visual themes and even printing techniques, such as the example below:



Drowning Girl by Roy Lichtenstein

1963

Oil and synthetic polymer canvas

An interesting aspect of his work is how it masked more personal themes. He took excerpts from comic panels depicting moments of tension or possible tragedy and created works of art that lasted ad infinitum. In other words, unlike the fanciful reality of the romance comics upon which these images were based, real life doesn't always end so happily.

5. Claes Oldenburg

Claes Oldenburg is a pop artist whose medium is sculpture. His “Typewriter Eraser, Scale X” sculpture depicts his interest in elevating the status of everyday items that he found particularly interesting.



Typewriter Eraser, Scale X by Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen

1999

Stainless steel and cement

Like other pop artists, he was challenging previous notions of art. Within sculpture, he was challenging the idea that public works of art were limited to historical figures or events. His image of a giant, falling eraser instead commemorates an object of interest from his childhood and immortalizes an object that would typically be forgotten or even discarded.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about **pop art**, which undermined the exclusive and elitist nature of high art by incorporating the imagery of popular culture. You learned how to identify and define today's key terms, as well as how to describe the context that influenced the development of pop art. You also learned how to identify examples of pop art, by exploring the work of several artists, including "Just What is it that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?" by **Richard Hamilton**, "Marilyn Diptych" and "Campbell's Soup Can I" by **Andy Warhol**, "Drowning Girl" by **Roy Lichtenstein**, and "Typewriter Eraser, Scale X" by **Claes Oldenburg**.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Ian McConnell



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