

# “POPing ART”

Electronic Art Theory

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“Pop artists made their careers by putting a fresh spin on everyday items. Andy Warhol elevated soup cans and soap pads to fine art and Roy Lichtenstein put comic-strip illustrations in museums, right alongside the old masters.”<sup>1</sup>

When I saw Pop art works in an art book, the Pop art works was funny to me because they were different from other works that I had seen. I thought they are not Art works because the Pop art works include cans, superstars, and junk style objects which I liked, felt, and touched in the life. At this time my Arts, before I saw Pop art works that I had learned from school, were great works that include beautiful ladies, fantastic scenes, serious moods or something that I do not understand. When I asked about some serious works to teachers “I don’t understand this works, this is too hard to me”. They answered, “Because this is Art....”. However, Pop art works came to me smoothly and naturally not because they are easy or familiar to me, but because they come from my culture and life. And then, Pop art became my favor Art. Recently, I have seen a lot of art works that I do not understand. When the artists explained about their works, the answer was the same, “Because my work is Art.....” I felt that their talking was a sort of Performance Art than their great works. Pop art is my main art in my mind. It always makes me fun. That is the why I think Pop art is a real art to me. Art should be easy and fun to the audience.

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<sup>1</sup> David Biedny and Nathan Moody, “Pop Art”, MacUser September 1997, 54-55

Marshall McLuhan believes that the arrival of a new medium consigns prior media to obsolescence. It is true that each new channel of communication has its effect on the existing ones, but so far the effect has been cumulative and expansive. The number of possibilities and combinations increases with each new channel, whereas McLuhan assumes a kind of steady state of a number of messages that cannot be exceeded. Consider the relation of movies and TV. At first, movies patronized the tiny screen and the low-definition image in asides in films; then movies began to compete with TV by expanding into large screens (CinemaScope and Cinerama, for instance) and by using higher-definition film stock (for example, VistaVision). Today, TV shows old movies (more than two years old) continually and in so doing has created a new kind of Film Society audience of TV-trained movie-goers. In addition to making TV films, Hollywood is making sexier and tougher films, leaving the delta of family entertainment largely to TV. Movies, now, are more diversified and aimed at more specialized audiences, which is not what McLuhan's theory (which would expect the extinction of the movie) requires.<sup>2</sup> Marshall McLuhan's theory became the main theoretical background of Pop Art. His brilliant thinking about art also gave a great influence to Pop artists.

The beginning of Pop Art came from the works of Jasper Johns that is a painter and an ideologist. His working method is to deal with whole forms, which involves reducing the number of procedures by which the work of art is constructed. John also used unreliable symbols and signs of extreme banality

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art*, (Collier Macmillan Publishers 1974 by Whitney Museum of

and painted them with a regard for his artistic characterization. "The first stage of Pop art began with Rauchemberg and Johns who are main exponents separate from abstract expressionism. The first Pop art works are based on the 1950s and it also parts from advertisement drawings, design, and poster paintings. The main leaders are Andy Warhol, Roy Lichestein, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Tom Wesselaman and Robert Indiana." <sup>3</sup> Abstract Expressionism had already become an institution, and then, in the last part of the fifties, Jasper Johns and Bob Rauschenberg and others had begun to bring art back from abstraction and introspective stuff. The Pop artists did images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in some split second-comics, picnic tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles-all the great modern things that the Abstract Expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all. <sup>4</sup> In the mid 60's American pop art extends from New York to the West Coast and Canada, and later arrives Europe. In the 60's the hippies were born who is a young person proclaimed the use of drugs, pacifism, and their motto "Make love, not war." In other words, Pop art is an artistic movement that uses technique and the comparison of various elements like canvas, wax, plastic paint, etc. Pop art is together with available materials from present culture. Ironic and protest paintings surge in

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American art), pp.4

<sup>3</sup> University of Guadalajara 1995-1998, <http://udgftp.cencar.udg.mx/ingles/Pintura/pintura20/templ.html>, March 5, 1998. Line 1-7

<sup>4</sup> Andy Warhol & Pat Hackett, "POPism THE WARHOL' S 60s"Harper & Row, Publishers, 1980, pp.3

North America in 1960, being inspired on Dada, for which it is also, called neo-Dadaism.<sup>5</sup>

Dada and Abstract Expressionism together with McLuhan's theory gave a great influence to Pop artists. Dada means "Hobby horse" in French. Dada was a movement that was deliberately shocking, anti-art and anti-sense, an expression of disgust and incomprehension at the world. It became real in Zurich during World War I. A principle leader was Schwitters, who as well as making collages from the worthless materials and he also wrote incomprehensible poetry and gave performances where he would sit in the audience and bark like a dog.<sup>6</sup> Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968) was one of the most important members of the Dada movement in Europe, later moving to New York and one of whose best known works was Fountain, a urinal 'signed' R. Mutt. In 1913 he had pioneered the concept of the Ready made by taking a bicycle wheel and mounting it on a kitchen stool. By creating an artwork from an ordinary household object, Duchamp opened up a debate about the nature of a work of art and the creative role of the artist that has had a major influence on the avant-garde art of this century, including Pop art. Dada is an important ancestor of Pop art. Like Pop art Dada was opposed to the classical, the exclusive and the pretentious in art.

The difference between Duchamp and Warhol is that Duchamp used the ready-made as an aggressive insertion into the field of art and Warhol uses the ready-made, such as a photograph from the public domain, to saturate his art

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<sup>5</sup> University of Guadalajara 1995-1998, <http://udgftp.cencar.udg.mx/ingles/Pintura/pintura20/templ.html>,

with life's traces. The texture of visual and social reality that photographs convey is an essential part of his art.<sup>7</sup>

Pop Art is a hybrid, the product of two abstraction-dominated decades, and, as such, is the heir to an abstract rather than a figurative tradition. Pop Art has more in common with the American post-painterly abstraction than with contemporary realism.<sup>8</sup> Abstraction is an ancestor of Pop art that is a main movement in painting in the 1950s and 1960s. " Pollock and Rothko were prominent Abstraction artists. Roy Lichtenstein's screenprint *Brushstroke* of 1965 is an ironic comment on such painting. He has completely destroyed the expressive qualities of the mark by turning it into a mechanically reproduced standard version. Unlike Abstract Expressionism Pop Art is an inclusive art. Pop Art makes reference to real objects, people, and events, although a number of Pop Artists presented their subject matter in ways that were abstract and allusive.<sup>9</sup>

Historically, Pop Art can be said to react from a contemporary culture in which reality was subordinated to the interest of art. The subsequent de-individualization of art, its mechanical and anonymous quality, stood at the end of a long process of development in art history. Pop Art holds up a mirror to industrial, mass society with its technological progress, its expansion of mechanically reproducible media and its commercialization of popular culture.

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March 5, 1998. Line 12-16

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e\\_ed\\_pop\\_PopHistory.html](http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e_ed_pop_PopHistory.html) , 1998

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art*, (Collier Macmillan Publishers 1974 by Whitney Museum of American art), pp.113

<sup>8</sup> Lucy R. Lippard contributions by Lawrence Alloway, Nancy Marmer and Nicolas Calas, *Pop Art*, Oxford University Press, pp.9

Pop Art is, for the time being, positioned at the end of a process that reduced reality to the status of a consumer product. "Pragmatism, realism, objectivity, optimism and entertainment are typical characteristics of Pop Art. Both the fascination for advertisements, for poster and movie painting and for consumer goods packaging, and the delight in the trivial and simple, in apparently meaningless, banal and trite things are deeply rooted in the Pop Art history. Pop Art can be seen in conjunction with any other realism in the history of art whose aim was to give a routine, harmonious appearance to the contradictions and absurdities of the material world. "<sup>10</sup>

Andy Warhol (1928-87) is a representative American Pop Artist. In 1952 he had his first one-man exhibition at the Hugo Gallery, New York. In 1954 he was in a collective exhibition at the Loft Gallery, New York. In 1956 he had an individual exhibition of his drawings for Boy Book at the Bodley Gallery, and his Golden Shoes were exhibited in Madison Avenue. In 1960 he began to make paintings based on newspapers, advertising and other images from popular culture, including the comic-book characters Superman and Dick Tracy. When he saw Roy Lichtenstein's comic-derived work exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1961, he began to focus his attention on food and drink products. In 1962 he produced his silkscreen prints on canvas of dollar notes, Campbell's Soup cans, Marilyn Monroe, etc. <sup>11</sup>

Campbell's Soup is a popular brand of soup, available in thirty-two different flavors in the early 1960s. "When someone asked him why he used the

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e\\_ed\\_pop\\_PopHistory.html](http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e_ed_pop_PopHistory.html) , 1998

Campbell's Soup tins in his work, Warhol said that as he had soup for lunch every day for twenty years it seemed like an obvious choice." Soup cans appeared in Warhol's work throughout the 1960s and 1970s. He showed only Soup Can pictures of identical size, hung in rows. The exhibition made his reputation. The cans appeared singly, in groups, with peeling labels and in other formats. He started his series of disaster pictures: Car Crash, Plane Crash, Suicide, Tunafish Disaster and Electric Chair in between 1962 and 1964. In 1963 he made the movies Sleep (6 hours long) and Empire (8 hours long). In 1964 his Flower Pictures were exhibited at the Gallery Sonnabend, Paris. He was also forced for political reasons to paint over his Thirteen Most Wanted Men which he had attached to the wall of the New York State Pavilion for the World's Fair in New York. He made his first sculptures with silkscreen prints of company cartoons.

Screen-printing is a printing technique involving the use of stencils. Pop Artists such as Roy Lichtenstein took up screen-printing. Silkscreening enabled Warhol to create "an assembly line effect" in his work. He said "In my art work, hand painting would take much too long and anyway that's not the age we live in. Mechanical means are today, and using them I can get more art to people." Warhol and Rauschenberg, in their silk-screened paintings, both depend on the equation of photographic textures with real world events. This began with nineteenth-century newspaper photographs and was continued by twentieth-century picture magazines; the movies and TV have, in different ways,

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e\\_ed\\_pop\\_PopHistory.html](http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e_ed_pop_PopHistory.html) , 1998

maintained the idea of photography as the most evidential channel of communication. The fading or loss of detail that occurs within silk-screened images is like life itself when it has been photographed and reproduced. In addition, the repetition of imagery from one work to another produces an effect of proliferation, as his module is extended beyond the borders of single works. Thus, no one painting can exhaust an image's meaning; each painting is part of a group that extends into the world beyond its edges. It is this sustained flow of images that acts as a metaphor, though not as the fact, of mass production.<sup>12</sup>

In 1967 he produced the first record of the rock band "the Velvet Underground" and between 1966 and 1968 made several films with them. In 1968 he had an exhibition at the Moderna Museet, Stockholm. In 1968 he brought out his novel "a", which consisted of telephone calls recorded in his Factory. In 1969 the first number of the magazine "Interview" appeared, which Warhol helped bring out. In 1980 he became production manager of the cable TV station "Andy Warhol's TV". In the same year POPism, The Warhol '60s was published. Warhol is one of the few artists this century to have enjoyed the celebrity status of his famous subjects. He survived an assassination attempt in 1963 and died in 1987 after a routine gall-bladder operation.

The sense of the mass production of the image is intensified by aspects of Warhol's technique other than serial repetition. We can see even in reproduction that there are slight variations among the hundred faces in the

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<sup>11</sup> Tom Staudek, 1998, <http://www.fi.muni.cz/~toms/PopArt/Biographies/warhol.html>

Marilyn Diptych and among the 210 Coca-Cola Bottles. This is achieved in two principal ways. First, by 1962 Warhol had begun to use a screen printing technique in his pictures, which allowed a monochrome photographic image to be repeated at will across the canvas. By altering the quantity of ink on the screen the image would come out either darker or paler – to the point of obliterating the image in either direction. The right panel of the Marilyn Diptych was left at this stage. Second, by masking off various areas of the image on the screen, Warhol was then able to lay down five different colors on and around the faces in the left panel. Several of these are not registered particularly accurately, which also produces small but significant variations. We might expect these variations, which serve to make each of the Marylins technically unique, to distract from the mechanical implications of the work. In fact something like the opposite happens. The apparently careless quantification of images does far more to amplify than negate the mass produced and impersonal mood of the image, as does the use of sharp, hard, color which treats all areas as equal flat islands, irrespective of whether it coincides with face, lips, eyelids, dress or background.<sup>13</sup>

All art begins with dividing spaces that exist all objects on the earth and thought in you mind. The definition of space is important to artists. I think that all people including artists can not erase or create new spaces, but they only divide the space to make a new style of space. Warhol was a person who

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<sup>12</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art*, (Collier Macmillan Publishers 1974 by Whitney Museum of American art), pp.113-114

<sup>13</sup> Liz Dawtrey, Toby Jackson, Mary Masterton, Pam Meecham and Paul Wood, “Investigating Modern Art”, *The Open University* 1996, pp.132

understands space. "Space is all at once and thought is one thought, but my mind divides its spaces into spaces and thoughts into thoughts. Like a large condominium... To be really rich, I believe, is to have one space. One big empty space. I really believe in empty spaces, although as an artist, I make a lot of junk. Empty space is never-wasted space. Wasted space is any space that has art in it. An artist is somebody who produces things that people don't need to have. Business Art is a much better thing to be making than Art, because Art doesn't support the space it takes up, whereas Business Art does. If Business Art doesn't support its own space it goes out-of-business."<sup>14</sup> Warhol didn't really see his art as junk, though. He was something of an ecologist. He recycled every cultural item. "I always like to work on leftovers, doing the leftover things. You are recycling work and you are recycling people, and you are running your business as a by-product of other businesses" "I think a lot about "space writers"-the writers who get paid by how much they write. When Picasso died, I read that he had made four thousand masterpieces in his lifetime and I thought, 'Gee I could do that in a day.'...And they'd all be masterpieces because they'd all be the same painting...even when the subject is different people always paint the same painting." Warhol's routine was of absolutes: repetition, reuse, recycling always the same, or else one new thing only once. This went for his TV viewing or eating a box of chocolates. He said, "It freed his thoughts to repeat things and clearly recycling form released him of any illusion as to forms intrinsic capacity to carry meaning or ideology.

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<sup>14</sup> Andy Warhol, *Philosophy of Pop Art*, 1975

Consumption drives routine in Warhol, as a mode for liberating oneself of ends.”<sup>15</sup>

Another great pop artist “Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997)” was born in 1923 in New York. His early work consisted of small-scale paintings relating to American History subjects and the Wild West. In 1951 he had his first one-man exhibition at the Carlebach Gallery, New York. Until 1957 he worked as a commercial artist and designer and did display work for shop windows. Toward the end of the 1950s he began to make drawings of Walt Disney characters and inserted hidden references to Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny into what appeared to be Abstract Expressionist paintings. In 1960 he began to use typical elements of commercial art, comics and advertisements in his drawings and painting.

Comics are a popular source of Pop art. Comics are in many ways the ultimate low art source for fine art, being cheap, commercial, crude, childlike, exciting, bright and fantastic. Lichtenstein is best known for his appropriation of imagery and the visual language of comics, and Warhol also used Superman, Dick Tracy and Popeye as sources in a number of early works. In Britain Peter Blake made paintings of Children Reading Comics in 1954 and 1956, and Paolozzi incorporated covers and cut-outs from trashy pulp and science fiction periodicals and comics, including Mickey Mouse, into his BUNK collages. “Eduardo Paolozzi's BUNK prints are lithographic reproductions of a series of collages he made during the 1940s and 1950s. The original works were made in

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<sup>15</sup> Andy Warhol, *Philosophy of Pop Art*, 1975

notebooks and were used as the basis of a lecture, also called BUNK, which he gave to The Independent Group at the ICA in 1952. The importance of these works, as a form of proto-pop, has long been acknowledged. In them Paolozzi gleefully mixes up engineering, medicine, Mickey Mouse, science fiction, and a host of other preoccupations culled from the pages of pulp fiction magazines, pin-up books and The National Geographic. This imagery is presented without comment."

In 1961 Lichtenstein made his first pictures based on cartoon frames, featuring Mickey and Popeye, and household objects such as washing machines. When they were exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery in 1962, the paintings caused a mixture of shock and excitement. By 1962 Lichtenstein had developed his appropriation of commercial and comic-book styles even further and was using the Benday dot system to approximate the textures of commercial screen-printing. When asked, "What is Pop Art?" in 1963, Lichtenstein replied "I don't know - the use of commercial art as subject matter in painting, I suppose. It was hard to get a painting that was despicable enough so that no one would hang it - everybody was hanging everything. It was almost acceptable to hang a dripping paint rag. Everybody was accustomed to this. The one thing everyone hated was commercial art; apparently they didn't hate that enough either." He recycled comics, and then created new style art. <sup>16</sup>

The knowledge of Lichtenstein's source reveals that the act of switching an image from one channel (printing) into another (painting) is fairly complex.

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<sup>16</sup> Tom Staudek, 1998, <http://www.fi.muni.cz/~toms/PopArt/Biographies/lichtenstein.html>

It involves Lichtenstein's view of style no less than his view of the mechanics of composition. Lichtenstein's use of style as subject matter is an essential part of his personal work as well as characteristic of Pop art, by and large, as an art of quotations, translations, imitations, and double-takes. A possible analogy would be to nineteenth-century historicism, when the traditional custom of respectful quotation from the classics expanded to embrace all periods and countries as sources, There is a comparable abundance in the assimilation of a wide range of sign-systems in Pop art and the devising of original connections between the disjunct materials.<sup>17</sup>

The art critic Lawrence Alloway, is credited 'pop art' in an essay, 'The arts and the mass media'. However, he was not referring to Pop Art as it is presented in this exhibition, but the rather more vague notion of "mass-produced folk art", meaning art produced by and for the masses. He came very close to pointing at the future concerns of Pop.

Pop Art is conceptual. "Pop Art conceptions of style stem from one of art's central themes, namely its concern with its own medium: l'art pour l'art, the work of art as an object, the image, the act of painting, the painting itself, painting materials, packaging, art history, parody, abstraction, composition. Pop artists saw their work as anti-art, at least in relation to traditional notions of art. " Pop Art can be used to characterize a cultural movement which had to do with a particular generation, and in which art and artists entered into very

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence Alloway, *American Pop Art*, (Collier Macmillan Publishers 1974 by Whitney Museum of American art), pp.75-78

different relationships with popular culture and their social environment in general. <sup>18</sup>

In the sixties one thesis became a main subject about the birth of a new media landscape. "The medium is the message" was Marshall McLuhan's book of the psychological and sociological consequences of the mass media. He found that the mass media industries changed the culture, art and behavioral norms of a society by changing the consciousness of the people. New technology changes the present culture and then the changed culture change people's thinking. Pop artists are motivated by the new culture, captured their ideas and created them. <sup>19</sup>

The new media necessitate a restructuring of our thoughts and feelings. They require new habits of attention with the ability to move in all directions and dimensions simultaneously. Since art, like life, must extend its boundaries to deal with changes in the environment, the major issues no longer hinge upon the creation of enduring masterpieces as the unique and solid repositories for human energy. The new problems for art concern the constant redefinition of its boundaries, and more process-oriented distribution of energy. Changes in the way that we live in the world cause changes in the way that we live in the world cause changes in the way we do our work, as well as changes in what work we do. Before the electronic age the various channels of information – painting, music, literature-were held in balance and did not infringe upon each other very much. Mass communication, television in particular, appropriates

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<sup>18</sup> [http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e\\_ed\\_pop\\_PopHistory.html](http://www.ecn.co.uk/PopArt/e_ed_pop_PopHistory.html)

relentlessly from all other media: films, literature, graphic design, theatre, events. It acts as a great leveller, while also providing techniques for combining many separate frames of reference. As a result, widely separated experiences are being brought under one comprehensive and simultaneous formula.<sup>20</sup>

Now, our culture is moving to Computer culture. Computer is making a new Art, life, culture and custom, and the high technology change all of environment. It also brings a new art style, Computer art. However, nobody brings the new art style to the present culture not as like Pop art presented cultural figures in 1960s' popular culture. In 2000s Computer art will be a main stream art as Pop art was a main in 1960s. To be a successful art, Computer art should be conceptual. Pop artists understood their culture and accept it to their mind, and then changed it to a new style art, Pop art. That is the why computer artist should learn from Pop art. As Pop artists recycled their cultural elements, new technology artists should recycle themselves and the computer culture.

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<sup>19</sup> Tom Staudek, <http://www.fi.muni.cz/~toms/PopArt/Overview/media.html>, 1998

<sup>20</sup> John Russell and Suzi Gablik, "Pop Art Redefined", Frederick A. Praeger Publishers 1969, pp. 12-13