

Pop Culture: Selections from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation
Frederick R. Weisman Museum of Art, Pepperdine University
August 25 - December 2, 2012

When the Pop art movement first surfaced in the mid 1950s artists sought to challenge traditional conceptions of art making by incorporating consumer culture and everyday objects into their work. Artists during this period transformed icons associated with mass media, comic books, and popular culture into visual expressions that often reflected a growing societal infatuation with consumerism. When it originated, the Pop art movement sought to ironically emphasize images representing the commonplace or kitschy elements of a given culture. Today, contemporary artists have elaborated on the traditions established by the Pop artists who created an aesthetic style that reflected the changing needs and interests of varying societies. This exhibition merges art that reflects and comments on popular culture and vernacular of the 1960s until the present with selections curated from the Frederick R. Weisman Art Foundation.

One of the most notable players in the Pop art movement, Andy Warhol, placed images of consumerism, advertising, and entertainment at the forefront of his artistic production. Warhol laid much of the groundwork for his contemporaries by creating repetitive silk screen images of entertainment icons such as Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, which became known as one of his signature styles. With encouragement from Warhol, artist Beau Bradford created silk screen portraiture in a comparable way. Paul Rusconi continues this tradition today with his portrayal of tabloid newspaper characters on Plexiglas. Similarly to Warhol, Claus Oldenburg draws upon imagery of the banal in his work. However, while Warhol implicitly engages the consumer object in its mass-disseminated original identity, Oldenburg gives it a life of its own, transforming the mundane into the extraordinary. Creating works of varying scales and media, his *Swiss Army Knife* and *Typewriter Eraser* (the latter now virtually extinct with the emergence of the computer), abandon conventional assumptions about visual demonstration. By employing comparable artistic methods, Srdjan Loncar depicts sculptural representations of pay phones and the ever-changing cell phone often through the use of unexpected mediums.

Illustrations of the traditional American lifestyle became a prominent subject matter in the work of many Pop and contemporary artists. In the 1970s Arman created *Football Shoes*, an assemblage of multiple athletic shoes encased in a Plexiglas box, which reflects on a commodity-driven throwaway society. By drawing attention to functional objects, the work also comments on how we attribute importance to even the most mundane events in our lives. More recently, Joel Morrison's *Alligator Shoes* takes an equally unusual approach to traditional subject matter, and creates a coherent sculptural link between art and life. He comments on

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the duality of modern society by forming a dialogue between mainstream American culture and the alternative Punk lifestyle by casting the all-American casual shoe (in this instance, Vans) with metal studs. Akin to the work of Arman and Morrison, in the 1980s Red Grooms chronicled the pleasures and absurdities of ordinary American life. Grooms illustrates a cross section of American society in *The Blue Restaurant*, a scene depicting a local pool hall complete with figures wearing casual T-shirts, sneakers, and letterman jackets.

The work of Keith Haring in a parallel sense incorporates some of the elements of everyday contemporary lifestyle. First known for his graffiti-inspired chalk drawings in the subways of New York, he eventually elevated his iconic style by creating paintings on canvas which were displayed in galleries world-wide. Artist Daze used motorcycles—utilitarian objects—on which to paint graffiti art, while Crash spray painted graffiti images directly onto traditional canvases. Contemporary artist Retna has created his own graffiti language in his work that is comparable to Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Wayne White uses words in a sculptural form. In a related way, newsstands, bulletin boards, punctuation marks, and other ideas associated with language have been incorporated into the art of Masaaki Sato and Richard Artschwager, as well as in the video and digitalized installations by Nam June Paik, and Jenny Holzer. These works illuminate the ways in which commercialism is articulated through language, technology, and the public domain as a whole.

Throughout the history of the Pop art movement and extending into the present moment, cartoon, game, and comic book idols like Pinocchio, Superwoman, Spiderman, and Pennybags from the Monopoly board game have been utilized in the work of artists such as Blake Boyd, Greg Miller, and Mark Dean Veca, who seek to display popular culture icons as the subjects of artworks. John Chamberlain, Robert Townsend, Pamela Michelle Johnson, Andrew Lewicki, and José Quiñones use crushed metal, kitchen appliances, junk food, and beverage advertising imagery in their work to align consumer culture with artistic production.

The works on view demonstrate conceptions of Pop art as they emerged in the 1950s and 60s, as well as the ways that contemporary artists today have extended and elaborated upon visual representations of mass culture and consumerism. Pop artists and their successors abandoned traditions of high art in favor of creating work that is based on the conventionalized imagery of commercial graphics. This exhibition illustrates how the Pop art movement's extensive history has influenced artistic production in our present cultural moment.