

art & man

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ROY LICHTENSTEIN

WORKING
WITH
COMIC ART

WHY, BRAD DARLING, THIS PAINTING IS A
MASTERPIECE! MY, SOON YOU'LL
HAVE ALL OF NEW YORK CLAMORING
FOR YOUR WORK!



A New Way of Seeing

*How did Roy Lichtenstein turn ordinary
comic strips into famous works of art?*

I

n 1962, an unknown artist did a painting called *Masterpiece* (left). In it, a blonde beauty right out of a *True Romance* comic book announces, "Why Brad darling, this painting is a masterpiece! My, soon you'll have all of New York clamoring for your work!" But even this seemingly fantastic prediction fell far short of what really happened when people saw this painting a few months after it was created.

In February 1962, the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York presented a show of paintings by a new artist, Roy Lichtenstein. The crowd at the opening reception couldn't believe what they saw on the walls—Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Popeye, giant refrigerators, washing machines, and deodorant sprays. There were paintings of planes, machine guns, and fighter pilots with titles like *Blam, Whaam*, and *Varoom*. Worst of all, the heavy lines, "speech balloons," bright colors, and large dot patterns made these works look just like gigantic, blown-up comic strips. Some people loved the paintings, but most were outraged. *Life* magazine asked in a giant headline, "Is He the Worst Artist in Ameri-

How does the painting, on the left, tell the story of Roy Lichtenstein's life?

ca?" Today, some 22 years later, Roy Lichtenstein is one of the most successful and respected artists in the world, and his innovative comic strip paintings are considered masterpieces. Why were people so shocked when these works first appeared?

Since the 1940s, a kind of painting called *Abstract Expressionism* had dominated American museums and galleries. In fact, this way of painting had become almost the only acceptable art style for the middle of the 20th Century. In the early 1960s, a group of young artists began to feel that *Abstract Expressionism* was somewhat empty and unrelated to real life. They found themselves surrounded on all sides by exciting images—in the supermarket, on highways, on TV, in magazines, and newspapers. And, they felt like shocking other people into seeing the art they saw in this everyday advertising design. So the new artists—Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenberg, James Rosenquist, George Segal, and Roy Lichtenstein—began painting objects like soup cans, fast food, advertising signs, and comic books.

Long before he became one of the creators of the important new art style, later called *Pop*

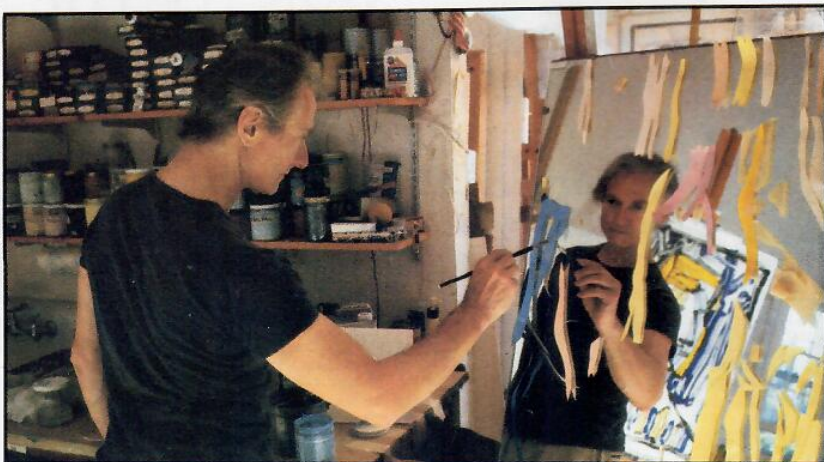


The artist got this idea from a bubble gum wrapper.

Art, Roy Lichtenstein had been involved with popular art. Born in New York City in 1923, he grew up during a time when the comics were a part of nearly everyone's life. Adults read them on Sunday, and children read them almost all the time. After high school, Lichtenstein went to Ohio State University and the Art Students' League in New York. He was an engineering draftsman, then taught art while he painted and showed his work. One day, "I was doing little Mickey Mouses for my children—working from bubble gum wrappers. Halfway through a painting, I really got interested in it. There was this thing in the air, and I had just seen Andy Warhol's *Nancy* and *Dick Tracy* paintings." He took his cartoon paintings to an important dealer, Leo Castelli, who almost immediately exhibited them in a show that marked the beginning of Lichtenstein's painting career.

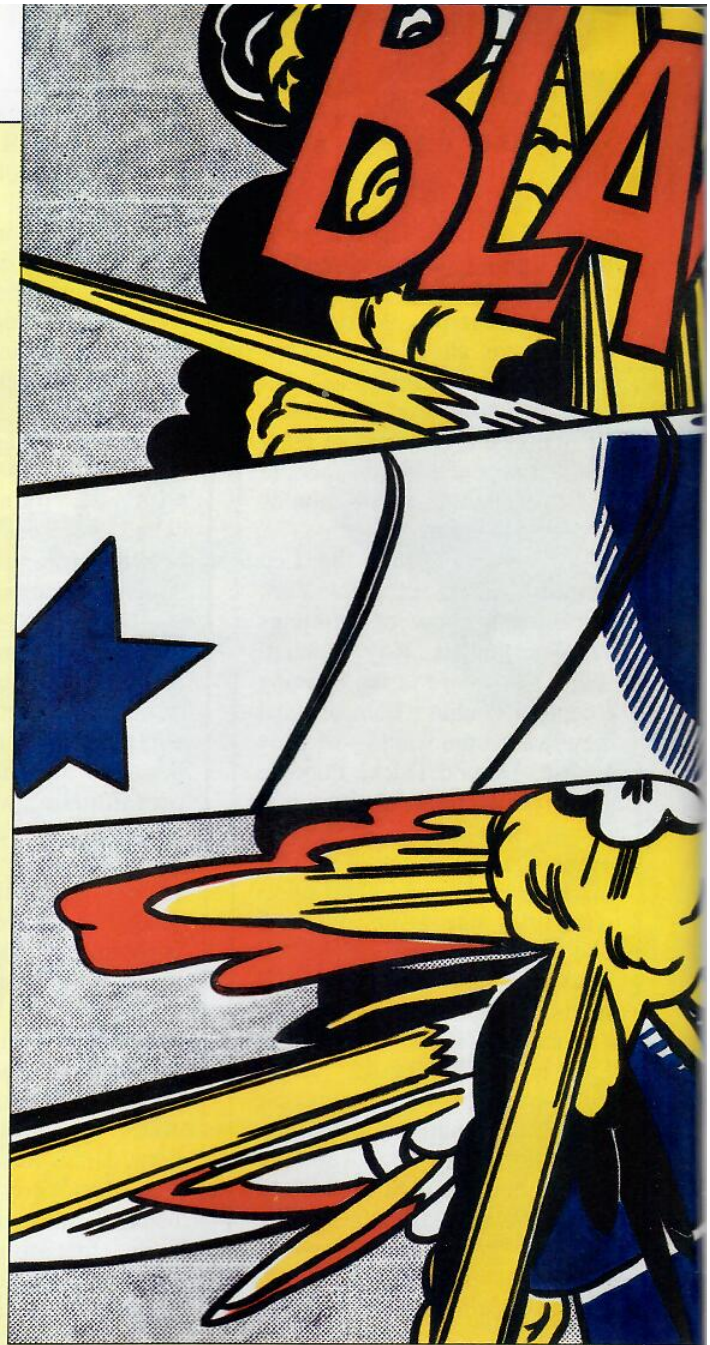
Since that time, Roy Lichtenstein has been creating humorous visual comments on contemporary art and society. In this issue, you'll learn more about this modern master, as well as other artists who also took a new look at their worlds. You'll meet a young *Pop* artist and finally, you'll create a "comic" design of your own.

Photo of Roy Lichtenstein by Michael Abramson.



COMIC STRIP TO ART MUSEUM

In 1961, Roy Lichtenstein came across this war comic (below) in a newspaper. In 1962, he created his famous painting Blam (right).



Why has one of these works already been thrown out with the daily newspaper, while the other will probably hang forever on a museum wall?

LOOK AT THE "comic strip" paintings by Roy Lichtenstein on the cover, pages 2-3, as well as the one above. In each, the artist has chosen three very dramatic and emotional situations—a romantic misunderstanding, the hopes and dreams of a young artist, and a pilot whose plane is being shot out of the sky.

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Blam, 1962. Yale University Art Gallery.

ing the impersonal machine-technique of the comic—the heavy lines, the dots used in reproduction, the primary colors (red, blue, yellow)—Lichtenstein reminds us that *Blam* is a copy of a copy. It shows us that sometimes the mass media feeds us third-hand emotions, neatly packaged.

Early critics were especially upset by Lichtenstein's comic strip paintings, because they thought he simply enlarged a panel and signed it. The artist describes how he really creates paintings like *Blam*. "I look through comic books—war, romance—for material that has possibilities. I try to take messages that are universal. Then I draw a small picture—not to reproduce it but to *recompose* it—and project it onto the canvas. Sometimes my drawing is almost like the original, sometimes I make it up."

Compare the small comic book drawing (far left) with Lichtenstein's painting based on it. By turning the panel, cropping it, and changing the proportions, Lichtenstein has made a *realistic* drawing into an *abstract* painting. At first, it's hard to tell just what is going on in the painting. The idea of violent action is increased by the "exploding" bursts. The shapes of the letters **BLAM** have become part of the painting. The ovals (Lichtenstein has added more) in the plane's nose now play against the ovals in the cockpit and bring our attention to the inhuman-looking figure falling out of the plane. While the line-quality in the drawing changes, and the shadows are "realistic" looking, in the painting, the uniform outline and stenciled dots are very flat and impersonal. The comic looks as if it was drawn by an artist's hand. But the painting *Blam* seems to have been created by a giant *machine*.

But do you feel that these are "real" emotions that you are able to experience along with the characters? What makes these "real life" situations so unlikelike?

As Lichtenstein himself said, "I was struck by the violent and emotional content, but impersonal handling of love, hate, and war in these cartoon images." In his paintings, all the women look the

same, all the heroes are "Brad," and none of them look like actual people. *Blam* (above) is not a painting about war, but a painting of a *comic strip* about war. Reading an adventure comic removes us from the actual adventure. And looking at a giant painting that reminds us of a comic strip takes us several steps farther away from the original experience. By emphasizing

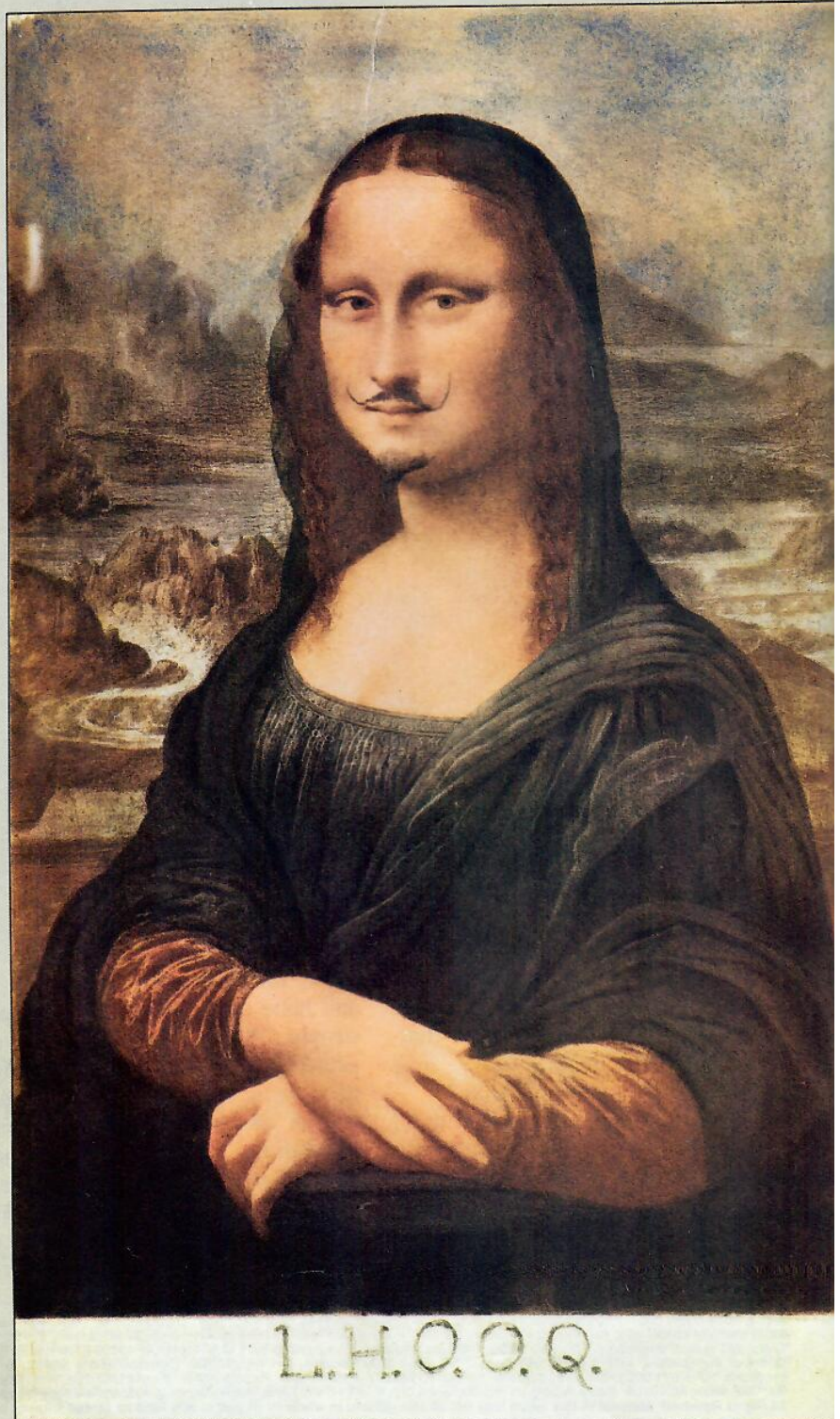
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THREE COMIC ARTISTS

Find out how other artists made comic comments about the world around them

MOCKING MASTERPIECES

Do you recognize this painting? But does it look a little bit different from the last time you saw it? French artist Marcel Duchamp did this work, which he titled *L.H.O.O.Q.*, in 1919. What do you think a postcard of the *Mona Lisa* with a mustache and beard drawn on it means? How is this work similar to Roy Lichtenstein's comic strip paintings? Like the Pop artists, Duchamp felt that the art of his time was very empty and decorative. He presented the art world with a new kind of sculpture, which he called a "Ready Made." He wanted people to notice the beauty in the new mass-produced, machine-made objects, so he mounted combs, bicycle wheels, and shovels, put labels on them, and exhibited them as works of art. When the most famous painting in the world is reproduced on everything from postcards to ashtrays, anything can happen to it. When the letters *L.H.O.O.Q.* were said quickly in French, they sounded like a popular saying of the time. *Mona Lisa* was reduced to a dirty joke on a subway wall.



Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968). *L.H.O.O.Q.*, 1919. Postcard of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. Beard and mustache by Duchamp. Private Collection, Paris.

William Hogarth (1697-1764). *The Bench*. c. 1750.

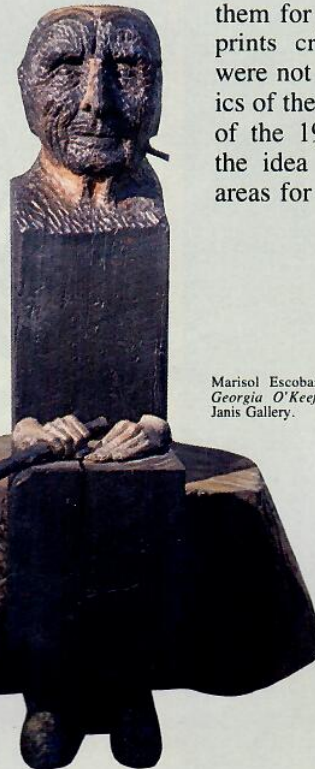


4 SOCIAL SATIRE

Pop artists were not the first to comment on the society in which they lived. Eighteenth-century artist William Hogarth hated the injustices of English public institutions—politics, elections, the wealthy classes. In this engraving (left), called *The Bench*, what do you think the artist is saying about English law? Does this group of judges, in their flowing robes and long curly wigs, look interested in justice? Do you think they can even manage to stay awake during their court cases? Hogarth's paintings were so popular that he made them into engravings and sold them for a few pennies. But these prints criticizing English society were not considered "art" by critics of the time. Like the Pop artists of the 1960s, Hogarth broadened the idea of art, opening up new areas for future artists.

PARODIES OF PEOPLE

While Duchamp made fun of art, contemporary sculptor Marisol does *parodies* (funny imitations of a serious piece of work) of famous artists. Carved out of solid blocks of wood, her life-sized portraits make references not only to their subject's appearance, but their personalities and art work as well. A composer of modern music "grows" out of his piano. Pablo Picasso (see Picasso painting on page 11) has four hands, referring both to the large amount of work he produced—enough for two lifetimes—and to the figures he painted with many faces, legs, and arms. And, in this portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe (right), famous for her paintings of the rocky hills and animals of the American Southwest, Marisol shows the 96-year-old artist, with her two dogs, sitting on an ancient tree stump.



Marisol Escobar (b. 1930). *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe*, 1978. Photo Sidney Janis Gallery.



ART & MAN MASTERPIECE
OF THE MONTH #6



“I don’t mean to go through the whole history of art. It just seems to work out that way.”

—Roy Lichtenstein

RECLINING FIGURE

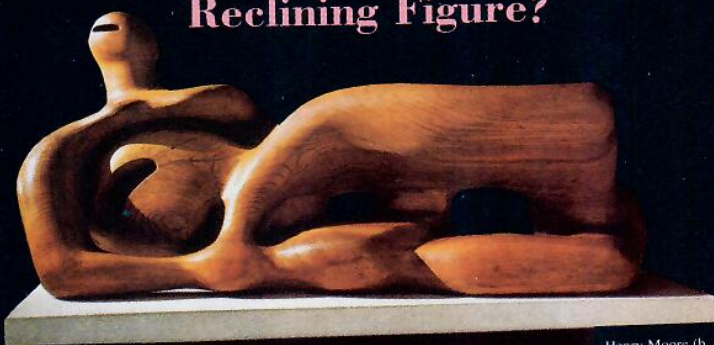
BY ROY LICHTENSTEIN



Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923), *Reclining Figure*, 1977. Private Collection. Photo: Leo Castelli Gallery.

A COMIC GALLERY

Can you find these famous art works in Roy Lichtenstein's *Reclining Figure*?



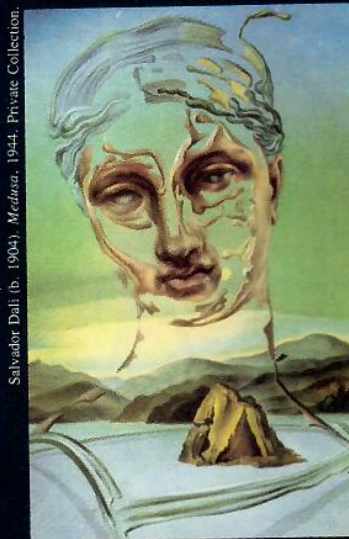
Henry Moore (b. 1898). *Reclining Figure*, 1945-46. Private Collection.

Henry Moore

Were you able to find the “reclining figure” in Lichtenstein’s painting? How does it resemble this sculpture, above? For the past 65 years, many of English sculptor Henry Moore’s works have focused on one image—that of a person lying down. The Swiss cheese-like holes refer to Moore’s trademark, his use of round spaces in solid forms.

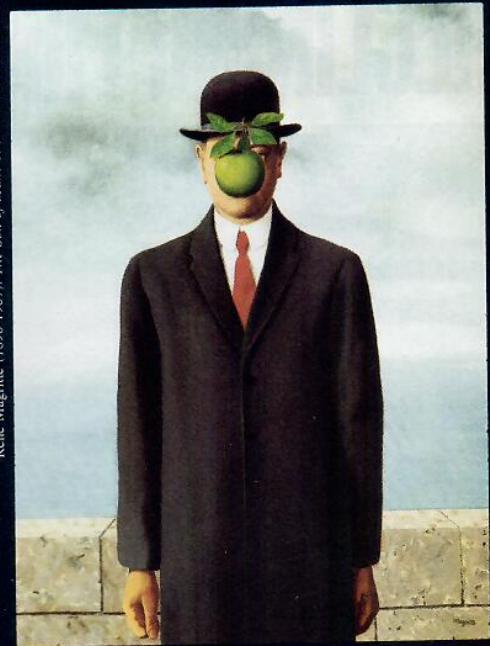
Salvadore Dali

Spanish artist Salvadore Dali painted nightmare images of drooping watches, invisible bodies, long, blonde locks of hair, and red lips, all floating above a desert landscape. Can you find any Lichtenstein images that remind you of the painting on the right?



Salvador Dali (b. 1904). *Melancolia*, 1944. Private Collection.

René Magritte (1898-1967). *The Son of Man*, 1964. Private Collection.



René Magritte

Belgian painter René Magritte created some of the strangest visions in the history of art. Magritte achieved many of his dream-like effects by combining his own image—a man in a black overcoat, tie and derby hat—with other unusual objects. Above, the face of Magritte’s man becomes an apple. How has Lichtenstein used this figure in his painting?

Today, Roy Lichtenstein no longer does “comic strip” paintings. But, in his new work, the artist asks the same questions. Since we live in a media culture, most of our experience of art is based on printed reproductions. In that case, how can you tell which is the copy? And is a copy ever a work of art? In *Reclining Figure*, Lichtenstein puts together a

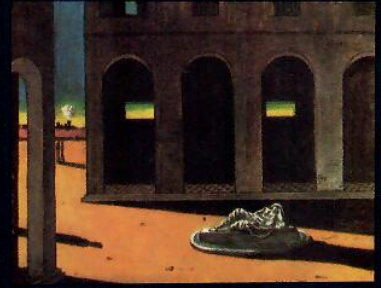
number of 20th-century masterpieces of art, perhaps commenting on a consumer society that tends to cheapen everything—including art. He has reduced the styles of at least seven famous artists (including himself) to reproduction techniques—heavy lines, dots, shading. Can you find the works shown here, or parts of them, in Lichtenstein’s *Reclining Figure*?

Pablo Picasso

The great Spanish artist Pablo Picasso worked in many styles. One famous series of Picasso paintings is of people in bathing suits at the ocean, playing with beach balls. How has Lichtenstein included Picasso's work, right, in his Reclining Figure?



Pablo Picasso (1881-1973). *Bather with Beach Ball*, 1932. Private Collection.



Giorgio de Chirico

The mysterious landscapes of the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico, are usually set in the narrow streets of an ancient Roman town. In the painting (above), the background is blocked off and painted in deep shadow, except for one narrow view of bright blue sky. Can you find a reference to de Chirico in Reclining Figure?

René Magritte (1898-1967). *The Lovers*, 1928. Private Collection.



René Magritte

René Magritte also did several paintings of a man in a black coat together with a woman, and called these works *The Lovers*. However, the heads of the two figures are covered with sheets, like ghosts. What might Magritte be saying about love in the above work, and what might Lichtenstein be saying about Magritte in *Reclining Figure*?

Henri Matisse (1869-1954). *Composition with Red Cross*, 1947. Private Collection.



Henri Matisse

The famous French artist Henri Matisse invented a whole vocabulary of new shapes cut out of brightly painted paper. This language was based on abstract forms which could symbolize plants, animals, people, the jungle, the sea. Is there a shape in *Reclining Figure* that might suggest a Matisse work like the one above?



Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923). *White Brushstroke 1*, 1965. Private Collection.

Roy Lichtenstein

Finally, can you find the reference the artist makes to his own work? Lichtenstein created a series of gigantic canvases featuring one single brushstroke. The image on the left, suggests the drops and globs of paint that marked the style of Lichtenstein's old friends, the Abstract Expressionists. How does the brushstroke image in *Reclining Figure* become a parody of a parody?

James Carr:

POP ARTIST

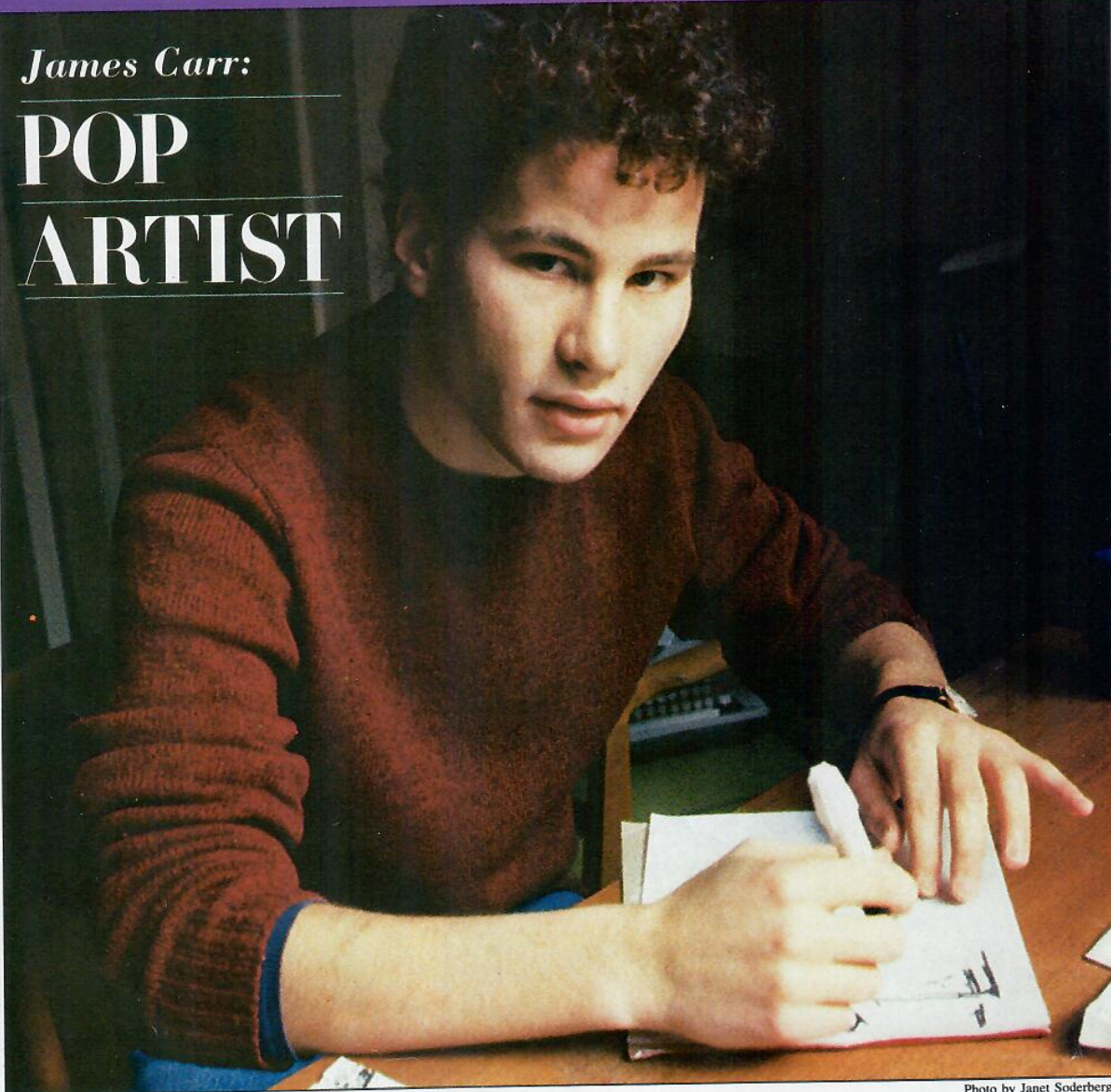


Photo by Janet Soderberg.

When he lived in Boston, nineteen-year-old James Carr saw a certain Coca-Cola sign (right) nearly all the time. Every night he would pass it while driving home with his dad. He never got tired of watching the lights in it flash on and off. It was especially beautiful against the sunset, or standing out from the dark city at night.

Last winter, we visited James Carr at Columbia University in New York to find out how he made this Scholastic Art Award-winning print of his favorite sign. James is currently studying political science, and does art in his spare time.

How long have you been doing art?

All my life, but I guess I really got going in junior high. A friend of mine and I both felt sort of out of it, so we used to sit around and draw superheroes all the time. It's a great fantasy. You start to really identify with these guys, especially somebody like Spider Man—the wimpy kid in high school who becomes superhuman. We actually put out our own comic book and had 80 copies printed. Then I got into art at Brookline High School and started doing other things.

How did you happen to do this print?

I took a printmaking class in my sophomore year, and we were all working on our own projects. I don't remember how I got the idea, but it was natural for me to pick this landscape, because it was so familiar to me. I had a pretty clear idea of what I wanted to communicate. I especially wanted a sense of the sign being so bright in the sky. It's a really great sign. The sign is what's beautiful about that area. Otherwise it's just warehouses, truck depots, and the highway.

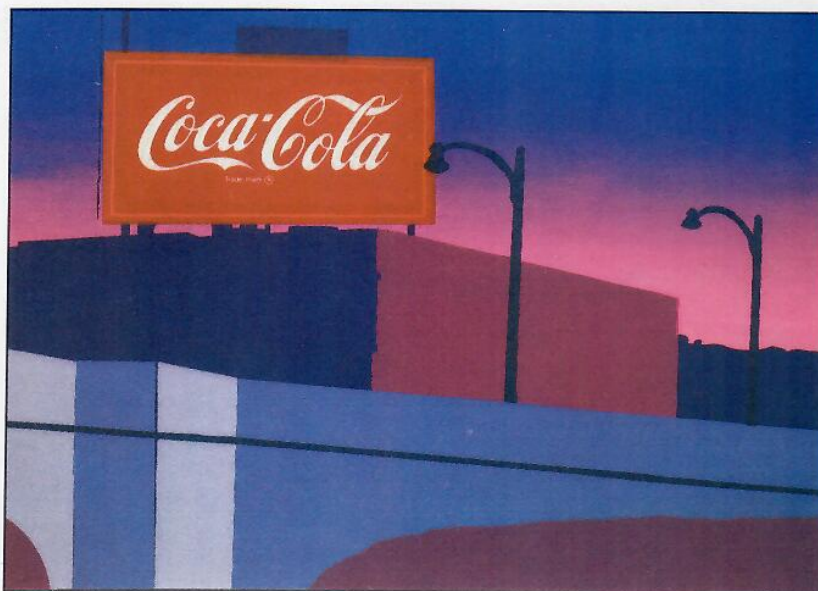
How did you begin?

My teacher suggested I take a snapshot. Then I fiddled with the layout until I got it right—just enough of the city with the sign being the main focus. It was a very stark image, especially with the street lights silhouetted against the sky.

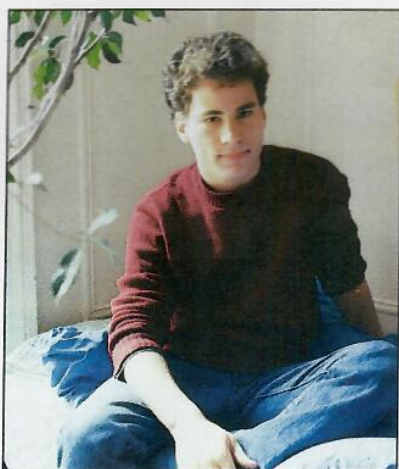
Then I started thinking of colors. Reds and blues and purples seemed natural, since I'd always thought of this sign at dusk. Mixing the colors probably took more time than anything else.

Were there any surprises as you worked?

I finished the print before I thought I would. I had planned to have more detail—bright green windows in the buildings, a back of a truck going over the bridge,



Pop artists love to paint the images they see all around them, especially billboards and advertising symbols.



and lights in the streetlights. But when I got to this point, I realized it was done. I didn't want to lose that feeling of starkness.

Have you done any other signs since this one?

No, but I was thinking I would enjoy doing other landmark signs. I even thought of approaching Coca-Cola to see if they would send me across the country to do silkscreen prints of all their big, old signs. Coca-Cola signs are such a fixture in the American landscape. Anywhere you go,

you're going to find one. And, as graphic design, I think their logo is great. I heard someone spent five years developing it.

What makes you keep working in art?

Gosh, I don't know! It's something I never feel tired of. And it seems to be a way I communicate well. You always feel good when you can make people see what you have seen.

Is there any advice you would offer to readers interested in art?

Well, if you're looking for ideas, do a picture of yourself in an environment you feel comfortable in. That was the first assignment my teacher gave, and it's a great way to start thinking about what art is. It's sometimes hard to know what to paint, what to draw. Maybe you're good at it. There's something that makes you do it. So you look around and see all these artists and you think, "Am I supposed to imitate them?" I think that's a mistake. Because what you really have to do is put your own feelings into the picture.

Creating a Comic Composition

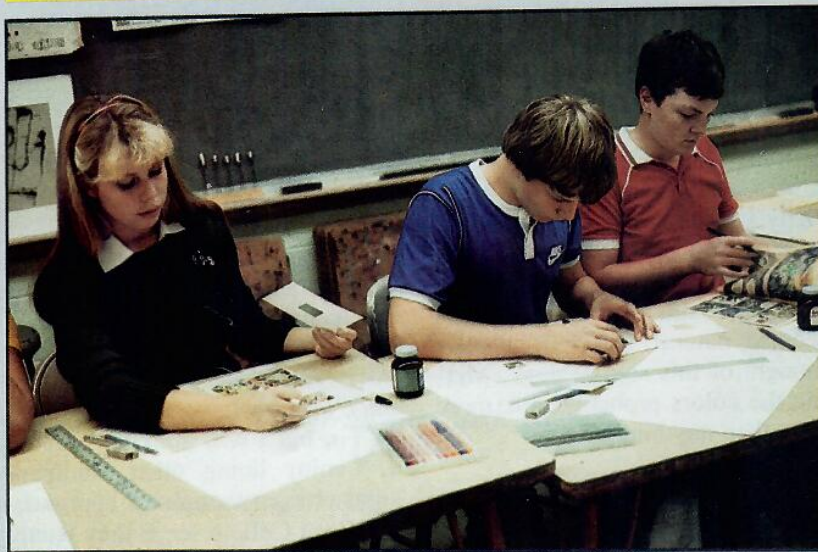
*Get new ideas
from an
unexpected source
—a comic book*

THE *POP* ARTISTS saw exciting new possibilities in the familiar objects that surrounded them. Just as Roy Lichtenstein was inspired by comic strips, in this workshop, you will have an opportunity to create an action drawing, using comic books as a source of ideas.

MATERIALS

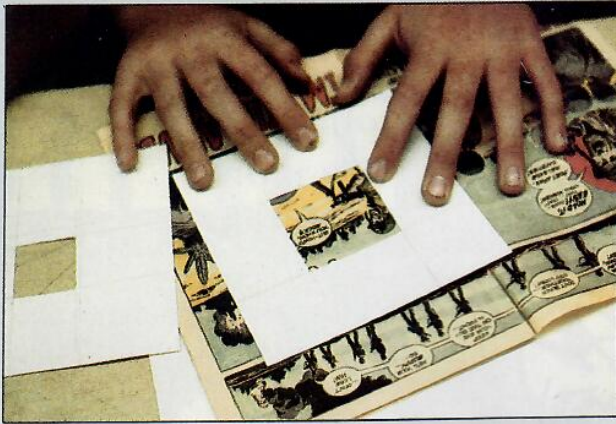
- Variety of comic books (older classic, romance, *Superman*-type of comic will work best)
- Water felt markers
- Hard lead pencils
- Rulers
- Fine line ballpoint pens
- 12" x 18" oak tag paper
- 6" x 6" oak tag paper with 1½" x 1½" window or 1¾" x 1¾" window (depending on size of comic book frames)

STARTING OUT



Photos by Janet Soderberg.

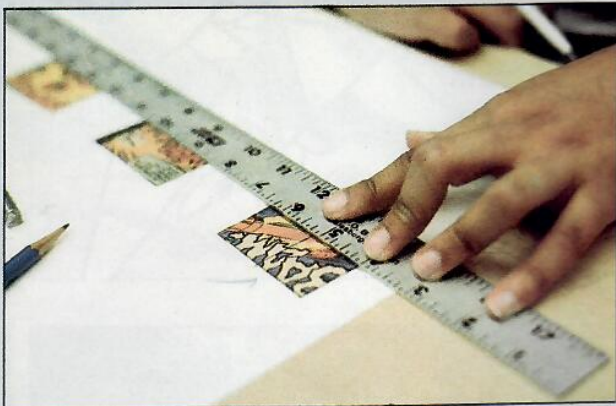
1 Cut window in piece of oak tag. Use as a guide in order to select a section from an individual comic book frame which best sums up the comic's theme/idea. What kind of composition says "action," or "romance" or "superhero"? Select at least four different compositions.



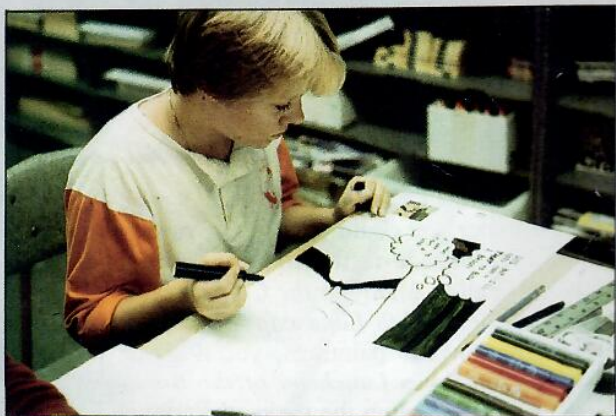
2 Include enough of the writing (but not all) to get the message across. You can cut off figures and have action run off edge of page. Action does *not* have to be in the center of the composition.



5 Use felt water markers to color the enlarged sketch, using the comic book square as a guide. Or you could use colored lines, dots, or wavy lines as Lichtenstein does.



3 With the fine line pen, *carefully* and accurately trace window outline on comic strip. Cut out square and rubber cement to oak tag. Divide square in half horizontally and vertically.



4 Lightly transfer the enlarged contents of each of the quarters of the square, one by one, to the corresponding quarter of a 10½" x 10½" square drawn on the oak tag.

SOME SOLUTIONS



Prepared by Ned J. Nesti, Jr., Morrison High School, Morrison, IL.

Try stressing the flat shapes and simple colors of comic books in your drawings. What kind of story is each of these artists telling? How does the use of type, close cropping, and non-centered composition add to the story? *Diagonals* (lines that go from one opposite corner to the other) show action effectively. What do you think Roy Lichtenstein is saying about violence in 20th-century America? What are these artists saying?

*Here are some special art shows
to help you enjoy your summer even more.*

OLYMPIC ART

What do you think will be the biggest sports event of this summer? Every four years, the Olympic Games—two weeks filled with dozens of sporting competitions—are held in a different country. This summer, the games will be in Los Angeles. To celebrate this event, 16 American artists, including Roy Lichtenstein, have done Olympic posters. This one (right) by Lichtenstein shows a horse and rider in motion. The Olympic Games will be televised during the first two weeks in August. After the games, the *Olympic Poster Exhibit* will travel in the U.S. (cities to be announced).



Roy Lichtenstein (b. 1923). *Red Horseman*, 1974. Museum of Modern Art, Aachen, Germany.



Winslow Homer (1836-1910). *Breecing Up*, 1876. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

SUMMER SPORTS

How will you be spending your summer? You may be going to the beach, the lake, or to a pool. Whatever you do, you will probably be spending some time by the water. A new show, *The Waters of America*, features nearly 100 famous paintings of favorite summer sports—sailing, swimming, boating, and fishing—by America's best-known artists (such as Winslow Homer, above). The exhibition will be at the New Orleans Museum of Art all summer from May 1–November 18. The travel schedule will be announced.



Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1918). *The Luncheon of the Boating Party*, 1881. The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

A DAY IN THE COUNTRY

This summer you could go to a museum *and* spend some time outside in the country, by going to an art show called *A Day in the Country: Impressionism and the French Landscape*. Standing in front of more than 200 paintings, you'll go on picnics (such as Renoir's *Luncheon of the Boating Party* above), walk through the parks of Paris, and sit on beaches by the Mediterranean Sea. This exhibition will be at the Los Angeles Country Museum, July 28–September 16; the Art Institute of Chicago, October 18, 1984–January 6, 1985.