

The first pop artists came from the Dada movement, for example, the French artist Marcel Duchamp and the German artist Kurt Schwitters. Duchamp used everyday objects and took them out of their usual contexts to exhibit them as art. He would retitle the objects "to declare its change of function from a utilitarian purpose to an aesthetic or conceptual one". Duchamp claimed that he did not choose his objects for esthetic reasons and that instead his choices were based on "visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste." Some of the most controversial pieces were 'Fountain' which was a urinal, and 'A Bicycle Wheel', which was a snow shovel.

Pop art itself emerged gradually in the mid-1950s. But it was only after the exhibition at the Sidney Janis Gallery in New York in 1962 that it established itself as a serious, recognized form of art. The exhibition featured such artists as Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol and Peter Blake.

Peter Blake was a young British painter who, in 1954, was using comic books, printed ephemera and imagery drawn from funfairs, the circus and wrestling in his work. In 1959, he began to produce collage-based paintings of pop musicians, film stars, posters, LP covers and trivial images and became known as a pop artist. He also designed the cover of The Beatles' 1967 album Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.



Madonna on Venice Beach 4



Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

In the mid-1950s Jasper Johns was using images of targets and flags in his paintings. These paintings had a major impact on the art scene because they were ordinary objects flatly put on to canvas rejecting the attributes associated with art as an expression of personality. They were close enough to reality to make the viewer question whether it was art or just an ordinary target or flag.



Three Flags, 1958

Warhol was one of the first artists to understand the importance of the mass media. He took his early material from comic strips and advertisements which he found in tabloids like ~~the New York Times~~ and ~~the New York News~~.

Whereas Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and pop artists did not modify the objects in their paintings, Warhol did and did not use other objects in the background. He did not use any preliminary sketches and used a projector to put them on canvas. In making his art plain and simple he was able to create the icons of Pop Art.

Warhol's artwork had always reached more broadly than that of the other pop artists. Added to this the fact that he consistently publicised his career and persona in texts such as "The Philosophy of Andy Warhol" and "POPism: The Warhol 60s", he emerged as the emblematic pop artist for the public.

Warhol was his art. His studio and his wife Edie were part of his art work. He was willing to make studio practice a public sight and connected it with the world of entertainment and celebrity.

Lichtenstein combined motifs from several sources in his compositions and used a stencil to produce the Benday dots. Rosenquist's training as a billboard painter had provided him with sufficient experience of enlarging a small image to a bigger scale.

At first, in order to manually copy and enlarge images Warhol used an opaque projector to project the image on to canvas which he would then trace, like the other pop artists. Then his use of machine devices increased and he used a plethora of stamps and stencils to produce works like the Campbell's soup can paintings. In 1962 he developed his signature silkscreen technique, where he was able to have a photograph made into a silkscreen which would then transfer the image to canvas.

When the news broke in August of 1962 that one of Hollywood's most legendary stars, Marilyn Monroe, was found dead, Andy Warhol was as stunned as the rest of the world. It's reported Warhol admired Marilyn's glittering career and became fascinated and impressed with the amount of publicity her death generated and the rampant press speculation concerning the cause of the tragedy. Within days Warhol bought a publicity still of Marilyn's from her 1952 film Niagara. This single image, cropped and presented in Warhol colors, would become the basis of all of his Marilyn portraits.

The term "Pop Art" was first used by an English critic in 1958 to describe paintings that celebrate post-war consumerism and worship the god of materialism. Pop Art emerged as an art movement in the mid 1950's in England, but realized its fullest potential in New York in the 60's. Pop Art elevated the material realities of everyday life (Campbell's Soup cans and Coca Cola bottles) to an art form. It also repackaged the visual pleasure derived from popular culture, (TV, magazines and comics), and presented them as art. The movement blurred the distinction between fine art and commercial art techniques.

Having started as a commercial artist Warhol knew the importance of art in the business world of marketing and knew the importance of image in product promotion. The media and advertising were favorite subjects for Pop Art's often witty celebrations of consumer society, so there's little mystery as to why Warhol became part of a new form of art based on marketing and consumerism. In Warhol's mind everything could be seen as having a relationship to art. In his words: "Everything is beautiful. Pop is everything". Therefore the label of a soup can was art in itself as was any object created by a designer.

At the heart of Pop Art was the transformation of mass culture, including advertising, into high art: soup can paintings by Andy Warhol; magazine ad collages by Richard Hamilton; comic strip paintings by Roy Lichtenstein. And yet, the line separating fine art from advertising continues to be drawn. For example, Andy Warhol's place in art history is contested. Barbara Rose called Warhol the Mary Magdalene of art history. She suggested in a 1970 review, that his art was trash and that he had sold himself to the public for fame and money. On the other hand, many critics contend that Warhol actually expanded the definition of what art could be.

