

Irony and Humor in Pop-Art Sculpture

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PUBLISHED JAN 7, 2015 AT 9:23 PM (UPDATED JAN 5, 2015)

In an intimate show at the Flag gallery, Roy Lichtenstein pays tribute



Mirror II, Roy Lichtenstein. Photo by Mary Gregory



Maquette for Brushstroke, Roy Lichtenstein. Photo by Mary Gregory

Pop art icon Roy Lichtenstein brings to most people's minds large-scale canvases painted with comic book imagery and tongue-in-cheek text.

But for those not already familiar with it, there's a whole other realm of Lichtenstein's works to be discovered.

Throughout his career, but particularly in his final years, Lichtenstein created sculptures large and small, and always imaginative and inventive. The Flag Art Foundation Gallery on 25th Street in Chelsea is currently showing an exceptional selection of Lichtenstein's three-dimensional works in Roy Lichtenstein: Intimate Sculptures, an exhibition of 14 sculptures, organized in collaboration with the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, through Jan. 31.

The Pop Art movement started in the late 1950s and early 60s partly as a reaction to the Abstract Expressionism of the previous decades. Painters like Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, Helen Frankenthaler and Robert Motherwell poured their expressions and their paint onto canvases that captured their gestures and their idiosyncratic signatures, both manual and conceptual. They made paintings about nothing so much as the idea of painting. Subject matter, perspective, foreground and background all went out the window and pure painting was all that mattered. Enter the 60s, when artists like Lichtenstein and Warhol found inspiration in popular culture. Rather than highlighting the private and often inaccessible mind of the artist, they sought to bring everyday life into the spotlight, democratizing subject matter, style and technique. With Pop art, everything could be art – from soup cans to comic strips, and how a piece was made might not be as important as why. While Warhol riffed on advertising and celebrity, Lichtenstein turned to the humorous yet dramatic possibilities in comics. He used the Ben-Day dots found in newspaper print and created works of art that seemed far simpler than they turned out to be.

The collection on display in the Flag Art Foundation's 10th-floor gallery gives a perfect introduction to Lichtenstein's sculptures. Smaller pieces can be seen up close, and the many artist's models, or maquettes, for large-scale works give a sense of major pieces installed at museums and in public spaces from Long Island to Tokyo. In all of them, you'll find Lichtenstein's bold, simple forms, his use of bright primary colors highlighted in black and white, and a healthy dose of the artist's characteristic wit and humor.

Parody played a big role in Lichtenstein's work. He played on the splattery, painterly style of the Abstract Expressionists in the series of Brushstroke sculptures in the exhibition. Lichtenstein depicts dripping strokes of paint that are neither dripping nor paint. Instead, they are careful, meticulous representations of paint. The liquid look of his Brushstroke sculptures, like Maquette for Brushstroke (the actual work, at 32 feet tall stands outside Madrid's Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia) belie the fact that they're constructed of dense, hard metal, treated by the artist to appear like they were just left by a wet brush. "It's a symbol of something it isn't, and that is part of the irony I'm interested in," Lichtenstein said.

Lichtenstein's sculptures that look like pictures are full of playful contradictions. In them, the artist raised questions by turning conventions upside down. A picture of a house is actually a sculpture of a picture of a house. There's a mirror in which the only thing missing is the reflection. There's a stable mobile, a nod to fellow sculptor Alexander Calder's dancing forms. But always, it is a nod of respect. In fact, Lichtenstein once said, "The things I have apparently parodied I actually admire." Lichtenstein was an artist who made art about art.

The Flag Art Foundation is a relaxed, welcoming place, founded by Glenn Fuhrman to encourage the appreciation of contemporary art among a diverse audience. It's free and open to the public, and through January 31st, offers visitors a rare opportunity to get to know the sculptures of one of the acknowledged masters of 20th century art. It's an extraordinary, delightful exhibition in a beautiful, intimate venue that's bound to bring a smile. Flag Art Foundation, 545 W 25th St, Wed. – Sat. 12-5 pm.

- See more at: <http://www.chelseaclintonnews.com/city-arts-news/20150107/irony-and-humor-in-pop-art-sculpture/1#sthash.PtRM0RGY.dpuf>



Joanne Greenbaum, *Untitled*, 2013. Oil, acrylic, and ink on canvas, 60 x 50 inches. Courtesy the artist and Rachel Uffner Gallery.

NEW YORK, NY.- The FLAG Art Foundation is presents two exhibitions: Roy Lichtenstein: *Intimate Sculptures*, organized in cooperation with the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, and *East Side to the West Side*, an exhibition featuring three Lower East Side galleries: Brennan & Griffin, James Fuentes, and Rachel Uffner.

Roy Lichtenstein: *Intimate Sculptures* presents a selection of the artist's sculptures and maquettes, works that playfully and pointedly blur the boundaries of drawing, sculpture, and painting. Comprised of everyday and mass-produced objects - a mirror, water glass, and coffee cup - as well as the artist's signature brushstrokes, the works highlight Lichtenstein's ability to elevate the everyday to the iconic. Presented in a gallery space populated with furniture, the exhibition encourages engagement, inviting audiences to view historic works in an intimate setting.

Concurrent with the exhibition at FLAG, Lichtenstein's monumental sculpture, *Tokyo Brushstroke I & II* (1994) is on view as a long term loan by the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation at the Parrish Art Museum, Southampton, NY, made possible by the Fuhrman Family Foundation.

East Side to the West Side highlights artists from the rosters of three distinctive and influential LES programs - Brennan & Griffin, James Fuentes, and Rachel Uffner - providing each gallery with its own show within a show. The artists in this exhibition represent a variety of backgrounds and creative practices. Brennan & Griffin presents Heather Guertin, Naotaka Hiro, and Dave McDermott, artists whose work examines figuration and the body, each

engaging with art history while evincing a singular artistic position. James Fuentes presents a new series of paintings by Benjamin Senior and Michele Tocca that are collaborative in spirit, exploring the artists' interest in nineteenth and twentieth century French landscape painting, perception and representation, and the materiality of paint. Rachel Uffner presents a selection of gallery artists including the work of Bianca Beck, Joanne Greenbaum, Hilary Harnischfeger, Anya Kielar, Sam Moyer, and Sara Greenberger Rafferty, showcasing a myriad of formal approaches to painting and sculpture.