

Emily Westwood-Atkins 2204666

Illustration

Ways of Thinking (ADAD4018)

1539

Gwenllian Beynon

Pop Art

During my research into the history of *pop art*, I found that this movement began approximately around the 1950s to rebel against the more dominant approaches to the culture and traditional ways surrounding art and how it should be. Some young artists believed that what they were being taught and the things they were viewing in museums had nothing to do with what was around them, or their lives (*Gopnick , B. (2022) Andy Warhol, Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation*). British curator Lawrence Alloway, in 1955, invented the term '*Pop Art*' to describe a new form of art which has been characterised by new media, mass reproduction and consumerism imagery. *Pop art* has distinct characteristics that make this form of art easily recognisable, with my research I found 3 main characteristics of *pop art* are the recognisable imagery which involves images and icons that are from products and popular media that have been utilized in *pop art*. These include commercial products and other items that are popular in the commercial world, along with brand names and logos. Another important characteristic is the use of bright colours, using vibrant and bright colours are what make this art pop. Colours such as red, yellow, and blue pigments were prominent that have appeared in multiple famous works, especially in Roy Lichtenstein's work. The last easily recognised characteristic is the innovative techniques. To be able to reproduce images in large quantities, artists would take part in printmaking process'. Silkscreen printing was used by Andy Warhol, this is a process by which the ink is transferred onto either a canvas or paper through mesh screen with a stencil. Lithography was used by Roy Lichtenstein's to achieve his signature style. Being either in this original form or altered, artists would often take imagery from other areas of mainstream culture to then incorporate into their art pieces. (*What is pop art? techniques, artists, and examples that shaped the movement (2018) Invaluable. Invaluable*).

An artist that I took a particular interest in was film director, producer and American visual artist, Andy Warhol. Within his works, he explored the relationship between advertising, artistic expression and the celebrity culture that had flourished by the 1960s. Andy Warhol, who would become known as the "Pope of Pop" (*Andy Warhol (2022) Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation*), turned to experimental form as his new

style. With his earlier paintings show images that have been taken from advertisements and cartoons, hand-painted with paint drips. One of his pieces that I found interesting



was his Marilyn Monroe due to the multiple ways he shown how to create such a colourful piece of art that pops. Many people have theories on the symbolism behind this piece due to the use of certain compositions and colours, and the message he was meant to pass on to society. However, Andy Warhol himself claimed to be very transparent, even though it is clear the amount of thought he puts into his work. As he was very excited about photographic silkscreen printing due to the simplicity, quickness and how he could make modification multiple times, he portrayed Marilyn Monroe in a pure act of coincidence. *Andy Warhol (2022) Wikipedia. Wikimedia Foundation).*

Another artist I came across while progressing into my research was Roy Lichtenstein, an American pop artist. One of Lichtenstein's most famous piece is the 1963, *Whaam!* This is a two-canvas, large painting which took the structure of a comic book strip. The painting features an American fighter plane, on the left-side of the canvas, launching a missile towards the right-side of the canvas and contacting with an enemy plane. Throughout the piece, Lichtenstein used bright primary colours with prominent pigments to get the desired style. He also used thick, black lines to enclose the areas of letters and primary colours. Along with uniform areas of Ben-Day dots, shading using purple for the plane and blue for the background of the sky. This also involved using homemade aluminium mesh then pushing oil paint through the holes in the mesh while using a small scrubbing brush (*'Whaam!', Roy Lichtenstein, 1963 (1963) Tate*). *Whaam!* was created as the Vietnam War was gathering steam, deconstruction of military heroism could possibly be read as a



statement regarding to the events of that time. This is an interesting art piece as I think the comic book art forms are always interesting due to the cartoon feel, colour palette and the over-the-top style.

Pop art can also be linked back to the Dada or dadaism which was a movement which was developed as a reaction to the WW1. (*Dada art defined in 8 Minutes* (2018) *Invaluable*). This movement consisted of artists who rejected the idea around reason, logic, and aestheticism of the modern capitalist society, instead they expressed irrationality, nonsense, and anti-bourgeois protest into their works. Many seeking safeties from military draught took refuge in Switzerland and on February 5th, 1916, in Zurich, artists Hugo Ball and Emmy Hennings founded Cabaret Voltaire. This was created as an epicentre of artistic expression and entertainment. However, the Dadaists shared no common style, they did unite to attack the artistic modes and the social complacency, which was at the core of a broken system. The movement didn't go beyond 1916-1922 as it quickly spread from Switzerland to Europe then the USA, this marked a shift away from art as decoration and became art as protestation. Dadaism, however, did help launch the modern art that we know it as, this forever changed the course of artistic expression along with helping answer the question of what is and what isn't art. (*Dada art defined in 8 Minutes* (2018) *Invaluable*)

Another movement that is related to *pop art* is the Neo-Dada movement. This was a term given to artists Allan Kaprow, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg who began the radical shift in the focus of modern art which was during the 1950s. Neo-Dada artists were also known for their usage of the mass media. Abstract Expressionists dominated the art world and these artists rebelled against these emotionally charged paintings from this. Minimalism, Conceptualism and *Pop art* surfaced during the 1960s due to the introduction of emphasising performance and mundane subjects. As a movement, Neo-Dada shares a great number of similarities with the Dada movement, however, the "neo" does imply that the artists reinterpreted the goals from the original Dada movement. They viewed their varied methods and mediums as ways to expand the boundaries of *fine art*, but the original Dadaists wanted to deconstruct the modern society and the culture through their art. *Neo-Dada Movement Overview* (no date) *The Art Story*)

To further my knowledge, I researched into *Semiotics*. What is semiotics? Semiotics are the signs and symbols that are used in visual language, their use and/on interpretation. Semiotics are heavily relied on in visual communication, because this is where the audience is translating and interpreting the signs and symbols. Mainly by association, *Semiotics* in illustration enables effective visual communication. Having *Semiotics* knowledge provides cultural and visual content which enables the communications of ideas. Evidence of *Semiotics* is noted in products such as clothing, fashion, cartoons, and facial expressions, to name a few. These are treated as "texts" which are to be read and decoded. Signing to humans is vital to their existence as this underlines the forms of all human

communication. These signs and symbols are dependant for their meaning on the culture and contexts in art and design, which is vital for the understanding to this subject. These signs are important as they mean something other than themselves. Ferdinand de Saussure is known as the 'father of semiotics' and then goes on to explain *Semiotics* as "the life of signs within society". Obtaining this knowledge, I used this to investigate the pieces that were mentioned earlier. In Andy Warhol's Marilyn Monroe piece, the first thing to stand out is the hair as this is the brightest colour on the page and that's where your eyes are drawn to first, the bold make up is a symbol of her beauty along with the shadows to accentuate her bone structure. The bright colours in certain places create an order of where to look first and last. In Roy Lichtenstein's piece, the bright colour of the word *Whaam!* is the focal point of the whole piece as it diverts your eyes to where the most important part of the piece is, until the bright colours make you see the piece as a whole and the story that is happening within.

To conclude what has been stated throughout this essay. *Pop art* has helped shape the art world into the pieces we see and create today. Having main characteristics that are different to what people may see as 'normal art', has opened up doors to new and bigger ways to create art pieces. While researching the Dada movement, I realised how much issues either in the present day or in the past has a severed affect on the art we create, as it can be a response such as Warhol and Lichtenstein's pieces, or just simple inspiration. Learning more into Semiotics made me realise that when you look at an art piece, you subconsciously look in a specific order from what is bold to what is tamer.

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