

Compare and contrast Claes Oldenburg and Edward Kienholz.

Pop Sculpture bridges 2D and 3D work, and creates the “combines” of Rauschenberg. Work is not meant to be permanent, or commemorative. Edward Kienholz and Claes Oldenburg both contributed to this era in sculpture and explored the boundaries of what art actually is.

Both Kienholz and Oldenburg use everyday items from around which are impersonal, banal and kitsch. Kienholz was an American installation artist. He continuously used items found in everyday life, which are cheap and spontaneous. They come across as being socially critical and satirical, and reconstructs atmospheres with horrific imagery. He distorts realism and creates counter worlds with surrealist aspects. Compared to Oldenburg, his sculpture can be politically complex and create many propaganda clichés. “The Portable War Memorial” does this, using juxtaposition to create grotesque mementos. To the left are soldiers in real uniform juxtaposed with a bar on the right with tubular steel furniture, business as usual. By reinterpreting everyday objects, Kienholz explores the confines of sculpture, and what makes art, art.

In “The Wait”, an old woman awaiting death confronts us; a dehumanised figure in a photographic pose looks frail and uncomfortable in a hard, oversized chair. Surrounding her, are relics of her childhood, marriage, birth and death (awareness of self) and appears nostalgic, almost tender.

In comparison Claes Oldenburg produces ironic and jokey sculptures, used to poke fun at advertising companies and manufacturers. Like Kienholz, he reinterprets objects but he uses oversized dimensions, using soft materials. He likes to challenge ideas and recreates rather than using past themes, objects or materials, to expand the field of sculpture. Oldenburg makes “readymade” sculpture – new dimensions in aesthetic thinking. It replaces narrative symbolism, anatomical correctness, sculptural modelling and unity of material.

He was keen to experiment with modern materials: plastic, plaster, vinyl, fabric etc. This was to highlight materials of the 1960’s modern world. “Bedroom Ensemble” is a grotesque but unerringly accurate parody. Soft fabric has been used to stage a glamorous, decorative and staged bedroom – a theatre of the domestic. It is a new realism of sculpture to produce an image of everyday life. Tracy Emin with “My Bed” was influenced by Oldenburg to create her idea of everyday life. Claes Oldenburg uses everything, from food, household items, leisure and clothes. “Floor Burger” – a giant sculpture – challenges the sculptural convention. Something everyday and mundane is made hard and permanent. He forms “visual puns” by using satirical and ironic references. He challenges the gallery system by placing sculptures in public places and areas. Both Oldenburg and Kienholz were highly influenced by Surrealists and the movement Dadaism, such as people like Marcel Duchamp with his Urinal and Bicycle Wheel.

Sculpture has been driven by a desire to break from the past, and is about art and the everyday. It is politically aware and it criticises the modern world with its emphasis on capitalism and accumulation. Both Claes Oldenburg and Edward Kienholz explore all aspects of Sculpture, both continuing to challenge and excite, in different approaches.