

Spring 5-2-2011

## Comparing and Contrasting Expressionism, Abstract, and Pop Art

William Johnson

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William Johnson and Kiana Mostajabian

IDH 5975

Wallace Wilson

March 29, 2011

From Mondrian to Warhol:

Creating Abstract, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop Art

**Introduction:**

This is not your typical art history thesis. We have written this thesis to educate not only ourselves, but to give other non art and art history majors, an idea of where to start if you were thinking about exploring the subject. With little background in art and art history, we didn't know where to start looking, but quickly found three art movements that interested us the most: Abstract, Abstract Expressionism, and Pop Art. With our topics in mind we decided to paint six paintings, two in each movement, and yet it seemed that the six paintings by themselves were not enough. We wanted to learn more. To supplement those six paintings we wrote this paper to give some background information on each movement and how we incorporated the styles of each movement into our paintings. When we first presented our idea to an advisor, he virtually tried to talk us out of it saying that as two science major students we might offend art professors and artists for suggesting we could show quality work in a subject that we had no background in. Not to be discouraged, we started asking around for potential directors and were luckily able to find someone who would work with us which we are very grateful for.

By far the easiest of the three movements to identify was pop art. Everyone has at least seen a pop art piece sometime in their life. The famous Marilyn Monroe pieces done by Andy Warhol or his Campbell Soup Can piece (see examples 1 and 2) are well known pop art pieces done by probably the movement's most popular artist. But what makes a piece pop art? What are the characteristics? The answer is there are no set characteristics that make a piece pop art, but there are common elements among each piece. This is true for all art movements. You cannot give a finite set of characteristics and say if a painting has them, it falls into a certain movement. This concept will be explored for each movement and examples given.

Abstract and Abstract Expressionism were a little more difficult to categorize. At first glance, they seemed to have the same common characteristics, and also occurred around the same time, but are categorized as two separate movements. Yet as we explored abstract art, our research lead into other movements such as impressionism, expressionism, and romanticism. Clearly we chose the right movements to research because our preconceived notions for the movements were incorrect. So the question then became, "Well what makes a piece of art abstract or abstract expressionism?" Both showed similar stylistic characteristics so where was the line between the two to be drawn? The answer was actually quite surprising. Abstract Expressionism actually overlaps with Abstract art. Abstract Expressionism takes some of the techniques and ideas from the Abstract Art movement and incorporates them (in a new way) into pieces that are considered to be Abstract Expressionist.

However we did run into an interesting problem while researching our selected topics: Which of the techniques and styles from each movement should we incorporate into our paintings? Because each movement was so vast and had many different techniques we decided to chose some of the more recognizable artists from each movement and "mimic" their style but yet

in our own way. For the Abstract Art movement, we chose to make an original painting of our own style and design, as well as use the style of Piet Mondrian and create a painting stylistically similar to his own. Our Abstract Expressionism paintings are in the style of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman, and one of our Pop Art paintings is in the style of Andy Warhol while the other is an original Pop Art piece using the reggae icon Bob Marley as the image and subject.

### **Abstract Art:**

#### **Brief History:**

Abstract Art was a term applied to forms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Western art. These forms tended to reject any kind of representation, and have no start or finish point in nature. One could argue that abstraction dates back all the way to Palaeolithic cave paintings, but these processes of abstraction from nature and objects were not intentional. Therefore a better definition of abstract art would be that the conscious effort of using abstraction based on assumptions of self-sufficiency is a modern trend used in 20<sup>th</sup> century Western art (Moszynska). Modern abstraction started in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century where attention was refocused from object to emotion. Painters now wanted to invoke an emotional response in the observer without actually describing the painting. This idea of independence of form from its description is a trend that continued, especially in France, and eventually characterized the move toward true abstraction in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Moszynska).

Europe is where abstract art really took shape. In the years leading up to World War I, several different factors helped lead a number of artists towards abstract art. Museums featuring art from other cultures and civilizations started to open, and this encouraged artists to explore new methods of representation instead of conforming to the conventional methods that have been

used for years (Vallie). It was the major names of Cubism that were some of the first to rethink the approach to both figure and space. The earliest paintings using abstraction still showed some form of subject matter, such as in Pablo Picasso's *Nude Woman* (Example 1), but the painting showed different views of the image which were fragmented to the point where the image was unrecognizable without having the title present to allow for visual reconstruction (Moszynska). Artists like Picasso held on to using a subject in their paintings, but other artists started taking Cubism concepts to even more abstract conclusions. Eventually the artists Giacomo Balla, Mikhail Larionov, and Natal'ya Goncharova used Cubist fragmentation and the representation of movement from Futurism to create abstract pieces by combining the two (Moszynska).

From 1910 to 1920, there was a surge of many different beliefs and ideas on how to use different methods to portray what artists felt abstraction was. Vasily Kandinsky and František Kupka were the two earliest artists for abstract art. They believed in the supremacy of mind over matter which was an idea that came from 19<sup>th</sup> century German Idealist thought. Other ideas such as using color to create the illusion of movement as well as form in abstract paintings, or the use of machine parts and geometric shapes (capitalizing on associations provoked by machinery yet still independent of form) were also used by artists in their abstract works (Moszynska).

Kandinsky concentrated most of his thinking and theories around color suggesting that it could evoke a certain emotional or psychological response even if there is no discernable image in the painting (the beginning of Abstract Expressionism). However Kandinsky still used some type of discernable figure, animal, or landscape in certain works as he approached pure abstraction (Vallie). It wasn't until Mondrian in 1917, where the development of geometric abstraction (as well as a justification for it) had no discernable image except for the geometric shapes being used in the piece. By 1921 Mondrian had created a new style that he termed Neo-

plasticism, where he used a black linear grid on asymmetric zones of primary color. It was Kazimir Malevich's development however, which led to the official support of abstract art for the first time. His idea of Suprematism and of the Fourth dimension challenged the ideas of the conservative tradition which was why it gained the temporary support that it did (Moszynska).

Another commonly occurring theme in Abstract Art was that artists were trying to "counter" the devastating realities left over from World War I using abstraction. Due to a reconstructive spirit after WWI, the 1920s saw artists begin to band together into associations. Along with the creation of schools and periodicals, the spread of theory and practice of abstract art became widespread in Europe. The idea was that abstract art had now become associated with the future direction of art and artists felt they needed to move forward and rebuild Europe, pushing into the future (Moszynska). It eventually became seen as a tool to improve the quality of life.

The next innovation for abstract art was the idea of Purism; an aesthetic idea based on using geometry and mathematics in art. This attracted many different artists to abstraction and caused the expansion of the craft into new terms such as Constructivism and Concrete Art used to describe abstractions using geometric forms. However the consequence of expansion is that not everyone will agree on the ideas of others. These disagreements were about how to engage the audience in abstract art. Some believed that abstract art should raise human consciousness while others thought it should raise emotions (Vallie). However the use of geometric shapes was still the main style used.

In the 1930s, Concrete art and geometric abstraction were the main focus for works done in this time. With the rise of communism in both Russia and Germany, abstract painters flocked

to Paris which eventually became the center for abstract art. After new groups and periodicals were established, painters continued to paint in the geometric shape style that was started in the 1920s. Theo van Doesburg argued for the total autonomy of abstract art, an argument that had gathered momentum from the 1920s. He argued that “a picture should be ‘constructed entirely from purely plastic elements, that is to say planes and colours’ and that as ‘a pictorial element has no other significance than itself’ the picture as a whole similarly has ‘no other significance than itself’” (Moszynska). This explanation and reasoning for Concrete art quickly gained acceptance, and instead of calling it abstract called it concrete instead, feeling that (in the words of Doesburg) “nothing is more real than a line, a colour, a surface” (Moszynska). Many other artists such as Hans Arp, Wladyslaw Strzeminski, Katarzyna Kobro, and Max Bill all tried to interpret Concrete art in their own way.

After the 1930s, Europe held many exhibitions showing the geometric abstractions of many different artists, but the scene shifted to America in the 1940s. America was coming out with its own unique movement of Abstract Expressionism. Still falling under the category of Abstract Art, Abstract Expressionism (which will be in more detail later) was a response to the European schools and showed Abstract Art in a different way.

### **Paintings:**

The two paintings we have done for Abstract Art are in the typical geometric fashion seen in many pieces done throughout the movement. For one painting we chose to show the style of Mondrian and his Neo-plasticism. The other we decided to use the concept of Concrete art using geometric shapes and extensive color to portray a mixing of ideas from van Doesburg and

Kandinsky. Mondrian was a precursor to the ideas of van Doesburg and Concrete art so we started with him.

Although Mondrian started out as a landscape painter he quickly shifted his methods when he came across the cubist ideal and movement of anti-materialism and the simplification of all forms. He started by simplifying his landscape paintings until there were only many small defined lines throughout the canvas left. It was not until he was forced to be isolated from Paris because of the war that his art truly reached its abstract forms. Mondrian was very theoretical towards his work (as were many other artists of the abstract movement) and it can be seen in his writings that his goal was to exclude nature in all of its forms from his paintings. After a few years of practicing his philosophy he changed himself in order to be able to live up to his theory that “paintings must imitate feelings, not images” (Champa). His paintings always had an element of black lines always intersecting each other at right angles which created rectangles that he often painted red, yellow, blue, or white. Using these simplistic primary colors, he was able to draw out emotion without actually painting an image that could be seen in nature (Edwards).

In his paintings done in the early 1920s, he liked to place a white square on the inside of the paintings surrounded by smaller colored squares formed by defined black lines intersecting one another. Then in the late 1920s however he started experimenting with positioning the square canvas at a 45 degree angle from the ground, giving the painting a more asymmetrical feel (Champa). . This technique was termed neo-plasticism and was recognized as one of the signature art styles of the twentieth century (Edwards). The lack of symmetry, the differentiating thickness of the defining black lines, and the use of the three primary colors, slightly altered depending on their positioning within the canvas; all contributing to the overall idea that the paintings were a form of their own. While this style dominated Mondrian’s paintings in the



1920's and well into the 1930's, the works from his last four years of life had a new voice of their own, reflecting his move to New York in 1940 (Henkels). His new surroundings and his continual search for new relationships between lines and color can be best reflected in his last finished work *Broadway Boogie Woogie* (Example 2).

Mondrian used colored adhesive tape in this and others within the series, allowing him to lay out his images on the canvas and be able to easily change and manipulate them to his desired place. Once he was satisfied with the tape placement, he would mark around them with graphite or lightly outline them in pencil, then proceed to remove the tape and put the desired color in its place. In his painting *Broadway Boogie Woogie* the black lines that predominated his previous paintings are replaced with yellow lines that are interrupted every so often by his usual color pallet, giving the painting a completely new character and life (Edwards).

After learning about Mondrian's philosophy of life and art and studying his works not only in their stylistic uniqueness but also in the technique in which they were created, we utilized the information for our Mondrian inspired painting (Example 3). We kept to his color pallet of only using black, white, and the three primary colors. We angled the canvas so that it was 45 degrees from the floor and then created a scheme playing with the thickness of black lines that intersect each other at right angles throughout the canvas keeping true to Mondrian's Neo-plasticism technique. While creating this painting we came to appreciate Mondrian's work and philosophy in a new light.

Our other painting involves using the ideals of both Kandinsky and von Doesburg. We used Kandinsky's view on color inciting an emotional response along with Doesburg's view of Concrete art using geometric shapes (Example 4). We first chose blue, red and yellow as the

accent colors then using paint bottles “dripped” the paint onto the canvas in different directions. We then made stencils of Farsi letters and numbers and placed in different geometric arrangements on the canvas. We then used black spray paint to fill in the stencils. The combination of the rough edges of color contrast to the soft curves of the stencils made the painting’s geometry stand out.

### **Abstract Expressionism:**

#### **Brief History:**

Abstract Expressionism was a term to describe an art movement in America that flourished in the 1940s and 1950s, and is also sometimes referred to as the New York School. However, the term Abstract Expressionism had already been used by 1929, to describe the work of Wassily Kandinsky. At the time, the works of this generation of artists were non cohesive. They seemed as if they were completely different styles and could not be classified into one particular movement, however Abstract Expressionists did share the same ideals. They wanted to use abstraction as a way to express a strong emotion, but they also unintentionally alienated American society with their work. However it was still regarded as an “American” style and was the first American visual art to gain recognition and have an influence on the rest of the world (Anfam).

Most of the major artists of the movement were born between 1903 and 1915. They grew up in a period in America where the country was isolated from the rest of the world, and the Great Depression hit in 1929. This separation from the cultural center in Europe, allowed for the development of an aesthetic independence that eventually was recognized as Regionalism (Anfam). Regionalism, however, was only one side of the political spectrum in America; Social

Realists (the left wing) identified with communism, while the regionalists (the right wing) supported the nationalists who wanted to stay isolated, believing America should come first (Caroline). Later, the artists of the movement became strongly influenced by European modernism and used its abstraction to convey their emotions and personal experiences (Anfam).

In the time between the wars, New York became a proverbial land of opportunity, allowing the interpretation and comparison of recent artistic developments collectively. The Federal Art Project, which was established as part of the Works Progress Administration in 1935, was a way to encourage American artists, while at the same time provided the public with works of art. Many of the artists employed on this project (including Jackson Pollock, Willem De Kooning, and Mark Rothko) would later become considered Abstract Expressionists (Rodgers). Also the Museum of Non-objective Art, which later became the Guggenheim in New York, housed the extensive Kandinsky collection. His ideas during the Abstract Art movement (as stated before) had a pivotal role in the development of Abstract Expressionism. The Museum of Modern Art was yet another venue that held several exhibitions throughout the 1930s and 1940s that covered many different aspects of 20<sup>th</sup> century painting (Anfam).

In the 1940s Surrealists played an important role in the development of American painting. The Exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism*, held between 1936 and 1937 in New York, as well as the arrival of several European Surrealist artists such as André Breton, André Masson, and Max Ernst, marked the beginning of the Surrealist phase in American Painting (Anfam). This was an important time in history as well (marking the start of World War II), and artists felt they needed a way to express the tragic and chaotic scenes of war torn Europe. Surrealism satisfied this need, however the subject material of “nothing”, so to speak, became unnecessary since artists were focusing on the war, using it as the subject of their paintings

(Anfam). There were however a few artists that used this nonobjective approach in some of their paintings, supporting the Surrealist idea of the unconscious. At the same time Freudian imagery became very popular among artists, and the desire to express the unconscious (such as in some surrealist pieces) were developed by Abstract Expressionist, especially Jackson Pollock (Caroline).

Jackson Pollock embraced the technique of Automatism which led to his famous “drip paintings” later termed “action painting”. Automatism is a technique from Surrealism, where the artist was supposedly able to paint without full control of his body thus unlocking the unconscious. It was actually Hofmann who was one of the first to pour and drip paint on a canvas, but it was Pollock who revolutionized the technique. He took it to such extreme measures that any decipherable image was lost in the composition of great arches and whorls (Anfam). The 1940s was also where Abstract Expressionists started to shift away from “graphic symbolism and towards the capacities of color and space to acquire an absolute intensity, not bound to describe events and forms within the picture but free to embody extremes of light and darkness, enclosure, liberation and so on” (Anfam). Other subjects utilized in early Abstract Expressionism were sexuality as well as the concept of myth as shown in Arshile Gorky’s *The Liver is the Cock’s Comb* and Pollock’s *Guardians of the Secret* (Examples 5 and 6).

In the 1950s is where Abstract Expressionism reached its height. In Barnett Newman’s essay “The Sublime is Now” suggested that art should be stripped down to only the essentials but that it still deal with “absolute emotion”. Newman, Rothko, and Clyfford Still took this idea to a new level as shown by Mark Rothko’s painting *Red and Orange* (Example 7), by concentrating fully on color. Using fields of color on an entire mural, “tended to minimize internal pictorial relations and so invite the onlooker’s participation...” (Anfam). Thus this color field painting

was in high demand and even claimed as “a breakthrough in modernist painting’s attitude to space because it superseded the shallow figure-ground relationships found in Cubism” (Anfam). Pollock and others continued “action painting” but some artists such as Franz Kline began painting black and white abstract works where brushstrokes were made into enormous vectors that seemed to continue beyond the canvas as seen in *White Forms* (Example 8). However Kline still characterized his works as action painting (Anfam).

National recognition of Abstract Expressionism increased during the 1950s, and because of the increased activity of dealers, critics and museums such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York led to the theory that the movement was promoted as a tool of the Cold War. It showed America as having superior freedom of expression (unlike communist Russia); however the artists played no part in this action. Eventually Abstract Expressionism showed a decline due to no new innovations, and a re-direction back to ideas that have already been done. Jackson Pollock was the best example of this dilemma. His last period showed a resurgence in mythic imagery as seen in his compositions of 1951 and 1952, but more so his “drip” paintings’ showed a “fusion of audacity and control” which “pre-empted further innovation” (Anfam). Pollock’s death in 1956 confirmed suspicions that a vanguard was now declining.

### **The Paintings:**

While researching the movement for ideas on what paintings or styles we wanted to use, we found ourselves drawn to the styles of two different artists: Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman. Each artist played different roles in the movement. While Pollock concentrated on painting, Newman was a huge influence on the ideas and theories of the movement as well as painting. He wrote several essays that contributed to the theoretical debates on the meaning of

non-figurative expression (Anfam). In a way, Newman justified the works of Pollock and his other colleagues. When Newman was active at the height of the Abstract Expressionist movement, he was one of the last to innovate it towards a new direction. He thought that art should be stripped down to only the essentials and he accomplished this by using chromatic color fields. He would paint the entire canvas in only one color field which would be broken in the middle with a vertical band of a brighter color. His painting *Onement I*, shows his typical style (Example 9). The use of fields of color allowed the minimization of any pictorial element, and catches the eye of the observer; especially when the scale of the mural is enlarged (Anfam). Pollock revolutionized the Abstract Expressionist movement with his action paintings. He turned the actual process of making a work of art into art itself almost like a dance. He created a show for his audience who would come and watch him create these masterpieces, always moving around the canvas, dripping paint at different angles.

Pollock was one of the most noted artists working on the Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project which allowed him to experiment until 1943; however in 1938 he spent several months in a hospital undergoing psychiatric treatment for alcoholism (Cernuschi and Landau). During this time he worked with two Jungian analysts, who used his drawings during his rehabilitation until 1941. This period was the most influential for Pollock developing his action painting, because after this experience he started to obsess and explore his own unconscious symbolism (O'Connor). The result of this psychotherapy is culminated in his work *Male and Female* which shows, for the first time, freely poured pigment in the painting (Example 10). It was not until 1947 that he started painting his famous poured paintings or action paintings. The genius for the paintings was that instead of naming them, he assigned them

numbers instead to allow the observer to give their own meaning instead of being biased by a trivial title (O'Connor).

He moved from a canvas that was propped up, to painting significantly larger canvases that were placed on the floor. This allowed for movement around the canvas creating different angles to disperse the paint. Using everything from brushes to sticks to even turkey-basters, he heavily loaded the paint onto his tool of choice and dispersed the paint into lines, drips, and splatters. The true mastery in his work however was in his control. Even though he was “dripping” paint onto the canvas he did not do it randomly. He was carefully controlling and concerned about his effects on the painting, however ultimately how the paint landed on the canvas could not be controlled (O'Connor). All his action paintings were layered and each stroke is put down in such a way that they complement the rest of the painting. Even the order of colors that he added into the paintings was done in such a way that each color complemented the next. The surface of his paintings consisted of drops of paint and thin lines while the layers underneath were usually more substantial and had thicker lines of paint with more spaced out curves. These techniques allowed Pollock to show all of the notions of spontaneity and the unconscious without actually randomly throwing paint on his canvases (Rohn).

Pollock was so meticulous in his work that he carefully inspected each stroke of paint on the canvas and exploited their imperfections in his favor by strategically placing certain colors or certain lines to give the painting's dimensions a life of their own. The flow of the paintings for most of his works went from left to right across the canvas as if he was writing. However sometimes the contrast between black and white elements created a certain tension in flow of the painting. In Pollock's *Number 2, 1949* (Example 11) this conflict is noticeably present. The vertical black element seem as if they were applied from left to right, however while looking at

the predominant white elements, the tension can be seen. This tension is solved by recognizing that the whites were dripped from the other side of the canvas (O'Connor). When this painting is reversed, it looks as if the whites are free flowing and logical just as the blacks are. This is a discernable trait seen in many of Pollock's works; the major design elements flow from the left to the right as if they were being written. The left edge of where Pollock was working, would show beautifully choreographed lines of paint which flows across the canvas until the right edge is reached where a suddenly obstructive form is viewed. For *Number 2, 1949* Pollock felt that the painting "worked" better if "...the tension in the whites was retained against the freer blacks underneath" (O'Connor).

Unable to recreate the mastery techniques of Pollock ourselves, his innovative style inspired us to make a work of art, stylistically similar to some of his famous pieces (Example 12). We first chose a color pallet, but instead of choosing to only use colors in the grey scale, which Pollock tended to do in his more famous paintings, we decided to use more vibrant colors. After the color selection process, we then used sticks, brushes, and paint bottles to disperse the paint on the canvas. When dripping the paint, we first started with one corner of the canvas and moved across it in a systematic way. Depending on how that paint laid on the canvas we moved around and dripped the different colors at different angles and thicknesses to complement one another. We controlled what section of the canvas the paint would fall in but not how it would splatter and sink into the canvas, thus allowing the art to exist as a living piece. That is the beauty of Abstract Expressionism. It is the subconscious that is being reached instead of the conscious mind. The idea was to free your mind of the limitations of perfection and order, allowing the subconscious to take control and analyze the painting. The paintings were not targeting a specific emotion, but instead trying to invoke a subconscious thought of the



individual viewing the painting. The real significance of this is that each person is different thus each individual will interpret the painting in a unique way.

The style for our second painting in Abstract Expressionism was in the style of Barnett Newman. Newman was an active painter in the 1920s but then destroyed most his early works, which were more realistic, and stopped painting around 1939-1940. He felt that the “world historical crisis” (in other words WWII) had made the subject-matter and styles that have traditionally been used in the past invalid (Anfam). He started to search for new content that was, to him, appropriate for the times they lived in. So throughout the 1940s he began writing a series of essays on different theories and ways to create a “new” way to paint and create art. One of his main ideas was to completely break away from war torn Europe and its traditions. He felt that hiding the violence during WWII by showing beauty in art was not a correct representation of the times. His thoughts seemed to be and could be called “apocalyptic” because they dramatized WWII or things associated with WWII such as the Holocaust or the nuclear bomb (Anfam).

During the 1940s Newman started to draw images of plant, seed and spermatozoid forms. These images suggested germination and origin, and his titles such as *Slaying of Osiris* or *Song of Orpheus* referred to destruction (Anfam). This concept of destruction became a common theme through most of the 1940s, but at the end of the 1940s he created his *Onement I* which had a vertical line running through the middle of a red dark field. This led to his more famous pieces of vertical line paintings against single color fields as a background during the end of the 1940s through the mid 1950s. His reasoning for creating these pieces were expressed in his essay “The Sublime is Now”: “The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history”

(Anfam). His works progressed and got bigger and bigger using the same concept of vertical line against single color, color field backgrounds.

For our painting we took Newman's ideas and theories then created a painting in his style. We took his concept of color fields and vertical lines and painted a blue color field background with a single vertical white line (Example 13). We chose to place the vertical line in a place where the canvas would be split asymmetrically. After deciding where to place the zip, using tape we covered the area where the line would be. Then, using a large brush, we laid down a light blue background on the canvas. Using smaller brushes we then went over the painting using a darker shade of blue to give a color gradient look to the color field. Newman's earlier works in this style showed varying hues of the background color and, through layering, we were able to create an effect similar to his own. We then removed the tape from the canvas and painted the vertical line with white paint to create a distinct contrast from the blue.

### **Pop Art:**

#### **Brief History:**

During World War II Abstract Expressionism became the mainstream art movement to the point where too many amateurs were imitating the style with no real innovation or manipulation of the style to make it their own. This unoriginality of paintings was not connecting with the general public, even though critics and art lovers were still enticed by the Abstract Expressionist pieces. In the 1950s a small group of upcoming artists started to break away from the norm and started using imagery that the general public could relate with. In post World War II America, advertising started to make consumer items such as Coca-Cola into household names; these images were bombarding American culture from newspapers to billboards. The

ruling upper class Britain did not want to accept the new reality that America had become the new center for cultural influence in the world. Thus they viewed everything American as vulgar and provocative (Alloway et al). However the working class of Britain viewed American culture as an escape and ideal lifestyle. This “good life” view of American culture, was recognized by the younger generation of Britain, of which a small group formed the Independent Group, which brought American imagery to Britain.

The Independent Group (IG), founded in London, England in 1952, was a small gathering of young painters, writers, architects, sculptors, and critics who wanted to challenge the “traditional views” (which at the time were Abstract Expressionist views) of Fine Art (Strickland). In one of their first group meetings, a sculptor by the name of Eduardo Paolozzi, the co-founder of IG, presented a series of ten collages in a lecture which were later published into a portfolio and titled *Bunk!* These collages consisted of “found” items from advertisements, magazine covers and other American popular culture imagery. One of these collages titled “Meet the People” (Example 14) was the first piece where the term “pop” was coincidentally used, taken directly from the mass media (Livingston). After Paolozzi gave his lecture, the IG focused on the imagery of American popular culture, more specifically mass advertising (Livingstone). At the time, Paolozzi’s collages were not considered works of art in their own right, however in time became considered some of the first works of Pop Art.

After Paolozzi’s lectures, the IG took a direction towards science and technology as subject material for two years. In 1954, Lawrence Alloway and John McHale organized the lectures for that year, bringing the direction of the group back towards mass media and popular culture. It was Alloway who was considered to have coined the term “pop art”, and described popular culture as, “The sum of the arts designed for simultaneous consumption by a numerically

large audience. Thus, there is a similarity in distribution and consumption between prints and magazines, movies, records, radio, TV, and industrial and interior design” (Alloway et al).

Popular culture, however was always changing to the demands of the consumer. This forced artists to follow this progression and portray these images in their artwork.

In 1956, the IG held its landmark event called “This is Tomorrow” which featured popular images soon to become reoccurring themes in pop art. Pieces like “The Seven-Year Itch” featuring Marilyn Monroe, and “Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?” by Richard Hamilton (Examples 15 and 16) were some of the pieces which were featured in this exhibition (James). The efforts of both Alloway and Hamilton set the stage for the acceptance of Pop Art as an international phenomenon. At the same time that the IG was production what was considered to be pre-Pop Art pieces, an independent painter by the name of Peter Blake, was siphoning American Culture images, and using them in his paintings and collages such as "Got a Girl" (Example 17).

At the same time the IG and Peter Blake were experimenting with this new concept of popular culture, Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg were providing the stepping stones for the Pop Art movement in America. These artists wanted to break away from the self centered norm of Abstract Expressionism and portray the feelings of the exciting and luxurious life style of American popular culture. There was however a transition period between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art as shown by Robert Rauschenberg. He created pieces he called “combines” which was half painting and half sculpture. Rauschenberg says, “Painting relates to both art and life... I try to act in the gap between the two. A picture is more like the real world when it’s made out of the real world” (Strickland). These “combines” had elements of both Pop Art (from the items he used for the sculpture part of his “paintings”), and Abstract Expressionism

(from the paint he actually used to cover the items in). Jasper John was the other side of American Pop Art. He took a more conservative approach, and created works that involved “simple” two dimensional objects, easily recognized by everyone regardless of economic standing (Livingstone). His portrayal of the American Flag is an example of how he used simple objects and contorted them to grab the viewer’s attention, instead of being dismissed as an everyday object (Example 18).

The stage has now been set for the rise of Pop Art in the 1960s. Pop Art became a literal “overnight sensation” in the sixties. Galleries that had stockpiles of Abstract Expressionist paintings were turned into virtual ghost towns as everyone quickly embraced the Pop Art style. The shiny colors and clever designs gave the pieces a certain familiarity, yet in an innovative way. Pop Art made people happy again, and this was very important due to the state of the world still rebuilding from World War II (Strickland). Roy Lichtenstein was one of the most recognized artists in the Pop Art movement during the sixties. His comic paintings took direct aim at the conformity and tradition of Abstract Expressionist art, and he said he tried to make his works as artificial as possible. He started out using recognizable characters such as, the Man of Steel himself, Superman and Popeye and then progressed into using comic book techniques and subjects, using mechanical printer’s (benday) dots and stereotypical imagery (Livingstone). Lichtenstein’s “Engagement Ring” shows how these Benday dots were incorporated into the paintings (Example 19).

During the sixties, Pop Art took many forms, but shared similar characteristics throughout the movement. From Andy Warhol’s prints and silk screens, to Lichtenstein’s comics and Benday dots, pop art pieces started to show common characteristics but in their own unique way. The most obvious of which (and stated before) was the use of American Popular Culture

images as the motif for the movement. Celebrities, such as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis, were common icons used along with everyday objects, like the Campbell Soup Can and Coca-Cola bottles. Everything was fair game. TV, radio, magazines, advertisements, and comics were all sources of inspiration for Pop artists. Some artist deviated so far from the norm they started to just use the everyday objects in pieces by themselves instead of incorporating them into a piece with multiple objects in the typical collage fashion.

Although Pop Art pieces have a shared motif, each artist made their pieces in their own style (which was previously stated above). Roy Lichtenstein used comic and cartoon characters in his pieces, which was with the tradition of the Pop Art style, yet used printing to create a technique called Benday dots. Some of his pieces showed recognizable themes in American popular culture, rather than the images created by it. An example of this can be seen in “Blam” (Example 20) where he uses images of planes in a comic book style to portray a recognizable ideal from the war without actually using real images. He wanted to show a more simplistic way of viewing popular culture, and society at the time. During an interview by Alain Robbe-Grillet he was paraphrased saying, “I have the feeling that these flat images conform far more to what really goes on inside our heads, than those false depths of lyrical abstraction or abstract expressionism (Alloway).

Color was another shared characteristic for Pop Art pieces. Bright, vibrant colors that made the viewer happy were used in different sequences to portray the illusion of romanticism portrayed in the Hollywood films of the time. Andy Warhol’s Marilyn Monroe pieces use bright, idealistic colors to draw attention to her stance in the society at the time as a golden goddess, a saintly perfection. Warhol used colors in a strategic way, every color he used had a symbolic feel to it, a purpose (McCarthy). Artists such as Richard Hamilton used color in order to draw

attention to the different images used in the prints or collages to give each figure their own spotlight within the piece. For example his collage titled “Just What Is It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?” (Example 16) uses the vibrance of the color orange and the subtleness of the black and white rug, as well as other images to dramatically bring attention to the glamour of the couple featured in the piece.

Mass production became a staple characteristic for Pop Art. Andy Warhol realized the necessity of using easily recognizable and endlessly repeatable images in order to promote himself and his works through the mass media (McCarthy). He was quoted saying, “Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art... Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art” (Mamiya). He shows this reoccurring characteristic in many of his pieces such as his Campbell Soup Can images (Example 21) and Coca-Cola Bottles (Example 22). Richard Hamilton’s “My Marilyn” (Example 23) and Robert Indiana’s “The X-5” (Example 24) also shows this repeating figure characteristic (Alloway).

### **Paintings:**

For our paintings, we wanted to incorporate the characteristics from Pop Art in the 1960s, and apply them to a more modern popular culture. However after more consideration we decided that at the very least, one of our paintings should mimic a piece which was done by an artist in the 1960s such as Andy Warhol. Andy Warhol’s pieces were so influential and popular that he was (virtually) Pop Art in the 1960s. His images were so popular that someone who has never stepped foot inside a museum could easily identify his work.

Warhol started his career as an illustrator but quickly became a household name. His Campbell Soup Can pieces and celebrity images, lead to the widespread distribution of Pop Art

in America. You no longer had to go to a museum to view Pop Art pieces, but instead only had to look at the morning newspaper or magazine (James). His anyone-can-do-it attitude caused a lot of concern for the art community because according to the critics, art is a talent that only a select few excel at. He caused a small panic when he claimed that some of the pieces he did were actually done by his assistants. He later retracted the statement, yet still caused reason for concern because to this day no one is quite sure which of the two statements he made is actually true (Livingstone).

Warhol got involved in Pop Art when it started to become mainstream art in the sixties. His early works, such as Water Heater (Example #), were painted in way as if it was mocking the works of Abstract Expressionism. Later, he took this a little further and phrased his paintings in a deliberate inexpressive style using hard outlines and flat areas of color (Livingstone). Because audiences had been so accustomed to viewing paintings designed to convey emotion, these paintings, (which had none of the previous personality of Abstract Expressionist pieces) were designed to “offend” the audience’s sensibilities. He even went so far as to use stamps, stencils and hand cut silkscreens which gave his pieces the appearance as if they were printed. From 1962 (only two years after he started to paint popular images, images from advertisements and even comic strips) he almost exclusively made his is pieces by screenprinting photographic images on to backgrounds of a single color or “...in flat interlocking areas that corresponded approximately to the contours of the superimposed images” (Livingstone). He further stripped his images of meaning by mass producing the same image over and over challenging the concept of unique art work.

Taking a common image used in a number of his pieces seemed like a proper way to pay tribute to an amazing artist, so we decided to take the image of Marilyn Monroe and use it in our



painting (Example 25). We chose an image of Marilyn that had not been used by Warhol (to put our own spin on his style and image selection) and recreated it four times on the canvas using gridding and enlargement techniques with the assist of a computer. To recreate the same image four times on the canvas we used carbon paper to transfer the image from section to section. We then picked the color schemes for each of the four images and began to paint them using acrylic paints. When we chose the color schemes we thought about what colors would best represent the vibrancy of pop art as well as give balance to the painting. We also wanted to make sure that a color from each rectangle was used in some way in another but in a different shade. Because we did not have the facilities or the experience necessary to create a silkscreen, we used his earlier style of painting in our own to “mimic” Warhol’s style.

For our other painting, we chose to use reggae legend and popular culture icon Bob Marley to represent a more modern image recognizable (and more relatable) to a younger generation (Example 26). We first chose an image of him that is pretty well known, and then manipulated it using computer technology. Using the scale already present in the image, we added on additional aspects to enhance it through the use of more color. We then chose a canvas and enlarged the image chosen using the technique of gridding. In order to keep true to the pop art style we manipulated the drawing of the image on the canvas to show the face of Bob Marley through only black and white contrast and in this way the smoke that is present from the marijuana will stand out even more. We chose the colors red, yellow, and green for the smoke to truly represent the icon’s culture of Jamaica. We used different brush strokes in order to blend the red, yellow and green together in a way that makes it seem as if it was all one halo of smoke. In the background, we tried to eliminate as many brush strokes as possible to stay true to the era of pop art.



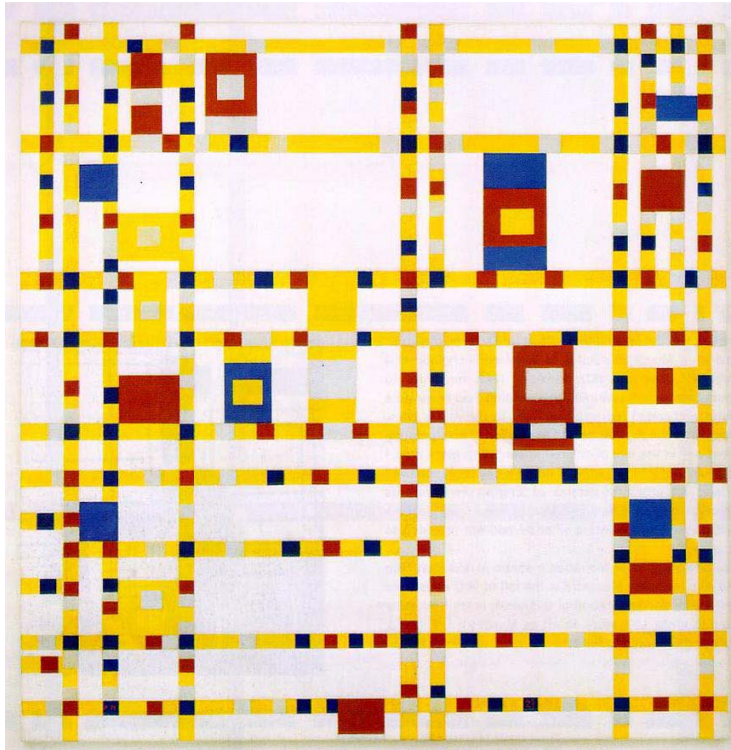
**Examples:**

<http://www.abcgallery.com/P/picasso/picasso273.html>



Example 1: Nude Woman by Pablo Picasso

<http://www.artchive.com/artchive/m/mondrian/broadway.jpg>



Example 2: Piet Mondrian's Broadway Boogie Woogie



Example 3: Mondrian





Example 4: Abstract

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2008/05/01/arts/23012199.JPG>



Example 5: Arshile Gorky's *The Liver is the Cock's Comb*

[http://www.sfmoma.org/images/artwork/large/45.1308\\_01\\_d02.jpg](http://www.sfmoma.org/images/artwork/large/45.1308_01_d02.jpg)



Example 6: Jackson Pollock's Guardians of the Secrete

<http://www.kaboodle.com/reviews/moma.org-the-collection-mark-rothko.-red-and-orange.-1955>



Example 7: Mark Rothko's Red and Orange

[http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?artistFilterInitial=L&criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A3148&page\\_number=5&template\\_id=1&sort\\_order=1](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?artistFilterInitial=L&criteria=O%3AAD%3AE%3A3148&page_number=5&template_id=1&sort_order=1)



Example 8: Franz Kline's White Forms

[http://www.moma.org/collection/browse\\_results.php?object\\_id=79601](http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=79601)



Example 9: Newman's Onement I

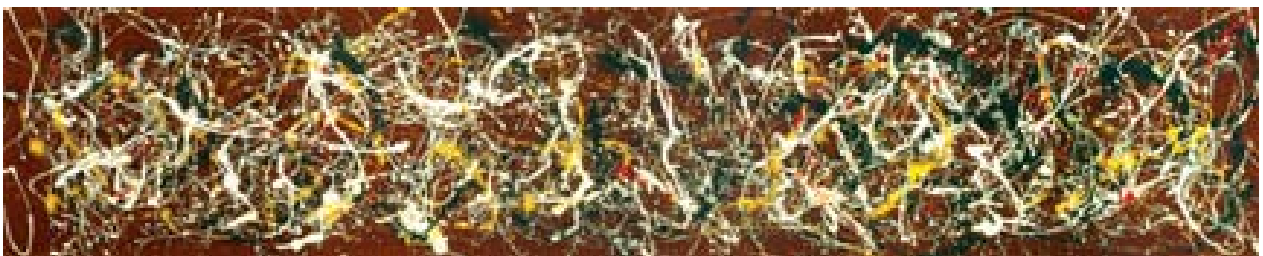


<http://www.humanitiesweb.org/human.php?s=g&p=c&a=p&ID=1236>



Example 10: Jackson Pollock's Male and Female

[http://www.arttimesjournal.com/art/reviews/jun\\_06\\_Raymond\\_J\\_Steiner/Number\\_2.jpg](http://www.arttimesjournal.com/art/reviews/jun_06_Raymond_J_Steiner/Number_2.jpg)

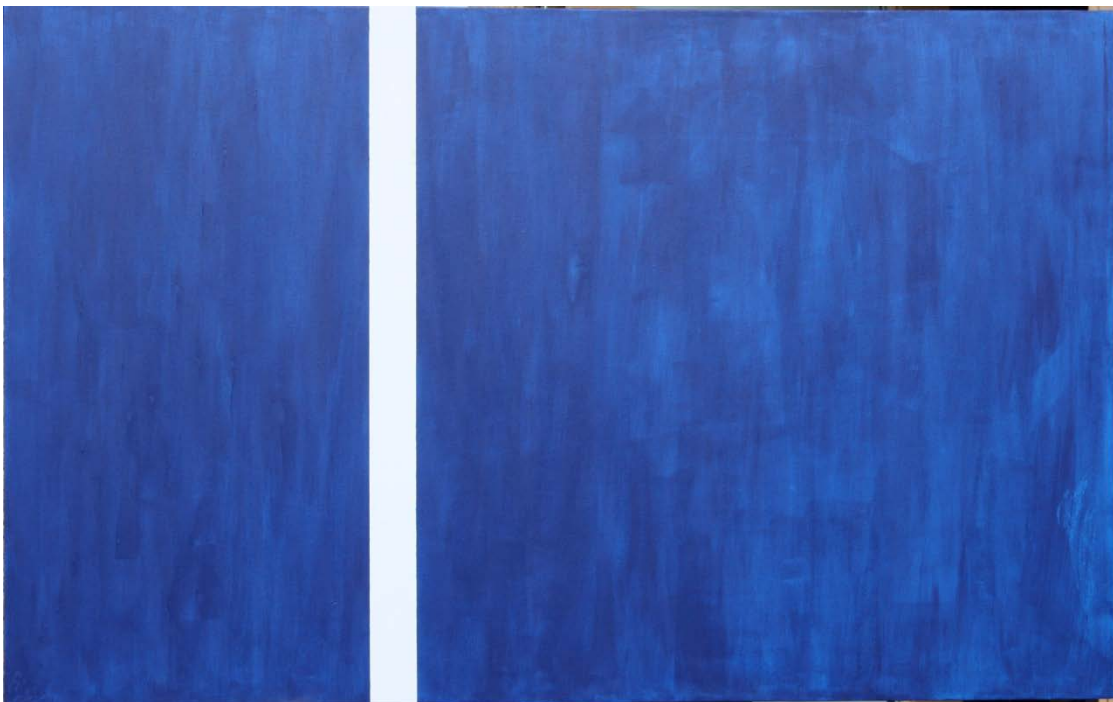


Example 11: Jackson Pollock's Number 2 1949





Example 12: Jackson Pollock



Example 13: Barnett Newman

[http://artexpertswebsite.com/pages/artists/artists\\_l-z/paolozzi/10.paolozzi.jpg](http://artexpertswebsite.com/pages/artists/artists_l-z/paolozzi/10.paolozzi.jpg)



Example 14: Eduardo Paolozzi's "Meet the People"

[http://www.fulcrumgallery.com/Marilyn-Monroe-In-The-Seven-Year-Itch\\_473808.htm](http://www.fulcrumgallery.com/Marilyn-Monroe-In-The-Seven-Year-Itch_473808.htm)



Example 15: "The Seven Year Itch" Featuring Marilyn Monroe



<http://www.usc.edu/programs/cst/deadfiles/lacasis/ansc100/library/images/771.jpg>



Example 16: "Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?" by Richard Hamilton

[http://www.studio18.co.uk/shop/images/blake/Peter\\_blake\\_Got\\_A Girl.jpg](http://www.studio18.co.uk/shop/images/blake/Peter_blake_Got_A_Girl.jpg)



Example 17: "Got a Girl" by Peter Blake

[http://www.globalgallery.com/prod\\_images/600/sw-1413.jpg](http://www.globalgallery.com/prod_images/600/sw-1413.jpg)



Example 18: Jasper John's American Flag

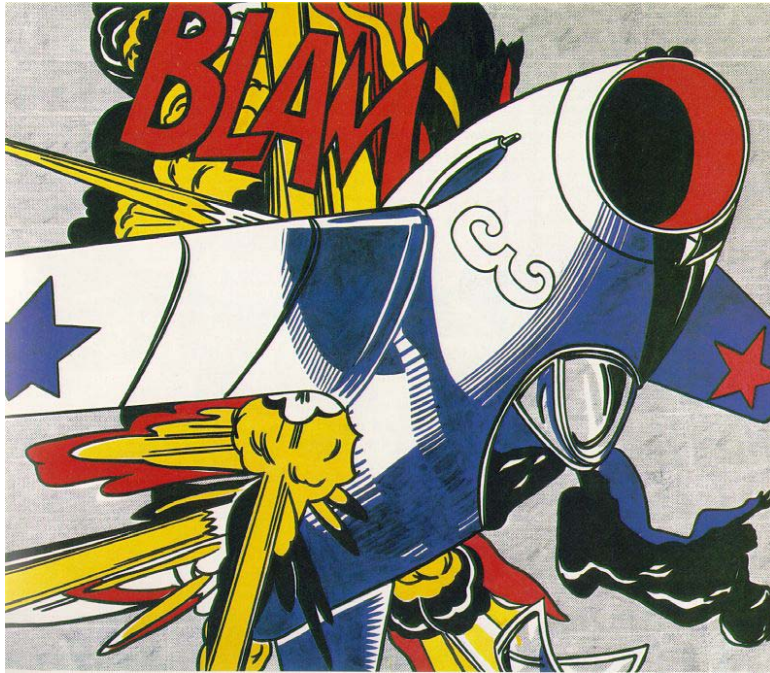
<http://www.polyvore.com/cgi/img-thing?.out=jpg&size=l&tid=7980020>



Example 19: "Engagement" Ring by Roy Lichtenstein



[http://lh4.ggpht.com/\\_SZekRLdFEow/SsizTgVZCBI/AAAAAAAAJfA/QrtJqA1XB8c/s800/lichtenstein\\_blam.jpg](http://lh4.ggpht.com/_SZekRLdFEow/SsizTgVZCBI/AAAAAAAAJfA/QrtJqA1XB8c/s800/lichtenstein_blam.jpg)



Example 20: "Blam" by Roy Lichtenstein

<http://www.mountainsotravelphotos.com/USA%20-%20New%20York%20City/MOMA%20Next%20/slides/MOMA%2022%20Andy%20Warhol%20Campbell's%20Soup%20Cans.jpg>



Example 21: Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans

[http://www.studio-international.co.uk/studio-images/face\\_to\\_face/Bottles\\_b.jpg](http://www.studio-international.co.uk/studio-images/face_to_face/Bottles_b.jpg)



Example 22: "210 Coca Cola Bottles" by Andy Warhol

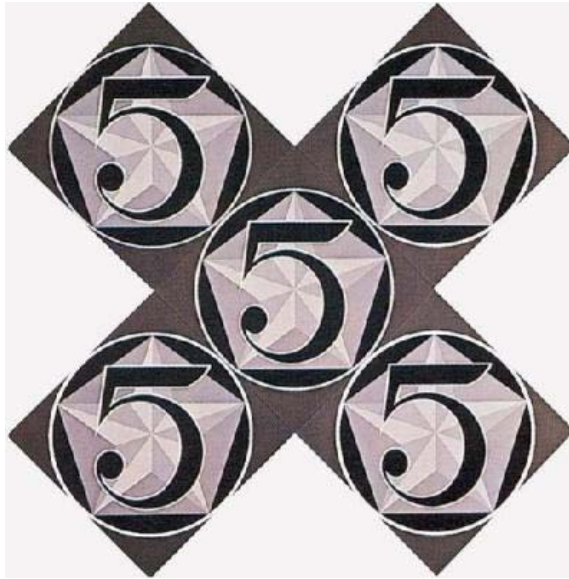
<http://i53.photobucket.com/albums/g80/rosethawns/mymarilyn.jpg>



Example 23: "My Marilyn" by Richard Hamilton



<http://images.easyart.com/i/prints/rw/lg/2/5/Robert-Indiana-The-X-5-25428.jpg>



Example 24: "The X-5" by Robert Indiana



Example 25: Marilyn Monroe



Example 26: Bob Marley



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