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<div align="center">Deciphering the Value of Pop Art</div>

The growing world of art is full of content and ideas that are always changing and developing from day to day. Art movements will gain popularity and soar to the top of the creative charts to then inevitable fizzle out and move to the back burner as the next big trend captivities the interests of both artists and consumers. We can find influence, intentionality, and impact within many of the movement that have come and gone and the discussions that they have left us with. The Pop Art movement is in no way undiscussed today as many of the prominent artists of this era, such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, are considered to be some of the most credited artists of the 20th century. As we continue through this analysis of the world of Pop Art, we will determine the potential value that it holds as being a credible and cultivated aspect of art by examining a few works created by well know Pop Artists.

Andy Warhol, Marilyn Monroe Series, Silkscreen Print on Canvas, 1962
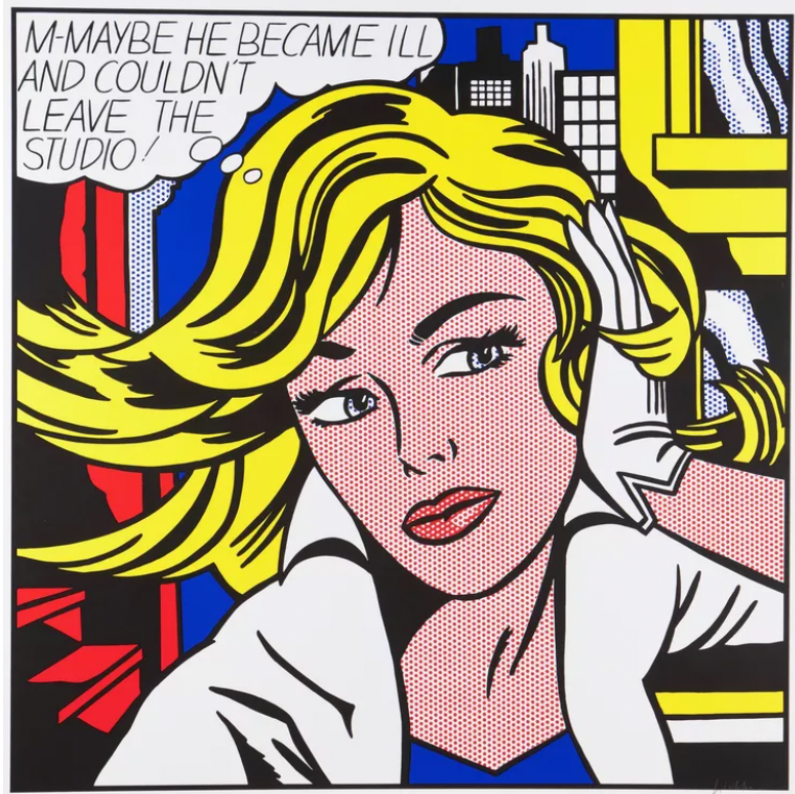
Roy Lichtenstein, M-Maybe, Colored Silkscreen on Cardboard, 1965

Robert Rauschenberg, Untitled: Watercolor, graphite, gouache, and solvent transfer on paper,

1968

Forming towards the end of the 1950's in both Europe and North America, Pop Art was the growing movement following the highly influential movement of Abstract Expressionism, which was the dominating creative form throughout the 1950's (Galenson, Section 2). After growing distaste for the high personal standards and gestural human touches present in Abstract Expressionism, many young artists sought to create art that broke away from these long-standing individualized standards. Artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns openly spoke out against the presence of Abstract Expressionism. From Johns himself, he said, "There was this idea associated with Abstract Expressionism that the work was a primal expression of feeling, and I know that was not what I wanted my work to be like." (Galenson, Section 3). A sense of impersonality was the goal present within many works of Pop Art. The ability to identify a personal style throughout different works was not always sought after by Pop Artists, as some even though the ease of identifiability was too personal of an element within their works. An artistic style could be seen as filter and limiter to potential creative processes and goals. The innovative ideas presented by each of the artists were part of the driving factor for what landed in the art world. Pop Art lacked the value that Abstract Expressionism had on the process of creating art as it only focused on the image of the completed piece. Many artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Frank Stella already had a completed vision when they were about to start creating a piece. Stella was quoted saying, "The painting never changes once I've started to paint on it. I work things out beforehand in the sketches." Lichtenstein too commented on his artistic process, saying his work is, "The same kind of thing you find in Stella...where the image is very restricted. And I think that is what's interesting people these days: that before you start painting the painting, you know exactly

what it's going to look like." (Galenson, section 3). This impersonal approach to art within the Pop Art movement is shown through many ways, whether it is its subject material, its process of creation, or in its relationship to its artists.

Our first piece and artist that we will be examining for our appraisal of Pop Art is Andy Warhol, and his Marilyn Monroe Series. Warhol entered the art world in New York City during the 1950's. Before he began gaining traction in popularity, he started out as an artist for commercial properties. From just illustrating the drawings of clothing brands, he already had the concepts that evolved into Pop Art in his mind during his creation process. "Warhol's use of everyday objects and commercial poster art aimed to blur the lines between high and low art, and the aesthetic and ordinary, while his representation of the rich and powerful through a medium hitherto regarded as cheap and disposable evokes the transitory nature of success and status and implies a many-facedness on the part of its subjects" (Pagliari). Andy Warhol's vision within his work was aimed to deplete the image of prosperity that rich people held, stripping them of their personal representation through the clothing that they wore. This idea presented in Warhol's early works aligns with the concepts of impersonal work that many Pop Artists would come to make.

Created in 1962, Warhol's series of Marilyn Monroe silkscreen prints were created as a direct result of Monroe's death just weeks prior. The colorful yet repetitive prints were seen with mixed reviews as many suspected their creation was a cash grab and popularity stunt. These accusations would continue with many of Warhol's future series, most notably his print series of Jackie Kennedy after the assassination of her husband in 1963 (Pagliari). Looking at the Marilyn Monroe series, we can see the repetitive image of Monroe being copied and pasted

from her work in the 1953 film, Niagara. Warhol's process of creating the prints was done using a very cut and dry method. This resulted in his prints retaining the same form throughout each version. Aside from the color used and how the print quality turned out, each of these works were identical. Here, we see the impersonal approach of Pop Art mention prior being used. There was no set message being presented in the Monroe series. The use of color was sporadic and not representative of any emotional presentation. Johnathan Fineberg discusses this presentation of Marilyn Monroe is his textbook analyzing works of art since 1940. "…the mechanical repetition of her portrait makes her seen paper-thin, robbing her of any sense of existence beneath a superficial image. It is a frightening annihilating depersonalization and echoes an anxiety that underlies the artist's image of himself" (Fineberg, pg. 245) We can see the restricted approach that Warhol has created in this work as well as the disassociation with the sense of reality that his Marilyn Monroe series possesses. The nature of his work is similar to that of our next artist and work up for discussion, Roy Lichtenstein.

Lichtenstein entered the world in the early 1960's. One of his first pieces that gained traction was a recreation of a Mickey Mouse comic strip. Within this piece, Lichtenstein uses the primary colors alongside white to illustrate the image. His following works would later incorporate the color black as well as Ben-Day dots. When looking at Lichtenstein's piece, "M-Maybe," we can see the use of Ben-Day dots on the woman's skin. The Ben-Day dots were used to create more instances of color within his works by adding a second color to a pre-existing area. When creating one of his works, Lichtenstein would first take a sourced image and then crop the framing of the piece. Small adjustments to the color and the text would follow next in

the silk-screening process. This process was also implemented in his piece, "M-Maybe," by changing the color of the shirt originally worn by the woman and then adding the Ben-Day dots.

Lichtenstein faced some criticism and mixed reviews for his works mainly due to where he located his, "source material." Nearly all of his works were recreations or heavily influenced by comic book strips and advertising that were used at the time. The subject of his pieces ranged anywhere from action scenes between enemy war planes to damsels in distress, much like the woman in his piece, M-Maybe. The topic of legitimacy and authenticity began to come to a head as Lichtenstein grew in the world of art. Douglas McClellan, an author for the *Artforum Magazine* commented on Lichtenstein's work, criticizing it for ripping off an already illegitimate art form, "In the funnies, the world of human happenings is comfortably simplified by flaccid drawing, the only dimension is conveyed by mechanical dots, and life is represented by triumphant balloons of platitudinous speech rising from the mouths of the characters. It is like shooting fish in a barrel to parody a thing that has so long parodied itself" (Beaty 257). Other art critics, like Lawrence Alloway, had a different opinion on Lichtenstein's works, He argued that his works were appropriate translations of their comic book source material, "… it makes no difference whether Lichtenstein invented or copied particular comic-book images (he worked both ways), because a reference to the general style of the comics is legible" (Beaty 255). Lichtenstein's approach to his creation process is supportive of the elements of Pop Art. The single cell recreations of popular comic strips leaves the pieces detached from the emotions that their original counterparts had. Due to the fact that his art was recreations of other works, Lichtenstein was able to avoid creating a personal artistic style that would leave his artwork easily identifiable. His pieces were also very cut and dry, similar to Andy Warhol, in

that they were deprived of artistic creativity, leaving only color to be the interpretive element present in his works. The clean and repetitiveness that results from the use of silk screen printing process that both Warhol and Lichtenstein used also helped to remove any artistic gestures in both of their works. We can see the elements of Pop Art once again in our last piece up for analysis by Robert Rauschenberg.

Rauschenberg began to create his works in the late 1940's and early 1950's, predating the start of what is considered Pop Art. His stylistic approach changed and developed as he grew as an artist. Many of his early works explored elements from Abstract Expressionism, but he soon moved away from its influence in 1953, denouncing it entirely (Fineberg, 169). His next big series of his career was his combines. These mixed media pieces were combinations of traditional art mediums with material found objects. In 1962 however, he began to move away from his combine works as he wanted to keep the subject of his work even more vague than it currently was. The use of found objects such as paper cutouts and photographic images still remained and became a bit for of the visual focus of his works. His piece from 1968, "Untitled," is a great example of one of these works that I got to see for myself at the MIA back in September. Hidden within this pieces' layers of watercolor and graphite, are the images of an oil rig, a candelabra, the face of a clock, and many other images of objects from day-to-day life. The random juxtaposition of the scribbles and colors as well as the hidden imagery leaves the viewer with little idea as to what the message is. This ambiguity is precisely what Rauschenberg is trying to achieve. Attached next to this piece, the label goes into detail explaining what Rauschenberg was trying to present, "… the interpretation of this aggregated compositions was largely left to the viewer, who must draw on their own memories, association, and knowledge

to extract meaning." Tom Folland's article discussing the artistic practices and works of Rauschenberg gives us some insight and explanation to the use of visibility and conceptual ambiguity through the use of Leo Steinburg's essay title, "Other Criteria." "If some collage element, such as a pasted-down photograph, threatened to evoke a topical illusion of depth, the surface was casually stained or smeared with paint to recall its irreducible flatness" (Folland, 356). Rauschenberg made sure to go out of his way to keep his pieces as devoid of emotion as possible. We can see through this piece that Rauschenberg invited an impersonal approach to his later works as a way to separate himself from the prudent emotions found within Abstract Expressionism. His use of found images and pictures left each of his works distinctly different from each other, further supporting the idea of a separation from the artist and the use of a personal style. Rauschenberg gives us a unique take on how to look at Pop Art through his found objects and juxtaposition of different mediums and imagery.

Now, looking back on Pop Art as a whole, I believe that we can see a well thought out and intentional moment that deserves to be treated as such. From an outsider or uninterested point of view, Pop Art could appear as a nonsensical attention-seeking display of art with its sometimes vague or even exploitive nature, but that only accounts for the face value that its works hold. Behind their bright colors or abstract forms, you can find well thought out and executed works that serve their own unique purposes. Pop Art is not art that was just made for art's sake, it was rebellious content that served to break away from long standing traditions that some argued was hold back that world of art from growing and developing new ideas. The ambiguity of subject matter or emotion found in many pop works was an intentional approach that was done to create uncertainty within its viewers and actually force them to think

abstractly about art as opposed to observing a piece and instantly gaining a picture of what message it is trying to present. Pop Art broke away from the idea that artists have to have a cohesive artistic style that was identifiable to them. Since pieces didn't have to stay true to the previous works that came before them, artists had a greater expanse of content and techniques that they could apply to their creative process. This kept Pop Art fresh and innovative as opposed to many of the movement that came before. The use of impersonal approaches also assisted Pop Artists during their creative processes. Without having to be attached to the meaning of the piece, artists could do quick and simple tests of different technical approaches to see what best achieved the idea that they were attempting to achieve. Their lack of attachment helped them to best achieve art that was as separate from ideas of Abstract Expressionism as possible. From what Pop Art has presented and achieved, I believe that it has successful created meaningful art that is absolutely deserving of the credibility and attention that many other art movements receive.

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