The 1960s:
Pop, Op, and Minimalism

In the late 1950s and 1960s, a reaction against the character of Abstract Expressionism took the form of a return to the object. The most significant style to emerge in America in the 1960s was "Pop," whose popular imagery was derived from commercial sources, the mass media, and everyday life. In contrast to Abstract Expressionist subjectivity—which viewed the work of art as a revelation of the artist's inner, unconscious mind—the Pop artists strove for an "objectivity" embodied by the imagery of objects. What contributed to the special impact of Pop Art was the mundane character of the objects selected. As a result, Pop Art was regarded by many as an assault on accepted conventions and esthetic standards.

Despite the 1960s emphasis on the objective "here-and-now," however, the artists of that period were not completely detached from historical influences or psychological expression. The elevation of everyday objects to the status of artistic imagery, for example, can be traced to the early twentieth-century taste for "found objects" and assemblages. Likewise, the widespread incorporation of letters and numbers into the new iconography of Pop Art reflects the influence of the newspaper collages produced by Picasso and Braque.

Another artistic product of the 1960s, the so-called Happenings, probably derived from the Dada performances at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich during World War I. Happenings, in which many Pop artists participated, were multimedia events that took place in specially created environments. They included painting, assemblage, television, radio, music, film, and artificial lighting. Improvisation and audience participation encouraged a spontaneous, ahistorical atmosphere that called for self-expression in the "here-and-now."

The small collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (fig. 30.1), by Richard Hamilton (b. 1922), was originally designed for reproduction on a poster. It can be considered a visual manifesto of what was to become the Pop Art movement. First exhibited in London in a 1956 show entitled "This is Tomorrow," Hamilton's collage inspired an English critic to coin the term "Pop."

The muscle man in the middle of the modern living room is a cross between the Classical *Spearbearer* (fig. 7.12) by Polyclitus and the *Medici Venus* (fig. 15.14). The giant Tootsie Pop directed toward the woman on the couch is at once a sexual, visual, and verbal pun. Advertising references occur in the sign pointing to the vacuum hose, the Ford car emblem, and the label on the tin of ham. Mass media imagery is explicit in the tape recorder, television set, newspaper, and movie theater. The framed cover of *Young Romance* magazine refers to popular teenage reading matter of the 1950s.

30.1 Richard Hamilton, Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing? 1956. Collage on paper, 10 ¼ x 9 ¼ in. Kunsthalle,Tobingen (Collection. Professor Dr. Georg Zundel). Hamilton compiled a checklist of Pop Art subject matter: "Popular (designed for a mass audience), transient (short-term solution), expendable (easily forgotten), low-cost, mass-produced, young (aimed at youth), witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous, big business."

Despite the iconographic insistence on the contemporary, however, Hamilton's collage contains clear historical references. The image of a white-gloved Al Jolson, above the marquee advertising *The Jazz Singer*, recalls an earlier era of American entertainment. The old-fashioned portrait on the wall evokes an artistic past, and the silicon pin-up on the couch is a plasticized version of the traditional reclining nude. Hamilton's detailed attention to the depiction of objects, especially those associated with the domestic interior, reveals his respect for fifteenth-century Flemish painters, as well as his stated admiration for Duchamp.

New York Pop Art
Painting

Although Pop Art made its debut in London in 1956 and continued in England throughout the 1960s, it reached its fullest development in New York. In 1962 an exhibition of the "New Realists" at the Sidney Janis Gallery gave Pop artists official status in the New York art world. Pop Art, however, was never a homogeneous style, and within this classification are many artists whose imagery and technique differ significantly.

One of the constant themes of Jasper Johns (b. 1930) is the boundary between commonplace physical objects and the work of art. In the late 1950s Johns selected the objects with which he is principally identified—the American flag, the target, the map of the United States, stenciled numbers and words. In *Three Flags* of 1958 (fig. 30.2) Johns depicts a popular image that is also a national emblem. "Using the design of the American flag," Johns is quoted as saying, "took care of a great deal for me because I didn't have to design it." It is abstract insofar as it consists of pure geometric shapes (for example, stars and rectangles), but it is also instantly recognizable. The American flag has its own history, and the encaustic medium that Johns used to paint it dates back to antiquity.

30.2 (above) Jasper Johns, *Three Flags*, 1958. Encaustic on canvas, 30 7/8 X 45 ½ " Collection, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Johns's return to the object, however, did not cause him to reject the painterly qualities of Abstract Expressionism. The flags are built up with superimposed canvas strips covered with encaustic—a combination that creates a pronounced sense of surface texture. The question that Johns implicitly raises is: At what point does the flag cease to be a sign or symbol and become an image? In this sense it is reminiscent of Magritte's *This is Not a Pipe* which has also crossed the boundary between object and image.

30.3 Larry Rivers, *Portrait of Frank O'Hara*. 1961,Oil on canvas, 36 X 36 in. Private collection. Rivers worked as a professional saxophonist before taking up painting in 1945. His portrait of Frank O'Hara (1926-66), a post-World War II poet, playwright, and art critic, reveals his interest in diverse expressive media. O'Hara himself worked as a curator at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, and his poems depict mental states of consciousness in a style reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism.

Another Pop artist who studied briefly under Hofmann and never lost his sense of painterly texture is Larry Rivers (b. 1923). His Portrait of Frank O'Hara (fig. 30.3) combines words with the poet's image. "O'Hara" is stenciled over the poet's head, and individual words are written on the left. The picture is co-signed "Rivers" above "O'Hara" near the figure's shoulder on the right, signifying that the work is a collaborative effort of both painter and poet. As such, the portrait recalls Dada combinations of words and pictures, and other forms of multimedia experimentation.

Robert Rauschenberg (b. 1925) was as profuse in his choice of images and objects as Johns was frugal. Every found object and image was grist for Rauschenberg's mill. The most unlikely objects found their way into his sculptures and "combines"—lineal descendants of Duchamp's "Ready-mades." His paintings and other two-dimensional works contain a dazzling juxtaposition of images from different sources—newspapers, television, billboards, Old Master paintings.

Rauschenberg's silkscreen print of 1964, *Retroactive I* (fig. 30.4), is an arrangement of cut-outs resembling a collage. It illustrates the artist's expressed wish to "unfocus" the mind of the viewer by presenting simultaneous images that are open to multiple interpretations. The newspaper imagery emphasizes current events, reflecting the contemporary focus of Pop Art. A returning astronaut parachutes to earth in the upper left frame, while in the center

President Kennedy, who had been assassinated the previous year, extends his finger as if to underline a point. The frame at the lower right reveals a historical sense lurking behind Rauschenberg's "current events" iconography. It contains a blow-up of a stroboscopic photograph of a take-off on Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase* (below left). At the same time, it is strongly reminiscent of Masaccio's *Expulsion* (below right) of 1425.

Despite the presence of media images in this print, Rauschenberg seems to have covered it with a thin veil of paint. Brushstrokes and drips running down the picture's surface are particularly apparent at the top. The dripping motion parallels the fall of the astronaut, and one drip lands

humorously in a glass of liquid embedded in the green patch on the right. More hidden, or "veiled," is the iconographic parallel between the falling paint, the astronaut, and the

"Fall of Man," which resulted in the expulsion from Paradise. Kennedy's "mythic" character is implied by his formal similarity to the Christ of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* (fig. 16.21) and to God in his *Creation of Adam* (above).

30.4 Robert Rauschenberg, Retroactive I, 1964. Silkscreen print with oil on canvas, 7 X 5 ft. Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. Connecticut

Andy Warhol (1928-87) was a protagonist of the Pop Art lifestyle, as well as the creator of highly individual works of art. With his flair for multimedia events and self-promotion, Warhol turned himself into a work of Pop Art, and became the central figure of a controversial cult. One of his most characteristic works, *200 Campbell's Soup Cans* of 1962 (fig. 30.5), illustrates his taste for repeated commercial images. Since a label is, in effect, an advertisement for a product, Warhol's painting forces the viewer to confront the sameness and repetition inherent in advertising. The clear precision of Warhol's forms and the absence of any visible reference to paint texture intensify the viewer's confrontation with the object represented—with the object as object. Warhol's famous statement "I want to be a machine" expresses his obsession with mass production and his personal identification with the inhuman, mindless, and repetitive qualities of mass consumption.

0.5 Andy Warhol, *200 Campbell's Soup Cans*. 1962. Oil on canvas, 6 ft x 8ft 4 in (1.83 X 2.54 m). Private collection. Courtesy, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York. The smooth surface of Warhol's canvas replicates the illusion of paper labels stretched over metal cans.

30.6 Roy Lichtenstein, *"Torpedo...Los!"* 1963. Oil on canvas, 5 ft 8 in X 6 ft 8 in. Courtesy, Roy Lichtenstein. In addition to comic-book imagery, Lichtenstein produced his own versions of paintings by Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian, and others.

The popular reading matter of the 1940s and 1950s included comic books. These provided the source for some of the best-known images of Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923). He monumentalized the flat, clear comic-book drawings with their "balloons" containing dialogue. *"Torpedo ...Los!"* (fig. 30.6) is a blow-up made from a war comic, illustrating a U-boat captain launching a torpedo. The impression of violence is enhanced by the close-

up of the figure's open mouth and scarred cheek. The absence of shading, except for some rudimentary hatching, and the clear, outlined forms replicate the character of comic-book imagery.

The *Great American Nude* series of Tom Wesselmann (b. 1931) combines Hollywood pin-ups with the traditional reclining nude. In No.48 (fig. 30.7), the nude is installed in a contemporary setting with real as well as painted objects. The exterior urban skyline contrasts with the more intimate interior bedroom. The nude is faceless except for her voluptuous red lips, which are visual echoes of the tulips and the apple and tomato on

the windowsill. Her pose is clearly derived from such figures as Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (left). Wesselmann's play with flat, unmodeled painted shapes and literal three-dimensional space is echoed by the reproduction of a Matisse woman with flowers, which hangs over the bed. In this work, therefore, Wesselmann juxtaposes the three-dimensional "object" with flattened geometric abstractions, interior with exterior, intimate and personal with general and anonymous. He sets hard metallic or wooden surfaces against soft, floral textures, and creates a "Modernism" with historical echoes.

30.7 Tom Wesselmann, *Great American Nude No.48*. 1963. Mixed media, 7ft X 9ft. Private collection. Photo courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.

Sculpture

Generally included among New York Pop artists are the sculptors Claes Oldenburg (b. 1929) and George Segal (b. 1924). Although both can be considered Pop artists in the sense that their subjects are derived from everyday objects and the media, their work is distinctive in maintaining a sense of the textural reality of their materials.

Oldenburg has produced an enormous, innovative body of imagery, ranging from clothing, light switches, food displays, and furniture sets to tea bags. The *Giant Soft Drum Set (Ghost Version)* of 1972 (fig. 30.8) is one of his "soft sculptures." In these works, which are composed of materials such as vinyl and canvas, he typically represents a hard, solid object in soft form. The effect on the observer can be startling, because tactile expectations are reversed. Drums, for example, require a degree of tautness in order to create

0.8 Claes Oldenburg, Giant Soft Drum Set (Ghost Version). 1972. Canvas painted with latex, nine instruments (125 pieces), 7 X 6 X 4 ft. Private collection. For many of his soft sculptures made mainly of vinyl, which has a shiny texture, Oldenburg created a "ghost" version, which was drained of color and made of canvas. This is the ghost version of his soft drum set.


sound. Soft drums are impotent and without sound. In this sculpture, Oldenburg's drums and batons have collapsed on their pedestal, as if worn out from overwork. The drums sag, and the metal stays and batons are splayed and flat, assuming an almost human quality despite their inanimate nature.

Oldenburg takes a different approach with other popular objects. His giant *Clothespin* of 1976 in Philadelphia (fig. 30.9) illustrates his enlargement of objects that are small in everyday experience. Like the soft drums, the *Clothespin* has an anthropomorphic quality. It resembles a tall man standing with his legs apart, as if striding forward. The wire spring suggests an arm,

0.9 Claes Oldenburg, *Clothespin*, Centre Square, Philadelphia. 1976. Corten and stainless steel, 45ft X 6ft 3 ¾ in X 4ft x 3in. This is one of several "projects for colossal monuments," based on everyday objects, which Oldenburg proposed for various cities. Others include a giant Teddy Bear for New York, a Drainpipe for Toronto, and a Lipstick for London (presented to Yale in 1969). Oldenburg says that he has always been "fascinated by the values attached to size."

and the curved top with its two circular openings, a head and face. Despite the hard texture of this work, Oldenburg manages to arouse a tactile response by association with actual clothespins. Pressing together the "legs," for example, would cause the spring to open up the spaces at the center of the "head." The "tactile" urge aroused by the clothespin, together with its anthropomorphic character, reflects Oldenburg's genius for paradox and metaphor. The clothespin thus assumes the quality of a visual pun, which is reminiscent of Picasso's *Bull's Head* (right) and the Dada esthetic.

The sculptures of George Segal differ from Oldenburg's in that they are "figurative" in a quite literal sense. Segal creates environments in which he sets figures, single or in groups, who convey a sense of isolation or self-absorption. In *Walk Don't Walk* (fig. 30.10), three lifesize pedestrians encounter each other by a one-way street sign. Their otherworldliness is emphasized by Segal's "mummification" of living figures (see caption) and the impression that they do not communicate. Their light, textured surfaces create a paradoxical impression for, although they have been molded from specific people, they seem ghostly and alien.

30.10 George Segal, *Walk Don't Walk*, 1976. Plaster, paint, aluminum post, and metal sign, l0 ft 3 in X 3 ft 5 in X 4 ft 7 in. Segal wraps the subject's body in gauze bandages dipped in wet plaster. Once the plaster has hardened, he cuts it off in sections, which he then reassembles. His effigies, the descendants of Egyptian mummies and Roman death masks, are usually in unpainted white plaster, but sometimes in gray or color. Segal's subjects, however, are alive when the cast is made, and are often depicted in the course of some activity.
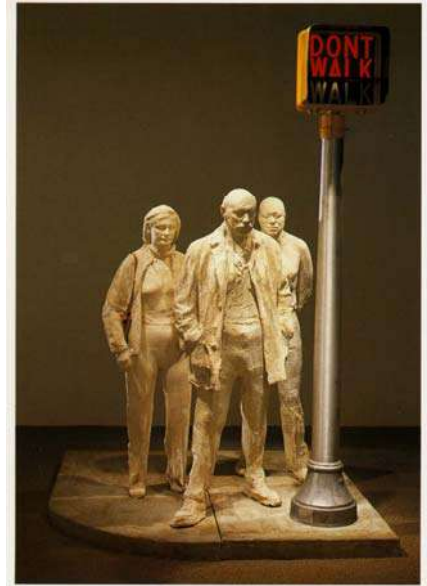
Marisol Escobar's (b. 1930) brand of Pop Art combines Cubist-inspired blocks of wood with figuration. In her monumental sculptural installation of the Last Supper (fig. 30.11), she recreates Leonardo's fresco (fig. 16.12) in a modern idiom. The architectural setting replicates the Leonardo, with four rectangular panels on either side, which recede toward a back wall, a triple window, and a curved pediment. The apostles, like Leonardo's, are arranged in four groups of three, with corresponding poses. An image of Marisol herself sits opposite the scene, playing the role of viewer as well as artist. As viewer, Marisol contemplates the past, which she appropriates and integrates with her own contemporary style. Art history itself is thus an implied subject of this installation, as the modern artist communicates with a great predecessor by participating in the work.

30.11 Marisol, The Last Supper (installed at the Sidney Janis Gallery). 1982. Wood, brownstone, plaster, paint, charcoal, l0 ft 1 in X 29 ft l0 in X 5 ft 7 in. Photo courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
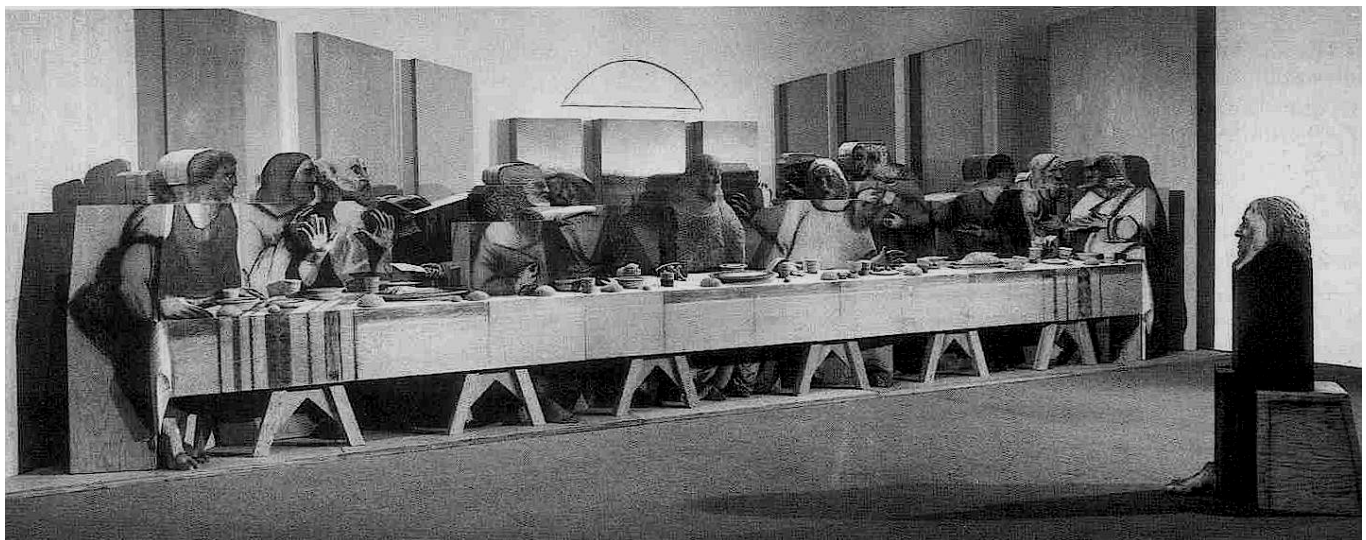
Op Art

Another artistic movement that flourished during the 1960s has been called Optical, or Op, Art. In 1965 the Museum of Modern Art contributed to the vogue for the style by including it in an exhibit entitled "The Responsive Eye." Op Art is akin to Pop Art in rhyme only, for the recognizable object is totally eliminated from Op Art in favor of geometric abstraction. The Op artists produced kinetic effects (that is, illusions of movement), using arrangements of color, lines, and shapes, or some combination of these elements.

30.12 Bridget Riley, *Entice 2),* 1974, Acrylic on linen, 6ft 10 in X 8 ft 11 ½ in. Private collection, Photo courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery, New York. Riley's work generally relies on two effects—producing a hallucinatory illusion of movement (as here), or encouraging the viewer to focus on a particular area before using secondary shapes and patterns to intrude and disturb the original perception, Riley's early Op Art pictures were in black and white and shades of gray. In the mid-1960s, she turned to color compositions such as this one.

In *Entice 2,* 1974 (fig. 30.12), by the British painter Bridget Riley (b. 1931), there are evident affinities with Albers and the color field painters. Riley has arranged pinks, greens, and blues in undulating vertical curves of varying widths, evoking the vibrancy of dawn itself. The changing width of each line, combined with the changing hues, makes her picture plane appear to pulsate with movement.

30. 13. Judd. *Untitled.* 1989

Minimal Sculpture

Sculptures of the 1960s "objectless" movement were called Minimal, or Primary, Structures, because they were direct statements of solid geometric form. In contrast to the personalized process of Abstract Expressionism, Minimalism eliminates all sense of the artist's role in the work of art. There is no reference to narrative or to nature, and no content beyond the medium itself. The impersonal character of Minimal sculptures is intended to convey the idea that an artwork is a pure object having only shape and texture in relation to space.

Untitled (fig. 30.13), by Donald Judd (1928-94), is a set of rectangular "boxes" derived from the solid geometric shapes of David Smith's *Cubi* series (fig. 29.16) and the "minimal" simplicity of Ad Reinhardt (fig. 29.10). Judd's "boxes," however, do not stand on a pedestal. Instead, they hang from the wall, thereby involving the immediate environment in the viewer's experience of them. They are made of galvanized iron and painted with green lacquer, reflecting the Minimalist preference for industrial materials. Judd has arranged the boxes vertically, with each one placed exactly above another at regular intervals, to create a harmonious balance. The shadows cast on the wall, which vary according to the interior lighting, participate in the design. They break the monotony of the repeated modules by forming trapezoids between each "box," and between the lowest "box" and the floor. The shadows also emphasize the vertical character of the boxes by linking them visually, and creating the impression of a modern, nonstructural pilaster.
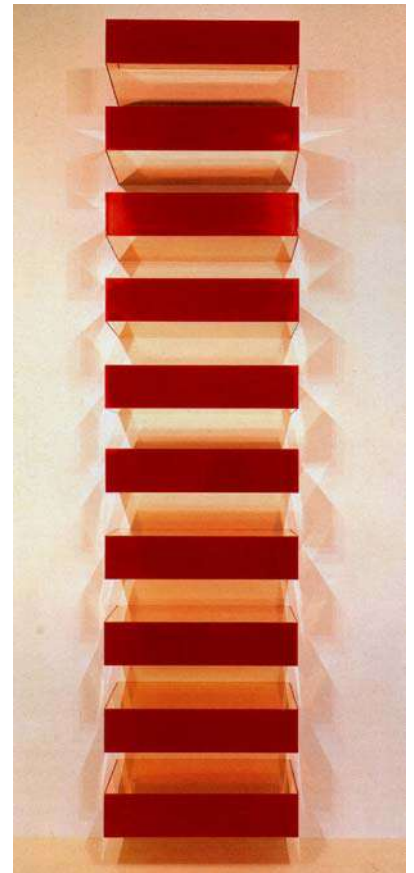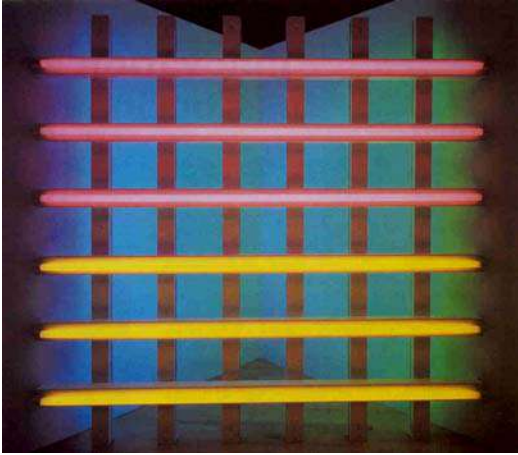
Light is the primary medium of the Minimal fluorescent sculptures of Dan Flavin (b. 1933). They can be related to Duchamp's Ready-mades—store-bought objects transformed into "art" by virtue of the artist's intervention. Flavin defines interior architectural spaces with tubes of fluorescent lights arranged in geometric patterns or shapes. Light spreads from the tubes and infiltrates the environment, creating an installation within an available space. The technological character of the medium and its impersonal geometry is typical of the Minimal esthetic. Sometimes, as in *Untitled (in honor of Harold Joachim)*, 1977 (left), the color combinations are quite unexpected. Flavin's merging of light and color, dependent as it is on technology and twentieth-century abstraction, nevertheless has a spiritual quality that allies his work with stained glass windows and the play of light and color inside Gothic cathedrals.

The 1960s were a decade of social upheaval in the United States and western Europe, culminating in the Paris riots of May 1968, campus takeovers by college students, and radical changes in university curricula which continued throughout the 1970s. The burgeoning women's movement, conflicts over civil rights and, above all, the deep divisions caused by the Vietnam War contributed to this turmoil. In the arts, these events were reflected in the "here-and-now" character of the Happenings, in the withdrawal from figuration by the Minimalists, and in the protests against commercialism implied by some Pop Art. The contradictory nature of the decade, in which two generations clashed over cultural and political issues, was reflected in the arts. Pop Artists, for example, exalted the "object" by making it a central image while, at the same time, protesting the abuses of materialism and the profit motives of industry. Minimalists avoided the "figurative" object in favor of geometric form, but they used industrial materials to do so. As we see in our final chapter, it is in the nature of art to contain elements of the past while also "pushing the envelope" into the future.