

## Week 9 – 20<sup>th</sup> Century Art

### Abstract Expressionism/Action Painting/New York School

- Emerged in New York City during mid 1940s, also known as Action Painting and New York School
- Represented shift of artistic capital to America, New York became focal point of artistic innovation
- Massive emigration of European artists to US during WW2; European artists (esp. Surrealism) exerted profound impact on American culture; economic supremacy of American further contributed to its primacy in visual arts
- American art prior to development of Abstract Expressionism was provincial, followed the artistic trends established in Europe, London, Paris and Rome; patronage for local American art was minimal; art collection focused on art of Europe
- The term 'Action Painting' was coined by critic Harold Rosenberg, who developed a theory that the painter improvises images as he goes along; hence the final work records a moment in artist's life
- First important school in American painting to be independent from European styles and to influence development of art overseas
- Art redefined. After end of WW2, people yearned for a new start. Important avant-gardist like Chagall, Albers, Moholy-Nagy, Mondrian, Duchamp, Grosz and Dali emigrated to the US in order to escape the National Socialists
- In America, there was a tradition of artistic sponsorship
- The Armory Show brought European avant-garde to American audience who particularly enjoyed the Expressionists, Cubists and Surrealists
- Mrs Rockefeller, one of the co-founders to the Museum of Modern Art, who heavily promoted contemporary art in America, which made New York the new artistic metropolis starting from the 1940s
- All forms of figurative painting were hastily rejected in the West after the war, based on ideological grounds because all forms of figurative representation were equated with Nazi art or the state-commissioned Socialist Realism
- Abstract painting, because of its openness and its free-floating content, was seen as the only art that could be appropriate to the 'free West'. Hence, abstract painting became the clearly dominant style in the western hemisphere in the 1950s.
- Focus on action of the painting, rather than the final result
- Important artists – Jackson Pollock, Hans Hoffmann, Robert Motherwell, Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Theodoros Stamos, Adolph Gottlieb, Helen Frankenthaler, Barnett Newman, Lee Krasner, Esteban Vicente, Willem de Kooning, Ad Reinhardt

### Philosophy

- Emphasized the active process of creating art – energy, action, kineticism, freneticism – the act of painting
- Developed inspirations from Surrealism, relying on instincts to shape/create works of art that were irrational, works were unpremeditated accidents
- "...painting is a state of being...Painting is self discovery..." – Jackson Pollock

### Painting Theory

- Attention to surface qualities, i.e. qualities of brushstrokes, texture, use of huge canvases,
- Glorifying the act of painting itself as means of visual communication
- Attempt to transfer pure emotions onto canvas through subconscious means
- Traditional concepts of composition, space, volume and depth were abandoned
- Made use of flatness of picture plane & varying qualities of colours to create an ambiguous spatial relationship
- Physical action of the artist became an end & means to directly express his internal unconscious being

Arshile, Gorky (1900-48)



- American painter, born in Armenia as Vosdanig Adoian; escaped the Turkish slaughter of Armenians, emigrated to the US in 1920
- Studied at Boston's New School of Design, moved to New York City in 1925
- Extraordinary draftsman inspired by Ingres and Picasso, Gorky developed a unique figurative style based on spontaneous automatism found in surrealism and in the works of Joan Miro and Roberto Matta
- began (c.1940) to create abstractions consisting of involved, voluptuously organic shapes and glowing colors, all enveloped in an aura of mystery. In these works he became a pioneer in the development of abstract expressionism
- committed suicide at age 44 after a series of personal and professional disasters
  
- Gorky is well represented in American collections, e. g., in New York City, *Water of the Flowery Mill* is in the Metropolitan Museum and there are works at the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum.



One Year the Milkweed, 1944



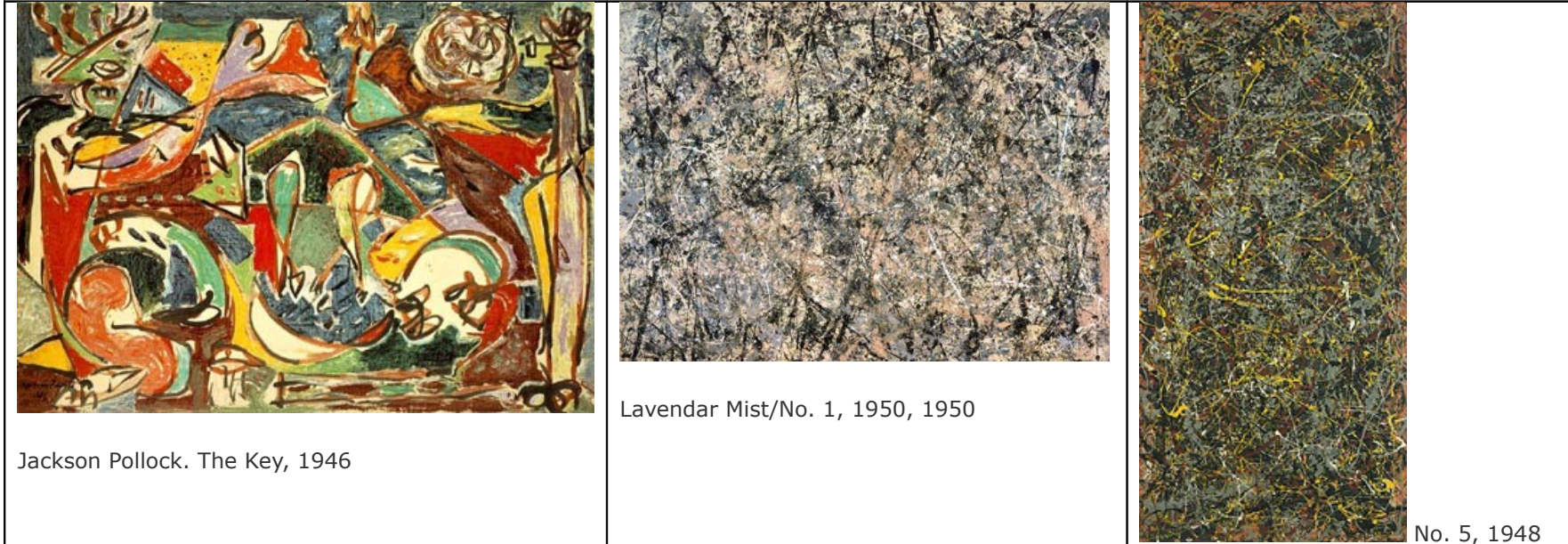
Golden Brown. 1943-44



Portrait of Master Bill. 1936

**Jackson Pollock**

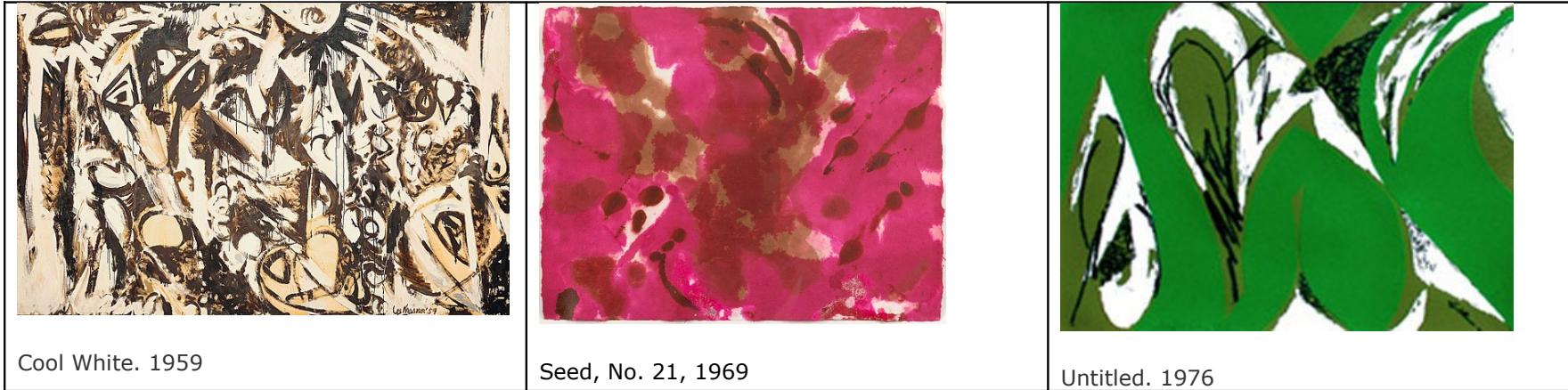
- 1912-56
- Studied in New York City under Thomas Hart Benton
- Broke down conventional idea of art; freed the need to depict images; the act and process of painting became the subject and content of work
- Influenced by AP Ryder and Mexican Muralist, especially Siqueiros, Surrealism and Picasso
- Famous for his "drip" paintings, in which he energetically drew or "dripped" complicated linear rhythms onto enormous canvases placed flat on the floor
- Became symbol of new artistic revolt – abstract expressionism, highly promoted by art critic Clement Greenberg and the CIA to promote the USA as haven of free thought and free markets, thus challenging the social realist styles in communist nations and dominance of European art markets



Lee Krasner (1911-1984)



- American artist, born in Brooklyn, New York
- Studied with Hans Hofmann and became a leading figure in abstract expressionism along with her husband, Jackson Pollock.
- Her compositions are intellectually controlled and characterized by broad gestural brushstrokes
- often utilized collage, usually cut-up sections from her own earlier work, in her paintings. Notable examples of her work include *The Bull* (1958) and *Polar Stampede* (1960)



**Colour Field Painting/ Geometric Abstraction**

- Originated in 1960s, came after abstract expressionism of the 1950s
- Involved strong personal emotionalism, pure intellectual aesthetic – flat, two-dimensional areas of space, monumental scale
- A type of Abstract Expressionism characterized by works of Mark Rothko, Clyfford Still, Barnett Newman, Robert Motherwell and Adolph Gottlieb, Helen Frankenthaler, Ellsworth Kelly, Jules Olitski, Kenneth Noland, Frank Stella, and Morris Louis
- Highly stylized and minimalist, getting rid of recognizable imagery
- Intelligent and psychological use of colour, influenced by Bauhaus Functionalism disseminated by Josef Albers
- Colour as centre of attention and
- Artists wanted to present each painting as one unified, cohesive, monolithic image

**Mark Rothko (1903-70)**



- 1903-70, American painter, born in Russia. Emigrated to the United States in 1913
- Influenced by the surrealists
- In mid-1940s, experimented with abstraction, arranging intense colours in irregular shapes
- Soon he became a leading exponent of a uniquely meditative and personal strain within the larger movement of abstract expressionism
- His later works (e.g., *No. 10*, 1950; Mus. of Modern Art, New York City) frequently consist of floating rectangles of luminous color on enormous canvases that manage to simultaneously convey a deep sensuality and a profound spirituality.
- Rothko's images preceeded some of the techniques of the later colour field painting
- In early November, 2005, Rothko's 1953 oil on canvas painting, *Homage to Matisse*, broke the record selling price of any post-war painting at a public auction at U.S. \$22.5 million dollars.
- In May 2007 Rothko's 1950 painting *White Center (Yellow, Pink and Lavender on Rose)*, broke this record again, selling at \$72.8 million dollars at Sotheby's New York. The painting was sold by philanthropist David Rockefeller, who attended the auction



White Centre (Yellow, Pink and Lavendar on Rose)



Untitled, 1953



Yellow, Red, Red. 1954

### Robert Motherwell (1915-91)



- 1915-91, American painter and writer
- Taught at several art colleges and during the early 1940s, he became the theoretician of abstract expressionism
- His canvases are characterized by large, amorphous shapes, painted in strong, austere colors
- His most famous body of work is a series of over 100 paintings entitled *Elegy for the Spanish Republic* (1948-90). He also created numerous masterful collages and more than 500 editions of prints.
- married for several years to the painter Helen Frankenthaler
- Motherwell edited *Documents of Modern Art* (15 vol., 1944-61), *Modern Artists in America* (1952), *The Dada Painters and Poets* (1951), and *Documents of 20th-Century Art* (1971-80). His keen critical powers and abundant intellectual gifts are evident in his many essays, brought together in *The Collected Writings of Robert Motherwell* (1993).



Elegy to the Spanish Republic No. 54. 1957-61



Rojo. 1971



Signs on white. 1981

Helen Frankenthaler (1928 - )



- American painter, born in New York City
- A painter of the abstract expressionist school
- greatly influenced by Jackson Pollock, with whom she studied
- In the early 1950s she developed a technique for staining unprimed canvases with color that was later to influence the color-field painters
- Her abstract works evoke a lyrical and sensuous mood, as in *Blue Territory* (1955) and *Arden* (1961; both: Whitney Mus., New York City)



Nature abhors a vacuum. 1973

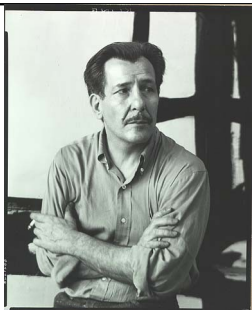


Southern Exposure, 2005



Magic Carpet, 1964

### Franz Kline (1910-62)



- American painter
- studied (1937-38) in England, then settled in New York City
- From the early 1950s, Kline exhibited large canvases of dynamically painted black-and-white grids
- His works often recall Chinese calligraphy but he himself denied Asian influence
- His subsequent works, sometimes with notes of bright color, established his reputation as an important figure in abstract expressionism





Painting No. 2, 1954



Untitled, 1958



Chief, 1950

### **Barnett Newman (1905-70)**

- American artist, born in New York City
- Newman was one of the first to reject conventional notions of spatial composition in art. A member of the New York school
- In his severe *Stations of the Cross* series (1958-66), he divided raw canvas vertically at intervals by black or white bands of various widths. In other paintings (e.g., *Who's Afraid of Red, Yellow, and Blue IV?*, 1969-70) Newman used large areas of saturated, sometimes primary color punctuated by narrow vertical bands of other colors that he called "zips" as the source of visual and emotional impact
- Often using monumental scale, he took abstraction to its farther reaches. Newman became known as a major painter in the last decade of his life, and his work was an important influence on the practitioners of colour-field painting
- He also created a number of monumental abstract sculptures



Ad Reinhardt (1913-67)

- American painter, art theorist born in New York City
- Best known for black paintings begun in 1960 – associated with Minimalism, the paintings appear all black and exhibit only slight variations in hue and the presence of form on close scrutiny
- In rejecting the conventional attributes of painting, he attempted to abstract the pure and contemplative qualities he admired in Eastern art



Black painting. 1960-61



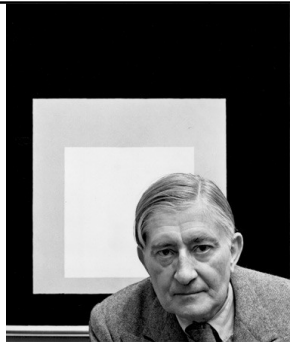
One of his series of Black Paintings



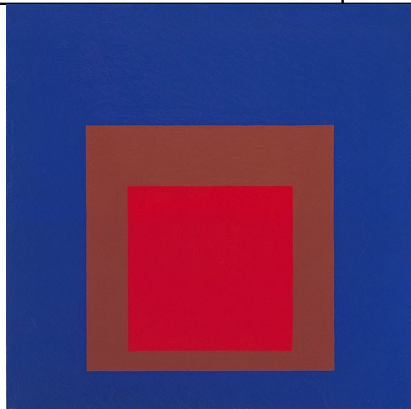
Yellow painting (abstraction). 1946

**Concrete Abstraction**

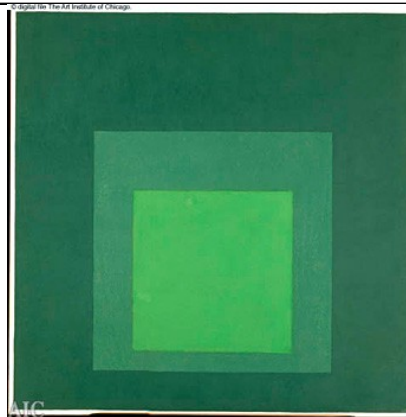
Josef Albers (1888-1976)



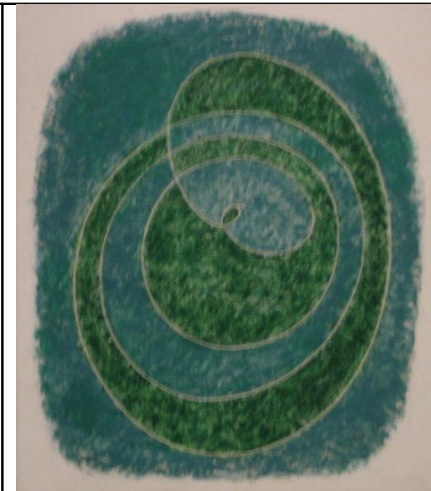
- German-American painter, printmaker, designer, and teacher. Born in Bottrop, Germany
- After working at the Bauhaus [Bauhaus](#) (1920-33), Albers and his wife, the textile designer and weaver Anni Albers, emigrated to the United States when Hitler came to power
- Albers taught throughout the Americas and Europe, headed the art department (1933-49) at Black Mountain College, and was director of the Yale School of Art (1950-58), where he was responsible for major innovations in art education
- An extremely versatile artist, he is best known for his *Homage to the Square*, a series of paintings and prints begun in 1949. These serene works, quasicentric squares of subtly related colors, form an extensive examination of color properties.



Homage to the square: on an early sky. 1964



Homage to the square: new light. 1967



Protoform (B), 1938



- American artist, b. Malden, Massachusetts
- Stella exhibits the precision and rationality that characterized minimalism, employing parallel angular stripes to emphasize the rectangular shape of his large canvases. His innovative and influential use of irregularly shaped canvases first appeared in his metallic series in 1960
- In his early "black paintings" Later examples of his work stress color in decorative curved motifs. In the 1970s and 80s, Stella abandoned the studied, minimalist aesthetic in favor of a more improvised, dynamic, and dramatic idiom in mixed-media. During that time he abandoned flat paintings and instead created large, jutting, multipart, three-dimensional painting-constructions that often incorporate bright colors, enlarged versions of French curves, and lively brushstroke patterns.
- Stella's work became fully three-dimensional in the early 1990s in a series of dense abstract sculptures composed of found and cast elements in stainless steel and bronze. These unpainted and often large-scale metal wall constructions, with their tangled, layered, and looping shapes, project an air of vibrant spontaneity
- Throughout his career, Stella also has been a prolific printmaker. The Whitney Museum, New York City, has several of his paintings, and his works are included in numerous museum and corporate collections worldwide.



The Pequod meets the Bachelor. 1988



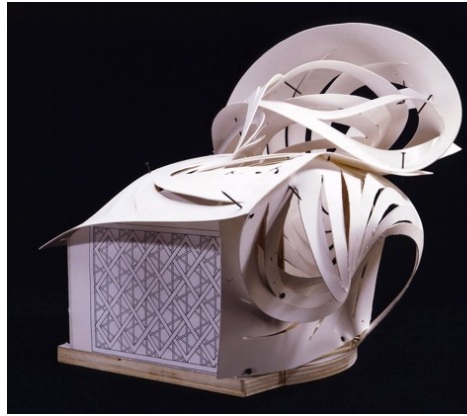
The Dart. 1990



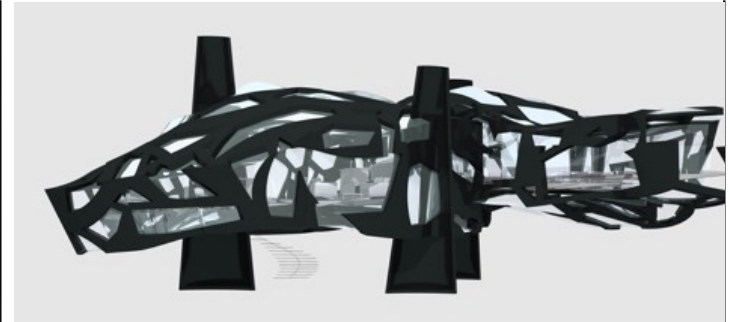
Constantini Museum (Buenos Aires, Argentina). 1999



First Model. Kunsthalle, Dresden, 1991



Gatehouse model. 1994



Guesthouse. 2007

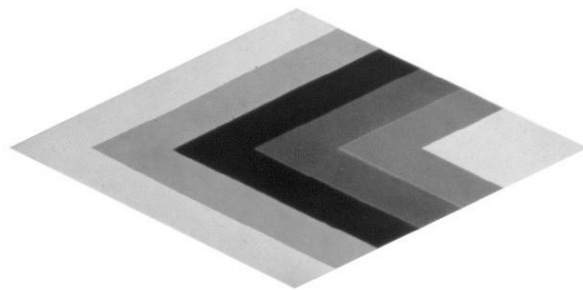
Kenneth Noland (1924 - )



- American painter, born in Asheville, North Carolina
- Noland first experimented with bands of pure color in bull's-eye and chevron motifs and horizontal parallel stripes
- emphasized the flatness of his canvas by staining paint into raw canvas and using uniform color values. In his work color itself is the subject. Later paintings treat plaid designs with muted color bands of varied width.



The other side of midnight. 2000



Trans West. 1965



## POP ART

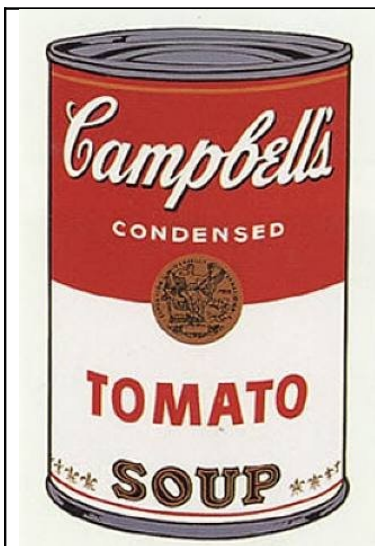
- Art movement which first emerged in Great Britain at the end of 1950s
- Reaction against seriousness of abstract expressionism by using common imageries found in pop and commercial culture - comic strips, soup cans and Coke bottles, to express formal abstract relationships
- Making art accessible to ordinary people
- Artists – Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Keith Haring, Sigmar Polke, etc

### Andy Warhol



- Pop star of visual arts, started out as a very successful commercial illustrator in New York
- Studied commercial art the School of Fine Arts at Carnegie Institute of Technology
- His art told of the psychological state of a society of mass media and mass production than any amount of sociological research – American pop culture
- Reportedly disliked Abstract Expressionism
- Founded 'The Factory', his studio in 1960s which attracted a wide range of artists, writers, musicians and underground celebrities
- In 1962, produced first serial paintings of Campbell soup cans, through silkscreens. His inspiration was consumer goods, Campbell soup was what he ate everyday for lunch and dinner. His work is instantly recognizable, consisting of dollar bills, images from headline stories of the decade, food packaging etc.
- His signature was having eliminated the hand-made from the artistic process (e.g. silkscreens, tracing drawings from slide projections, employing assistants to do his work, etc)
- On June 3, 1968, Valerie Solanas shot Warhol and art critic and curator Mario Amaya at Warhol's studio, claiming that he 'had too much control over my life'
- 1970s saw Warhol rounding up new, rich patrons for portrait commissions, including Mick Jagger, Liza Minnelli, John Lennon, Diana Ross, Brigitte Bardot and Michael Jackson
- 1975, he published *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol : From A to B and Back Again*
- Religion-wise, he was a practicing Byzantine Rite Catholic
- Died in New York City on February 22, 1987 from complications following gallbladder surgery

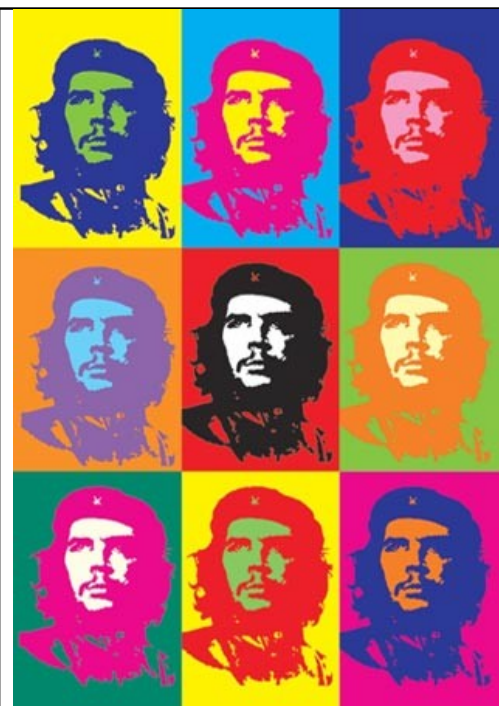




Andy Warhol. *Campbell's Soup*, 1968



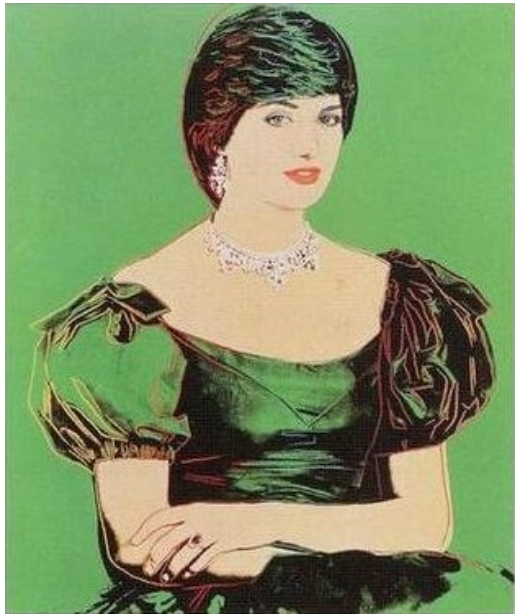
Andy Warhol. *Marilyn Monroe*



Andy Warhol. *Che Guevara*



My shoe is your shoe, 1955



Princess Diana, 1982



Warhol, Andy (1928-1987)  
Botticelli's Venus (1984)  
Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas.  
© 2003 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY.  
Photo © The Andy Warhol Foundation, Inc. / Art Resource, NY.

Botticelli's

Venus. 1984

Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997)



- American painter, born in New York City, master of pop art
- Derived his subject matter from popular sources such as comic strips,
- His paintings reflect modern typographic and printing techniques such as Ben-Day dots and make innovative use of commonplace imagery
- Primary colors--red, yellow and blue, heavily outlined in black--became his favorites. Occasionally he used green. Sometimes he selected a comic-strip scene, recomposed it, projected it onto his canvas and stenciled in the dots. "I want my painting to look as if it had been programmed," Lichtenstein explained.



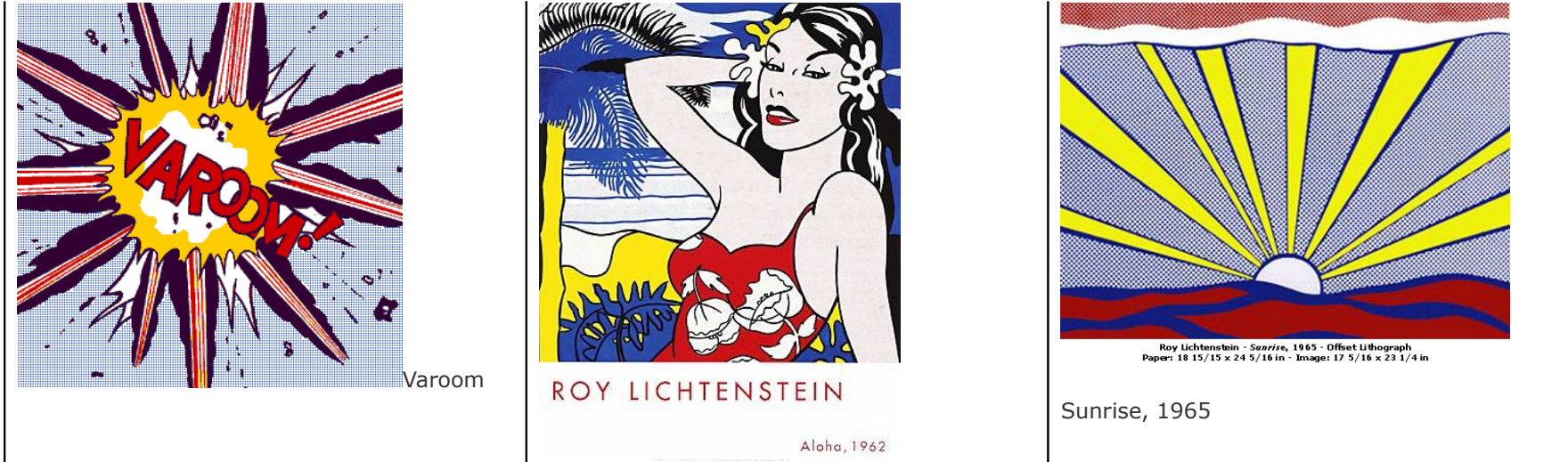
In the car, 1963




Maybe, 1963



Popeye, 1961



Robert Rauschenberg (1925 - )

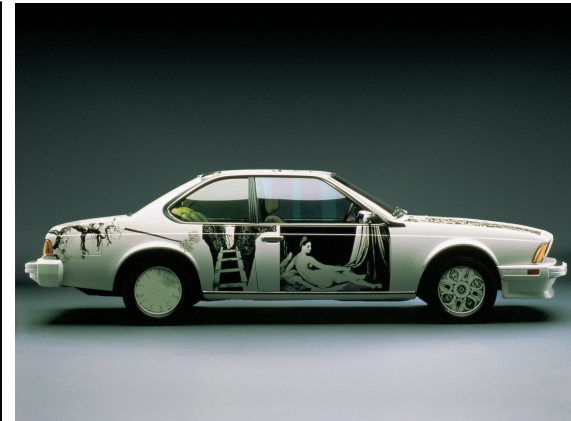
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• American painter, sculptor, printmaker, photographer and performance artist</li><li>• Studied at Kansas City Art Institute and Academie Julian in Paris</li><li>• Credited as one of the major influences on representational art in the US</li><li>• While too much of an individualist ever to be fully a part of any movement, he acted as an important bridge between Abstract Expressionism and Pop art and can be credited as one of the major influences in the return to favour of representational art in the USA</li><li>• First American to win the Grand Prix at the Venice Biennale in 1964</li><li>• As iconoclastic in his invention of new techniques as in his wide-ranging iconography of modern life, he suggested new possibilities that continued to be exploited by younger artists throughout the latter decades of the 20th century.</li></ul> <p>"I don't want a picture to look like something it isn't. I want to look like something it is. And I think a picture is more like the real world when it's made out of the real world."</p> <p>"A pair of socks is no less suitable to make a painting with than wood, nails, turpentine, oil and fabric."</p>
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Bed, 1955



Retroactive, 1964



1986 BMW 635 CSi Art Car by Robert Rauschenberg



Monogram, 1959



Patrician Barnacle, 1981



Satellite, 1959

### John Cage (1912-92)

- American composer, leading figure in the musical avant garde
- Studied with Arthur Schoenberg, Adolph Weiss and Henry Cowell
- In 1943, he moved to New York City where his concerts featured percussion instruments
- For these performances, he invented the "prepared piano", in which objects made of metal, wood, and rubber were attached to a piano's strings, thus altering pitch and tone and producing sounds resembling those of a minuscule percussion group
- He sought to break down barriers between "art" and "non-art", maintaining that all sounds are of interest
- Many of his works feature nonmusical sounds
- 4'33" is probably the most famous of his works, consisting of 4 minutes and 33 seconds of silence, providing a frame to be filled by random environmental sounds

### Merce Cunningham

- American modern dancer and choreographer
- Studied with Martha Graham, soloist in her company from 1940 to 1955
- his first work in 1942 and formed his own company in 1953, beginning to create innovative dances to the music of avant-garde composers, including his longtime friend and musical director John Cage.
- His best-known early works include *Suite by Chance* and *Symphonie pour un homme seul* (both 1952), which reveal his spare, expressive style.
- His works are composed of abrupt changes and suspensions of motion, some performed by autonomously moving dancers in chance sequence, and occur in a decentralized stage space.
- especially known for his collaborations with contemporary American artists, including Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns, who have created sets and costumes for his productions. His later works include *Locale* and *Duets* (both 1980); *Fabrications* (1987); *Trackers* (1991), the first work he created with the aid of a computer; *Crwdspcr* (1994); *Installations* (1996); *Scenario* (1997); *Biped* (1999); *Way Station* (2001); and *Split Sides* (2003), with music by the experimental rock bands Radiohead and Sigur Ros.