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POP: THE CONTINUING INFLUENCE OF POPULAR CULTURE ON CONTEMPORARY ART

Andy Warhol, America's most famous pop export said, 'Once you "got" Pop, you could never see a sign the same way again. And once you "thought" Pop, you could never see America the same way again'.¹ The Pop art movement coincided with the birth of pop culture. More than just an artistic style, Pop became a way of life.

Lurking beneath the glossy surfaces, bright colours, and graphic attraction of the distinctive style termed 'Pop art' was a culture of criticism waiting to be unlocked. Since the Pop art phenomenon of the 1950s and 1960s there has been ongoing critical examination of the movement; many exhibitions have offered alternative frameworks for understanding the movement and its subsequent influence. The continuing interpretation and reinterpretation of Pop art has stemmed from its diverse appeal.

'POP: The Continuing Influence of Popular Culture on Contemporary Art' includes works drawn from the Queensland Art Gallery's collections of Australian, international and Asian and Pacific art. The works range from the early 1960s to contemporary works by artists who demonstrate a 'Pop' sensibility. The artists in this exhibition articulate their immersion in popular culture through innovative approaches to printmaking, collage, painting, sculpture and new media. This exhibition examines the works through the interwoven themes of popular and counter-culture, music and celebrity, packaging and advertising, media and medium.

Popular culture, disseminated through modern mass media, continues to be a creative source for many artists throughout the world. Japanese artist Takashi Murakami characterises a new genre of artists who engage with a 'critical pop' approach to comment on the current climate of rampant consumerism. *And then, and then and then and then and then* 1994, Murakami's portrait of his fictitious character, Mr Dob, represents the changing Japanese aesthetic, which embraces a Western-influenced commodity-based culture and an obsession with fashion,

media and technological innovations. With conventions continuously smashed and reworked, Pop in all its various guises is still a worldwide phenomenon.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Andy Warhol, *America*, New York, Harper & Row, 1985, p.112.



Andy Warhol *[Untitled]* (from 'Ladies and gentlemen' portfolio) 1975

Front: Takashi Murakami *And then, and then and then and then and then* 1994



THE ART OF POP AND ITS ORIGINS: HISTORICAL POP ART

In the early 1960s Pop art prided itself on being open to the many influences and seductions of modern living. The United States was one of the few places whose economic structure was not destabilised after World War Two. With increased wealth and leisure time, the purchase of new luxuries from supermarket shelves and department stores allowed many to forget the world's unrest. Reflected by the happy blank faces that adorned new television jingles and print media advertisements, pop consumerism suggested that it was acceptable to enjoy life for all its glorious, material worth.

Warhol acknowledged that Pop art originated with artists such as Peter Blake and R.B. Kitaj in London during the 1950s, before arriving in America. America did, however, illustrate a visual overload in advertising that was brilliantly captured by Warhol's works from the 1960s. Other artists such as Roy Lichtenstein adapted this 'new realist' approach to cherished styles of art, such as still-life painting, and expanded and simplified the image until it became a graphic identity like advertising itself.

Here in Australia historical Pop has an immediately recognisable feel. Having watched it unfold in Britain and the United States, Australian artists of the 1960s and 1970s often adopted the 'Americana' influence in a unique way. From Warhol and Lichtenstein to Blake and Kitaj, Pop art made its way into the backyards of suburban Australian homes. Howard Arkley, for example, spray-painted repetitious patterns to create paintings of suburban houses and interiors in flat, bright colours that we might associate with interior decorating magazines of the 1970s. During this period, Robert MacPherson looked to the example of packaging products and advertising, with a unique approach to collage and the 'Australian image'. He combined found objects, fragments of reproductions of famous art works, and our own pop icon — the 'boxing' kangaroo. Both artists have been pivotal in the formation of this country's unique brand of Pop.



Robert Rauschenberg *Square* (from 'Polygons' series) 1975

Front: Roy Lichtenstein *Before the mirror* 1975



MASS MEDIA: THE PRODUCTION AND REPRODUCTION OF THE POP IMAGE

The development of new media in the 1950s, such as television, colour reproduction and advanced printing techniques, revolutionised the way people saw themselves and the world around them. Relatively new concepts of mass media and consumerism also influenced the way people lived and worked. This was manifested in the work of young artists of the Pop art movement, who began to use commercial pigments, materials and methods.

Pop artists borrowed directly from the style of graphic art and advertising campaigns, using the same processes of design and reproduction to create their work. In fact, a number of the key artists of this movement, such as Andy Warhol, Tadanori Yokoo, Peter Blake and James Rosenquist, had worked in the advertising and design industry before earning recognition as artists.

In 1963 Robert Indiana noted that the techniques Pop artists employed were a direct rebellion against the painterly manner of other artists of the day such as abstract expressionists like Jackson Pollock. 'Pure Pop culls its techniques from all the present-day communicative processes . . . It is straight to the point, severely blunt, with as little "artistic" transformation and delectation as possible. The self-conscious brushstroke and the even more self-conscious drip are not central to its generation'.¹

Howard Arkley painted with an airbrush, an apparatus usually associated with the commercial or production-line processes of coating objects. Arkley shared similar sentiments to those expressed by Indiana, in that he deliberately removed the brushwork from his painting to depersonalise or reject the notion of the artist's 'touch'.

In his 'Secular red/s' series Queensland artist Robert MacPherson juxtaposed mass-produced images and objects. MacPherson's interest was in the iconography of everyday objects and how classifications and relationships between these objects create identity or meaning. These

collages explore the notion of the Australian identity from an overseas perspective, and were completed after he returned from a residency in New York.

In today's society we are inundated with the images and messages of the mass media, the products of consumerism and the propaganda of global advertising. As such, many of the influences and approaches that first inspired the Pop artists five decades ago are still relevant to contemporary artists today. Developments in computer graphics technology and digital imaging and reproduction have been employed by contemporary artists in ways that could not have been imagined by the original Pop artists.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Robert Indiana, quoted in Gene Swenson, 'What is Pop Art?', *Art News*, vol. 62, no. 7, 1963, p.27.



Robert MacPherson *New York kangaroo, no. 6* [from Series II 'Secular red' series] 1978

Front: Howard Arkley *Stucco home* 1991



PACKAGING AND ADVERTISING: CREATING CONSUMER DESIRE

Many of the works in the exhibition play on the concepts of advertising, taking the conventions used to package and sell merchandise as their subject. Some directly incorporate packaging material in the work, such as Michel Tuffery's sculpture of a bull made from beef cans and Ay-O's collection of flattened cardboard boxes from beauty products. Others imitate products, such as Mieko Shiomi's *Assorted spices for dinner and daydreams* 1995, where a bottle of capsules is housed in a wooden box as if to be purchased from an apothecary. Their packaging functions as a form of advertising; the visual allure of product display creates desire for specific brands.

Works such as Robert Watts's *Tattoos: Stick-ons by Implosions, Inc.* 1984 and Joe Tilson's *New York decals 3 and 4* 1967 replicate a product and its packaging. Watts's screenprint on canvas is a magnified set of temporary tattoos incorporating mock product and company information.¹ Similarly, Tilson's screenprints emulate tourist stickers housed in transparent paper envelopes complete with detailed instructions on how to apply them. Both artists use the enthusiastic language of advertising and promotion within the work as attributes of the 'product', for example, 'durable, waterproof, washable, do-it-yourself accessories'. These works not only play on the visual characteristics of merchandising, but also employ the techniques of packaging production.

The design of product packaging and advertising is indicative of an era. This ephemeral material instantly defines, and is simultaneously defined by, the period of its production. The contemporary collage works sealed beneath lacquer by Chinese artists the Luo Brothers reference ephemeral Chinese New Year prints and capitalist advertising by reproducing product branding from soft drink bottles and fast food to electronic goods. Their manipulation of these symbols illustrates how the beginnings of 'political pop' in China in the late 1980s coincided with the introduction of Western-style commodity culture. Chinese artists began to celebrate and

critique consumer desire and brand recognition in their work. This contemporary approach mirrors the explosion of product availability in the 1950s which was a catalyst for, and defining element of, Pop art.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Watts and fellow Fluxus members set up the company Implosions Inc. to carry the spirit of Fluxus into popular culture and generate cash flow for the avant-garde movement.



Joe Tilson *New York decals 3 and 4* 1967

Front: Luo Brothers *Untitled [children with lemonade bottle]* 2000



From labor's viewpoint, on key votes—
Jack Kennedy has voted **RIGHT** 120 times, and **WRONG** 2 times
Richard Nixon has voted **RIGHT** 10 times, and **WRONG** 56 times
(SEE BACK COVER FOR COMPLETE SCORE CARD)



From labor's viewpoint, on key votes—
Jack Kennedy has voted **RIGHT** 120 times, and **WRONG** 2 times
Richard Nixon has voted **RIGHT** 10 times, and **WRONG** 56 times
(SEE BACK COVER FOR COMPLETE SCORE CARD)



POPULAR CULTURE: IT'S WHAT'S HAPPENING

'So what's pop? Pop is what's happening . . . '1 *Newsweek* 1966

The term 'popular culture' has come to mean many things, encompassing concepts associated with music, art, celebrity, advertising, media, history, fashion and television. Pete Townshend, of British band The Who, said in 1965: 'We stand for pop-art clothes, pop-art music, and pop-art behaviour . . . we don't change offstage. We live pop-art'.² Pop artists also challenged notions of high and popular culture, drawing their inspiration from diverse sources including mass-produced goods such as appliances, furniture, clothing, magazines and newspapers. Hierarchical views of imagery did not apply.

Logos and packaging developed to brand products, such as Coca-Cola, have become icons of popular culture, representing much more than the product they are advertising. The way contemporary artists such as the Luo Brothers recontextualise these icons reflects and builds on the tradition of Pop art established by Andy Warhol's Campbell's soup cans and Brillo boxes, which in themselves became pop culture icons.

It was not just Warhol's images that received international popular attention; the artist himself captured the limelight. Similarly, the fairytale life of Warhol's contemporary, Jacqueline Kennedy (Onassis), was celebrated by the media to the point that the fame, fortune, scandal and glamour surrounding her existence ensured that she also became an icon of popular culture. Warhol contributed to this process by immortalising Jackie Kennedy in the screenprint *Jackie '64* 1964.

With the multimedia work *Jackie ohhh!* 1997, Brisbane artist Lucy Francis mischievously pays homage to an extraordinary period in the life of the woman who became known worldwide in the popular consciousness as 'Jackie O'. Francis describes the work as exploring the media myth surrounding Jackie's marriage to John F.

Kennedy — 'the golden days of her semi-royalty, the sense of hope and innocence destroyed by an act of violence, the endless conspiracy theories, the ensuing corruption and degradation of the myths [the loveless marriage, endless adultery, etc.]'.³ The work includes media coverage and press images of icons like Marilyn Monroe and Joe Di Maggio, alluding to their roles in the 'Camelot' era.

Francis's CD-ROM plays with the pop practice of collage via an interactive twenty-first-century medium, incorporating layers of images, text and sound. By taking up and extending the notion of collage and the celebration of popular culture that were integral to Pop art, Francis demonstrates the continuing influence of the movement on artists of today.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Peter Benchley, 'The story of POP: what it is and how it came to be', *Newsweek*, 25 April 1966, pp.56–61, in David Brauer and Jim Edwards, *Pop Art: U.S./U.K. Connections 1956–1966*, Hatje Cantz Verlag, Ostfildern-Ruit, Germany, 2001, p.81.
- 2 Nick Jones, excerpt from *Melody Maker* (3 July, 1965), in *The Faber Book of Pop*, Faber & Faber, London, 1980, p.239, in Brauer and Edwards, p.83.
- 3 Lucy Francis, Artist statement, 2000.



DESTROYED
MUSIC

12/80

Pauline Kessler
1963-80

POP STARS: MUSIC, ART AND CELEBRITY

Andy Warhol exploited notions of fame and celebrity, stating, 'in the future everybody will be famous for 15 minutes'. Celebrity status can be reached through various cultural pursuits, though few reach the heights of popular musicians and actors. Warhol himself was a central figure in the glitterati of the 1960s and 1970s. His close relationship with a number of famous musicians and actors meant many became the subject of his work. In addition to his own art, Warhol created a number of album covers for bands such as The Velvet Underground and The Rolling Stones.

English artist Peter Blake referenced many different symbols from pop culture, especially images from American movies and rock and roll.¹ These influences are particularly apparent in Blake's most famous work — the cover art created for The Beatles' 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, which features a collage of popular icons and celebrities such as Marlon Brando, Marilyn Monroe, Albert Einstein, Bob Dylan and Lewis Carroll.

Around the time of Warhol's popularity in the United States, the underground Fluxus movement emerged in Europe. During 1965–66 Fluxus artist Milan Knizak began to produce 'Broken Music' works which confronted traditional modes of composition, recording and listening to music. This theme has remained a source of inspiration for Knizak, who recently explained how he created new music by destroying old records, 'In 1965 I started to destroy records: scratch them, punch holes in them, break them. By playing them over — which destroyed the needle and often the record players too — an entirely new music was created. Unexpected, nerve-racking, aggressive'.² By altering the physical nature of vinyl records as in *Destroyed Music* 1963–80, Knizak focuses on how contemporary culture and technology progress in parallel.

Contemporary Australian artist Tim Johnson is interested in blurring the boundaries between art and popular culture.

In the screenprints he produced in the 1970s and 1980s, Johnson adopted the visual iconography of alternative music posters, especially those of the punk music scene and bands such as The Sex Pistols, The Clash and The Stooges. Music remains central to popular culture and a favoured subject for a number of contemporary artists. More recent collaborations include Jeremy Blake's design for the cover of Beck's *Sea Change* album and Julian Schnabel's paintings for the Red Hot Chili Peppers' album *By the Way* (both 2002).

ENDNOTES

- 1 Brauer and Edwards, p.116.
- 2 Milan Knizak, quoted in Fred Cress, *Adelaide Festival Exhibition* [exhibition catalogue], BMG Fine Art, Adelaide, 1992.



Tim Johnson *Untitled (Iggy Pop)* 1980

Front: Milan Knizak *Destroyed music* 1963–80

KENNETH REKROTH

INDEX
25¢

CARDS

Ruled 5 x 8



FROM THE UNDERGROUND: SUB/COUNTER-CULTURE AND POP

Beneath the superficial surface of the mainstream magazine and television world, many groups of artists, writers, poets and musicians have marched to a different beat. It has been said that 'Pop art's first generation came on like a revolution',¹ and in many ways this reflected the major concerns of what is known as counter-culture.

Spurred by reactions to the Vietnam War, the 1960s is best known for its subculture of experimentation with drugs, music and 'free love'. Andy Warhol's 'Factory' was a veritable hive of activity with groups of 'workers' manufacturing screenprints and paintings, imitating the production processes of popular culture. Warhol's crowd of underground friends became the subjects of his art and films. The artist's gritty portraits of New York transvestites in his 'Ladies and gentlemen' portfolio reflected Warhol's fascination with sexuality and identity, long before such marginalised groups became more widely accepted by society.

In 1952 a friend of the legendary beat poet Jack Kerouac introduced a subcurrent of experimental literature to the general public in an article titled 'This is the Beat Generation'. In alliance with his interests in popular culture, this movement was intriguing to R.B. Kitaj and his fellow students in London. Kitaj's portrait of the Californian beat initiator Kenneth Rexroth brings together a collage of non-sensical colours and shapes, floating over the surface of a quasi-realistic portrait of the poet on the street.

As well as literature, counter-culture thrived in music; music being the best form of expression to reach the masses and illustrate 'individuality'. Tim Johnson had close links with the punk scene in Australia during the 1970s and 1980s, which looked to icons such as Iggy Pop for inspiration. Johnson's screenprints of the time explore not only the major tenets of Pop art such as multiple reproduction, but also the 'take control' approach of the punk era.

Around this time, Korean artist Nam June Paik took television to the streets and pioneered 'video art'. Paik and his contemporaries explored 'culture' as it was seen in real life. Sidelining punk music, Paik produced discordant 'sounds' with musicians such as John Cale and The Velvet Underground.

Although the term counter-culture is most often linked with the 1960s and 1970s, similar critiques have continued to operate in the contemporary sphere. In 1996 Melbourne artist Matthew Jones reproduced by hand, each word, advertisement and image from the 27 June 1969 issue of the *New York Daily News* in an effort to show the ignorance of gay rights issues before the Stonewall riots exploded the following day.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Glenn O'Brien, 'Bop Art', *Artforum*, February 1982, p.50.

ILLUSTRATED WORKS

PANEL 1

Murakami, Takashi
Japan b.1962

And then, and then and then and then and then 1994

Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
Diptych: 280 x 300 x 7.5cm (overall)

Purchased 1996. Queensland Art

Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© 2003 Takashi Murakami. All rights reserved.

Warhol, Andy

United States 1928–87

[Untitled] (from 'Ladies and gentlemen' portfolio) 1975

Screenprint, photo-screenprint

98 x 68 cm

Purchased 1995 with funds from the 1994 International Exhibitions Program

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© Andy Warhol Foundation, 1975/ARS.

Licensed by VISCOPY, Sydney 2003

PANEL 2

Lichtenstein, Roy

United States 1923–97

Before the mirror 1975

Lithograph and screenprint

89.8 x 63.8cm

Purchased 1996 with a special allocation from the Queensland Government. Celebrating the Queensland Art Gallery's Centenary 1895–1995

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© Roy Lichtenstein, 1975/Lichtenstein.

Licensed by VISCOPY, Sydney 2003

Indiana, Robert

United States b.1928

Square (from 'Polygons' series) 1975

Screenprint

61 x 61cm

Purchased 1991

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© Robert Indiana, 1975/ARS. Licensed by VISCOPY, Sydney 2003

PANEL 3

Arkley, Howard

Australia 1951–99

Stucco home 1991

Synthetic polymer paint (with

'Hammertone') on canvas

167 x 167cm

Purchased 1994. Queensland Art

Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© The Estate of Howard Arkley

MacPherson, Robert

Australia b.1937

New York kangaroo, no. 6 (from Series II 'Secular red' series) 1978

Collage of printed ephemera

78 x 42cm

Purchased 1990

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© The artist

PANEL 4

Luo Brothers

China b.1963/1964/1972

Untitled [children with lemonade bottle] 2000

Collage and lacquer on board

65 x 55 x 2.3cm

Purchased 2001. Queensland Art

Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© The artist

Tilson, Joe

England b.1928

New York decals 3 and 4 1967

Screenprint with collage of envelopes and label

47.2 x 35.8cm + 50.8 x 40.8cm (decals)

1 and envelope);

47 x 35.3 x 50.8 x 40.8cm (decals 2 and envelope)

Purchased 1984

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© Joe Tilson, 1967/DACS. Licensed by VISCOPY, Sydney 2003

PANEL 5

Francis, Lucy

Australia b.1976

Jackie ohhh! (detail) 1997

CD-ROM

Purchased 2001 with funds from

Energex Brisbane Festival 2000

through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© The artist

PANEL 6

Knizak, Milan

Czechoslovakia b.1940

Destroyed music 1963–80

Vinyl record fragments and red paint on board in boxed frame

47.8 x 38 x 4.7cm

Gift of Francesco Conz through the Queensland Art Gallery Foundation

1995

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© Milan Knizak, 1980/Bild-Kunst. Licensed by

VISCOPY, Sydney 2003

Johnson, Tim

Australia b.1947

Untitled [Iggy Pop] 1980

Screenprint

29.2 x 21cm

Purchased 2001. Queensland Art

Gallery Foundation Grant

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© The artist

PANEL 7

Kitaj, R.B.

England b.1932

Kenneth Rexroth (from 'First series: some poets' suite) 1969

Colour screenprint, photo-screenprint

51.1 x 75.6cm

Purchased 1984

Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

© The artist

TOUR SCHEDULE

Logan Art Gallery 6 August – 6 September 2003

Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery 19 September – 2 November 2003

Artspace Mackay 8 November – 21 December 2003

Redcliffe City Art Gallery 7 January – 14 February 2004

Bundaberg Arts Centre 26 February – 21 March 2004

Gladstone Regional Art Gallery and Museum 26 March – 15 May 2004

Caloundra Regional Art Gallery 26 May – 4 July 2004

Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville 8 July – 5 September 2004

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