

Question 2: Within a given time period, select examples of what could be considered high and low cultural artefacts. Discuss these, taking into consideration the surrounding social, political and historical context.

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ADVERTISING & BRAND DESIGN

1,885 WORDS

LOUISE BURSTON

Contextual Essay

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“It really became kind of recognised that art could be anything, and could be made out of anything, and that it didn't necessarily cross boundaries - they thought - between theatre, the visual arts, dance, music, that you could mix all this up and make a multi-media or...environmental art.” (Kenneth Noland, 1950). This quote can be identified within the concept of what the term culture is and how it is interpreted. As stated by the Oxford Dictionary, “culture can be seen as the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of particular people or a society” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2018). Similarly like the perception of art and design, all four of these aspects need to be taken into consideration when creating high and low cultural artefacts. However, pop art goes against all of these and challenges each perspective of the term ‘high and low culture’, which is what I intend to discuss further on in this essay.

Pop art was discovered in the 1950s, yet it became extremely popular in the 1960s. The unique artistry all began in the UK, however it developed into an authentic art movement in NYC with artists such as Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns producing such art. I strongly believe that Pop Art was initially inspired by the world of the Dada movement as it is characterised by particular techniques and themes drawn from popular mass cultures such as advertising, comic books, and mundane cultural objects. When looking into depth within the Dada movement it was found that the “Dada was an art movement formed during the First World War in Zurich in negative reaction to the horrors and folly of the war. The art, poetry and performance produced by Dada artists is often satirical and nonsensical in nature” (Tate, 2018). With this in mind, this context suggests an obvious inspiration for Andy Warhol as the similarity within its

culture is portrayed in Warhol's practice as he began using methods such as silkscreen printing, which then lead and inspired in to the pop art culture.

Warhol and many other artists created a rupture and divide between high art and low art culture as their perception of art was seen as audacious, revolutionary, and previously unthinkable. However, it paved the way for culture in all its disparity as we see it in this day and age. Such examples include pieces such as The 'Marilyn Diptych', which was created in 1962 and is considered a mass culture object of a media star and is now a mass produced piece of art.



The movement was aimed to obscure the boundaries between "high" art and "low" culture, and to further the concept that there is no hierarchy of culture and that art may borrow from any source, which has been one of the most influential characteristics of Pop art. The subject matter became far from traditional "high art" as the themes of morality, mythology, and classic history were celebrated as commonplace objects such as Coca-Cola bottles and people of everyday life such as Marilyn Monroe. In this way, Warhol attempted to heighten popular culture to the same level of fine art by adopting mundane objects and enabling common ground to the general public.

By taking images typically seen in advertising, newspapers and supermarkets, Pop Art contrived 'high art' accessible to all (Grudin, 2010). However, it blurred the line between avant-garde and kitsch. Kitsch is personified by its method of production, more often than not being

mass produced in order to be consumed by the general population. As previously discovered, Warhol expressed his work through the medium of screen printing. In contrast to this, Roy Lichtenstein created his pieces by the iconic use of Ben-Day dots. “Ben-Day dots were considered the hallmark of American artist Roy Lichtenstein, developed in the late nineteenth century, his method consisted of enlarging and exaggerating them in many of his paintings and sculptures, especially his interpretations of contemporary comic books and magazine images” (Awdsgn.com, 2018).

In several ways the comics were considered the very definition of low culture for the masses, as they were portrayed as style over substance and were easy to read. This then suggested to society that the wealthier individuals (upper class) in the 50s and 60s were aware of the low culture portrayed in these pieces and it then led them to believe that this style of work was purely for lower class individuals who were perhaps less educated. Despite this, Lichtenstein took portions of these pulp comics and manipulated them to much larger proportions. An example of this interpretation would be his best-known work, 'Whaam!' which is over four metres long. This factor creates a dispute in the claim that the style is considered 'low culture' as it conforms traditional methods and is now identified as high culture in the modern world due to its bold and bright aesthetics.



Richard Hamilton's piece of work called 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' (measuring only one foot square) is one of the most celebrated images in

twentieth-century British art. It is made up of images drawn purely from American illustrated magazines and then finally collaged. The collage is filled with ultra-modern objects of desire such as, the vacuum cleaner, the tinned ham, Television, the body builder's muscles, the recorder, and the cone-shaped coolie hat perched on the naked housewife on the furniture.

'Hamilton's consumer's catalogue is well observed and playful, but at a more intellectual level it is horribly distressing' (MacCarthy, 2014). It has been proven that there is no other work of art of its period that exaggerates so precisely the jarringly contradictory spirit of the age. Hamilton is known as an art visionary who had immersed himself in most forms of media platforms such as; television, films, magazines, and modern music as he outlined ideals and introduced the perception of the artist as a consumer and contributor to mass culture. Despite Warhol going on to become Pop Art's household name, I strongly believe that credit should be aimed towards Hamilton as he was the individual that laid down the foundations which built his art empire; the Brit's 1956 collage, *'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?'*. This was the first work in a fledgling genre to achieve a truly iconic status; which then become a manifesto for an art movement as it was presented as a catalytic work in 1963, and the following year it was declared as the first genuine work of pop art.

This particular piece has most commonly been described as a, 'pockets of meaning' this is because there are several deeper meanings which remains true to this day (Spencer, 2014).

Above all, this piece of art was a projection on the use of comic books, tinned food and burlesque nudes that formed the iconic pop art, and the widespread use by artists of the metonymic language of advertising (Spencer, 2014). Despite this fame, the immediate basis of Hamilton's collage have remained enigmatic which could possibly challenge the fact that it is in fact a high culture piece of work. Pop Art has become well known and has a title as 'contemporary art's most immediately recognisable styles', it has managed to edge its way into the world of fashion and even the music industry, before it created a path for younger artists who would grow up on a diet of consumerism and over-saturated popular culture; which is one of the reasons why *'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?'* is

now categorised as high culture, even though it may not have been back in that particular era (Spencer, 2014).

By refining all aspects of contemporary culture, we can clearly see that the resonance of Pop can be felt from some aspects of interior design—Italian labels Seletti and bold pieces like Studio 65's *Bocca* chair are key pieces of art work which help define the culture crossover, this can also be seen throughout all aspects of graphic art and marketing; where even bingo sites have soaked up the inspiration, putting Lichtenstein-esque dots to good use as savvy marketers understand the impactful nature of Pop (Davidson, 2018).



Andy Warhol, *The Souper Dress*, 1966–67

With a long history of cross-pollination, the worlds of art and fashion have collided regularly in the decades since Pop Art began. Yves Saint Laurent co-founder Pierre Bergé once offered the following ditty: “fashion is not art, but it needs an artist to create it”, and the two disciplines have frequently bled into one another.

Warhol's '*The Souper Dress*' is also an excellent example of genuine art-fashion crossover, and

Lichtenstein's comic books have also been favoured by bigger brands such as Nike and Converse (Lisa Davidson • 28 February, 2018) This statement clearly demonstrates that pop art plays a massive role in the contemporary world by collaborating with these high end and popular brands. Furthermore, this clearly determines that pop art does in fact have some what of a high culture feel; particularly in the contemporary world that we live in now.

The line between pop iconography and brand representation is so faint it's worth questioning if it even exists at all, and that is the division Australian artist Ben Frost has been cheerfully overriding in the piece of art; *'The Perfect Drug'* (Artitude.com, 2013). Examples of Frosts' paints in a pop style are directly 'found' on packaging such as McDonald's branding. He gently rebels against mass-consumerism by doing this. The fact that Frost uses found packaging may trigger one to consider if it is worthy of a high culture title; However, we cannot forget to consider the importance of McDonalds as a symbol and as a participation in a global culture. Similar to music, media and politics McDonald's has crossed many international borders and has been able to contribute an "identity" on certain aspects of culture; which automatically changes Frost's work to a high culture piece because of McDonalds' identity and popularity. On the other hand, it could still be seen as a low culture piece of work purely because of where the packaging came from; However, this is the audience perspective and how the individual decided to visualise it.



Although pop artists' individual uniqueness of technique and style would differ, they still all share the same judgement in their choice of a symbolic representation of popular culture as a central element which contributes to their work. A perpetuation of low- to high-culture, Pop Art seems to be set on a repetitive loop as the work style is applicable in any day in age. As Warhol quoted, "Isn't life a series of images that

change as they repeat themselves?” This is something to consider whilst thinking of low and high culture and its relation to all concepts of art, particularly pop art as art work’s meanings and aesthetic changes over time- although the work doesn’t change the audience perspective, views and opinions of the art pieces change over time; which then manipulates the cultural status.

(Davidson, 2018).

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