Objects Transformed

Jim Dine and the Pop artists saw ordinary objects in extraordinary new ways.

A giant soup can, an old lawn mower, a strange-looking slice of cake, and a row of tools hanging on an empty canvas—these are among the best-known works of American art created during the last century. What makes them so great? And why would museums pay millions of dollars to own any one of them?

For one thing, in 1962—the year in which all these pieces were created—nothing like any of these works had ever been presented as art. People had, of course, seen pictures of food, cans of soup, and ads for tools. But they'd seen them on TV, in magazines, or on billboards—never in museums or art galleries. For another thing, the images were enormous or were real objects put on nearly blank canvases. Most viewers and critics were outraged. They thought that the young artists who had created these works were making fun of them.

This was understandable, because up to this time, the art world had been dominated by the work of a group of painters called Abstract Expressionists. Their work was nonrepresentational, formal, serious, and had come to represent fine art for most people. But in the early 1960s, many younger artists began basing their art on items taken directly from popular culture. These new Pop artists also began creating works they called "combinés," in which they joined together elements of painting, sculpture, and collage.

Pop artist Andy Warhol isolated and enlarged images of everyday manufactured objects. He painted Coke bottles, movie stars, and soup cans (right). He didn't paint the objects themselves, but the way in which the media presented them. The white backgrounds and commercial printing techniques Warhol imitated implied that these images had come right out of a magazine or a TV ad.

Claes (CLOWse) Oldenburg also based his sculptures on everyday objects. He chose items that symbolized American life but had never been considered appropriate subjects for art: ketchup bottles, hamburgers, toilets. By changing scale, shape, and texture, and by using unexpected materials, Oldenburg gave human characteristics to works such as Floor Cake (far right).

Jim Dine

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"I paint soup cans because I like soup." —Andy Warhol
Jim Dine began showing his work in New York galleries with Warhol and Oldenburg. Though Dine did not consider himself a Pop artist, his work focused on ordinary objects. But Dine didn't reproduce advertising images. He chose objects with personal meanings, such as the hand mower on the cover. In Lawn Mower, blue and yellow paint strokes on the blades and canvas mix optically to suggest green grass. The paint areas activate the space between the object and painting, further involving the viewer in the work. In Five Feet of Colorful Tools (above) real objects balance the large area of negative space. The tools crowd together at the top, suggesting people in a subway car. The artist sprayed each tool a primary color (red, blue, yellow), leaving its white silhouette on the canvas behind. He then rearranged the tools so their positive shapes would contrast with the ghostly negative spaces. The density of images at the top balance and activate the open space below. The two areas are connected visually by shadows, spray paint, and drips of color.

▲ "The tools are metaphorical; they're obvious stand-ins for human things." —Jim Dine

▼ "What I see is not the thing itself, but myself in its form." —Claes Oldenburg

Jim Dine was born in 1935 in Cincinnati, Ohio. For years he struggled with a learning disorder. Luckily, he was good at art. As the artist remembers: "I just couldn't concentrate. So I was able to get through school by drawing." When he was 12, his mother died, and his father sent him to live with his grandparents. He spent much of his time working in his grandfather's hardware store, an experience that would have a great influence on his later art. After graduating from Ohio University in 1957, Dine moved to New York City. There he created some of the first multimedia performances called "Happenings" and began showing his paintings and mixed-media constructions. By the early 1960s, Jim Dine was thought of as a rising young star of the new Pop art movement.

But soon the artist began developing his own style. Dine has said: "Pop art is one facet of my work. More than popular images, I'm interested in personal images." One of his best-known works, Child's Blue Wall (above, right) is considered a Pop art piece. But, like many of the artist's creations, it is based on childhood memories. Real objects—a light switch on the upper left and a lamp on the lower right—frame a rectangular area filled with gradations of blue paint. A random pattern of positive dots and negative stars activates this blue space. The work deals with contrasting realities: the light of a real night sky, the false light of the cartoon-like stars, the artificial
light of the child's lamp, and the gallery lighting illuminating the work. The work's scale—occupying nearly an entire wall—and the use of real objects physically involve viewers in the artist's memories.

Still searching to define his identity, Dine began using the painter's palette as a symbol of his profession. Then one day in 1964, he saw a newspaper ad for a bathrobe. "There was nobody in the robe," he explains, "but it looked like me." In Palette (Self-Portrait No. 1) (center), an empty robe, posed as if the figure's hands are on its hips, is framed by the palette. The black palette suggests that the artist may sometimes feel trapped by his profession. The thumb hole creates a negative space above the robe where we expect to see a head. A real watch, a bicycle chain, and wires symbolically link the artist with his art. The texture and volume of the bathrobe's form stand out against the dark, flat palette. The robe can be seen as disguising its wearer or forming a protective skin. Or perhaps the artist is presenting himself as empty under the layers of behavior imposed on him by society.

Once the artist identifies with an object, he makes it his own and uses it over and over. As the bathrobe is a symbol for the artist, hearts have come to represent his wife. The symmetrical composition and intense complementary color pairs (red/green; blue/orange; yellow/purple) that make up Imogen III (opposite page, left) and Four Hearts (pages 8-9) convey a rich emotional feeling. The thin washes that make up all these images blend and interact with one another. They seem to create new shapes and join the foreground with the background in both works.

In the 1970s, Dine believed he needed a new focus based on drawing directly from life. His works always had a personal quality, and from that point on, Dine began creating his own unique visual language.

"I deal exclusively with the references I saw as a child and the things I have accumulated in the back of my head." —Jim Dine

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Always struggling to express himself through objects, Jim Dine comes back to his favorite image: that of the tools he grew to know so well as a teenager working in his family's hardware store. Throughout his career, he has used their familiar shapes to express feelings, to reassure himself, and to prepare for other subjects. As the artist has said: "I choose an image and make it mine. I'm a different person when I come back to it 20 years later, but it's still mine."

Dine has used tools to express aspects of his own personality. He chooses different tools at different times: Sometimes he works with cutting tools, sometimes hammers, screwdrivers, or clamps. At certain times, he'll choose artist's tools—brushes, palette knives, etching tools. He repeats, duplicates, elongates, and enlarges his forms. They can be objects in space, constructed in a vertical format to resemble buildings. Or, several tools can be placed together in horizontal formats to suggest landscapes. He uses every kind of medium to depict his tools—painting, printmaking, assemblage, drawing in charcoal or pastel—so he can build up what he calls "a vocabulary of feelings."

Each tool is given a distinct personality. The saw (above) in Untitled (5-Bladed Saw) floats in space, its blade pointed upward. The artist has darkened the handle, making it the work's focal point. This suggests that the saw has been or is about to be used. The repetition and overlapping of the blade implies motion, possibly even violence. Fine scratchy lines create shadows, adding to the work's ominous quality. These overlapping lines resemble hair or graphic symbols that suggest energy, adding to the object's human qualities.

Dine's tools can sometimes be read as figures in a landscape. The pair of pliers in Red Handle (opposite page) suggests a rugged, self-contained, active, three-dimensional structure. The defiant figure can be seen as standing against a bright blue sky, its "head" thrown back. This alarming object's open "mouth" reveals sharp, repeated angular shapes resembling teeth. The suggestion of a horizon line in the middle divides the composition in two. The intense primary colors (red, yellow, and blue)—from which all other
Colors can be mixed—suggest strength and power. And the intersecting diagonals resemble legs and massive jaws ready to move into action.

By contrast, the horizontal composition and color tints used to depict the wrenches in Three Tools (below) make these objects seem more approachable. The wrenches don’t have moving parts. They have single handles, and their forms are flat and passive. The solid black shape in the center is the focal point of this nearly symmetrical composition. Echoes of this shape are repeated on either side. The negative space on the left is defined by an outline.

The ghostly, fragmented version on the right has nearly disappeared. A random pattern of secondary colors (orange/green/purple, which are mixed from primaries) joins the foreground figures with the background.

“I decided to invent my own universe made from things used, found, or modeled.”
—Jim Dine
Four Hearts by Jim Dine

"A while ago I saw a painting of a heart, and it reminded me of a valentine that I had loved as a kid."—Jim Dine
Activated Spaces

Three modern artists who've used negative space to showcase objects with personal meaning

"I paint things that connect through a flow of movement, light, and color."
—Janet Fish

Everything is part of something else, says contemporary American artist Janet Fish. And a charge of visual energy runs through all the objects gathered together in her painting Coffee Cake. The table is seen from a high point of view. Since the work has no focal point or horizon line, the viewer's eye is free to move quickly through the entire composition. The objects are carefully woven together and appear to crowd the edges of the square frame.

The superimposed ovals of the glasses, bowls, and plates of food repeat, touch, and overlap. Reflections and refractions link the objects to each other, creating the effect of an overall pattern. A shiny teapot reflects the stripes on the tablecloth, which are then echoed in the overlapping ribbons of color decorating the transparent glasses. A network of complex, diagonal cast shadows sweeps across all the objects and spaces, visually tying everything together.
“THE WORK IS ABOUT SUBURBAN LIFE; THE MAIN IMAGE IS ICE CREAM, BUT THE BACKGROUND IS FULL OF TEENS, FOOTBALLS, AND MUG SHOTS.” —DONALD BAECHLER

DREAMLIKE SPACES

Sometimes negative space can be the subject of a work of art. In this piece by contemporary American artist Donald Baechler (BEK-ler), the viewer’s attention immediately goes to the work’s focal point—a giant, floating ice cream cone. The cone’s simple, thickly outlined cartoonlike shape is set off by the busy pattern of the photomontaged images in the background.

Like Jim Dine’s, much of Baechler’s art is inspired by childhood memories. This work’s title, Charter Oak Terrace, refers to the apartment building where the artist lived when he was young. To express recollections of this time in his life, the artist has made his images levitate (float), as if they were appearing in a dream. And like a dream, the flat, nearly symmetrical composition (the same on both sides) has no perspective or horizon line. Roses are as large in scale as snowmen. Lengths of plumbing pipe and dolls are juxtaposed with and take on as much importance as people—just as they do in memories and dreams.

“I WILL ASTONISH PARIS WITH AN APPLE!” —PAUL CÉZANNE

BALANCED SPACES

Late 19th-century French artist Paul Cézanne (say-ZAHN) painted apples and other fruit in the same way in which Jim Dine paints tools. Both artists chose to depict the same ordinary subject over and over, in order to express their visions. While Dine uses tools as personal symbols, Cézanne used apples as a way of showing us a new kind of reality.

At first glance, this work looks like an ordinary still life. But the painting’s focal point—the triangular group of apples—is seen from eye level, while the dish and tabletop are seen from above. For the artist, these multiple points-of-view, the tilted horizon line, and distorted forms reveal the scene’s underlying structure by showing it to us from many sides. The large area of negative space above balances the asymmetrical (different on each side, but visually balanced) composition. The wall behind has been carefully built up with the same expressive brushstrokes as the still life objects. These strokes of paint unify the work, and make the negative space just as important as the positive shapes.
Artistic of the Month

Brushes With Character

Fifteen-year-old artist Steven Thon loves to doodle or sketch action figures in his spare time. He also draws cartoons, and enjoys making up stories for his hero, an invented character named Keith. But for his award-winning drawing Paint Brush (opposite page), Steven turned his attention to an object from everyday life. He enlarged the proportions of a scrappy old paintbrush to create a monumental portrait loaded with personality.

Steven made this large-scale charcoal drawing when he was in the eighth grade at Sherwood Middle School in Sherwood, Oregon. Now a ninth-grader at Sherwood High School, he hopes to have a career someday as an artist or designer of digital graphics.

How did you first get involved in art?
I've always loved drawing. It's fun, and there are no rules. I've got stacks of blank paper in my room just waiting for ideas. I'll come across something in a magazine and try to draw it just to see how close I can get to what it looks like. My sister takes photos, so sometimes I draw from some of her pictures. Most of my drawings are cartoons. I draw the same guy over and over—I call him Keith. I draw pictures of him holding a football and little scenes from his life that I make up.

How did you come to do this drawing?
It was an assignment for my art class. We were supposed to bring in a tool to draw. I forgot to bring one, so my teacher gave me a paintbrush. It was a really old brush and the bristles were all dried up and stuck together. I tried to show that quality in my picture. Before I even picked up the charcoal, I used my nails to make the bristles spike out. I wanted it to seem like the brush had just been used to paint something. I had the bristles pointing in different directions so that it would look like they had been moving.

How did you go about creating this award-winning artwork?
The piece of paper was huge, so I enlarged the scale of the paintbrush. At first I drew the paintbrush life-size, but it didn't even fill half of the page. It didn't look very good small with all that empty space in the background. So I started over and enlarged the brush so it would be a lot bigger.

First, I made a basic outline. I started with the bottom of the handle and worked my way up until I got to the top of the handle. I worked on details in the handle, and then I tried to make the bristles look real. First I just drew 5 or 10 lines pointing in different directions. I figured I couldn't do all of the individual bristles. I also scratched away and erased some of the lines to add depth. At the top of the page, I added some black marks and blew on them so that they might seem like paint. I played with the charcoal, blowing it all around the paper to make it look like splattered paint.

Why did you decide to add the handprints?
The handprints were a last-minute thing. I noticed there was nothing

Steven Thon

"There was nothing else on the page except a giant paintbrush floating in empty space. . . . I thought adding my handprints would kind of finish the work."
else on the page except a giant paintbrush floating in empty space. I thought it might look cool to fill that space, so I colored my palm with the charcoal and then made a handprint on the paper. I actually used the same hand to make both handprints and just fixed the shape with charcoal. I thought adding my handprints would kind of finish the work. It looks like someone was painting and left their messy handprints behind.

**What was the biggest challenge for you in working on this drawing?**

Working on the shadows was pretty difficult. Shading has never been a strong point for me, but I tried my best. I had to keep looking back at the object to see where the shadows were. I found it hard to make the drawing appear three-dimensional.

**Were you satisfied when you were done?**

I thought the drawing turned out really well. I really liked the handprints that I added at the end. That's my favorite part of the picture.

**The paintbrush almost seems to have its own personality. What does it represent to you?**

To me, it's really just a brush. In the beginning, I was just drawing the object I saw in front of me. After I drew the actual brush, I tried to tell a story by drawing "brushstrokes" at the top of the page. By adding the handprints on either side of the paintbrush, it made it seem like someone had been using it to paint something.

**Do you have any advice for other aspiring artists like yourself?**

Be creative, draw what you like, and have fun.

Steven's drawing won a Silver Award in The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. To find out more about this program, ask your teacher to write to The Alliance for Young Artists & Writers, Inc., 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012-3995; or call 212-343-6892; or go to www.scholastic.com/artandwriting.
Creating Exceptional Objects

Develop an expressive pastel drawing of an ordinary tool

You've already learned how Jim Dine's Pop art paintings transform ordinary household objects into powerful symbols of identity. Dine creates these expressive works by enlarging the object's scale and giving it a distinct personality. In this workshop, you will work with positive shapes and negative space to draw a larger-than-life portrait of an art or a hand tool.

**STEP 1 MAKING A CONTOUR DRAWING**

Select a tool to draw. Work with an object that relates to your personality or that might seem to take on human qualities when its scale is enlarged. Choose forms with simple silhouettes. Using a pencil and paper, make a large-scale contour drawing of your tool. Focus on the positive form's relationship to the negative space surrounding it. The object should fill most of your horizontal or vertical composition. Use bold contour lines; avoid modeling and details. Reduce the object to its basic shape, making it a symbol of what it represents. On a new sheet of paper, try drawing another tool or the same tool from a different angle. Select the strongest composition for your pastel drawing.

**STEP 2 CREATING THE NEGATIVE PASTEL BACKGROUND**

On scrap paper, practice drawing and blending with pastels. Draw with your whole arm, not just your hand and fingers. Limit the background to two primary colors (red, blue, yellow), or a primary and a related secondary color (orange, purple, green). Apply initial color loosely all over the page. Use the side, not the corner, of the pastel to create broad, soft marks in varying directions. Adding a layer of white can help minimize the mixing of two colors.
Derek has repeated the same tool from different points of view. Mirror images float on either side of the central wrench. Scribbled black shadows add visual texture.

William's hammer spans the length of his vertical composition. Black contour lines define the object. The background is made up of patches of color drawn with the flat side of the pastel.

Dissolved contour lines distinguish these shapes from the color patches in the surrounding space. John links the silverware in the foreground and the spaces in the background by using variations of the same colors.

HELPFUL HINT:
- When making a large-scale drawing, compare the sizes of different parts of the tool (the size of the hammer's head to the size of its handle, for example) to keep proportions accurate.

PASTEL TIPS:
- Keep hands clean. Handle drawings carefully to avoid smudging.
- Avoid inhaling pastel dust. Blowing or brushing away dust can contaminate other colors. Instead, turn paper over and gently tap it.
- To store drawings, stack them with newsprint between each drawing.

(for example, if you want to add yellow on top of blue without creating green, apply a layer of white before applying yellow). You can also produce tints or provide contrast by applying white before colored pastel.

Apply the second, related color. Pastels will blend and create a third color. Do not overwork or colors will become muddy. Use a tissue to pick up color and gently blend previous marks; rubbing hard with a clean tissue will erase marks. Using the same colors, work back into the background a second time. Vary the direction of the marks. Layering builds rich, complex surfaces.

STEP 3 DRAWING THE POSITIVE FORMS

Define the interior and exterior contours of the object, but do not outline it completely. Instead, use dissolved lines; your eye will fill in the rest. Leave some areas unclear; soft edges will blend in with the background. Add additional colors to enhance figure/ground ambiguity (uncertainty). Choose a complement (opposite on the color wheel) to one or both of the background colors. Work with one color at a time to define interior and exterior edges further. Do not blend, or complementary colors will become muddy. Mistakes can be blended into the background and then covered with the original colors. Build up the figure and ground through a layering process. Save linear marks for the final touches. Step away from the drawing to evaluate; check for color balance and focal points. To avoid contaminating bright colors, use black only at the end. Adding black shapes or lines to the form and/or the background helps create unity and gives the drawing a sense of mystery. Spray the finished drawing with several light coats of fixative.
Ordinary, everyday objects may be the subjects of Jim Dine's paintings, drawings, and combines. But it is the artist's uniquely personal presentation of these objects that transforms them into works of art.

Below are details of some of the works featured in this issue, as well as a list of related descriptions, media, titles, and techniques. Next to each word or phrase, write the letter of the image (or images) it best describes:

1. Lawn Mower
2. Real objects
3. Negative space(s)
4. Repetition
5. Imogen III
6. Primary colors
7. Optical color mix
8. Intersecting diagonals
9. Symmetrical composition
10. Horizon line
11. Summer landscape
12. Child's Blue Wall
13. Complementary colors
14. Red Handle
15. Self-portrait
16. Random pattern
17. Childhood memories
18. Hardware store
19. Combine
20. Activated negative space
21. Secondary tints