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Modern Romance

Lichtenstein's Comic Book Paintings

Bradford R. Collins

The simplistic view that all Pop art is relentlessly objective and distant seems myopic now. . . . [W]e are increasingly coming to understand the private and subjective significance of the "public signs" of the Pop artists, most of which were loaded with highly personal and charged meanings.

—Paul Schimmel

"The Faked Gesture: Pop Art and the New York School" (1993)

Between 1961 and 1965 Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) produced a series of paintings based on scenes from love and war comic books (frontispiece). Although these works have become synonymous with his name, they stand apart thematically from the rest of his mature production, which was dedicated to high-art subjects and the purging of content in favor of minimalist formal values—simplicity, clarity, fluidity, flatness, and unity. Most scholars maintain that these paintings only appear inconsistent, and that Lichtenstein chose comic sources simply as another means to explore his late modernist aesthetic.¹

Lichtenstein encouraged this view. Throughout his career he insisted that he had no interest in the narrative content of the comic book scenes, and said he had turned to them in 1961 only because of their "possibilities for painting." In his first published interview in 1963, for example, he commented that the comic book artist "intends to depict and I

intend to unify. . . . I use [comic book scenes] for purely formal reasons."²

But at the end of the interview Lichtenstein appeared to contradict his own claim by acknowledging that the comic book paintings do entail "a stylistic intensification of the excitement which the subject matter has for me."³ This singular avowal might be overlooked but for the fact that it perfectly articulates what the viewer sees. The artist's adjustments to the comic book scenes so effectively sharpen their essential content that it is difficult to justify them solely in terms of his interest in color, line, and spatial relationships—the formal means of painting. The melodrama of adolescent romance is more pronounced and the macho violence of war more exaggerated in Lichtenstein's interpretations than in his comic book sources. The paintings themselves are primary evidence that Lichtenstein did care about subject matter. His oft-repeated claims of indifference to depiction bring to mind the character in

Roy Lichtenstein, *Hopeless*, 1963. Oil, 44 x 44 in. Collection of Peter and Irene Ludwig, on loan to Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Kunstmuseum, Basel

THAT'S THE WAY--IT SHOULD
HAVE **BEGUN!** BUT IT'S
HOPELESS!



Shakespeare's *Hamlet* who "doth protest too much."

Lichtenstein's exceptional admission of concern should perhaps be considered a classic Freudian slip. This was an emotionally difficult time for him, professionally and personally. He was on the verge of a breakthrough in his long quest for artistic success and, as he much later acknowledged, "in the middle of a divorce."⁴ The dates of the comic book paintings correspond precisely with his marital breakup. He and his first wife separated in 1961 and divorced in 1965. Interviews that I conducted in the 1990s with Lichtenstein, Letty Eisenhauer—the graduate student he lived with while negotiating his divorce—and some of his colleagues from the early 1960s indicate that the correspondence between his personal romantic turmoil and his choice of themes was more than coincidental. A contextual analysis of the comic book paintings suggests that their themes presented him with an opportunity to play out subconsciously a series of satisfying fantasies, which apparently helped

him to cope psychologically with the hopes and disappointments of this tumultuous time.

Before examining these paintings and the events they addressed, however, we must look afresh at the early development of Lichtenstein's pop art. Only in that context can the essential continuities and discontinuities contained within the comic book paintings be fully understood. One major thread of continuity was the artist's tendency to choose subjects that offered precise if veiled parallels to his professional circumstances. Before he turned to love and war comics, he was in the habit of identifying with the vernacular characters in his art.

Lichtenstein's Early Pop Art

Lichtenstein became a pioneer of American pop in 1961 at the age of thirty-seven when he copied a bubble gum wrapper given to him by one of his sons. When later asked what precipitated *Look Mickey* (fig. 1), he responded: "Desperation.



1 Roy Lichtenstein, *Look Mickey*, 1961. Oil, 48 x 69 in. Dorothy and Roy Lichtenstein, Gift of the Artist, in Honor of the 50th Anniversary of the National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

- 2 Roy Lichtenstein, *Donald Duck*, 1958. India ink on paper, 19 ¾ x 24 ½ in. Private collection



There were no spaces left between [second-generation abstract expressionists] Milton Resnick and Mike Goldberg.”⁵ Lichtenstein had long wanted a place in the forefront of mainstream art, and he hoped to win it with something radically different.

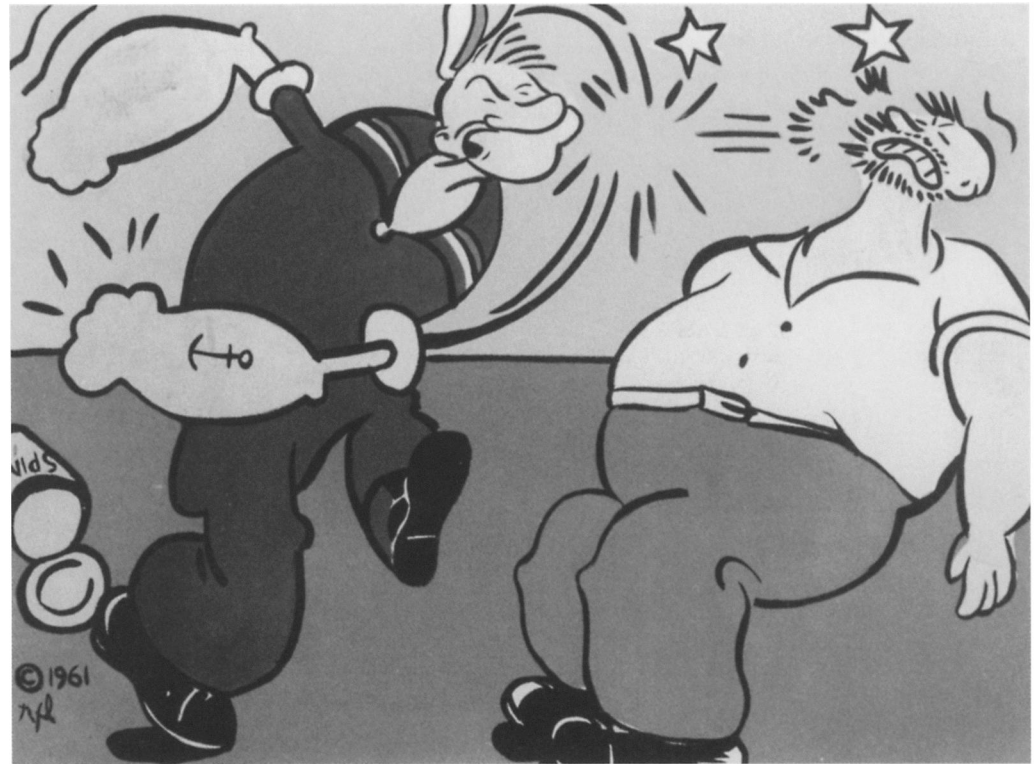
His previous career gambits had all failed. In the late 1950s he had tried to gain the art world’s attention by cleverly marrying the ascendant painterly style practiced by Resnick and Goldberg—what critic Clement Greenberg in an influential 1955 essay called “American-type” painting—with prototypically American subject matter, such as Disney cartoon characters Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse.⁶ Although Lichtenstein destroyed these paintings after they failed to generate interest, he kept some of the preliminary drawings (fig. 2).

The determined artist tried another tack in late 1959 or early 1960 when he subscribed to the cooler, “post-painterly” approach being championed by Greenberg

as the logical step “beyond” abstract expressionism. When Lichtenstein arrived on the Rutgers University campus in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in the fall of 1960 to teach in the art department, he brought along a dozen or so decorative stripe paintings in the general mode of Morris Louis and Kenneth Noland, Greenberg’s designates as the heirs of Jackson Pollock, Barnett Newman, et al. in an evolutionary purification of modern art.⁷

Lichtenstein found Greenbergian purity to be particularly ill-suited to the intellectual climate at Rutgers. The art department was then staffed and attended by a host of young men—including Robert Watts, George Brecht, Lucas Samaras, George Segal, Robert Whitman, and Geoffrey Hendricks—determined to take contemporary art toward ordinary life, not away from it. The leading theoretician of this loosely affiliated group was Allan Kaprow, who in 1958 had published “The Legacy of Jackson

3 Roy Lichtenstein, *Popeye*, 1961.
Oil, 42 x 56 in. Private collection

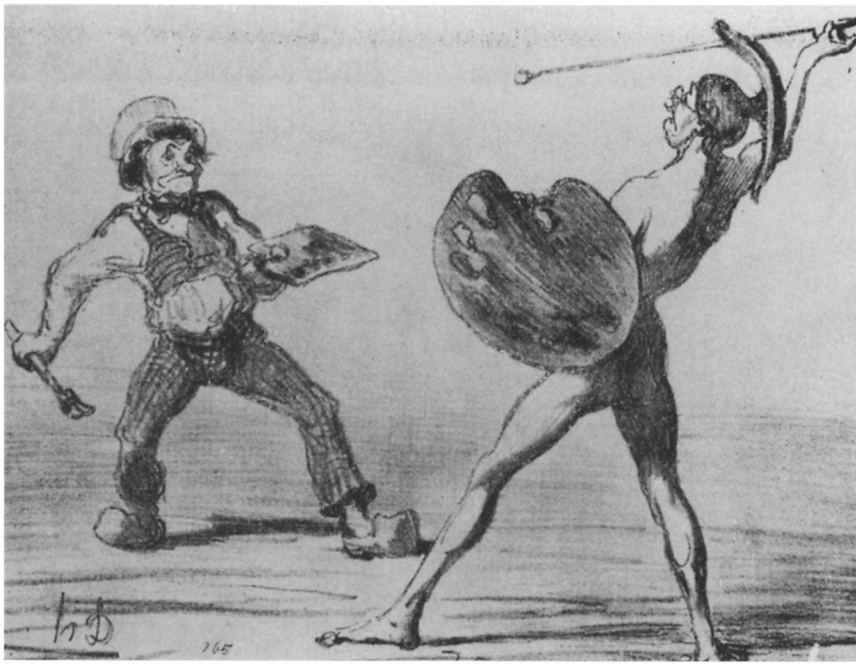


Pollock,” his assessment of abstract expressionism’s historical thrust. Inspired by composer John Cage’s belief that art ought to celebrate life as it is rather than offering escape or criticism, Kaprow tried to convince a disbelieving art world that Pollock’s emphasis on the act of painting and willingness to use ordinary materials had brought avant-garde artists to “the point where we must become preoccupied with and even dazzled by the space of our everyday life . . . [a]n odor of crushed strawberries, a letter from a friend or a billboard selling Drano [sic].”⁸

Lichtenstein’s new colleagues encouraged him to participate in their Cageian turn. The peer pressure became particularly intense when they discovered his drawings with Disney characters. He finally overcame his reluctance to give up high art for low life owing to two factors: the lukewarm response his stripe paintings had received from avant-garde dealers, and Kaprow’s timely reminder that “art doesn’t have to look like art.”

Lichtenstein later said, “I knew that, but it helps to have a nudge.”⁹ Both men would have understood the strategic usefulness of making this leap. That the most significant breakthroughs in the history of avant-garde art, from Manet to Pollock, had all seemed shocking at first was a cliché in postwar discussions of modern art.

Lichtenstein’s excited uncertainty that *Look Mickey* (see fig. 1) might have just the “promising despicability” called for in the current artistic climate is inscribed in the painting itself. The irrepressible Donald has caught his own coat while casting, and the heavy tug on his line must mean that he’s “HOOKED A BIG ONE!!” Mickey looks on amusedly, stifling a laugh that might embarrass his accident-prone friend or cut short the prospect of the more hilarious denouement suggested by Donald’s precarious situation at the pier’s edge. Lichtenstein recognized in the scene the embodiment of his own professional situation. “The



4 Honoré Daumier, *The Battle of the Schools*, 1855. Lithograph published in *Le Charivari* no. 2 (April 24, 1855)

subject of the painting,” he admitted, “is me.” Each character personifies a side of his ambivalence about the prospects of his artistic experiment. Donald represents his egoistic exhilaration about the possibility that he has finally “hooked” the “big one,” the breakthrough approach that had for so long eluded him. Mickey figures the sobering internal response of the super-ego that such buoyant optimism is merely self-delusional—a recognition implicit, of course, in his identification with Donald. In short, Lichtenstein was laughing at himself, and thus protecting himself from the painful prospect that his high hopes would turn out to be as foolish as Donald’s. According to Sigmund Freud, this is the defensive or “liberating” effect of humor, especially when self-directed.¹⁰

Lichtenstein also humorously employed children’s cartoon characters to play out his professional hopes in *Popeye* (fig. 3), another painting from 1961. The scene of Popeye delivering a knockout punch to his archrival Bluto surreptitiously enacts a success fantasy.

“I chose the scene,” Lichtenstein said, “because it reminded me of Daumier’s *Battle of the Schools* (fig. 4),” which illustrates the confrontation between representatives of the competing romantic (left) and academic (right) camps in mid-nineteenth-century France. The twentieth-century cartoon characters were ideal stand-ins for their contemporary artistic counterparts. Bluto was a ready-made caricature for the abstract expressionist painters and their supporters, famous for their swaggering and at times bullying masculinity. Because of his name and popular culture origins, Popeye effectively recalled the realm to which Lichtenstein was moving—a realm opposed by the abstract expressionists. Lichtenstein could also identify with Popeye because of a physical and psychological resemblance: both artist and cartoon character were slight and ordinarily mild-mannered. Lichtenstein apparently saw in the scene, then, a battle of the schools in which he led the victorious side—a satisfying if childish conceit, as his framing of it acknowledges.¹¹

The Marriage of Pop and Minimalism

Lichtenstein said he also was attracted to the formal qualities of the Popeye cartoon, “the strong, simple clarity of its contours and colors, the way the blue looked on the orange and red ground.” The image does have the same powerful, immediate impact on the eye that Popeye, the spinach-eating sailor, is shown delivering. The depicted scene underscores the purely visual pop of the style.

To cultivate this nascent taste for the aesthetic appeal of ordinary imagery, Lichtenstein turned to the richer terrain of commercial advertisement. His first painting to demonstrate this new emphasis was *Girl with Ball* (fig. 5), inspired by a newspaper ad for a resort in Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountains (fig. 6). Rather than merely copy his



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source, Lichtenstein developed its classical stylistic potential. The single idealized figure in a graceful, visually coherent pose participates in a tradition of Western art inaugurated in ancient Greece and preserved in the work of a long line of artists from Raphael to Ingres. By cleaning, strengthening, and elegantly reshaping the contours of the woman's upper torso, Lichtenstein converted his low-art source into a worthy example of the most venerable kinds of high art. His adherence to classical design principles is also evident in the way he tightened the composition in the front plane by cutting the figure at the waist, shortening her arms, and cropping the top of the ball.

In *Girl with Ball*, Lichtenstein realized a modernist brand of pop, a marriage of Mondrian and advertising; the painting could be subtitled *Composition with Red, Yellow, and Blue*. Unlike the commercial artist who wished to suggest the

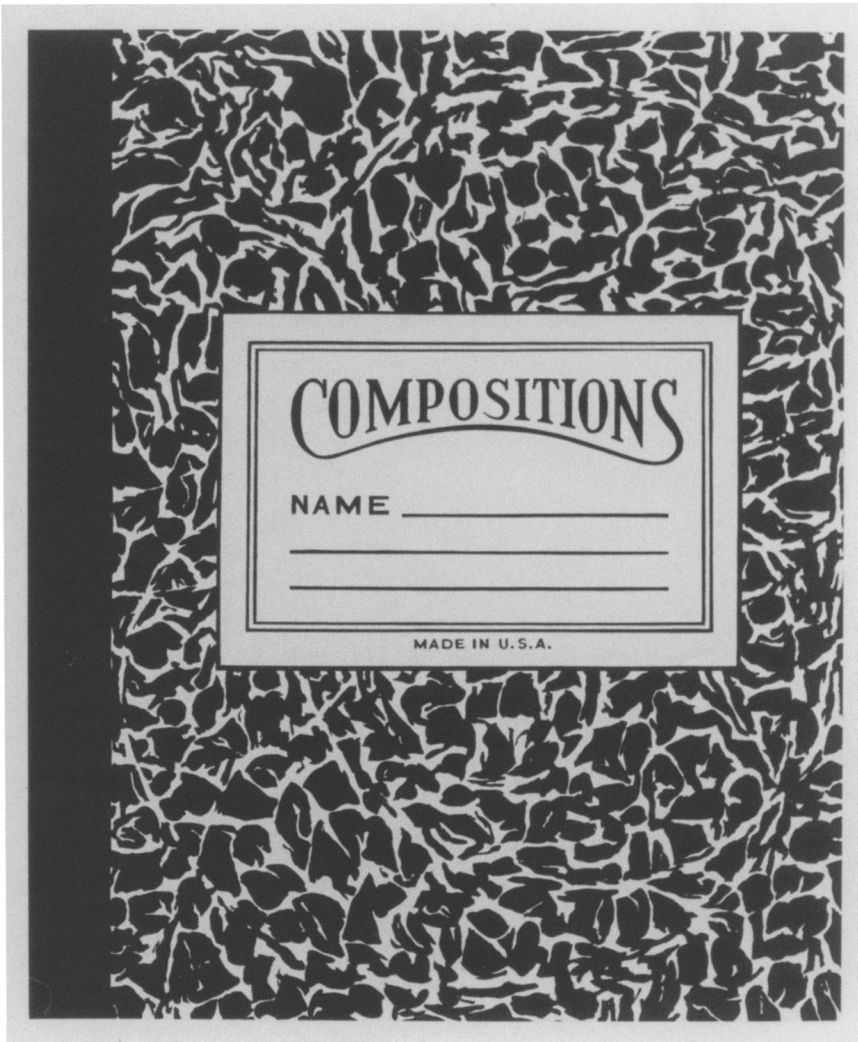
- 5 Roy Lichtenstein, *Girl with Ball*, 1961. Oil, 60 ¼ x 36 ¼ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Gift of Philip Johnson
- 6 Advertisement for Mount Airy Lodge, Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania, in the "Travel" section of the *New York Times*, 1961
- 7 Roy Lichtenstein, *Composition I*, 1964. Oil and Magna, 68 x 56 in. Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, former Karl Ströher Collection, Darmstadt

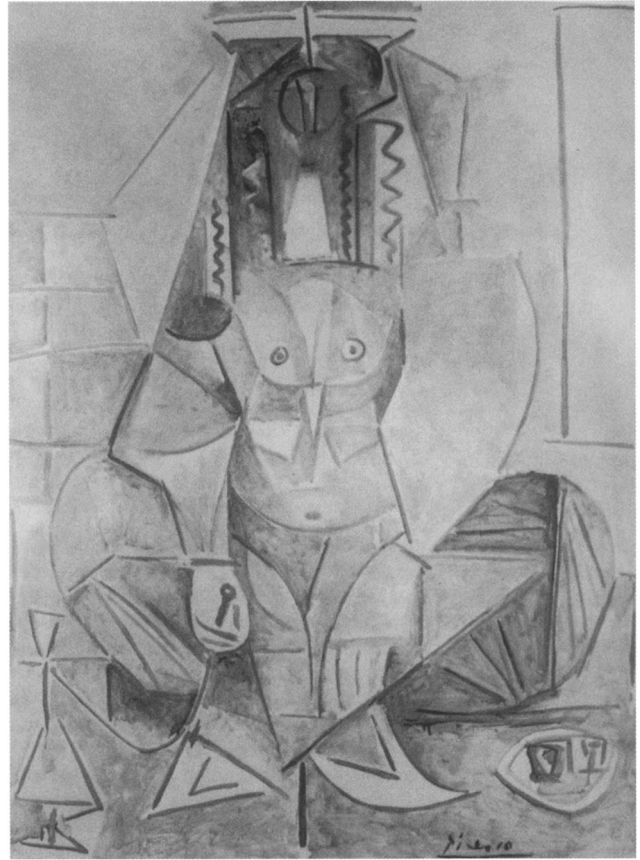
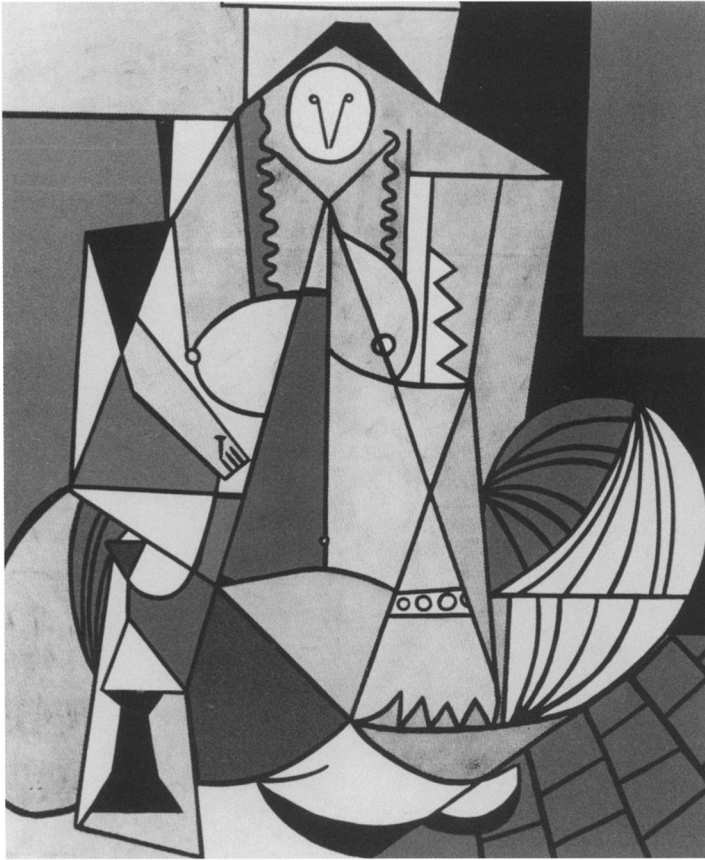
appearance of three-dimensional forms in space, Lichtenstein sought a radically two-dimensional effect. The telescoping of the figure, insistent outlines, and unmodulated colors effectively flatten the female against the ground. The rhyming between the body contours and the edges of the scalloped waves, which Lichtenstein added, integrate the figure into that ground, creating what Greenberg elsewhere praised as the "fuliginous flatness" toward which he thought modernist art aspired in its will to withdraw into itself and away from a tarnished world.¹²

Lichtenstein's idiosyncratic participation in the enterprise that Greenberg was

then describing and promoting is also apparent in the way he minimized or eliminated other facets of the ad's human content. Most obvious is the omission of the text that establishes the woman's identity as someone either on holiday or honeymooning at a particular resort in the Poconos. More importantly, the artist treated her hair, skin, and mouth in ways that subtly shift attention from representation to form. Eschewing the simplified naturalism commercial artists use to suggest hair, Lichtenstein opted for shapes so stylized that depiction nearly gives way to abstraction. He achieved a similar result in her skin. Minuscule Benday dots are used in newspaper ads in varying densities to create the illusion of modeling in light and shadow. Lichtenstein enlarged them and applied them uniformly—a feature that would grow more exaggerated in subsequent work. What appears as skin from across the room becomes a fine texture of red spots at normal viewing distance. By rhyming the red and white curved sections of the woman's open mouth with those of the ball above, Lichtenstein also made this facial feature simply another area of form and color. This effect could only occur because Lichtenstein emotionally emptied his subject. Whereas the woman in the ad is genuinely happy, her smile its expressive vehicle, Lichtenstein's counterpart is merely going through the motions. Her stare is vacant and her mouth merely open.¹³

Two related series begun in 1962 suggest that Lichtenstein wished sophisticated viewers to understand his commitment to a type of Greenbergian minimalism. In one, he chose commercial designs with well-known modernist counterparts. A prime example is *Composition I* (fig. 7), a mural-sized copy of an ordinary marbled notebook cover. The combination of scale and design invokes the "all-over" painterly style characteristic of abstract expressionism, especially the work of Jackson Pollock





- 8 Roy Lichtenstein, *Femme d'Alger*, 1963. Oil, 80 x 68 in. Eli and Edythe L. Broad Collection, Los Angeles
- 9 Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1955. Oil, 51 ¼ x 38 ½ in. Private collection

and Franz Kline. While raising the commonplace to the level of high art, this association also emphasizes Lichtenstein's commitment to simplified form. Whereas the marks of Pollock and Kline are profoundly subjective, Lichtenstein's were anonymously designed and then copied. The absence of a name on the notebook further underscores his repudiation of the personal. The cover is new, pristine, unsullied.¹⁴

In the second, related series begun in 1962, Lichtenstein began to produce "commercialized" versions of renowned modernist paintings. *Femme d'Alger* (fig. 8), for example, is based on Pablo Picasso's own revision (fig. 9) of a nineteenth-century masterpiece, Eugène Delacroix's *Women of Algiers* (1834). Here Lichtenstein adopted not only the minimalist aims identified with Greenberg and his critical followers but their recommended procedure as well,

which was to pursue the artistic goals initiated but left unfinished by avant-garde forbears.¹⁵ In his painting, Lichtenstein took up the task started by Picasso in 1955—the transformation of a romantic icon into classical form. Lichtenstein advanced the process by flattening and equalizing all forms. The navel becomes a small circle at the intersection of two planes; the breasts, now considerably more abstract, bear even less relation to their natural referents.

Art historian Donald Kuspit argues that Picasso's engagement with the Delacroix painting was part of a strategy to lessen the power women had in his life—to wrestle, if not subdue, a troubling subject into the manageable materials of art.¹⁶ The extent of Lichtenstein's effort to de-eroticize the subject suggests his sympathy with this aspect of the Spaniard's work. Not content to merely complete the emptying and abstracting

of the odalisque begun by Picasso, Lichtenstein belittled her, turning an erotic paradigm into a laughable caricature—an effect particularly visible in her face, left arm, and right breast. The comic book paintings confirm the suspicion that Lichtenstein, like Picasso, had personal reasons for depreciating the theme of woman. By the time of *Femme d'Alger*, they had become central to his production.

10 Roy Lichtenstein. *Mr. Bellamy*, 1961. Oil, 56 ¼ x 42 ½ in. Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum purchase, Benjamin J. Tillar Memorial Trust



The Love Comic Paintings

Between mid-1961 and late 1965 Lichtenstein worked on three subject areas: modernist masterpieces, commercial designs, and the comics. His paintings in the latter area are by far the most numerous and, from an art-historical perspective, the most complex. While the earliest of these (see figs. 1 and 3) constitute a prelude to his minimalist work in other areas, the comic strip-inspired pictures from later in 1961 represent an antithetical shift in his art. They generally observe the formal standards of other period production, but violate its insistently anti-romantic emphasis.

One of the first indications of this curious counterdevelopment is *Mr. Bellamy* (fig. 10), based on a minor scene from a Sunday newspaper serial that related the adventures of big-city news photographer Steve Roper. The painting shows an archetypal male hero—cool, handsome, granite-jawed, and much decorated—walking through an office complex to see a Mr. Bellamy, whom he has never met. On the way he wonders what the man is like. To the casual observer this scene may seem an odd choice, offering little of aesthetic or even narrative interest. But Lichtenstein selected it because of its professional resonance. In 1960 Richard Bellamy had opened an uptown gallery, the Green Gallery, sympathetic to those working on themes from everyday life. Lichtenstein had been considering taking some of his new work to Bellamy for possible exhibition. The painting was produced while he, too, was wondering “what [Mr. Bellamy’s] like.” Lichtenstein could further identify with the character because he, too, had briefly trained as a pilot at the end of World War II. The prop plane in the upper left, a detail the artist added, suggests that Lichtenstein’s alter ego belongs to that era.¹⁷ As in the case of *Popeye*, he used the scene to play out a masculine fantasy. One can understand the possible art-world uses of such a

- 11 Roy Lichtenstein, *The Engagement Ring*, 1961. Oil, 67 ¾ x 79 ½ in. Collection of Ronnie and Samuel Heyman, New York



steeling daydream, yet it seems more appealing for Lichtenstein the man than the aspiring artist. In this respect, the picture paves the way for the dramatic war paintings he began the following year.

The Engagement Ring (fig. 11) inaugurates the other major theme of the early 1960s—love. For this image Lichtenstein appropriated the concluding scene of one week's installment of "Winnie Winkle" (fig. 12), Martin Branner's long-running serial of the everyday trials and tribulations of a glamorous but sensible working girl. This episode involves the ill-advised infatuation of Winnie's younger brother, Perry, for an exotic dancer. In the chosen scene, Winnie registers her troubled hope that the piece of jewelry Perry plans to give the dancer is not an engagement ring. Lichtenstein said he picked the subject as part of his preoccupation with materials usually excluded from high art: "I had the idea of taking a single frame out of something

that implied a story . . . in contrast to the prevailing aesthetic disdain for literary content." His aim was not to contest those standards but to assimilate another foreign substance into the modernist canon, one considered even more intractable—and thus more challenging—than advertising. According to Lichtenstein scholars, the artist realized his aim in works such as this; he changed a storytelling mode into a "style" that could "rival the art of museums."¹⁸

Yet the adjustments Lichtenstein made to Branner's original strengthen narration instead of redirecting our focus from story to form, as in *Girl with Ball* (see fig. 5). His preference for a tighter focus contributes to the creation of a compelling image with greater emotional intensity. Expressively squeezed between the lamp and his sister's hair, the man now reacts more uneasily to her query. His body and mouth seem to tighten at her words, his

12 Martin Branner, panels from “Winnie Winkle,” in the *Chicago Tribune*, Sunday, July 16, 1961



reaction underscored by the sharp, nervous rhythms that Lichtenstein added in his necktie. The situation is more, not less, romantic, because the male character is no longer recognizable as Perry. He has darker hair, a thinner face, and smaller facial features. What had been a mildly dramatic confrontation between Winnie and her brother in the comic strip now seems a mysteriously tense moment in our heroine's love life.

Subsequent work in this vein, inspired by teen romance comic books, matches up better with the standard interpretation of Lichtenstein's formal achievement, but storytelling remains an essential and underappreciated facet of his production. One of the best examples is *Drowning Girl*

(fig. 13), derived from a 1962 DC Comics book entitled *Secret Hearts* (fig. 14). In the original scene a sad-faced young man clinging to an overturned sailboat watches helplessly while a grief-stricken young woman suffering from a leg cramp decides she would rather drown than call for his help. Lichtenstein said the scene reminded him of Katsushika Hokusai's famous woodblock print, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (fig. 15), which was the popular art of its own era in Japan. He suspected that the Hokusai—elevated to high-art status by nineteenth-century European cognoscenti—had inspired the cartoon artist: “But the original wasn't very clear in this regard—why should it be? I saw it and then pushed it a little

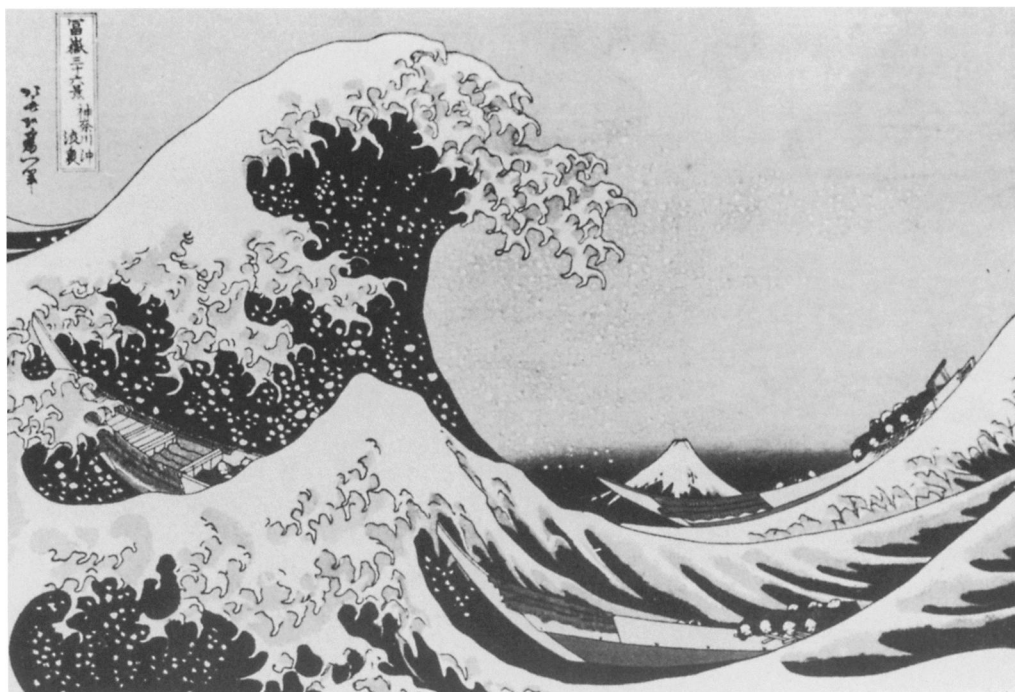
I DON'T CARE!
I'D RATHER SINK --
THAN CALL BRAD
FOR HELP!



13 Roy Lichtenstein, *Drowning Girl*, 1963. Oil and Magna, 67 ⁷/₈ x 66 ³/₄ in. Museum of Modern Art, New York, Philip Johnson Fund and Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright

14 Tony Abruzzo, panel from "Run for Love!" in *Secret Hearts*, no. 83 (November 1962)

15 Katsushika Hokusai, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, 1823–29. Color woodcut, 10 x 14 ³/₄ in. Private collection



further until it was a reference that most people [in the art world] will get.” An essential aim, then, was to reveal the unsuspected aesthetic correspondence between high art and low art, and to demonstrate how easy the more sophisticated comic book illustrators made it “to transform a cartoon style into an art style.”¹⁹ In this painting, little is actually transformed aside from the formatting. Lichtenstein brought out the high-art reference by zooming in on the area of water around the girl and by making a few minor adjustments to the original, the most obvious being the way the water’s edge now more gracefully washes across the girl’s shoulder.

In his pursuit of form, however, Lichtenstein did not neglect narrative. He made two changes in the girl’s thought balloon: he tightened it by removing the reference to her cramp and, as Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik perceptively observed, he changed the protagonist’s name “from what was, for his purposes, the wrong cliché—the peculiar ‘Mal’—to the right cliché, the nifty ‘Brad.’”²⁰ The scholar pair are convinced that these “purposes” were essentially stylistic, but in reality the name change is a matter of content. By altering the boy’s name, Lichtenstein actually preserves the essential story line. In the original, we can see that the protagonist is “nifty”; it doesn’t matter what his name is. Only by improving the name could Lichtenstein ensure the fundamental integrity of the plot. Left on its own, “Mal”—which in French and in English prefixes means “bad”—would falsely suggest that the young man for whose love our heroine is willing to drown is wrong for her, that they will not in the end patch things up and live happily ever after. “Brad” reassures us that she will not drown, except figuratively in his perfect embrace, that her love for him is right, and that the story line will proceed in the expected fashion. Lichtenstein sacrifices the specific story of Mal and the girl who considers herself unworthy of his notice for the

more essential one that stands behind it—the metanarrative.

Most love comics tell a variation of the same formulaic story, that of a beautiful young white girl who meets and falls in love with an equally white and handsome young man. A serious problem of some kind arises to threaten their relationship, and the heroine is briefly devastated before its happy resolution. Each variation is also told from the girl’s vantage point. By focusing on emotionally distraught young beauties, Lichtenstein captures and communicates the essence of this literary tradition. Perhaps his most effective encapsulation is *Oh Jeff . . . I Love You, Too . . . But* (1964), which depicts a beautiful blonde speaking those words into the telephone. Girl and boy have met, have fallen in love, and have just encountered the classic “but” that will, as we know, only temporarily postpone the inevitable, thus raising the emotional stakes and sweetening the adolescent female reader’s deferred enjoyment.

Lichtenstein’s paintings address a different audience, of course—sophisticated adults for whom these stories open a retrospective vista on love usually at odds with their idyllic promise. Most grownups find these paintings mildly humorous, as they apparently are meant to be. Lichtenstein often chose moments when the behavior of his heroines is laughable, such as the girl’s decision to risk drowning rather than call her beloved for help. Even Winnie’s question—“It’s not an engagement ring. Is it?”—sounds like the punch line of a dumb blonde joke. But the mature viewers may be smiling at their own attraction to the story line, not simply at the behavior of the comic book characters and their naive teenaged devotees. Looking at these paintings, it is difficult not to recall one’s own adolescent expectations about romance. Few among us ever completely give up on the dream of perfect love, as the popularity of romantic comedies such as *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993) or *Notting Hill* (1999) should attest. Each

year Hollywood produces a crop of adult love stories that follow essentially the same course as the teen love comics and address the same fundamental desire.

The only scholarly publication to recognize Lichtenstein's critical engagement with the myth of love is a 1966 article by the German critic Otto Hahn. According to Hahn, Lichtenstein's paintings were part of a widespread phenomenon in post-war art and literature to disabuse Western culture of its most cherished myths and attain a more realistic understanding of "the human condition."²¹ The specifics of Lichtenstein's romantic life at the time suggest a more personal motivation.

The Private Dimension of the Love Comic Paintings

In 1949 the twenty-six-year-old Lichtenstein married Isabel Wilson, the co-director of the Cleveland, Ohio, art gallery that showed his work. After he was denied tenure at Ohio State University in 1951, the couple moved back to Cleveland where he pursued a variety of art-related jobs, and she became a successful interior decorator. Their two sons were born in 1954 and 1956. Then in the fall of 1957 the family moved to Oswego, New York, where Roy Lichtenstein took a position as assistant professor at the state university. By the time the family moved to New Jersey in the summer of 1961, Isabel Lichtenstein had become an alcoholic, a condition that affected both her social behavior and parenting, according to a number of accounts. By the end of 1961 the painter demanded a trial separation. He briefly moved his residence and studio to New York City. In the summer of 1962 he returned to the family home, largely to be with his sons, but the reconciliation was unsuccessful. That winter the couple separated permanently and Lichtenstein moved to a loft in lower Manhattan with Letty Eisenhauer, a master's student who worked part-time in his

departmental office. The pair lived together for almost two years during the time the Lichtensteins were negotiating the terms of their divorce, which was finalized in 1965.²²

Because this was the period in which the artist produced the bulk of his comic book paintings, Eisenhauer observed firsthand the relationship between that work and his life. Now a counseling and forensic psychologist, she concluded that the paintings and the divorce were "intimately connected, although Roy was much too guarded ever to admit it." Both facets of Eisenhauer's assessment are confirmed by other colleagues from this era. Kaprow, for example, commented that "everyone at the time thought the paintings were about his personal life, but you couldn't ask about sensitive issues like that. He'd roll his eyes and make a joke." Eisenhauer insisted that the connection was not a simple one, however:

I believe the works were intended to express his pessimism about "the love story." He considered it hopeless, as he ironically stated in one of those "crying girl" paintings [frontispiece]. He was not disappointed about his divorce, however, but about love. His cynicism was intensified by the short, unhappy love affair he had had early in 1962 with a news-magazine photographer . . . who rejected him. He was deeply hurt by her, but he couldn't cry. The women in these paintings are crying for him, expressing indirectly what he could not express directly. But they are also crying over him. Roy wanted some beautiful Breck Girl to love him the way these women loved their men.²³

Eisenhauer's remarks open to understanding the curious "doubleness of feeling" these paintings seem to express, simultaneously ridiculing and embracing their subjects.²⁴ Lichtenstein apparently found it necessary to trivialize the myth of love not just out of disappointment—to rationalize his failures to attain true love—but because he was so attracted to it.

16 Roy Lichtenstein, *Masterpiece*, 1962. Oil, 54 x 54 in. Private collection



These scenes enabled him to both mock and indulge that attraction.

The conflicted appeal that the love story retained for him is evident in an underappreciated subgroup of the love comic paintings, scenes of his own invention that feature a painter. *Masterpiece* (fig. 16) is the most revealing of these. It features a classic blonde who looks away from the painting she has been examining to comment to its slightly smug and handsome maker—her darling Brad—that the work is a “masterpiece,” one that will “soon ... have all of New York clamoring for your work.” Lichtenstein produced the canvas for initial exhibition at the prestigious Leo Castelli Gallery—at a time when he, too, was contemplating the possibility of finally

having the New York art world clamor for his masterpieces. The concocted scene nicely illustrates Freud’s conception of the modern artist as one who “allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes.”²⁵ Pondering a professional triumph, Brad already has been blessed with the ultimate erotic success, chiseled good looks and a glamorous, admiring girlfriend. On the eve of the Castelli show, Lichtenstein created an indulgent fantasy of transformation, from plain, loveless, professional failure to handsome and adored leader of the avant-garde—from Roy to Brad. Eisenhower asserts that Brad was his alter ego, “the strong, cool, good-looking WASP that [this slight Jewish man] had always envied and wanted to be.”

Masterpiece was grounded in an astute, if subconscious, understanding of the consequences of the kind of success a Castelli exhibition might reasonably achieve. Art, as Freud noted and history attests, is a vehicle not only for the expression of the male artist's desires but also for their realization: the successful male artist may "achieve through his fantasy what previously he had achieved only in his fantasy—honor, power, and the love of women." By producing a "masterpiece," the artist may achieve actual mastery "to arrange things according to his desires"; he may "become the hero, king, creator, favorite he desired to be."²⁶

Critic Arthur Danto considers *Masterpiece* to be "a highly ironic statement" about the possibility that this and other Lichtenstein pop paintings might deserve the nomination. "Something drawn and colored in that [comic strip] style," he notes, "is so distant from what we are accustomed to terming 'masterpieces' that it is a joke to think of it in the terms that apply to, say, *Las Meninas* or *The Night Watch*"—celebrated works by Velázquez and Rembrandt.²⁷ But this analysis misses the painting's psychological complexity. Danto is correct in saying that Lichtenstein would answer "obviously not" if asked whether his piece is a masterpiece. But we would be naive to take the artist at his word. What creator does not secretly hope that his works will be judged masterpieces? More importantly, Danto's observation misses much of the object of Lichtenstein's joke. If the painting's claim to a certain status is laughable, then so is the entire fantasy scene of which that claim is but one part. Lichtenstein's intention to mock the daydream expressed here is suggested by his approach to it as something straight out of a love comic—a juvenile illusion.

The painting allowed Lichtenstein simultaneously to indulge in the exciting promise of finally attaining fame and its desirous consequences while laughing at himself for doing so—much as he did in

Look Mickey (see fig. 1). While giving free reign to his desires, he framed them in a way that acknowledges their fanciful essence. This protected him from the emotional price that a full commitment to these unlikely, if not impossible, scenarios might require. In an inner struggle between the competing voices of his adolescent and adult selves, Lichtenstein managed a finely tuned equilibrium—or "doubleness." In the battle that we all must fight between what Freud called the Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle, Lichtenstein cleverly and sanely met the demands of both.²⁸

A contextual analysis of *Masterpiece* supports the thesis that Lichtenstein used public materials for subjective purposes in his love comic paintings, and that his interest in these illustrated narratives was more than purely formal. The characters drawn from or inspired by love comics figured the emotional hopes and disappointments of a turbulent, transitional time in the artist's life. In effect, these paintings were subconsciously designed to help him achieve the kind of emotional mastery or "cool" demonstrated by the painter in *Masterpiece* and the pilot in *Mr. Bellamy* (see fig. 10).

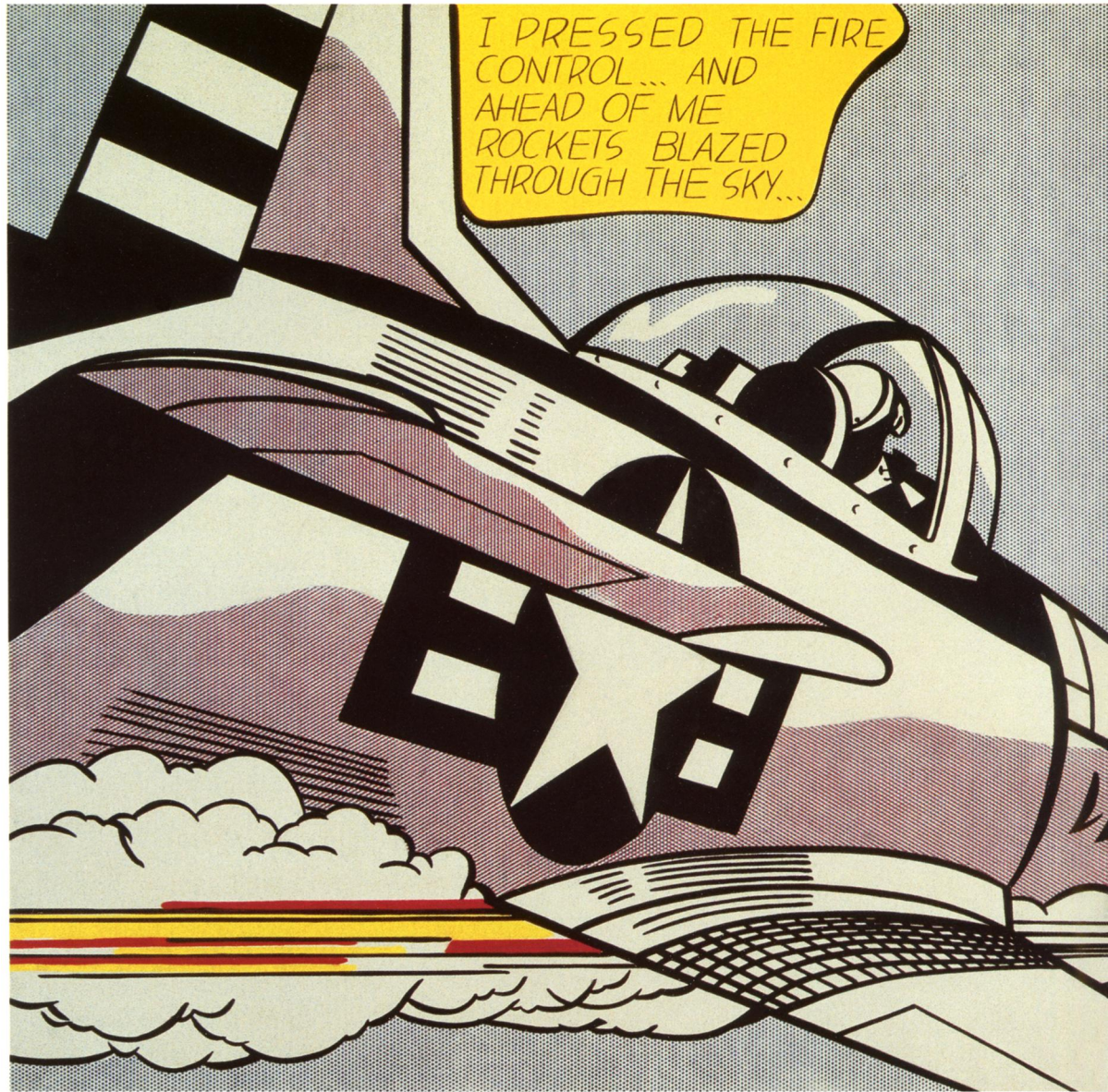
The war comic paintings that he produced at the same time were equally important to this life strategy. They allowed him to manage another of the powerful emotions triggered by his divorce—anger.

The War Comic Paintings

Lichtenstein began working on scenes from war comics in 1962. A representative example of the genre is *Whaam!* (fig. 17), which was based on a scene from "Star Jockey" in the January–February 1962 issue of *All American Men of War* (fig. 18). As he had done elsewhere in his work, Lichtenstein subjected the source image to his classicizing taste. He eliminated peripheral details, clarified and

17 Roy Lichtenstein, *Whaam!*, 1963.
Oil and Magna, two panels, each
68 x 83 in. Tate Gallery, London

18 Irv Novick, panel from "Star
Jockey," in *All American Men of
War*, no. 89 (January–February
1962)





strengthened lines and shapes throughout, beautified many of the contours, and flattened the action in the foreground plane. He also aligned the deadly rocket, and thus the entire scene, on the horizontal axis, and balanced the compositional weights of the two planes—an effect reinforced by his placement of the planes on separate, equally sized panels.

These changes were meant to please the artist's and his viewer's aesthetic taste, but they do not eliminate narrative content as many have claimed. Instead, some of the alterations strengthen the story.

The more beautiful flames of the exploding plane in Lichtenstein's painting, for example, are not "strictly ornamental" but a function of the story.²⁹ The comic book recounts the futuristic fantasy of World War II pilot Johnny Cloud, a Native American who is mercilessly hunted by a pack of enemy fighters after having been separated from his squadron. Finally he steels his nerve, turns his jet around, and bravely defeats his pursuers in a scene of blazing action. As the lead pursuer's plane explodes, he satisfactorily observes to himself, "The enemy has

become a flaming star!" Although Lichtenstein removed the words, he maintained the idea in his handling of the event.

Lichtenstein's choice of this scene as well as his reductive approach to its definition demonstrate a sensitivity to the basic narrative of the war comic. The genre features a single aspect of warfare, the struggle of the individual warrior to defeat his enemy or enemies. The metanarrative is that of a young man forced from the safety of home into the killing business to defend the United States against the unprovoked aggression of a cruel and ruthless enemy. Although America's blameless goodness is always implicit in these tales, an essential feature of their story line is also the metamorphosis of an unsure boy into a heroic man, as in the case of "Star Jockey"—a development consummated in the just destruction of the enemy. By stripping the scene of all anecdotal and physical detail and placing the antagonists on separate panels, Lichtenstein provides the viewer of *Whaam!* with the essence of the war comic genre.

The question, again, is why this story interested Lichtenstein at this time. What context might explain it? One theory is that the series was part of a venerable modern protest tradition that included works such as Picasso's *Guernica* (1939). Lichtenstein, it is argued, meant to belittle the romantic conception of war promoted by Hollywood films of the era, thus pioneering the antiwar sentiment that would engulf America as a result of the Vietnam War. But he began work on the theme in 1962, at a point when U.S. involvement in Vietnam was still limited and not yet a critical issue. He dropped the subject in 1965 at the moment when opposition to the war was beginning to burgeon.³⁰

A better answer is that Lichtenstein produced the war comics in the context of his own private war with his wife. Like many divorces, theirs was characterized by mutual resentment and anger—hers for his desire to end the marriage and his both for the behavior that forced him to

seek a divorce and for what he saw as her greedy approach to the divorce settlement. Fearing that Isabel Lichtenstein would use his relationship with Eisenhower to pecuniary advantage, the artist tried to keep it secret. He asked Eisenhower to leave when his children visited, and did not allow her to answer the telephone. When she forgot the rules one day and picked up the telephone, he became angry with her. Eisenhower believed the real object of his anger was Isabel: "Roy was angry with her all the time, although he rarely allowed himself to express it," she said. According to Eisenhower, the war paintings provided a vehicle for his anger; "Roy was playing out his revenge fantasies" in them. Lichtenstein could easily identify with Johnny Cloud—not just because he had also been a pilot, however briefly, but because this was Johnny's revenge fantasy!

Although Lichtenstein may have found a degree of emotional satisfaction in the American fighting man's just violence against an evil adversary, the paintings suggest that he also understood the childishness of his own fantasies. War comics cater to the desires of pre-adolescent boys, an even more immature audience than the readers of love comics. By framing his fantasies as he did, Lichtenstein could indulge a normal psychological need—as in his love comic paintings—while laughing at it or, more precisely, at the boy within. He could harmlessly vent his anger while keeping it in a mature, adult perspective.

The End of the Comic Book Paintings

As Lichtenstein's anger at his wife waned, so too did his interest in themes of war. By 1965 the couple had arranged a divorce settlement and their relationship was no longer intensely antagonistic. While Lichtenstein continued to work on war topics, in a sculptural series as well as paintings, the new works appear quite different. They focus only on individual



19 Roy Lichtenstein, *Frightened Girl*, 1964. Oil and Magna, 48 x 48 in. Collection of Irving Blum, New York

explosions. In the absence of either a protagonist or evidence of what, if anything, is being destroyed, the narrative element virtually disappears. In place of a story we have an emphasis on form.³¹

The love paintings of late 1964 and 1965 are similarly changed, as a comparison of *Frightened Girl* (fig. 19) with *Hopeless* (see frontispiece) attests. In the earlier paintings, formal issues remained subservient to narrative. *Frightened Girl* reverses these terms. The larger Benday dots, the broad, dynamic rhythms in the hair, and the bold contrast of light and dark colors throughout proclaim the work to be the product of an artist, not an illustrator. They direct our attention away from the comics to their remaker and his taste. A perceptual tension is established in *Frightened Girl* between the signs of her sorrow—slack mouth, downcast gaze, and tears—and the vivid patterns that almost mask them. That tension, and

not the young woman's sorrow and its probable cause, is now the content of the work. As in the case of the late war works, the critics' claim that Lichtenstein was most interested in the aesthetic encounter between a cool formalism and a hot subject matter—and not narrative—finally coincides with the visual evidence.

This change in his late love comic paintings is also best understood as a factor of developments in his personal life. In the fall of 1964, while still living with Eisenhower, he met Dorothy Herzka, an assistant at a Manhattan gallery. They began dating soon afterward and married in 1968. According to one magazine account, Herzka “was widely considered to be the reigning beauty of the New York art scene. Furthermore, she bore an uncanny resemblance to the seductive, full-featured, emotionally intense women he had portrayed in his romance-cartoon paintings.”³² By the beginning of 1965, Lichtenstein was living the fantasy figured in *Masterpiece* (see fig. 16). New York collectors were “clamoring” for his works, and he had won the love and devotion of a glamorous woman.

By the autumn of 1965 he was able to leave behind the imagery that had served his conflicting psychological needs in the turbulent period of the early 1960s and to return to high-art subjects. The first indications of this course were the Big Brushstroke paintings in which the signature gesturalist paint stroke—with all its connotations of subjectivity, spontaneity, and passion—is tamed into something cool, controlled, and formally elegant.

Ironically a comic book scene inspired the first of the series (fig. 20). *Brushstrokes*, truly a watershed work, marked both the end of one phase and the beginning of another. The source image comes from “The Painting” in the October 1964 issue of *Strange Suspense Stories* (fig. 21). The story concerns Jake Taylor, a talented young artist whose self-doubts prevent him from showing his work publicly. Although his teachers, friends, and even

20 Roy Lichtenstein, *Brushstrokes*,
1965. Oil and Magna, 48 x 48 in.
Private collection



the occasional art dealer encourage him to exhibit, he demurs, insisting to all that he is not quite ready. The real cause of his refusals, however, is a lack of confidence: "What if the world doesn't like them? That would kill me!" In the midst of this torment he is "possessed" to paint a portrait of a man who turns out to be the personification of his conscience. The man berates him for his cowardice and encourages him to face his fears and let the world see and judge his art. Angrily he refuses and covers the portrait. In order to pay his bills he resorts to "painting portraits of anyone who would pay his price!" But when alone, "Jake could not resist uncovering the sinister painting! And each time he did so, that face was

there to torment him." In a fit of anger and despair, Jake finally stops the voice by painting out the man's face. Lichtenstein chose the following scene, when Jake's torment ceases.

He may have selected this scene because it caricatures the famously troubled abstract expressionist painter and his quest to get in touch with his deeper self. But Lichtenstein's tendency to identify with his comic book characters suggests that he also may have seen himself in it. Like Jake, he produced a representational art form that suited the buying tastes of the wealthy bourgeoisie. Lichtenstein too had to endure constant and no doubt painful criticism for producing such an art. The guardians of high taste deplored



21 Anonymous panels from "The Painting," in *Strange Suspense Stories*, no. 72 (October 1964)

his early pop work as anathema to high art. In March 1962 critic Max Kozloff accused Lichtenstein of providing "a pretty slap in the face [to] both philistines and cognoscenti alike." Lichtenstein, he went on to imply, was responsible for the distressing "invasion" of art galleries, once sacred havens from bourgeois culture, "by the pin-headed and contemptible style of gum chewers, bobby soxers, and . . . delinquents." At a 1962 symposium on pop art at the Museum of Modern Art, critic Hilton Kramer pressured art historian Leo Steinberg to admit that Lichtenstein's paintings were not simply "a low form of art," but a "failed" one. Steinberg could only respond that he could not "yet see the art for the subject [matter]."³³ By moving away from his comic sources, Lichtenstein may have hoped to allow Steinberg and others to see the painterly qualities he self-consciously struggled to attain, thus silencing their nagging voices.

But the voice in the source image is that of the artist himself, which suggests that Lichtenstein may have shared some of the attitudes and reservations of his critics. He had turned to popular subjects not because of a Cageian commitment to undermine the aesthetic values of high

art but out of a desire to remake popular imagery into something compatible with those lofty standards. Although later scholars insist that he did so, critics at the time saw neither his achievement nor his goal. Their collective verdict might well have promoted self-doubts. The critical voice Lichtenstein may have most hoped to silence in *Brushstrokes* could have been his own.

Finally, of course, Lichtenstein could have selected the scene to express his relief at the cessation of the disquieting inner voices that had driven his interest in comic book themes over the past several years. Whatever the case, Lichtenstein's choice reflected his renewed commitment to a purified classicism, one from which the human voice had been cleansed. Besides making the brushstrokes more fluid and compositionally more stable, Lichtenstein also eliminated the words of both narrator and artist. His painting achieves the perfect silence to which the comic book scene only alludes.

Having resolved the troubling issues that had unconsciously found expression in his work for the past several years, Lichtenstein was able to return to the aesthetically more congenial path on which he had embarked in *Girl with Ball* (fig. 5) and had continued intermittently to pursue in works such as *Composition* (fig. 7) and *Femme d'Alger* (fig. 8). Except for the occasional foray into commercial or non-Western art, he would spend the rest of his career exploring the conceptual tensions between his commercially derived style and subjects drawn from the history of modern painting, and enjoying the way those tensions reduced these heavily freighted works to pure, sanitized form. In effect, Lichtenstein did to modern art what he had done to the subject in *Girl with Ball*: he cleaned and emptied it. Greenberg should have been pleased.

Notes

This article was supported by a SPAR Research Grant from the University of South Carolina.

- 1 Two views of the comic book paintings characterize the Lichtenstein literature. The first contends that Lichtenstein chose comic book themes simply to conceptualize the antithetical facets of his modernist aesthetic. Material that is culturally low, emotionally hot, and archetypally literary is transformed into something culturally high, emotionally cool, and preeminently formal. See, for example, John Coplans, *Roy Lichtenstein* (New York: Praeger, 1972), pp. 14–26; Lawrence Alloway, *Lichtenstein* (New York: Abbeville, 1983), pp. 9–10 and 23–24; and Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Abrams, 1990), pp. 197–208. The second view holds that Lichtenstein was also interested, if peripherally, in the gendered roles of the characters in this literature. See Diane Waldman, *Lichtenstein* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), pp. 93–106, and Cécile Whiting, “Borrowed Spots: The Gendering of Comic Books, Lichtenstein’s Paintings, and Dishwasher Detergent,” *American Art* 6 (spring 1992): 8–35.
- 2 See Alan Solomon, “Conversation with Lichtenstein,” *Fantazaria* (July–August 1966), reprinted in Coplans, *Roy Lichtenstein*, p. 85. Gene Swenson, “What is Pop Art? Interviews with Eight Painters,” *Art News* (November 1963), reprinted in John Russell and Suzi Gablik, eds., *pop art redefined* (New York: Praeger, 1969), p. 93. See also his remarks to Elizabeth Richardson in note 4 below.
- 3 Swenson, “What is Pop Art?,” p. 94.
- 4 In 1993 an interviewer asked Lichtenstein why so many of the women in his love comic paintings are weeping: ‘Well, I was in the middle of a divorce. I don’t know if that had an effect, but it might have,’ he says, and it is clear from the way he says it that he’s inclined to believe that it didn’t.” Lichtenstein then proceeded to offer the standard explanation: “Because the paintings were done in a mechanical way, it would be more of a statement since the method is so dispassionate and the content is so passionate, and I like that conflict.” See Elizabeth Richardson, “Those Lichtenstein Women,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 3383 (October 1993): 236.
- 5 John Coplans, “An Interview with Roy Lichtenstein,” *Artforum* (October 1963), reprinted in Coplans, *Roy Lichtenstein*, p. 51.
- 6 Clement Greenberg, “American-Type Painting,” *Partisan Review* (spring 1955): 179–96.
- 7 For an example of Lichtenstein’s paintings of this type, see Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, fig. 13. On “the crisis of abstract expressionism” and Greenberg’s campaign at the end of the 1950s to promote Louis and Noland as the new leaders of the historical avant-garde, see Bradford R. Collins, “Clement Greenberg and the Search for Abstract Expressionism’s Successor: A Study in the Manipulation of Avant-Garde Consciousness,” *Arts Magazine* 61 (May 1987): 36–43. When I asked Lichtenstein in our 27 April 1995 interview if he read Greenberg or attended any of his lectures in New York at this time, he replied that he “kept up.”
- 8 Allan Kaprow, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” *Art News* 57 (October 1958): 56–57. Kaprow had recently taken a class from the iconoclastic music theorist at the New School for Social Research in New York. For more on the subject and the general situation at Rutgers around 1960, see Joan Marter, ed., *Off Limits: Rutgers University and the Avant-Garde, 1957–1963* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1999).
- 9 Late in 1960 Lichtenstein showed the stripe paintings to Leo Castelli, New York’s leading avant-garde dealer, and his wife, Ileana Sonnabend, who owned a gallery in Paris, but neither was interested. See Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, p. 23. Information on the interaction between Lichtenstein and his colleagues is from the author’s interview of 27 April 1995. Unless otherwise noted, all further Lichtenstein quotes are from this interview.
- 10 The phrase “promising despicability” is from Tom Lubbock, “Dotting the Eyes,” *Modern Painters* 6 (winter 1993): 44. Lubbock’s discussion was prompted by the artist’s observation about his initial pop paintings: “It was hard to do a painting that was despicable enough that no one would hang it. . . . The one thing every one hated was commercial art.” Lichtenstein commented that the subject of the painting “is me” after I asked if the figure of Donald was a parody of the abstract expressionist painter, whom Harold Rosenberg in his influential essay “The American Action Painters” (1952) had described as someone fishing in the depths of consciousness for the true self. For the defensive function of humor, see Sigmund Freud, “Humour” (1927), in James Strachey, ed., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9 (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 164.
- 11 In my 1995 interview with Lichtenstein, he admitted that Popeye was not only the pop artist but “perhaps” himself. A number of scholars have noted his resemblance to Popeye and Bluto’s resemblance to the popular conception of the abstract expressionist. See, for example, Paul Schimmel, “The Faked Gesture: Pop Art and the New York School,” in Russell Ferguson, ed., *Hand-Painted Pop: American Art in Transition, 1955–62* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), p. 46.
- 12 For Greenberg’s quote, see “The Present Prospects of American Painting and Sculpture,” *Horizon* no. 93–94 (Oct. 1947): 26. The most important statement of his position was his first, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch” (1939), reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1962), pp. 3–21.
- 13 Lichtenstein’s self-conscious awareness of the two sides of his aesthetic enterprise—the purging of human content in favor of classical form—is evident in another painting from 1962, *The Refrigerator*. The work is based on a scene from the back of an Arm & Hammer Baking Soda box that depicts a happy homemaker cleaning her refrigerator. In Lichtenstein’s painting, the woman’s activities wittily call attention to the parallel ones of the artist, for Lichtenstein did to the scene what she is doing in it. He cleaned the forms of the original and emotionally emptied the housewife. See Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, figs. 58 and 59.
- 14 The commercial images that Lichtenstein began to collect in 1961 were kept in notebooks of this type, all of which included his name on the cover. See the illustration in Milton Esterow, “Conversation: Roy Lichtenstein,” *Art News* 90 (May 1991): 86.
- 15 On Picasso’s importance for postwar American artists, Greenberg said: “It was

- the unrealized Picasso . . . who became the important incentive for Americans like Gorky, de Kooning and Pollock, all three of whom set out to catch . . . some of the uncaught hares that Picasso had started." See "American-Type' Painting" (1955), reprinted in Greenberg, *Art and Culture*, p. 212. On the "requirement" of the modernist painter to grapple with the unresolved issues of his forbears, see Michael Fried, "Modernist Painting and Formal Criticism," *The American Scholar* 33 (autumn 1964): 648.
- 16 Donald Kuspit, review of the Roy Lichtenstein exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, *Artforum* 26 (May 1988): 142.
- 17 Information on the work was provided by the artist in my interview with him. For Lichtenstein's pilot training, see Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, p. 365.
- 18 Phyllis Tuchman, "Pop!: Interviews with George Segal, Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist and Robert Indiana," *Art News* 73 (May 1974): 27. Greenberg and his critical followers at *Artforum* were particularly disdainful of art with literary implications or associations. The best account of Lichtenstein's purported "transformation" of a "story-telling mode" into an "avant-garde style" is offered in Varnedoe and Gopnik, *High and Low*, pp. 197–208. The reference to museum art is from Peter Schjeldahl, "Lucky Strokes," *New Yorker* (19 November 2001), p. 87.
- 19 For other specific comic sources, which date from the late 1940s to the early 1960s, see Whiting, "Borrowed Spot," p. 34, and Varnedoe and Gopnik, *High and Low*, pp. 197–203. For the quote, see John Coplans, "Talking with Roy Lichtenstein," *Artforum* (May 1967), reprinted in Coplans, *Roy Lichtenstein*, p. 91.
- 20 Varnedoe and Gopnik, *High and Low*, pp. 199–200.
- 21 Otto Hahn, "Roy Lichtenstein," *Art International* 10 (summer 1966), translated by Arnold Rosin and amended by James Fitzsimmons in Coplans, *Roy Lichtenstein*, p. 142.
- 22 This information is compiled from three sources: Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, pp. 9 and 365–71; the recollections of Leo Castelli's assistant, Irving Blum, recounted in Martin Filler, "Pop's Granddad," *Vanity Fair* (August 1993): 152; and the author's interview with Letty Eisenhower on 28 July 1995. Isabel Lichtenstein's alcoholism is attested to by several sources, including Filler and Eisenhower. According to Filler, she was later institutionalized for her condition and died in 1980. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent information on Lichtenstein's dealings with Isabel and his personal investment in his comic book paintings is from the 1995 interview with Eisenhower.
- 23 Kaprow's quote is from author's telephone interview with Kaprow, 19 January 1995. For more on Lichtenstein's emotional reticence, see Filler, "Pop's Granddad," p. 150. Block quote is from author's interview with Eisenhower, 28 July 1995.
- 24 The phrase is from Adam Gopnik, "The Wise Innocent," *New Yorker* (8 November 1993), p. 120. Gopnik was referring to Lichtenstein's attitude toward the style of the comics, not their content.
- 25 A photograph of Lichtenstein seated next to *Masterpiece* at the Castelli Gallery appeared in *Life* 52 (15 June 1962), p. 120. Since the painting is dated to 1962, it must have been painted just before the Castelli exhibition, which opened on February 10. Sigmund Freud, "The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms," in James Strachey, ed., *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), pp. 376–77.
- 26 Sigmund Freud, "Psychopathic Characters on the Stage," in James Strachey, ed., *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7 (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), p. 305, and Freud, "Formulations Regarding the Two Principles in Mental Functioning," in *General Psychological Theory* (New York: Collier, 1963), pp. 26–27.
- 27 Arthur Danto, "Shirin Neshat's Rapture," *The Madonna of the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), p. 403.
- 28 The contradictory nature of the materials held in suspension in these works suggests that Lichtenstein was not fully conscious about the implications of his work. Only in primary (e.g., dreams) or secondary process (e.g., artistic inspiration) thinking can such opposites be tolerated. Denial is the classic defense against full self-awareness, which would force the subject to choose one of the contradictory terms.
- 29 See, for example, Varnedoe and Gopnik, *High and Low*, pp. 199–201. Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, p. 105.
- 30 Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, p. 93. The small-scale antiwar movement of the early 1960s was aimed at the possibility of a nuclear war, not the kind of conventional warfare Lichtenstein depicts in his paintings. Furthermore, Eisenhower says Lichtenstein was politically conservative and ambivalent about the Vietnam War and those who protested it.
- 31 For examples, see Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, figs. 244 and 245.
- 32 Filler, "Pop's Granddad," p. 153; see p. 133 of Filler's article for a photograph of Dorothy Herzka. For more on the circumstances of their meeting, see Waldman, *Lichtenstein*, p. 9. According to Eisenhower, Lichtenstein's relationship with Herzka precipitated their separation at the end of 1964.
- 33 For the Max Kozloff quotes, see "Pop' Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians," *Art International* (1962), reprinted in Kozloff, *Renderings* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. 221. On Kramer and Steinberg, see "A Symposium on Pop Art," *Arts Magazine* 37 (April 1963): 40.