

Introducing Modern Western Art : Movements and Artists
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Lecture - 19
Art & the Mass Culture: Pop Art

Welcome viewers to MOOC's online course on Introduction to Modern Western Art, Movements and Artists.

Today in this lecture we will be looking at a very interesting art movement that unfolded itself in united states of America around 1950s, and it is called pop art movement which is an embodiment of a relationship between art and the mass culture in a very, very big way almost for the first time in the history. Of course, mass culture in (Refer Time: 00:58) and bits has been addressed by artists like the Picasso in his second phase of cubist movement called synthetic cubism all by the (Refer Time: 01:12) started in early twentieth century. Even some of surrealist painters had also addressed to some extent certain aspects of mass culture, but here in the pop art movement of 1950s.

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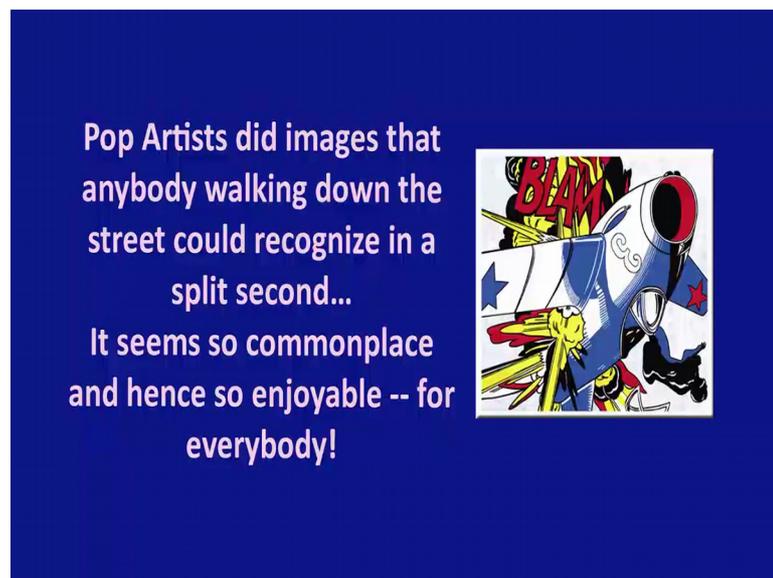
Pop Art was an American art movement in the late 1950s and 1960s that reflected everyday life and common objects. Pop artists blurred the line between fine art and commercial art.



It is not about a selective engagement with the mass culture, but the entire art movement got integrally connected with the mass culture in content in a subject matter in it is form even in it is means of production. So, pop art was basically an American art movement in the late 1950s and 1960s that reflected everyday life and common objects.

Pop artists blurred the line between fine art and commercial art. That is also very interesting because for the first time in the history of modern western art we come across an art movement that kind of tried to dismantle the hierarchy that existed. Until then between the mainstream fine art and the popular commercial art.

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So, pop artists did images in the form of paintings mainly and also sculptures, that anybody walking down the street could recognize in a split. Second and that was one of the objectives to engage the common people the public with the art otherwise common viewers would not have any clue any space to engage themselves with the art. Because it failed to address what the public in common was familiar with. So, it seems it is a commonplace and hence so enjoyable for everybody. So, that is why when you see a pop painting by Roy Lichtenstein they means that you see right now on the screen.

Since the painting does not look in any way different from a frame from a comic strip. So obviously, right at the outside it attracts the viewer the common viewer. The viewer feels familiar with images one is encountering either this portrait of the pop icon, mainly Monroe or a small little fragment from a comic stream very typical popular American comic stream.

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The Pop artists clearly moved away from Abstract Expressionism which was the “in” style of art in the 50s.

Instead of evoking feeling, emotion and psychological state of mind, they were more interested in incorporating the various ready-made signs from the living popular culture.

All for that matter an image of 3 coca cola bottles. The pop artists clearly moved away from the abstract expressionism which was the entry the most kind of sort of style of art in the 1950s. Instead of evoking feeling emotion and psychological state of mind pop artists were more interested in incorporating the various readymade signs from the living day to day popular culture, from the whole world of the visual culture which is the part of popular consumption every day. Whether it is coca cola that a soft drink or a very popular icon like mendy Monroe or Mao sai thung or (Refer Time: 05:08) or anything that has become a part of the popular visual culture.

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At first glance, all these images look pretty much like any commercial advertisements or publicity images. As a matter of fact, they are all remarkable examples of fine arts from the history of art. Obviously, the border line has become extremely thin...and it is deliberately done!

So, a quick glance at all these images look pretty much like any commercial advertisements or public images that we come across everyday. So, if you are not familiar with pop art in the first glance these images may look like they may not look like at all, that we are looking at some examples from the domain of art history. They look like a martial images or as a matter of fact they are all remarkable examples of fine arts from the history of art; obviously, the border line has become extremely thin and it has been deliberately done. To the extent that in many examples of pop art the boundary line between art and commercial image does not exist at all.

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Pop artists used common images from every day culture as their sources including advertisement that is publicity images, consumer goods, celebrities or images of celebrities like mendy Monroe Mao sai thung Mao sai thung or any other pop icon. In photographs that is photographs, photographs in mass circulation and of course, comic strips pop. Artistes were inspired by billboard huge billboards which was part of a new consumer visual culture of America since 1940s public murals, magazine images, newspaper photographs.

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In fact, when you compare these images which are photographs of various parts of America in 1960s and 70s and 80s with many pop art images you hardly find any difference this is exactly what they intended to do So that we do not get any differences. So, that we do not make the typical highbrow kind of discrimination between this is commercial art and that is fine art.

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Some of the most famous pop artists are Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Claes Oldenburg amongst many others.

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To put it simply, the Pop Art movement wanted to bring art back into the daily life of people.

It was a reaction against abstract painting, which pop artists considered as too sophisticated and elite.

Pop artists' favorite images were objects from everyday's life like soup cans for Andy Warhol or comics for Roy Lichtenstein.

Typical for the attitude of the Pop Art movement was Andy Warhol's use of serigraphy, a photo-realistic, mass-production technique of printmaking. Pop Art intruded into the media and advertising. The differences between The fine arts and commercial arts were voluntarily torn down.

To put it simply the pop art movement wanted to bring art back into the daily life of people, by using the images from the daily lives of people. It was the reaction against abstract painting, which pop artist is considered as too sophisticated, too elite, and too philosophical for the common people to comprehend. Pop artist's favourite images were objects from ever day life like soup cans for Andy Warhol comics for Roy Lichtenstein.

Typical for the attitude of the pop art movement was Andy Warhol's use of serigraphy: a photo realistic mass production technique of paint making. Pop art included into the media and advertising, the differences between the fine arts and commercial arts where voluntarily torn down. So, these are some of the features that we see happening during this movement of pop art.

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So, what looks like a cinema poster or a publicity emails is actually a work of art by Andy Warhol like this one. Now along with the fact that he was using silkscreen, reproduction method which was a typically a commercial printing method, but he brought that into the domain of fine art. Along with the fact that Andy Warhol was repainting the most popular and iconic images of American visual culture at that point of time, and in this case it is Merlyn, Merlyn Monroe face played. Along with these 2 things there is a third object that is noticeable in his works and many others works also that many pop artists were also using this idea of multiplicity.

This is very interesting, because multiplicity or multiple reproductions of the same image same photograph several times 100s and 1000 times. And circulated in our visual culture creates a huge impact of course, it has a commercial purpose, it has a market driven idea why it is to be done? But the fact that the pop artists were using this idea of multiplicity has a great impact on the whole idea of art because.

The generally speaking mainstream history of art has always relied on the uniqueness of a work of art of a image, but here somebody like Andy Warhol breaks down the myth of uniqueness, creates multiplicity. But not exactly that the same face or the same image get multiplied or reproduced several times, he has also shown like in this painting. That every time he reproduces the image of the same face of the same person the reproduced image is not exactly the same.

So, he introduces a wonderful paradox here, with multiplicity claims similar images. It claims that it is possible to reproduce similar images exactly the same kind in the same way again and again as many times you want. But the paradox is because of the very technology and because of the way the technology is being used by Andy Warhol; it is possible that whereas, on the surface superficially it appears to be multiplicity of the same kind at the back of the idea is also variations.

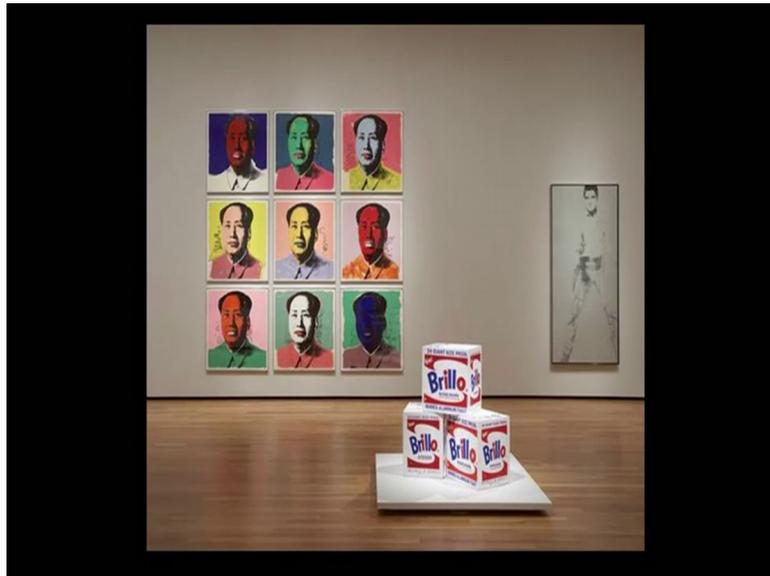
So, when you look at each of these 9 faces of Merlyn Monroe or this work of art he find none of them is actually same with the other they are all different. So, very certainly Andy Warhol introduces the paradox of multiplicity.

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In that sense he is really speaking not to going by the consumerist publicity image culture, but somewhere he is living a comment, he is leaving a statement. He is making his own observation, a few more work by him like this image of Mao sai thung or Walt Disney.

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A photograph of a display of Andy Warhol's work, and in the background you can see once again 9 same images of Mao Zedong's portrait, but each of them is slightly different because of the color and because of the technology. That is serigraphy used in slightly different way every time.

So, multiplicity itself is being questioned by using multiplicity as a possibility, this is where the paradox lies.

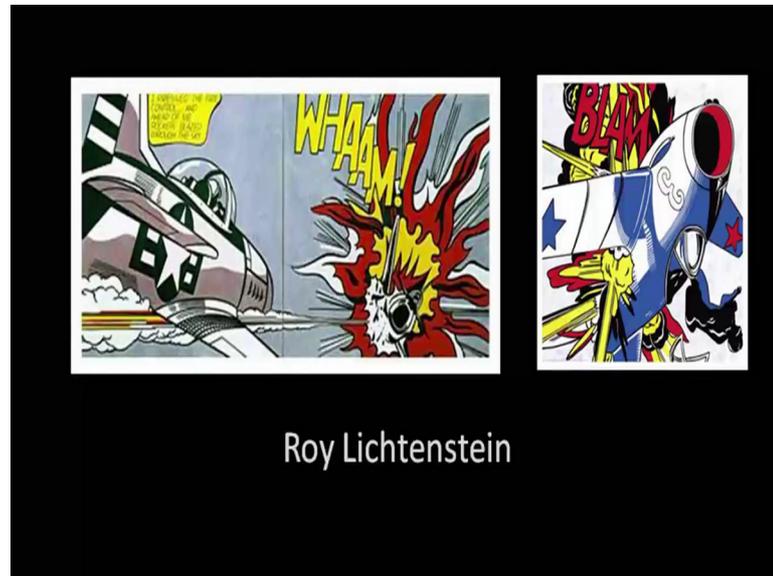
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But sometimes like this image of Campbell soup, Andy Warhol does not really change

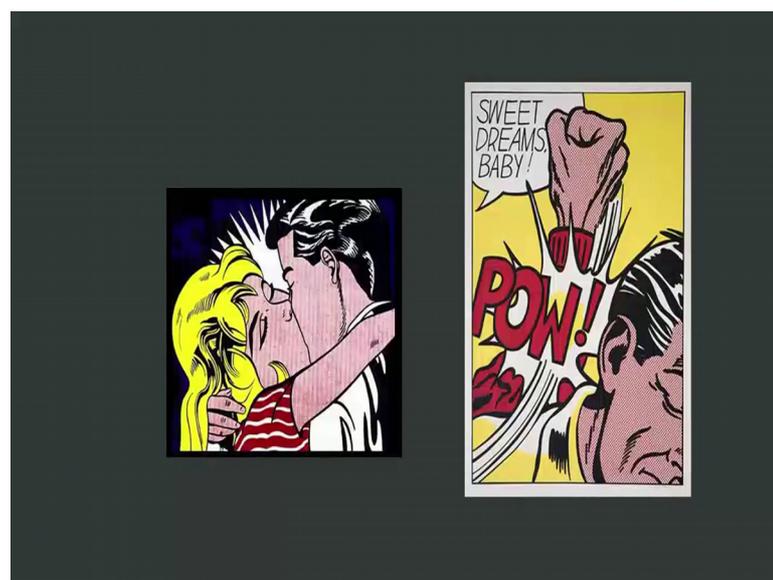
the character of the image every time. He leaves them as it is and makes a statement by almost saying that this is how the uniqueness of an image is completely destroyed in a market driven consumerist culture.

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Then we have Roy Lichtenstein who has been using images from every day comic strips, and simply blowing them up in a pic scale. And slightly manipulating somewhere some images or maybe little bit of text.

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But because of his focus on certain details from a large comic strip which we read every

day and blowing it up almost out of proportion on huge scale of canvas. There is a change in the meaning, of not meaning of the content of the comic strip, but there is a change in the impact of that image on us because we are used to see comic strips in very small scale printed on our daily newspaper. We are not used to see them in a huge size big canvas; however, familiar we are with those images that are beside the point, but we do not see them in that way.

So, I think they were playing a trick On the one hand.

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People like Andy Warhol Roy Lichtenstein or (Refer Time: 16:03) are using very, very commonplace motifs like American flag or Mao sai thung Merlyn Monroe comic strips, but simply by repainting it on a huge scale. They are creating a different impact they are playing with our familiarity, but at the same time de familiarising the experience that we have when we read the same comic strip from the newspaper.

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This is by (Refer Time: 16:38) again a different paintings based on the idea of a bulls eye which is very common as a motive.

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There are several such artists' Jasper Jones and Rauschenberg and of course, we have seen Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein. But particularly with Rauschenberg we have seen an increasing use of collage as a technique. Collage has already been used very effectively by the cubist painters like Picasso and Brock. Collage has been used by the Dadaist artists, but collage is being used by the pop artists from an entirely different

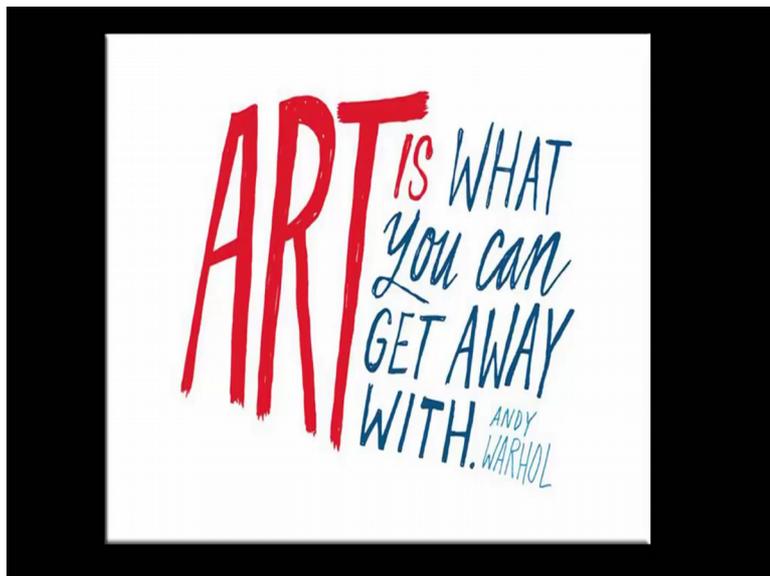
perspective. Because for them collage is a way to reclaim what is popular and bring them into the popular domain of art Forgetting the discrimination between fine art and commercial art.

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And at the same time by virtue of using collage you can also give up the authorship.

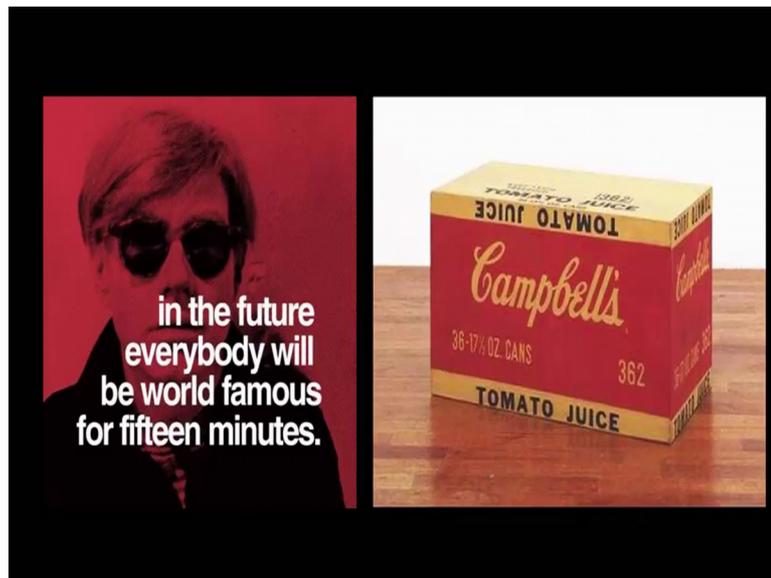
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That you do not have any signature style of painting, because you are all using already reproduced images as a part of your collage composition.

Now, this kind of attitude on part of the artist pop art is themselves became like Andy Warhol, an iconic figure a current figure let us say during his own time. So, his sayings came become very proverbial like the one that has been quoted here when he said that art is what you can get away with see.

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In other words Andy Warhol was somebody who was trying to let us say trivialize art. On the one hand and on the other hand he was also questioning and challenging, the bloated idea of fine arts and its claims. So, that is why all his sayings like in the future everybody will be world famous in 15 minutes or for 15 minutes. These kind of proverbial saying and quotations made him even more famous.

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It aimed to employ images of popular as opposed to elitist culture in art.

Emphasized the banal or kitschy elements of any given culture, most often through the use of irony.

It is also associated with the artists' use of mechanical means of reproduction or rendering techniques.

It challenged tradition by asserting that an artist's use of the mass-produced visual commodities of popular culture is contiguous with the perspective of fine art.

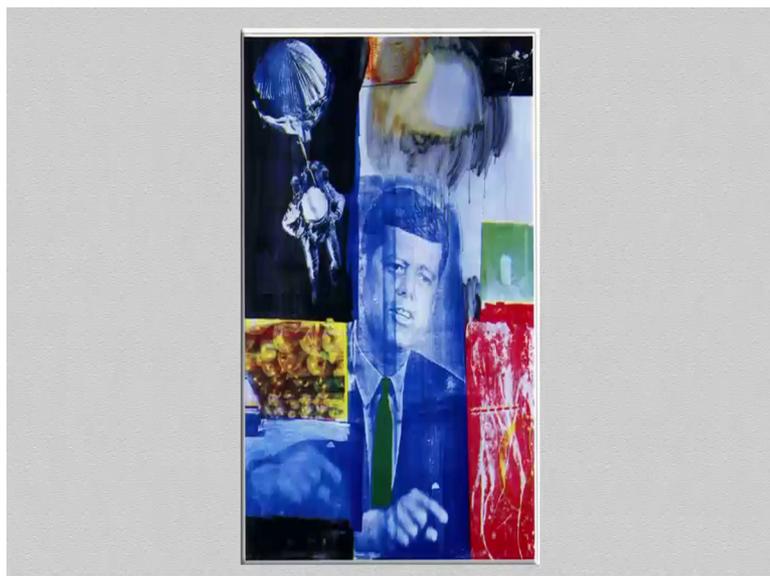
Because these quotations were in a sense a kind of (Refer Time: 19:26) sacrilegious challenging and of course, radical in the given context. Now pop art aim to employ images of popular as opposed to elitist culture in art. And this confrontation between the elite art and the popular art gets reflected in many of these sayings and quotations by Andy Warhol.

Pop art emphasized the banal or the kitschy elements of any given culture most often through the use of irony. It is also associated with the artist's use of mechanical means of reproduction or rendering techniques like we have already mentioned about serigraphy. And pop art certainly challenged traditions for a long kind of European tradition of art and its norms and conventions by asserting, that an artist's use of the mass produced visual commodities of popular culture is contiguous with the perspective of fine art they do not have anything in conflict. That is what they wanted to assert; a few more painting by Rauschenberg where he is using collages.

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He is using photographs, he is using different techniques of painting on same canvas, and thereby bypassing any singular stylist feature in his works.

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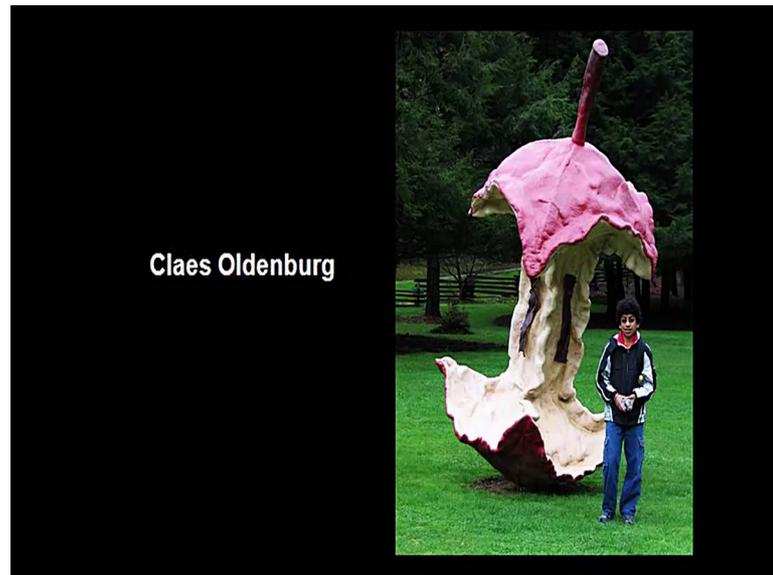


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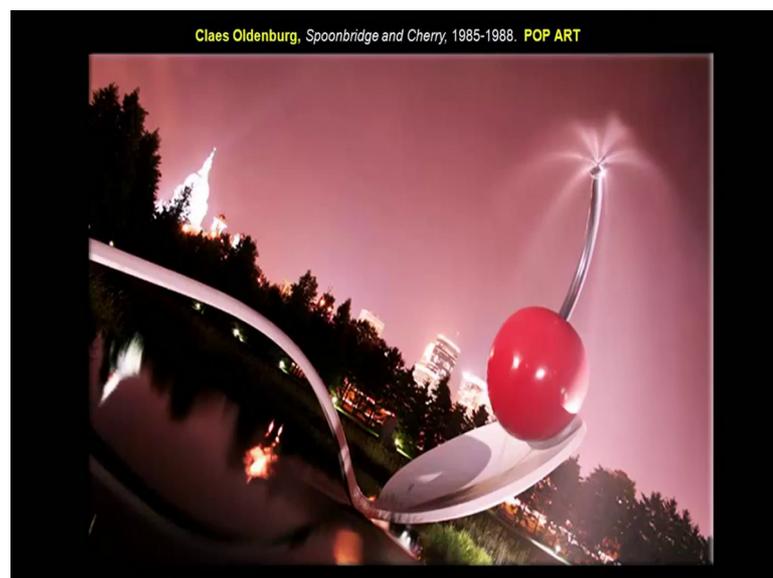
We have already seen this by him. And then we have one unique artist belonging to the pop art movement, and the name of the artist is Claes Oldenburg. Who made wonderful public sculptures, open air sculptures or even small sculptures, but interestingly as you see in this picture. The sculptures made by Oldenburg do not have anything very imaginative in the sense they directly and very realistically more often than not represent something that is very banal very common very ordinary like a safety pin, or like a toilet commode or like an eating apple or a shuttle cock or huge clip cloths clip.

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Now, once again there is this scale and the size that plays a very important role in creating a visual impact something that you see every day as common as a safety pin or a shuttlecock or a wooden clothes clip. And then when you see these objects again, blown up magnified in a huge scale and get the public space and kept in a public place installed in a public space claimed as statue or a sculpture that certainly creates a different impact. So, scale is a very important role here very important feature, if they had made the same objects like this.

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Cherry on the spoon and it is called Spoon Bridge to cherry, this scale close to the real scale of the objects. Probably that would not have created much impact. At least we would not have anything more to say other than appreciating skill involved in creating an imitation of a common piece object. But when you amplify the scale when you magnify the size of a very common object into a giant scale, into a giant image, into a giant structure and shape that is what that is something that reflects the popular American culture, because the popular American cultural always wanted to reach the big the bigger the biggest.

So, even a very, very common space object like a shuttlecock or a half eaten apple when amplified and magnifying into a huge scale, that somewhere gratifies the American aspiration too big to become very big the superpower of the world.

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Pop art in that sense was successful in addressing this particular sentiment this popular sentiment that was gradually gripping the imagination of American people, to become the superpower of the world to dominate the world to become the global hero. And pop art like this one an ice cream an ice cream cone recreated in a massive scale in a huge scale and installed on top of a building definitely was not only creating a very popular visual impact on the passer by or in the environment.

But in a sense pop art whether it is a sculpture by Claes Oldenburg or paintings and calligraphies by Andy Warhol Roy Lichtenstein Jasper Jones Rauschenberg, it could be

anybody's work. They all in a sense embody the aspirations of American popular dream.

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So, on the one hand pop art was successfully incorporating the elements of the mass culture. And on the other hand it was successfully manifesting and expressing and giving shape, a tangible visual shape to the common popular American dream.

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Pop art posed many a serious questions..provoking debates and counter-arguments:

Pop art was appealing to many viewers, while others felt it made fun of common people and their lives.

It was hard for some people to understand why Pop artists were painting cheap, everyday objects, when the function of art historically was to uphold and represent culture's most valuable ideals.



Thank you.