

Release Date: September 5, 2012

Roy Lichtenstein Retrospective On View at National Gallery of Art, Washington October 14, 2012–January 13, 2013



Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*, 1961

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Roy and Dorothy Lichtenstein in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art

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Washington, DC—Pop art was defined, refined, and ultimately blown wide open by American artist Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997). In the first major exhibition since his death, ***Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective*** will include more than 100 of the artist's greatest paintings from all periods of his career, along with a selection of related drawings and sculptures. On view in the East Building of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, from October 14, 2012, through January 13, 2013, the exhibition presents Lichtenstein's expansive legacy, including the classic early pop paintings based on advertisements and comic-book treatments of war and romance, his versions of paintings by the modern masters, and series including Brushstrokes, Mirrors, Artist's Studios, Nudes, and Landscapes in a Chinese Style.

Over the course of his career, Lichtenstein's work has been the subject of more than

240 solo exhibitions, the last full survey having been organized by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1993.

The exhibition was organized by the Art Institute of Chicago, and Tate Modern, London, in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington. Following the National Gallery presentation, the exhibition will be on view at Tate from February 21 through May 27, 2013. Centre Pompidou in Paris will host a smaller version of the exhibition from July 3 through November 4, 2013.

"With his unique combination of technical invention, deadpan humor, and cultural daring, Roy Lichtenstein moved the line between commercial and fine art and changed the way we look at our world. It is impossible to imagine contemporary art without his signature dots. We are delighted to be able to honor the career of this iconic artist with this major exhibition," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "This retrospective will allow our visitors to revisit Lichtenstein's familiar works and examine those rarely seen. Given his use of art history in so much of his work, the exhibition at the Gallery puts this 20th-century master in a broader context."

Exhibition Support

Bank of America is proud to be the global sponsor. The Robert and Mercedes Eichholz Foundation is the foundation sponsor. The exhibition is made possible by Altria Group. The Exhibition Circle of the National Gallery of Art is also supporting the exhibition. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Exhibition Highlights

Although many pop artists explored similar subject matter, what distinguished Lichtenstein was his use of hand-painted yet mechanical-looking dots to create areas of tone and color, which would eventually become his signature technique. The National Gallery's own *Look Mickey* (1961) is an early example of this method and will open the exhibition. Considered by Lichtenstein to be his first pop painting (which he donated, with Dorothy Lichtenstein, in 1990 in honor of the Gallery's 50th anniversary), *Look Mickey* pioneered the artist's now-famous combination of comic-book themes and the look of commercial printing processes.

The exhibition will be arranged chronologically and thematically, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of Lichtenstein's work.

Entablatures: On view on the Mezzanine outside the entrance to the exhibition, the Entablatures depict the architrave, cornice, and frieze that derive from classical motifs on institutional buildings in and around New York City's Wall Street. Like so many of his interpretations of man-made world around him, these paintings are starkly simplified and reprocessed. They can be divided into black-and-white works (1971–1972) and later works in color (1974–1976).

Early Pop: After completing several canvases with identifiable comic-book characters, Lichtenstein moved on to subject matter taken from other forms of printed media, including advertisements, telephone books, and catalogues. Rendered with a limited palette (red, yellow, black, and white), *Keds* (1961) depicts a larger-than-life pair of sneakers from a Sears, Roebuck, & Co. advertisement; and *Cup of Coffee* (1961) and *Hot Dog with Mustard* (1963) are idealized versions of their real-life counterparts.

Black and White: Lichtenstein experimented with a series of paintings without pop color or narrative—large black-and-white works depicting ordinary, everyday objects. Here the painted canvas was itself sometimes treated as an object, as in *Portable Radio* (1962), which includes a functional leather strap, and *Compositions I* (1964), a very large facsimile of a student notebook. In 1962 Lichtenstein transitioned to machine-made, perforated metal screens, through which he painted his trademark dots.

War and Romance: Lichtenstein is best known for his series of large-scale works of distressed young women and daring young men derived from war and romance comics. He was fascinated by the contrast between the emotional intensity of the stories found in comics and his own deadpan, mechanical style. The sentimental young romance of *We Rose Up Slowly* (1964) and the violence of war in *Whaam!* (1963) point to stereotypical representations of gender in the mass media. Male protagonists—featured in dramatic close-ups in *Torpedo...LOS!* (1963) and *Bratata!* (1962)—contrast with Lichtenstein's clichéd depictions of vulnerable women during moments of

high tension.

Brushstrokes: Early in his career, Lichtenstein experimented with abstract expressionism, but he soon abandoned the style. Later, with his signature pop art style, Lichtenstein returned to the motif of the brushstroke—the predominant feature in abstract expressionist works and arguably the core of painting itself. In *Little Big Painting* (1965), Lichtenstein created a dense layering of cartoony brushstrokes, while in *Brushstroke Abstraction I* (1996), the brushstrokes appear as graffiti juxtaposed with the dots and diagonals that were the basic building blocks of Lichtenstein's pop vocabulary.

Landscape: One of the first genres that Lichtenstein turned to following his comic-inspired pop breakthrough, the Landscape paintings contain his trademark halftone dots but their compositions are pared down to basic elements. The works range from strongly representational paintings such as *Sunrise* (1965) to almost completely abstract works such as *Seascape* (1964).

Modern: Lichtenstein's 1966 poster design for New York City's Lincoln Center was inspired by the architecture and design of the late 1920s and 1930s—the style of earlier performing arts palaces such as Radio City Music Hall. This poster initiated a series that parodied art deco—which Lichtenstein acidly described as "Cubism for the Home"—in which he isolated and recreated decorative motifs of the era, such as brass ornamentation and geometric reliefs. This series includes three-dimensional works such as *Modern Sculpture with Velvet Rope* (1968).

Art History: Throughout his career, Lichtenstein applied his comic style to create versions of impressionist, cubist, futurist, surrealist, and German expressionist works. In some cases, he worked from a particular painting; in others—*Grapes* (1972) and *Still Life with Glass and Peeled Lemon* (1972)—he worked with generalized conventions of a genre, always rephrasing a source in his own language. *Washington Crossing the Delaware I* (c. 1951), the earliest work in the exhibition, translates Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's well-known oil painting from 1851 into faux-naive, cubist-inspired style Lichtenstein employed in the 1950s. During the heyday of his comic-inspired pop works, the artist was simultaneously producing compositions that appropriated the

imagery of Piet Mondrian and Pablo Picasso.

Mirrors: Lichtenstein's choice of mirrors as a subject is one of the artist's references to art history—Jan van Eyck and Diego Velázquez famously depicted mirrors in their work. The convincing representation of a reflecting mirror has long been a sign of technical virtuosity. In 1969 Lichtenstein began his first *Mirror* and by 1972 he had completed almost 50 variations. Surprisingly, his mirrors reflect nothing except the play of light and reflection; in his *Self-Portrait* (1978), the artist's face is replaced by such a mirror.

Artist's Studios: In this monumental series, inspired by Henri Matisse's painting *Red Studio* (1911), Lichtenstein created a purely imaginary interior realm in which to inventory his images. In *Artist's Studio "Look Mickey"* (1973) Lichtenstein references individual works (including *Look Mickey*), and series (Entablatures, Mirrors). This exhibition tour is the first time the four life-size Artist's Studios canvases have been on view together since the exhibition *Roy Lichtenstein: The Artist's Studio*, held in 1974 at Leo Castelli Gallery in New York.

Perfect/Imperfect: The paintings in this series, made between 1979 and 1989, are Lichtenstein's first and last complete abstractions, his only pop works that do not depict anything. Rather than being based on preliminary sketches derived from mass-produced images, the Perfect/Imperfect works were invented and plotted on graph paper. Line is the primary structural element, forming webs of shapes filled with areas of dots, diagonal lines, and flat color. In the Imperfect paintings, a "mistake" in planning causes the lines to exceed the bounds of the rectangular canvas, resulting in triangular protuberances.

Nudes: Unlike traditional depictions based on live models, the women in Lichtenstein's Nudes series are inventions with origins traceable to the artist's archive of comic-book clippings, some dating back to the 1960s. Often the works—including *Nudes with Beach Ball* (1994) and *Two Nudes* (1995)—are composites of figures drawn from multiple panels, lacking narrative connection. These lesser-known works are a challenge to the chaste conventions of classic comic books, and a surprising departure in Lichtenstein's career.

Landscapes in a Chinese Style: Lichtenstein returned to the landscape genre in 1995, creating a powerful series of more than 20 works that appropriate motifs of the classical landscape painting of the Song dynasty (960–1279). In these highly stylized scenes, he recognized a painterly language distilled into codes and rules, and then translated this into his own style, seen in *Treetops through the Fog* (1996). Although Lichtenstein had been exposed to Chinese art as a student at Ohio State University in the late 1940s, the primary inspiration for this series was a group of monotype and pastel landscapes by Edgar Degas that he saw at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1994.

Exhibition Curators and Catalogue

Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective was curated by James Rondeau, curator of contemporary art at the Art Institute of Chicago, and Sheena Wagstaff, head of modern and contemporary art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and formerly chief curator at Tate Modern. Harry Cooper, curator and head of modern art, is the coordinating curator for the exhibition at the National Gallery of Art and a catalogue author.

Published by the Art Institute of Chicago, the 368-page fully illustrated exhibition catalogue will become a landmark of scholarship on the artist. Nine essays by leading critics and scholars, accompanied by photographs of the artist and his seminal exhibitions, examine the various styles and subjects featured in paintings created throughout his lifetime. The contributions from Yve-Alain Bois, Harry Cooper, Chrissie Iles, and Stephen Little, among others, give special consideration to Lichtenstein's historical influences and early contributions to pop art, from Picasso and cubism through surrealism, futurism, and British pop. Essays by curators James Rondeau and Sheena Wagstaff evaluate the artist's abstract work and his late nudes respectively.

The inclusion of a complete chronology of Lichtenstein's life and work—compiled by Clare Bell of the Lichtenstein Foundation—makes this catalogue the most authoritative publication on the artist since his death in 1997. The publication includes 172 color plates and is available in softcover (\$45) and hardcover (\$65) for purchase in the Gallery Shops. To order, please visit <http://shop.nga.gov/>; call (800) 697-9350 or (202) 842-6002; fax (202) 789-3047; or e-mail mailorder@nga.gov.

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General Information

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets along Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. With the exception of the atrium and library, the galleries in the East Building will be closing gradually beginning in July 2013 and will remain closed for approximately three years for Master Facilities Plan and renovations. For specific updates on gallery closings, visit www.nga.gov/renovation (<http://www.nga.gov/renovation>) .

For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at www.nga.gov. Follow the Gallery on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) at www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt and on [Twitter](http://twitter.com/ngadc) at twitter.com/ngadc.

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

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