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POP DRAWINGS OF THE 1960S

The year 1962 saw the widespread emergence, on both coasts of the United States, of a new tendency in painting, in which artists took as their subject matter commonplace objects and products of the new consumer society. The paintings associated with this movement were large in scale, brightly colored, and tended to feature clean edges, flat surfaces, and impersonal execution. The focus of this work was not on the actual physical objects or products themselves, but on the commercialized, mechanical complex of printed images found in advertising, the mass media, and popular culture. A distinguishing characteristic of Pop was the coincidence of subject and style. Some of the artists adopted commercial techniques for the rendering of images drawn from consumer culture, while others simulated or mimicked popular imagery by employing a vocabulary derived from graphic design. Indeed, many of Pop art's practitioners had backgrounds in commercial illustration.

In the context of an art of ready-formed images and dispassionate renderings that placed a high value on large size, bold colors, and high impact, what might have been the role of drawing? Drawing, which by tradition is intimately scaled, done in black and white, in charcoal or graphite, is considered uniquely revealing of the artist's hand and self. It would appear to be antithetical to Pop. However, the production of works on paper proliferated and played an essential role in the oeuvres of the artists associated with this style.

While Pop artists rejected the ideals of "finding the image" in the act of drawing and of drawing as autographic confession—widely held beliefs among artists of the 1950s—they embraced numerous long- standing conventions of drawing, first and foremost that works on paper continued to be handmade by the artist. Even drawings that attempted straightforward, "deadpan" transcription of source materials—some of them made by tracing found images, or by transferring them to paper by means of an opaque projector—were informed by the artist's eye, mind, and hand. Drawings in the 1960s therefore continued to serve as records of the creative process in the manner of far more traditional drawings.

All of the drawings included in *Drawing Then* are finished artworks as opposed to quick studies or sketches, although a great many are preparatory drawings: sites in which the artist explored ideas for work in other media. Comparing initial drawings to the paintings or sculptures that followed reveals the adjustments and transformations the artist made in moving from original conception to completion, and provides insights into the artist's thought processes and aims. No less revealing, however, are the wholly autonomous, so-called "presentation drawings." In many such works, artists exploit characteristics unique to the drawing medium, such as small scale, intimacy of address, and the specific qualities that ink, pencil, gouache, and watercolor assume when applied to paper. Although the use of primary colors and a wide range of saturated, artificial hues are a distinguishing feature of Pop paintings, most of the drawings seen here are uncolored, with emphasis placed instead upon line and form.

Part of the conventional thinking about Pop regards its "ineluctable flatness,"[1] which made it a counterpart to the leading abstract painting of the day—the work of Frank Stella, Ellsworth Kelly, Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, and so on. Clement Greenberg's formalism, which dominated art criticism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, made a virtue of flatness, the elimination of illusionist effects being what made pictures "modern." Illusionism, however, plays a significant role in the Pop drawings in this exhibition, as seen in Andy Warhol's *Heinz Tomato Ketchup with Campbell's Soup Can* (1962), Claes Oldenburg's *Blue Toilet* (1965), Ed Ruscha's *Trademark [#3]* (1962), and Wayne Thiebaud's *Ice Cream Cone* (1964), among others. Some of the artists employed tonal gradations to produce effects of light and shadow and to model forms in the round. Basic contour drawing, as well as graphic design techniques such as mechanical precision and perspective drawing, were also used extensively to situate objects and images in space.

While the Pop drawings seen here vary widely in subject matter, manner of execution, and intention, they all owe a debt of influence to the work produced in the mid-1950s and after by Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns. Together, Rauschenberg and Johns served as a bridge between Abstract Expressionism and Pop. They revived interest in Duchamp's idea of the readymade while maintaining, in their work in all media, the sensuous and emphatic mark of the artist's hand.

Rauschenberg's Combines, which he began in 1954, bring together all manner of objects and images of the real world on canvas, where they are interspersed with a wide variety of handmade but not personally expressive surface markings. Leo

Steinberg famously credited Rauschenberg with the invention of the "flatbed picture plane," the concept of the canvas as a literally flat surface filled with information and ideas that, Steinberg explained, enacted a shift in the orientation of art from nature to culture.[2]

In the transfer drawing technique that Rauschenberg developed in the 1950s, he would moisten images and texts cut out of newspapers and magazines with a solvent, and then rub their backs to deposit them on paper. Although he could have transferred the images with precision in their entirety, he preferred to work with multiple veiled fragments that would engage in formal and thematic dialogues. By the late 1960s, as seen in *Orange Body* (1969), the images were typically larger in scale and more legible. Encased in the orange rectangle that gives the work its title are two helmeted heads, one belonging to a grimacing football player, the other to a calm-faced astronaut. A golf ball, a beetle in a dish, bottles of Fresca soda and Listerine mouthwash, a running baseball player, and a seeming jumble of other photographic transfers also appear, the hatching strokes used to deposit the images further activating the whole.[3]

Whereas Rauschenberg engaged with the stuff of life in all its variety and multiplicity, Johns focused on individual commonplace objects, as in the paintings and drawings based on the design of the American flag that he began in 1954. In the graphite wash and pencil drawing *Flag* (1958), the flat, familiar design is rendered anew, its unitary structure shattered by the artist's energetic, tonally variant scribbling in both dense and fine lines that conjure illusionistic effects. In *Souvenir 2* (1969), included in the present exhibition, Johns again sensually and intellectually reworks a readymade image, albeit one of his own invention, employing a wide range of drawing and printing techniques on an intimate scale.

Claes Oldenburg's childlike construction *Flag* (1960) inevitably recalls Johns's flags. But Oldenburg's concerns in this seemingly weather-beaten, handmade fragment are extra-aesthetic. As he wrote a year after the work's creation: "I am for an art that takes its form from the lines of life itself . . . and is heavy and coarse and blunt and sweet and stupid as life itself."[4] Oldenburg's *Flag* is part of a series of drawings and driftwood assemblages devoted to the iconic image of the American flag, which he made in Provincetown, Massachusetts, during the summer of 1960. These works act as a playful response to the patriotic souvenir items ubiquitous in this historic beach town. The ragged and deskilled *Flag* recalls the rough-hewn cardboard and burlap assemblages of *The Street* (1960), in which Oldenburg replicated the grit and disorder of Manhattan's Lower East

Side in an immersive installation, while looking ahead to the brightly colored, plaster-over- chicken-wire reliefs depicting flags, brand-name consumer products, and other images taken from popular culture that appear in *The Store* (1961), which the artist began upon his return to New York that fall.

Similarly adopted from the proliferating mass- cultural images of the time, Roy Lichtenstein's tiny free- hand drawing *Study for Good Morning Darling* (1964) is revelatory of an early stage in his process of adapting comic frames as the subjects of his paintings. Loosely drawn in graphite and colored pencil, it is a quick but highly detailed sketch, in soft pastel colors, of a young woman waking up in bed and thinking the words of the title while tenderly gazing at a framed photograph of her lover. A later stage in Lichtenstein's process is seen in the larger graphite drawing, *The Kiss* (1962), which features firm contours and a pattern simulating Ben Day dots (probably made by rubbing the paper while pressing it against a screen), which Lichtenstein derived from his comic-book sources. Unlike its early study, the painting *Good Morning . . . Darling!*, which would have been transferred to canvas from a finished drawing by means of an opaque projector, is rendered in vivid primary colors seen both in multiple Ben Day dot patterns and flatly painted areas, with an extensive use of black.

Like Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol explored strategies to downplay the traces left by his hand. In the early 1960s, before he began to employ mechanical means (stencils, rubber stamps, and finally silkscreens) to produce works on paper and canvas, Warhol suppressed his facility at drawing by tracing photographs of commonplace objects on paper by means of an opaque projector. *One Dollar* (1961) is nevertheless remarkable for its lush, painterly, and improvisational character, and for seeming to reflect Warhol's engagement in the act of drawing, all of which were soon to be filtered from his art. The drawing relates to the painting, *One Dollar Bill (Silver Certificate)* (1962). Both take as their subject the U.S. dollar, the ultimate symbol of American wealth and power. But rather than presenting it flat and coincident with its support, as in Johns' first *Flag*, Warhol exploits a figure-ground relationship and the device of a wavy black shadow to convey a sense of movement and depth. Sketchy freehand work further animates the drawing, as does the swath of red watercolor that flows across its surface. The image of George Washington in the drawing is shaded and modeled in the round, as on the dollar bill, whereas in the painting his form is flattened, described largely in outline.

Not all artists who experimented with a Pop vocabulary continued to work in this vein. Executed during the brief period early in her career when Jo Baer identified

her work as Pop, the tiny (4 3⁄4 × 4 1⁄2 inch), independent drawing *Glass Slippers* (1960) stands like a nugget of thought, revealing the artist's penchant for tight formal control and anticipating her move to Minimal art. Here, a woman's black, heeled shoe and its "reflection" are silhouetted against a light ground, their forms extending to the very edges of the square format of the picture space. A pink line runs along the bottom of each shoe, bisecting the drawing. Having studied and then taught physiological psychology at the New School for Social Research in New York in the early and mid-1950s, Baer was intrigued by the optical phenomenon of Mach Bands, which occurs whenever there is a change from light to dark between two areas. Baer translated this principle into the color bands seen in this drawing, as well as in the reductive abstract paintings she began to create in 1962—square, white-surfaced paintings with black and thin color bands positioned around the framing edge. Glass slippers are the stuff of fairy tales, evoking fragility and conventional notions of feminine ideals; Baer's choice of this title for a drawing depicting stolid, opaque black shoes countered gender stereotype, much like her formally rigorous work in the art world of the early 1960s.

Conceptual rigor coupled with a poetic sensibility characterizes Ed Ruscha's *Quit with Pencil* (1967), which belongs to a series of independent works on paper referred to as "gunpowder ribbon drawings" because of their shared media and imagery. Although Ruscha has explained that he used gunpowder because he liked the granular texture it assumed when mixed with water (a consistency not dissimilar to that of charcoal), the explosive medium evokes a range of associations within the context of the works while providing evanescent, gradient gray fields. In *Quit with Pencil*, the word "Quit" appears to float against the seemingly boundless space, yet casts a shadow. The letters are gracefully formed in a ribbon-like script gently curled at the ends. Below is a *trompe l'oeil* image of a lead pencil bent in a zig-zag, the depicted pencil's sharpened tip "resting" on the edge of the pictorial field. The message the drawing seeks to convey, and to whom is it addressed, remain as suspended as the word and pencil. A primary tool both of drawing and cognition, the pencil is a loaded symbol for this consummate draftsman concerned with words as visual constructs and signifiers.

The boundless space of Ruscha's drawing finds a certain resonance in Vija Celmins's *Letter* (1968). This work shares the format of any number of Pop-related pieces Celmins began to produce in 1963, in which mundane objects and found images, rendered in muted tones and in a precise but nuanced manner, were isolated at the center of otherwise blank compositions. *Letter* was based on a photograph of a piece of mail sent to the artist in Venice, California, by her

mother in Indiana, and is a hand-drawn work of extraordinary intimacy. Celmins mimicked her mother's graceful penmanship on the envelope but invented its stamps, which were not U.S. Postal Service-issued, but related to her earlier paintings. Following in the wake of Warhol's Death and Disaster series, in the mid-1960s Celmins painted an extended series drawn from mass media and other sources. These works depicted forest fires, car crashes, and the like, most of them involving fire and great wafts of smoke. Born in Latvia in 1938, Celmins spent the better part of her first ten years of life as a refugee, traveling around Europe with her parents in flight from the Russians and the Nazis. The smoke-filled postage stamps, most of them representing bombs being dropped during air raids, looked back to childhood memories that her mother's letter may have evoked.

Celmins's *Untitled (Big Sea #2)* (1969), executed one year later, offers a meticulous rendering of the surface of the Pacific Ocean. If Rauschenberg's pre-Pop work can be understood to have shifted the focus of art from nature to culture, here the spotlight is once again directed at nature. While still working from photographs, in this and subsequent works based on observed natural phenomena, Celmins was aligned, not with Pop, but with Photo-Realism and its interest in transcribing the camera's vision of real-world appearances.

By the late 1960s, Photo-Realism, Conceptual, body, and performance art, land art, and a host of other fields emerged that further varied the artistic terrain. Pop art, with its focus on commonplace objects, the mass media, and consumer culture, was extended in new directions by many of its originators, while assuming broad international proportions. The drawings produced by American Pop artists in the 1960s had significant and continued impact upon the art that followed. These artists looked to low subjects outside the conventional bounds of art, while employing impersonal, mechanical, commercial, and even deskilled forms of execution. At the same time, they created works that widely varied in meaning and intention, and revealed their hands and minds. These artists reconsidered the role of drawing, leaving a legacy of possibilities for others to follow and expand.

1. The phrase "ineluctable flatness" derives from Clement Greenberg's essay, "Modernist Painting," in which he established this as a criterion for advanced abstract painting. See Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," originally given as a radio broadcast in 1961 for *The Voice of America Forum Lectures*, and printed in 1961 in *Arts Yearbook* 4, (1961): 101–108; reprinted with some revisions in *Art and Literature* 4 (Spring 1965): 193–201; available online at http://www.sharecom.ca/ greenberg/modernism.html. It may be noted, however, that Greenberg was dismissive of Pop, which he viewed as kitsch or "novelty art." See Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde Attitudes: New Art in the Sixties," originally delivered as the John Power Lecture in Contemporary Art, University of Sydney, 1968; published in Clement Greenberg, *The Collected*

Essays and Criticism, Vol.4: Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957– 69 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 292–303; avail- able online at http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/avantgarde.html. 2. Leo Steinberg, "Other Criteria," in *Other Criteria: Confrontations with Twentieth-Century Art* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), 61–98.

3. Also seen in *Orange Body* is the newspaper heading, "Deadline Scrapped Over Desegregation," which refers to the announcement made in mid-1969 that the Nixon Administration was delaying a ruling that would have required immediate desegregation of school districts in the South, a decision that caused great ire among desegregationists on the political left while somewhat appeasing the right. Given this information, the angry and peaceful faces of the helmeted football player and astronaut achieve renewed clarity, as does the image of the black baseball player running out of the drawing at the bottom right. 4. Claes Oldenburg, "I Am for an Art . . .," in Environments, *Situations, Spaces* (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961).