GRADUATE RESEARCH PAPER

ART HISTORY

AR 311 American Art II

ANDY WARHOL AND THE POP-STYLE

by

Frank L. Herbert

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CONTENTS

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CHRONOLOGY

1928   born Andrew Warhola, McKeesport, Penn.

1949   BFA, Carnegie Tech. Pittsburgh; moves to New York; shortens name to Warhol

1950   freelande commercial artist, commissions from Glamour, Vogue,
-57   Harper's Bazaar; shoe illustrations for I. Miller

1960   begins painting: comic strips—Nancy, Popeye, Dick Tracy; advertisements—Coca-Cola, Campbell's soup

1961   diagram paintings, do-it-yourself paintings

1962   1st gallery show—Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles; first screen print paintings—Troy Donahue, Warren Beatty, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis; 1st New York show—Stable Gallery

1963   took on Gerard Malanga as assistant; Liz Taylor, Jackie Kennedy paintings; portrait of Ethel Scull; disaster paintings; established 47th Street studio (the Factory); begins making movies, Sleep Kiss, Blowjob, Tarzan & Jane Regained, Sort of

1964   self portraits, flower paintings; films; Empire, Harlot (first sound film); Baby Jane Holzer—girl of the year

1965   retrospective in Philadelphia at Institute of Contemporary Art; flower paintings shown at Leo Castelli Gallery and at Sonnabend Gallery in Paris; announces retirement from painting; films: Vinyl, My Hustler, The Life of Juanita Castro, Poor Little Rich Girl; projection experiments

1966   Velvet Underground and the "Exploding Plastic Inevitable" multi-media happenings; film Chelsea Girls, portrait of Holly Solomon

1967   films: Four Stars, Bike Boy, I, a Man; sends imposter on western colleges lecture tour; Portraits of the Artists multiple

1968   films: Lonesome Cowboys, Blue Movie; moves Factory to 33 Union Square; takes on Fred Hughes as business manager; "a", (a novel); gets shot by Valerie Solanis; Paul Morrissey films Flesh; begins Interview magazine with John Wilcock

1970   begins extended series of portraits, Dennis Hopper

1971   Kimiko Powers

1973   Chairman Mao

1974   Ivan Karp

1975   Ladies & Gentlemen (drag queen series), Mick Jagger suite; the Philosophy of Andy Warhol (A to B & Back Again)

1977   John Powers

1978   Liza Minneli

1980   Shoes suite; Portraits of the '70's exhibition; Jewish Genuises of the 20th Century exhibition; "Popism"; "Andy Warhol's Exposures"; Andy Warhol's T.V.

I. INTRODUCTION

Andy Warhol is most significant in the history of American painting as a primary character in the Pop Art movement. Many critics and art historians illustrate their particular definition of Pop Art with Warhol's paintings of the '60's. His career, however, as a Pop artist was short-lived. By 1965, Warhol had already made his major contribution to Pop Art. His work after this date either made minor amendments to the Pop statement or had only a superficial relation to the Pop style. In this paper I will attempt to describe the Pop Art style by identifying particular technical and philosophical characteristics. Relating this style to Warhol's work, I will define when it fits the Pop style and when it does not.

II. POP ART: ORIGINS AND CHARACTERISTICS

Lawrence Alloway describes Pop Art as a merging of the fine and popular arts. He defines popular culture as "the sum of the arts designed for simultaneous consumption by a numerically large audience. Popular culture originates in urban centers and is distributed on the basis of mass production."[1] The phenomenon of popular culture is, therefore, a product of industrialization. With the industrial revolution sweeping outward from England in the eighteenth century, the factions of high culture responded to the onslaught of popular culture by defining a strict separation between the fine arts of painting, architecture, music and poetry from the popular arts (posters, magazines, catalogues, cartoons, romance novels and plays, etc.). This separation was strengthened throughout the following centuries. Alloway identifies "nineteenth-century aestheticism" seeking "the pure center of each art in isolation from the others, and twentieth-century formal theories of art assuming a universal equilibrium that could be reached by optimum arrangements of form and color."[2]

The period following World War II experienced a terrific acceleration of popular culture in Europe and America. The effects of wartime propaganda continued to support the great American myths of glamour, glory and goodness. With advertising acclaiming social stability and economic prosperity, American popular culture became more than ever consumer oriented. Advertising implied that every American should enjoy the spoils of democracy. It flirted with the individual, promising that participation in consumerism would offer a specialness, a separation

from the anonymous boring mass. With this power of advertising and the tremendous technical growth and sophistication of mass media, graphic commercial images became the dominant force in the urban American landscape. These images were designed to convey a single message at a quick glance. The style was flashy (bright colors and high contrast) and the images usually contained isolated, centralized and symmetrical forms which could be easily read. These read the same whether they were painted by hand or created by machine (figures 1, 2). The immense scale and/or repetition of these images throughout the mediascape effected an overwhelming barrage of visual information. The individual was confronted with more to see than could be perceived.

Throughout art history, artists have assimilated into their art, elements from the particular visual environment in which they have lived. The Impressionists included images of agriculture, boat-laden sea coasts, and smokey train stations in their paintings. The futurists illustrated the accelerated motion of the automobile. The Cubists incorporated the element of the printed word emulating the montage of placards, handbills, posters, newspapers, billboards, and catalogues as seen in the Parisian landscape (figures 3, 4). In America the Ash-Can group painted the bleakness of urban street scenes, the Precisionists painted skyscrapers and mill towers, and in the '30's and '40's Stuart Davis, expounding on Cubist collage, began to paint elements of lettering, emblems and logos from commercial package designs, signs and billboards (figures 5, 6, 7). It was the assimilation of elements in the cultural environment along with the challenge to an elitist separation of fine art from popular culture that effected the beginnings of Pop Art. In the mid '50's certain artists in the urban centers of America and England began adopting techniques and imagery from popular culture for use in the fine arts arena.

Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were two New York artists who, around 1955, in close correspondence, began to produce artwork based on an American urban vernacular. Rauschenberg proposed that his art should reflect the qualities of the world on the street outside of the studio. His paintings of 1955-1960 presented clusters of fragments taken randomly from the urban life experience. These often included actual objects of popular culture mounted directly onto the picture plane (figure 8). Johns took the most familiar objects—targets, flags, maps, numerals, beer cans, flashlights—and meticulously rendered these with the skill and precision of the traditional artist-craftsman. This rendering of common subjects with a high style reconciled two previously opposed modes (figure 9).

The British contingent of Pop Art had its beginnings in 1952, slightly before Pop characteristics emerged in American Art. A small group of young painters, sculptors, architects and critics who were meeting in London at the Institute of Contemporary Art initiated discussion about popular culture and its implications in art. This group included critic Lawrence Alloway, architects Alison and Peter Smithson, the sculptor Paolozzi, the artist Richard Hamilton and others. Presumably, the term Pop Art was first coined by Alloway, but it was Hamilton who first publicly introduced the word in relation to the particular subjects of the style.[3] This was in a small collage of 1956 entitled "Just What Is It That Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?" (figure 10). This collage shows a couple in a modern living room setting complete with elements of '50's popular culture: T.V., tape recorder, vacuum cleaner ad, comic book cover. The figures, both nude, are cut from popular magazines. The male holds a "Tootsie Pop" displaying the printed wrapper. Other significant early British Pop

artists were Peter Blake, who painted images of Pop celebrities, and Peter Phillips, whose machine-like images were painted in a hard edged, brilliantly colored style resembling billboard art (figures 11, 12).

Pop Art as a movement in America developed with an interesting simultaneity. Artists in New York and Los Angeles were privately inventing paintings based on commercial images and/or popular media. They worked behind closed studio doors, unaware that other artists were creating similar artwork. Andy Warhol had made paintings from "Nancy," "Dick Tracy," "Superman," and "Popeye" comic strips before he had ever seen or heard of Roy Lichtenstein's comic book paintings (figures 13, 14). James Rosenquist was making paintings resembling the scale, imagery, and air brushed technique of billboard paintings (figure 15). (He actually had worked as a billboard painter in the '50's.) Robert Indiana's paintings were symmetrical formats lettered with stenciled slogans like commercial signs (Eat, Drink, Die) (figure 16).

Henry Geldzahler, once the curator of twentieth-century art at the Metropolitan Museum and an early advocate of Pop Art describes the beginning of the movement.

> It was like a science fiction movie—you Pop artists in different parts of the city, unknown to each other, rising up out of the muck and staggering forward with your paintings in front of you.[5]

In view of this simultaneity of invention as a direct response to the outside world, Pop Art can be seen as an objective record of particular elements of the external environment. This characteristic is directly contrary to the philosophies and practices of Abstract Expressionist painting which was the American vanguard directly preceding Pop (1943-1955). These paintings were proportedly the records of a private dialogue conducted between artist and surface. The act of painting was

the focus of the final piece. The activity was generated and directed by the momentary feelings of the artist. In a 1963 interview Lichtenstein compared Pop Art to its modern precursors.

> I think art since Cezanne has become extremely romantic and unrealistic, feeding on art, it is utopian. It has had less and less to do with the world, it looks inward—neo-Zen and all that . . . Outside is the world; it's there. Pop Art looks out into the world; it appears to accept its environment, which is not good or bad but different—another state of mind.[6]

In Pop Art the particular images that were selected from the mediascape were those that were the most common and universal to the American culture: Coke bottles, soup cans, dollar bills, comic strip characters. They belonged to anyone who shopped in franchise grocery and department stores, who subscribed to popular magazines and newspapers, or watched T.V. (figure 17). They were mass produced and lacked the individual nuance that was basic to the Abstract Expressionist sensibility. Popism was anti-elitism. In his first autobiography, Warhol talks about Coke:

> You can be watching T.V. and see Coca-Cola and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking.[7]

In a 1962 symposium on Pop Art at the Museum of Modern Art, critic Leo Steinberg describes this anti-elitism in Pop Art. By borrowing imagery directly from the American landscape, i.e., commercial and popular media, "the subject matter" becomes so familiar and "is pushed to such prominence that the formal or aesthetic considerations are temporarily masked out." In the case of a Warhol painting of a Coca-Cola bottle, it is difficult to see the art for the Coca-Cola (figure 18).[8]

To further support the immediacy of the Pop icon, the images were usually taken from striking graphic sources; images that are simplified and forceful in design, are quickly read and usually speak in exclamatory tones: newspaper headlines, posters, magazine ads, comic books. This flat graphic quality was heightened in execution by incorporating or emulating mechanical image making methods: screen printing, direct transfer rubbings, stencils, half-tone enlargements and airbrush. In this way, the concepts as well as the means of execution were neither original nor obscure.

III. WARHOL AS A POP ARTIST

Andy Warhol was unique among the Pop artists; he had a career as a commercial graphic designer prior to his career as a Pop artist. In New York, Warhol designed catalogues, ads and illustrated for I. Miller Shoes, Glamour, Vogue and Harper's Bazaar. Toward the end of the '50's he had become the most successful illustrator in New York.[9] During this time he closely followed the art world and occasionally bought paintings and drawings through the galleries (paintings by Robert Goodnough and Larry Rivers, a Jasper Johns drawing of a light bulb, a double portrait of Andy and his friend Charles Lisanby by Fairfield Porter). He established a friendship with Emile de Antonio who was then an artists' agent. (De Antonio had often helped Rauschenberg and Johns to earn quick money with commercial art jobs. Through him they had set window displays for Tiffany's, both under the same pseudonymn —Matson Jones.)[10] It was de Antonio who persuaded Warhol to pursue a painting career. He told him, "I don't know why you don't become a painter, Andy—you've got more ideas than anybody around." Warhol credits "De" with being the first person "to see commercial art as real art and real art as commercial art," and with making "the whole New York art world see it that way too."[11]

Although Warhol was the last of the major Pop artists to have a New York gallery show, he soon became the dominant figure in Pop. His first New York exhibition was at Eleanor Ward's Stable Gallery in November, 1962. (He had shown soup can paintings at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles earlier that year.) Examples of nearly all the paintings

done from 1960 to November, 1962 were in this first Stable Gallery show (excluding the comic strip paintings). These included the Coca-Cola bottles, the soup cans, the Elvises, the nose job paintings, the money paintings, the Do-It-Yourself paintings, the diagram paintings, the front page paintings, and the match book covers. That same month Sidney Janis put on a two gallery show of Pop Art and in December, 1962 the Museum of Modern Art sponsored "A Symposium on Pop Art." It has been conjectured that Warhol barely made the Pop scene as an artist.[12]

The Warhol paintings of the early '60's were definitively Pop. He took the imagery directly from the American media-scape—Coca cola signs, match book covers printed with "close cover before striking," publicity photographs of Marilyn Monroe, Liz Taylor, Elvis Presley, and Troy Donahue, S & H Greenstamps, the American dollar bill, comic strip frames, etc. From 1960 to 1962 he hand painted the images in a style that mimicked mass produced commercial signs. They were trademarks painted as flat shapes as though they had been mechanically stenciled (figure 17). To discover one in the context of an art gallery raised new questions about art and about the commercial environment. If they were hand-painted on stretched canvas were they artworks? Were the signs on the street not artworks? In 1962 he adopted the commercial technique of screen printing to produce popular images. This development in his method brought the two basic elements of Pop Art together: a cool mechanical technique which would eliminate any expressionist hand gesture (an assistant could "make" Warhol's art using the screens), and an immediately familiar subject which was encountered in the commercial landscape so frequently as to become overlooked, filtered out by our selective systems of perception.

From 1962 through 1965 Warhol produced his disaster series.
These were paintings that incorporated images from news photos and high-
way patrol documents of horrible emergencies and death scenes (auto
accidents, suicides, funerals, mushroom clouds, emergency room acti-
vities, race riots, electric chairs). By presenting these horrible images
in continuous patterns screened onto the canvas, Warhol illustrated the
numbing effect of news media, with its cool mediums and constant
repetition of sensational images (figure 19).

Unlike the other leading Pop artists, Warhol always lifted his
images directly from popular culture. His borrowed images were trans-
formed only in color and scale. Lichtenstein either redesigned an
image from a popular source or invented a unique image to resemble
the half-toned planar shapes of cheap commercial printing (figure 14).
Rosenquist's images were designed to resemble billboards but were not
to be found in billboards of the commercial landscape (figure 15).
Indiana's paintings were like signs, but the slogans which he presented
did not exist as signs in the popular media (figure 16). In this aspect,
of all the Pop artists, Warhol's work was closest to popular culture.

IV. WARHOL AFTER POP

Although he became the dominant figure in Pop Art, Warhol's career as a producing Pop artist was short-lived. By June 1965 not only did he announce his retirement from painting (which, as with Duchamp before him, was not to be a permanent retirement), but by that time he had ceased to produce Pop oriented artwork. This announcement was made at the opening reception of his exhibition of "Flowers" paintings at Ileana Sonnabend's Paris Gallery (figure 20).[13] "Flowers" paintings presented some of the characteristics of his earlier Pop paintings but they also introduced elements which were not true to the Pop sensibility. Although the image was borrowed from a popular photography magazine it reverted to a more personal and romantic subject than the banal, universal images of modern, industrialized Pop America. Although the execution of the "Flowers" image involved the commercial techniques of screen printing which effects a cool-distant association to the picture surface, the reading of these paintings relied more on modernist sensibility than Pop.

Lacking that Pop characteristic identified by Steinberg as the absolute presence of the subject matter,[14] the presence of the flowers is less dominant than the formalist nuances of color and composition in these paintings. Warhol had borrowed photographs from the media before. The difference here was in the original photographic intention. The "Flowers" image was originally published as art focusing on formal qualities while the publicity photos of Marilyn, Liz and Elvis and the news photos used in the disaster paintings were originally published as

advertising and journalism (figures 21, 22, 23). The resulting Warhol product reflects this original photographic intention.

After the Sonnabend exhibition of "Flowers" Warhol became immersed in a four year obsession with making movies. This was an activity which he began in 1963 with the purchase of his first movie camera and which ultimately ended with his near assassination in 1968.[15] (By 1963 Emile de Antonio had become deeply involved as a filmmaker and had again affected his influence on Warhol.)[16]

Warhol's first films were Pop artworks. These predated the Sonnabend "Flowers" show and include "Sleep," "Eat," "Haircut," "Kiss" and "Empire." In each of these he equated actual time with "reel" time. They were silent, unedited, black and white recordings of simple actualities. "Empire" was an uninterrupted eight-hour stationary shot of that great popular icon, the Empire State Building, as photographed from an office in the adjacent Time-Life Building.[17] Here the medium is as objectively cool and mechanical as is possible and the subject matter so obvious and cliche as to dominate the aesthetic. (The art is blocked by the image.)

The films that Warhol made after his retirement from painting had little to do with Pop imagery. Like the flower paintings, they incorporate the cool mechanical execution of Pop but the subjects became increasingly introverted and elitist. They generally featured Warhol's personal friends, members of the young social clique who frequented the Warhol "Factory" in the mid '60's. The tone was usually consistent with counter culture themes of revolution and change rather than the cliches of early Pop. (Drugs, sex and rock and roll versus those issues confronting T.V.'s Beaver and Wally Cleaver and Rick and David Nelson.)

The attempt on his life in 1968 affected a change in Warhol's activities and attitudes. During his convalescence he began Interview, his monthly newspaper. Interview consists of features transcribed from taped interviews with celebrities of all kinds. Through Interview Warhol developed a personal involvement with the glamorous world of New York high society. Part of this involvement was his return to making paintings. His paintings of the early '70's constituted the beginnings of a prolonged involvement with portraiture. These portraits were commissioned by the members of the American elite—the wealthy, the powerful and/or the famous. The austere and objective Pop coolness of the screen printed celebrities in the early '60's was now replaced with the romantic painterliness of Abstract Expressionism. His 1975 portrait of Jane Holzer or the 1979 "Henry Geldzahler" have more the sensibility of an early De Kooning than of an early Warhol (figures 24, 25, 26, 27).

The 1962 "Marilyn" image presents the frontal and symmetrical emblematic quality of an icon (figure 21). The visual focus of the image is centralized and the space is flattened. Her head fills the frame affecting an obvious confrontation with a singular image. The composition has the directness of a Johns' target. By contrast, the Jane Holzer portrait involves oblique directional devices which invite a scanning of the composition. The chiaroscuro lighting sets a pictorial depth which is mysterious and provocative. Her image is cropped to expose a breast implying a fragment of a full living woman as opposed to the mounted head of the Hollywood legend.

In 1980 the Whitney showed a retrospective of Warhol's portraits of the '70's. This show included the portraits of 56 international figures, most obscure, all elite. The catalogue to this exhibition is like Warhol's

personal scrapbook or <u>Who's Who in American Aristocracy</u>.[18] By 1965 Pop had become the statement for America. By 1970 Pop Art was history and Warhol was a fading legend of that history.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Lawrence Alloway, American Pop Art (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1974), pp. 3-4.

[2]Ibid.

[3]H. H. Arnason, History of Modern Art (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 575.

[4]Calvin Tomkins, "Raggedy Andy," in Andy Warhol, by John Coplans (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, Ltd., 1978), p. 12.

[5]Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, Popism: The Warhol '60's (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980), p. 3.

[6]G. R. Swenson, "What is Pop Art?," Art News, November, 1963, p. 25.

[7]Andy Warhol, The Philosophy of Andy Warhol, Harvest/HBJ Books (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1975), p. 19.

[8]"A Symposium on Pop Art," Special Supplement, Arts, April, 1963, pp. 39-41. (Of the six panelists of this symposium, I refer only to the statements of Leo Steinberg because his ideas on Pop Art seemed the most concise and perceptive.)

[9]Calvin Tomkins, "Raggedy Andy," p. 12.

[10]Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, Popism, p. 4.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Calvin Tomkins, "Raggedy Andy," p. 13.

[13]Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, Popism, p. 113.

[14]"A Symposium on Pop Art," Special Supplement, Arts, April, 1963, p. 40.

[15]In the final chapter of his autobiography, Popism, Warhol explains that his sketchy relationship with Valerie Solanis, the woman who shot him, was established through their common interest in film-making.

[16]Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, Popism, p. 29.

[17]Ibid., p. 80.

[18]New York, The Whitney Museum of American Art: Andy Warhol: Portraits of the '70's, Random House, Edited by David Whitney, essay by Robert Rosenblum, 1979.

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New York Times. June 4, 1968, p. 1, 36.

New York Times. June 5, 1968, p. 50.

ILLUSTRATIONS

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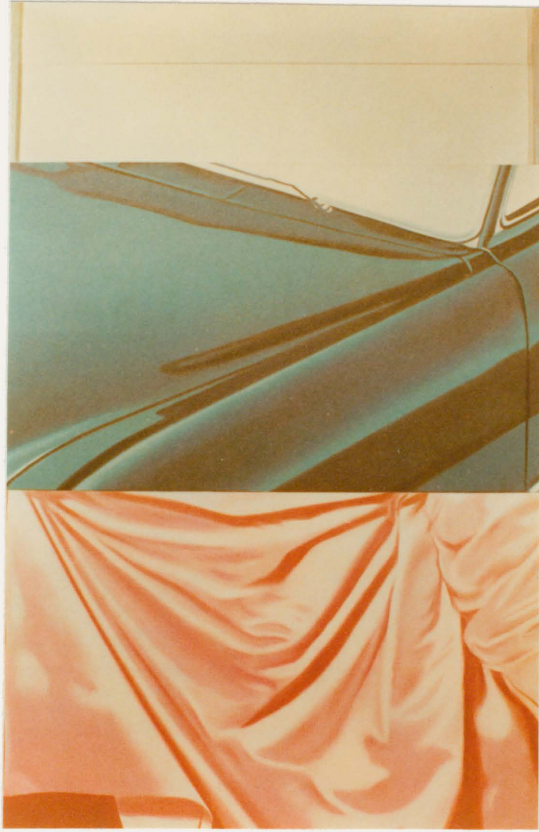Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?</u>, 1956

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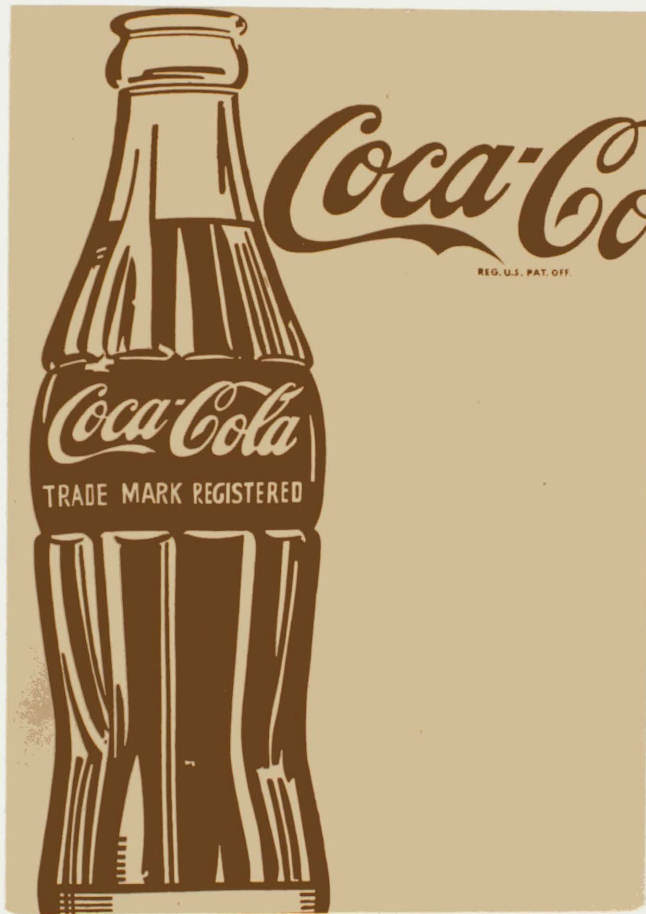
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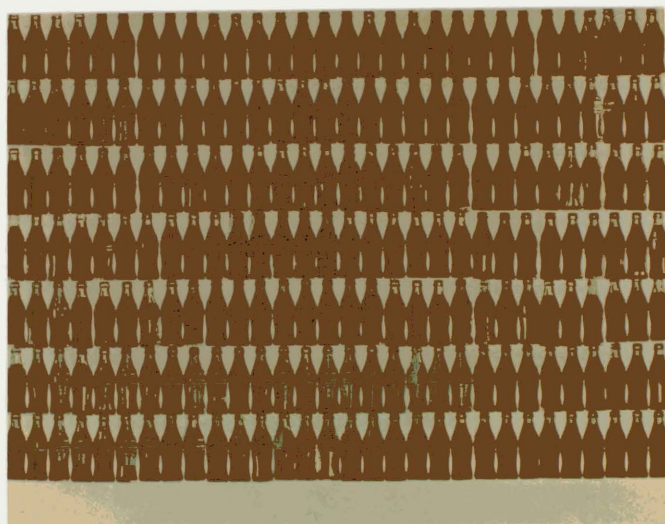14   Roy Lichtenstein, <u>Whaam</u>, 1963

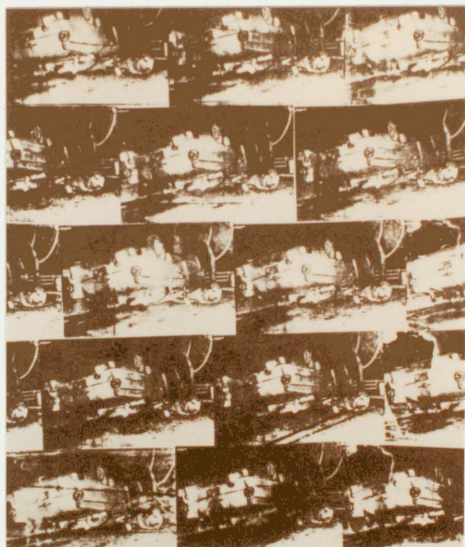15   James Rosenquist, 1,2,3 and Out, 1963

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