

Unveiling American Pop Art: A Comprehensive Study of Andy Warhol's Influence and Artistic Integration of Consumer Culture

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Abstract

Pop Art, distinguished by its engagement with elements of popular culture such as advertisements, consumer goods, and cartoons, represents a unique artistic genre that has been advanced by notable artists including Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and James Rosenquist. These individuals utilized a mechanistic methodology, amalgamating images from varied media sources into their artistic productions. Specifically, Andy Warhol attained significant recognition within the domain of American art, creating pieces that unveiled the effervescence of quotidian life and ingeniously integrating facets of American consumerism and advertising into his oeuvre. The import of Pop Art is considerable given its role in dismantling the boundary between high art and popular art, consciously incorporating aspects of an industrialized society into the domain of artistic expression. Accordingly, this research endeavors to scrutinize the genesis and development of American Pop Art, particularly emphasizing an understanding of its distinctive features through an exploration of Andy Warhol's work, a symbol of American consumer and popular culture.

Keyword : Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist, Pop art, pop culture, consumer culture

1. Introduction

The prevailing stature of American art on the international stage is both noteworthy and influential. This ascendant position may be traced back to the inception of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), an initiative introduced by the U.S. government in 1935 as a strategic response to the economic challenges triggered by the Great Depression of 1929. The WPA played a significant role in the financial sustenance of numerous artists who found themselves grappling with economic adversity. A division of the WPA, known as the Federal Art Project (FAP), was particularly focused on supporting artists and fostering a culture of appreciation for American art [1][2].

During the period of World War II, the American art landscape appeared bereft of a prevailing artistic trend. However, the influx of European artists to the United States instigated a notable influence of European surrealist automatic description on American artists. This influence was further expanded upon by abstract expressionist artists, notably led by Jackson Pollock, who personified what critics acclaimed as action painting and established a unique American artistic movement.

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Nevertheless, the advent of the 1960s marked the emergence of a dynamic pop culture and an increasing proliferation of consumerism, catalyzing the rise of diverse artistic movements that diverged from the established abstract expressionism. A notable example is the emergence of pop art. Artists within this movement negated the exclusivity of abstract expressionism as an art form catering to an elite minority and began crafting artworks using popular materials, intending to resonate with a wider audience.

Despite initial critical skepticism, American pop art progressively gained traction among the public from the 1960s onward. Artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and James Rosenquist integrated popular culture and iconic imagery into their distinctive artistic styles, focusing on elements like advertisements, merchandise, storefronts, television, and cartoons. By employing mechanistic techniques, they selected and transformed images from a diverse array of media sources into their artwork. Andy Warhol, in particular, rose to prominence in the American art scene by creating works that encapsulated the vibrancy of everyday life, adeptly incorporating elements of American consumer culture and advertising into his work. His extensive contributions also encompassed the popularization of celebrity culture through a multitude of artworks, establishing him as a luminary within the domain of American pop art and a pioneer of popular culture [3].

At its core, pop art served to deconstruct the dichotomous perception that art could only be classified as either pure or popular. The significance of this movement lies in its active incorporation of the realities of an industrial society into the realm of artistic expression. Therefore, this study seeks to probe the establishment of American pop art and elucidate its defining characteristics by exploring the oeuvre of Andy Warhol, who epitomizes American consumer and popular culture.

2. The establishment of American pop art

Pop art, as an artistic movement, challenges the prevailing notion that American art is predominantly characterized by grandiosity and wildness. While popular artists like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein from New York are widely recognized by the public, it is often believed that pop art originated in America. However, its roots can be traced back to its initial emergence in Britain before gaining international fame upon its migration to the United States. Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the establishment of American pop art, it is imperative to examine its early origins in the UK and the subsequent process of its dissemination to the United States. In the aftermath of World War II, European society grappled with social crises that engendered feelings of anxiety and skepticism.

Abstract expressionism emerged as a dominant art movement globally during this period, encapsulating the essence of human existence and destiny in artworks. However, abstract expressionism faced a significant challenge with the advent of consumer culture and the rise of pop culture in the United States. Artists who rebelled against the prevailing abstract expressionism at the time began presenting various forms of figurative art, ultimately paving the way for the emergence of pop art.

In England, Francis Bacon played a pivotal role as a precursor to pop art. Influenced by Sergei Eisenstein's film *Battleship Potemkin* and photographic data by Eadweard Muybridge, Bacon deliberately incorporated images derived from original photographs into his works between 1949 and 1951 [4]. These artistic endeavors by Bacon left a lasting impact on young artists and significantly shaped the development of pop art.

The turning point for pop art in Britain came with the exhibition of the Independent Group (IG) at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London in 1956 [5]. Richard Hamilton's work, *What makes households of today so different and wonderful?*, which served as a poster for the exhibition, garnered considerable attention. The IG works became emblematic of a new cultural movement embraced by young British individuals, leading to the widespread popularity of pop art from 1962 [6]. However, it is noteworthy that British pop art did not achieve the same level of prominence as its American counterpart, primarily due to the cautious nature of the British people. While British pop art demonstrated astuteness in its historical context, the English apprehension towards simplicity hindered the diversity of pop art [4].

Although pop art initially received limited attention in England, it gained significant traction as a representative artistic trend reflecting the spirit of the times upon its diffusion to the United States in the 1950s. Influenced by Marcel Duchamp's opposition to abstract expressionism, American artists began to embody pop art in their work. Jasper Johns played a foundational role in the emergence of pop art in the United States, equating reality with the act of painting by expressing symbols such as the American flag, map, alphabet, and target through abstract expressionism starting in 1954. Critics later labeled his works as 'Neodada' at a private exhibition in 1958, which greatly influenced the pop art movement of the 1960s [7].

Two key exhibitions, namely the *Art 1963: A New Vocabulary* organized by the Philadelphia Arts Council in 1962 and the *New Realist* exhibition in New York, marked the definitive emergence of American pop artists [8]. Artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and James Rosenquist gained prominence during this period, establishing themselves as pivotal figures in the realm of pop art.

3. Andy Warhol's Artistic endeavors and his influence

Andy Warhol, born on August 6, 1928, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, emerged as a prominent figure in American art. Raised in a household of Slovakian immigrant workers who practiced the Greek Orthodox faith, Warhol's exposure to Catholicism during his formative years influenced his religious beliefs [3]. Warhol's parents were hardworking immigrants, and this working-class ethic was a value they passed on to him. This can be seen in his prodigious output and his willingness to delve into commercial art. Warhol was raised in a devout Byzantine Catholic household, and religious imagery from his youth found its way into his later work. The idea of repetition in his work such as the iconic Campbell's Soup Cans or Marilyn Diptych has been interpreted by some as a reflection of the ritual and repetition inherent in Catholic practices like the rosary or liturgy [8].

Displaying artistic talent from an early age, he pursued studies in commercial art at Carnegie Mellon University, where he graduated with honors. Subsequently, Warhol relocated to New York City, where he found success as a commercial artist, receiving accolades such as the Art Directors Club Awards in newspaper, advertising, and art in 1952 for his exceptional work published in renowned magazines like Harper's Bazaar and Vogue.

While initially establishing himself as an illustrator and stage designer, Warhol dedicated himself to his artistic career in 1960. In the early 1960s, his artistic endeavors drew inspiration from cartoons disseminated through various media outlets. However, an encounter with Roy Lichtenstein's pop art prompted a shift in Warhol's focus, leading him to create works centered around famous products, celebrities, and newspapers starting in 1961. During this period, Warhol employed silk screen techniques to produce his works, often utilizing mass-produced items both acquired and manufactured.

In 1964, Warhol established The Factory, a studio space in New York City that functioned as a creative hub. The Factory served as a workplace and gathering place for a collective of artists, facilitating the exchange of ideas and fostering collaborations. However, in 1968, Warhol faced a life-threatening incident when he was shot by Valerie Solanas, a former employee of The Factory. The impact of this traumatic event reverberated throughout his life and influenced his subsequent artistic output.

Following the crisis, Warhol's artistic focus shifted towards human figures and themes of mortality, departing from his previous diverse use of materials. At the behest of his social circle, he produced numerous portraits using deceased celebrities as subjects, including Natalie Wood, who tragically

drowned, and James Dean, who met an untimely demise. Warhol continued to employ the silk screen technique in his portrait works [9]. Exploring concepts of disaster and mythology, he remained engaged in artistic production until 1986, a year before his death. On February 22, 1987, at the age of 58, Warhol passed away at Cornell Medical Center in New York City due to complications from gallbladder surgery.

Warhol's tumultuous life, lived amidst the societal upheavals of the early and mid-20th century in America, profoundly shaped his artistic creations and approach to his craft. The 1950s, when Warhol embarked on his career, marked a period of significant commercial and capitalist growth in American society following World War II. This era witnessed remarkable economic expansion, mass production, and the rise of consumer culture. The pervasive influence of media further fueled the public's desire for material consumption [4]. Against this backdrop of a mass-consumption society, Warhol formulated his artistic ideology.

Having commenced his artistic trajectory in commercial design rather than traditional fine art, Warhol directed his attention to materials associated with the burgeoning capitalist trend. These materials encompassed the realms of mass media, including television and cartoons, the rapid urban development and transportation networks, and the proliferation of mass-produced goods accompanied by advertising. The ethos of mass production remained a central component of Warhol's artistic methodology, exemplified by his adept utilization of the silk screen technique throughout his career.

During the period of Andy Warhol's artistic career, the silk screen technique held significant recognition as a fundamental method employed in engraving and printing for advertising purposes [10]. Advertisements relied on mass production to disseminate their messages and promote goods that were being produced on a large scale. Warhol skillfully utilized the silk screen technique to portray images of products emblematic of the mass-consumption society, such as Campbell Soup, Coca Cola, and Super Man. By naming his workspace called Factory, Warhol evoked the concept of the artist as a producer, generating works for public consumption. Thus, he interwove his artistic creations, work methodology, and physical workspace through the common thread of mass production and commercialism.

Furthermore, Warhol's artistic vision encompassed not only the broader cultural characteristics of American society but also the tumultuous events of the time, which became subjects in his works. For instance, he crafted a portrait of Chinese President Mao Zedong during President Richard Nixon's groundbreaking visit to China in 1972. Additionally, upon the sudden demise of the iconic movie star Marilyn Monroe, Warhol employed film images of her and reproduced them using the silk screen technique. However, following the near-fatal shooting incident, Warhol underwent notable shifts in his

artistic direction. Confronting mortality, he delved deeper into themes of humanity, death, disaster, and mythology. Portraits of deceased famous individuals such as Natalie Wood and James Dean emerged from this phase, incorporating skeletal imagery into his works.

His final artwork, the Portrait of Lenin, manifested mythical elements and reflected his lifelong Catholic faith [9]. Andy Warhol's biography and his artistic creations epitomize the essence of American pop art that flourished during that era. With the exception of his later years, his works astutely depicted American capitalism and a society driven by materialism. In his art, Warhol famously proclaimed, "the president drinks the same Coca-Cola as I do", encapsulating the essence of capitalism and asserting that the American society he inhabited was ideal. He emphasized that his artworks existed purely on the surface, inviting observers to explore the exterior of the artwork as a means of understanding him, with no hidden depths. This characteristic of pop art represented a rebellion against the prevailing trend of abstract expressionism, which delved deeply into the existential and fateful dimensions of human existence. Instead, Warhol embraced a more straightforward and surface-oriented approach.

While these aspects of Warhol's life are vital in interpreting his work, it is equally important to note that Warhol himself was often reticent about their influence. He was known for his elusive and enigmatic persona, often allowing the public and critics to draw their own interpretations about the meanings behind his work. The life and creative endeavors of Andy Warhol played a pivotal role in establishing American pop art as an independent artistic ethos. Through his artistic contributions and personal journey, Warhol solidified American pop art as a distinctive artistic movement.

4. Political climate and cultural transitions

The enduring growth and significance of American pop art can be attributed to the socioeconomic landscape in which it emerged. The economic prosperity of the United States played a pivotal role in fostering the development of this artistic movement. In the 1930s, the U.S. government's Federal Art Project attracted European artists seeking economic opportunities, thereby introducing new ideas and influences that laid the foundation for American pop art. Concurrently, the rapid expansion of the American economy and the rise of popular culture provided a basis for critiquing abstract expressionism as an art form that catered exclusively to certain privileged classes and focused solely on existential concerns. This socioeconomic context directly shaped the evolution of pop art in the United States.

In addition, the rise of Pop Art can be understood against the backdrop of both political and cultural shifts that occurred in the mid-20th century, especially in the United States. From a political perspective,

this period was marked by the aftermath of World War II and the emergence of the Cold War. The post-war era brought a period of considerable economic prosperity in the U.S., largely due to industrialization and technological advancements. However, this prosperity was contrasted by an underlying sense of fear and anxiety stemming from the threat of nuclear warfare, given the ongoing tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. As abstract expressionism dominated the art scene in the 1950s, it became viewed as elitist and inaccessible to many. In contrast, Pop Art, which emerged in the late 1950s and early 1960s, sought to reflect the realities of everyday life and the popular culture that was becoming pervasive. Pop artists began to use imagery from advertising, comic books, and mundane objects to challenge traditional boundaries between high and low art. By doing so, Pop Art became a critique of both consumer culture and traditional artistic values. Furthermore, the social movements of the 1960s, such as the Civil Rights Movement, Anti-Vietnam War protests, and second-wave feminism, created a climate where questioning of societal norms was encouraged. In this context, Pop Art's incorporation of everyday, lowbrow elements was seen as a direct challenge to the establishment. Culturally, the post-war period saw significant changes. The consumer culture expanded dramatically, owing to a booming economy and the advent of television and other mass media, leading to a proliferation of advertising. Consumption was not just an economic activity; it was also a cultural and social one. The public became enamored with consumer goods, celebrity culture, and media imagery, all of which found its way into popular art [11].

Central to the explosive rise of pop art was the artistic prowess of Andy Warhol. Through his artworks, distinctive work style employing the 'silkscreen' technique, and the establishment of his renowned workspace known as the Factory, Warhol vividly depicted the American capitalist society characterized by mass production and consumption. Furthermore, Warhol captured and portrayed significant events and personalities that shaped American society, further reflecting the breadth and depth of the country's cultural landscape. By encapsulating the multifaceted aspects of American society, Warhol's contributions solidified American pop art as an independent and influential artistic movement within the nation.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the rise of Pop Art, exemplified by the works of artists like Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, and James Rosenquist, marked a significant shift in the American art landscape. This paper revealed how Pop Art, through its utilitarian approach and incorporation of popular culture and everyday

objects, challenged the dichotomy between high and low art, redefining the boundaries of artistic expression. In particular, Andy Warhol's oeuvre, characterized by its bold engagement with consumerism and media imagery, emerged as a vivid representation of the vibrancy and complexity of American life.

Furthermore, Warhol's works not only encapsulated the essence of an industrial society but also reflected the subtleties of American consumer and popular culture. This examination of Pop Art, hence, offers a nuanced understanding of its transformative impact on American art and its enduring relevance in today's culture. Moreover, Warhol's prolific influence underlines the potential of art to dialogue with its societal context, echoing the pulse of its era while anticipating future cultural trends. By bridging the gap between pure art and popular art, Pop Art laid the groundwork for future artistic movements, demonstrating art's inherent capacity to adapt, innovate, and challenge prevailing norms. In particular, as people navigate through the digital age, the trajectory of Pop Art is anticipated to continue evolving in compelling and unforeseen directions so it continues to evolve and adapt, mirroring the ever-changing landscape of popular culture in innovative, immersive, and critically engaging ways.

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