pop art redefined

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made it possible for four of the contributing American artists to be invited to London. Within the Arts Council we had the inestimable advantage of Joanna Drew's experience, resource, unselfishness and delight in hard work. Finally, we should like to thank our publishers, Thames and Hudson, for their patience and support in times of stress, and for the turn of speed which has got this book out faster than anyone had a right to expect.

J. R.
S. G.

Introduction

Suzi Gablik

Antagonism still surrounds the whole subject of Pop Art. However, it is one of the ambitions of both the present exhibition and this book to achieve a reorientation of critical concern. With the exception of Lichtenstein who was given a major retrospective at the Tate Gallery last year, the work of most American Pop artists has hardly been seen in London, and is virtually unknown to the general English public. What little has been seen over the years is mostly a result of the single-handed efforts of Robert Fraser in his gallery on Duke Street, but this accounts of necessity for only a few of the artists, and their work has been shown only on a limited scale. Upon this rests our decision to make an exclusively Anglo-American show. Manifestations of Pop Art have appeared throughout the world, in France, Italy, Germany and Japan, but it was not possible on this occasion to deal with it all. Moreover, the English and the Americans are generally considered to have been the pioneers of the movement, and a significant dynamic of difference emerges when their work is juxtaposed, as has not happened before now. Since each was formed by a particular historical situation and has a distinct character, comparative meanings develop that were previously unclear, when the contexts in which they are used to being seen are altered, and their company varies. A marked disjunction between American and English Pop asserted itself as we applied certain criteria in our choice of works, and this served to emphasize the unsimilar cultural dynamic underlying each.

The first proving-ground in selecting works was visual immediacy. This meant choosing images which were highly specific and uncontrived in relation to their own subject matter: that is to say, images which suggested the world rather than personality. The authentic Pop image exists independent of any interpretations. It is simple, direct, and immediately comprehensible. Among American Pop artists, it was relatively easy to find works in which form and iconography fuse in a single, unified

image: Alex Hay's five-foot enlargement of an ordinary mailing label, for example, or Roy Lichtenstein's giant composition notebook, or Claes Oldenburg's soft typewriter. It should be stated that we afforded priority to this kind of image deliberately, as part of our intention to re-define Pop Art as having a more direct relation to Minimal and Hard-edged abstract art than is frequently admitted.

Pop Art has been handicapped with a freakish and flamboyant history, partly as a result of mishandling in the public news media, so that nearly everyone, including the artists, now responds to it with ambivalence. Certain critics still exclude it from serious consideration, and a proportion of the public think it is some sort of joke. I know of only two endorsements in contemporary criticism which support the notion that Pop and Minimal art have a common denominator. The first is an essay by Robert Rosenblum, appended in this book, which was published as early as 1964 (i.e. five years ago). He states: 'Already the gulf between Pop and abstract art is far from unbridgeable, and it has become easy to admire simultaneously, without shifting visual or qualitative gears, the finest abstract artists, like Stella and Noland, and the finest Pop artists, like Lichtenstein. The development of some of the Pop artists themselves indicates that this boundary between Pop and abstract art is an illusory one.' The second article is a more recent one by Barbara Rose, entitled 'The Politics of Art (II)', published in *Artforum*. She links both Pop and Minimal art to pragmatism and to earlier twentieth-century American art (Precisionism). Rosenblum's point of view was particularly far-sighted with respect to the date it was written and compared to many other opinions that were accumulating around Pop. In 1962, just two years earlier, for example, Max Kozloff had written concerning some recent exhibitions by Pop artists: 'The truth is, the art galleries are being invaded by the pin-headed and contemptible style of gum-chewers, bobby soxers, and, worse, delinquents.' The very title of his article, 'Pop Culture, Metaphysical Disgust, and the New Vulgarians', reflected the unpleasant impression which has irrationally adhered to Pop.

Our primary intention in this exhibition has been to assert the stylistic affinities of Pop Art with certain contemporary abstract art, in the hope of expanding the framework within which Pop has so far been considered. We have therefore tended to choose, *wherever possible*, examples which give visual credence to this particular

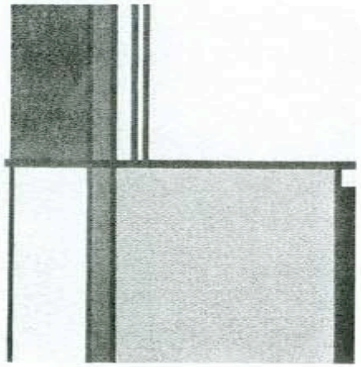
MARCEL DUCHAMP *L.H.O.O.Q.* 1919 Corrected ready-made: reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* to which Duchamp has added a moustache and beard in pencil, 7½×5 ins

idea. That is to say, concrete and legible images where colour tends to be flat, emblematic, and impersonally applied, and where the iconography is extremely explicit and usually unified in a single, non-relational image. Certain artists, like Rauschenberg and Rivers, have not been stressed, since their work runs counter to this view, insofar as it is a hybrid form of Pop. Their subject matter often overlaps, but the style is more painterly, diffuse and multi-evocative, whereas the real dynamic of Pop is best realized when style and subject merge in a single, unified *Gestalt*.

It is more difficult among English artists to find works where the style and imagery hold together in this particular way, as their modalities tend more toward the narrative and the picturesque (Phillips and Blake), or toward the autobiographical (Hockney), or toward subliminal and multi-focus imagery (Paolozzi).

It is difficult, therefore, to postulate a stylistic unity among Pop artists. There are, however, a number of thematic unities which apply to both English and Americans, a shared and recurrent iconography, based upon real things which are part of everybody's world, and not just a private world of the artist's. These images are a part of popular culture as presented through the surrogate world of the mass media; for the exhibition we have organized them into a basic schema: household objects, images from the cinema, images found in the mass media (like comic strips and billboards), food (like hamburgers and Coca-Cola), and clothing. Another important category of Pop images is art which makes some reference to other art. Certain Dada and Neo-dada precedents for the kind of irony involved can be cited in this context: for example, the 'L.H.O.O.Q.' of Duchamp, which is the prototype for the parody and manipulation of one artist's work by another (once, as John Cage has pointed out, we only had the 'Mona Lisa' – now we have Mona Lisa with a moustache), and Rauschenberg's erased De Kooning drawing. Art of the past has always contained a certain amount of deliberate quotation or references to specific works by previous artists, but it is among Pop artists that we find such an unqualified appropriation as Lichtenstein's use of Mondrian in 'Non-Objective II'. Sometimes, such a work can issue from an intense love-hate relationship, as with Dine's near-parody of 'stripe' paintings in the saw-horse piece (Plate VI); or, as in the case of the Lichtenstein, the original art work may be used merely as another common object, made familiar through reproductions,

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG *Erased de Kooning Drawing* 1953 Collection the artist



ROY LICHTENSTEIN *Non-Objective II* 1964 Magna on canvas, 48×48 ins Collection Ileana Sonnabend

in the everyday environment. That is to say, it has become part of a common language understood by everybody.

It is not without significance, for example, that in America so many Pop artists have taken the bathroom as a subject. The aesthetics of Pop contain disturbing elements which have implied a new interchangeability between art and non-art and a new flexibility with regard to subject matter that previously appeared marginal to the fine arts. We approach a time, Marshall McLuhan has pointed out, when the total human situation must be considered as a work of art. The explosion of the advertising and communications industry, and the speed with which images and information now travel through media channels, have resulted in a much broader awareness and a more extended involvement in our total environment. What this means is that it is now possible to know at once everything that is happening in the world, so that experience is all-inclusive and occurs on many simultaneous levels.

For the artist, the implications are that art, too, can no longer restrict its operations. The new media necessitate a restructuring of our thoughts and feelings; they require new habits of attention with the ability to move in all directions and dimensions simultaneously. Since art, like life, must extend its boundaries to deal with changes in the environment, the major issues no longer hinge upon the creation of enduring masterpieces as the unique and solid repositories for human energy. The new problems for art concern the constant redefinition of its boundaries, and a more process-oriented distribution of energy. Relativity and quantum mechanics have effected the shift from a timeless, Euclidean world in which all is precise, determinate and invariable, to a non-static universe where everything is relative, changing and in process. Changes in the way that we live in the world cause changes in the way we do our work, as well as changes in what work we do. Before the electronic age the various channels of information – painting, music, literature – were held in balance and did not infringe upon each other very much. Mass communication, television in particular, appropriates relentlessly from all other media: films, literature, graphic design, theatre, events. It acts as a great leveller, while also providing techniques for combining many separate frames of reference. As a result, widely separated experiences are being brought under one comprehensive and simultaneous formula.

Where art is concerned, canvas, stretchers and paint have not been the notional limits for quite some time. Certain tendencies in contemporary art have evolved an increasingly lifelike format which overlaps into the environment and blurs the distinctions between art and daily life. These tendencies also undo the formal divisions between art forms, and disregard the previous hierarchical separation that has existed between popular culture and fine art. All things being equal, it is not accidental that most Pop artists (especially in America) have been involved since the late 1950s in various environmental and multi-media projects, like happenings, events, performances, films.

It does not bear upon us directly in this context, but should be noted, that a polar tendency in contemporary painting and sculpture now exists in dramatic opposition to the attitudes just described. According to this point of view art and life are judged as wholly separate and as not occupying the same space. The significance of painting and sculpture depends instead upon the purity and integrity of an art which will refer only to itself and will exclude all references to life. This means reducing the perceptual world to the pure sensations produced by form and colour, often to an axiomatic or pre-established structure based on the laws of an internal necessity, not unlike the use of models in science. Like the laws of logic, such axiomatic models owe their necessary truth, not to some unalterable structural features of the world which they might be thought to describe, but to the conventions of language by which they are endowed with meaning. Abstract art has a great deal in common with those principles of modern linguistics which assert that content never has a meaning in itself, but that it is only the way in which the different elements of the content are combined together which gives a meaning. Abstract artists deal with the syntax of painting and the structures of meaning as the *only* valid subject matter for art. At the moment, these two non-complementary attitudes have become mutually hostile to such a degree that an almost schizoid situation has evolved. The two modes have become so dissociated that they barely recognize each other as part of the same continuum.

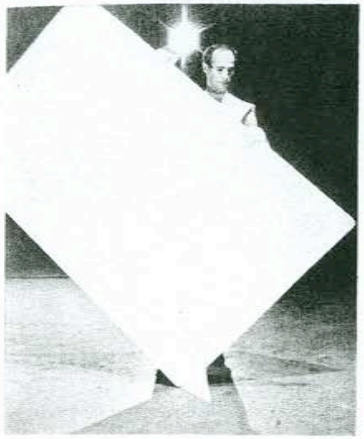
The aesthetics of Pop, then, concerns (1) the breakdown of the conventions of the picture plane and the use of three-dimensional extensions into the surrounding space, incorporating elements of the actual environment, (2) the substitution of industrial techniques and materials for oil paints and a pre-occupation with man-made

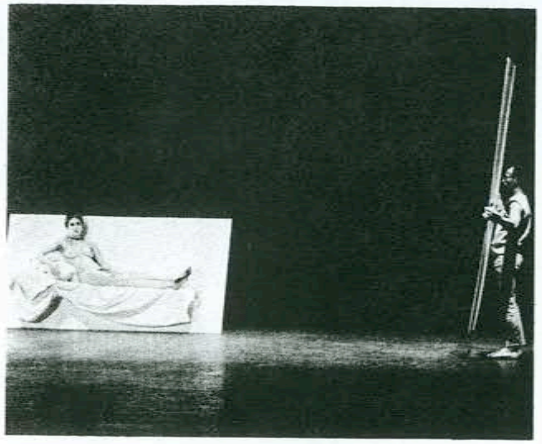
ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG *Pelican* 1963 Performed here with Alex Hay in 1965 at the New York Theater Rally. Photo Elisabeth Novick

objects as far removed from nature as possible, (3) the erosion of a previously established hierarchy of subject matter (Mondrian and Mickey Mouse are now equally relevant) and the expansion of art's frame of reference to include elements considered until now as outside its range, such as technology, kitsch, and humour, (4) the move away from the private mythologies of Surrealism and the interior monologues of Abstract-Expressionism to a more extroverted and impersonal subject matter associated with the urban environment, and (5) a greater mobility and flexibility toward art in general, whereby every art situation is more total and inclusive of the simultaneous levels which occur in actual experience. 'I am for an art,' declares Oldenburg, 'that does something other than sit on its ass in a museum.'

For the Pop artist, the aesthetic faculties cannot be disengaged from the rest of life. Rauschenberg's assertion that painting relates as much to life as it does to art is by now sufficiently well-known to be part of history, but the influence of his attitudes on Pop Art has been of tremendous importance. Throughout his painting career he has maintained an informal connection with the theatre, and in 1963 he himself performed in his first original multi-media theatre piece entitled *Pelican*, in which he rollerskated together with Alex Hay while both of them had parachutes strapped to their backs and Carolyn Brown danced in toe-shoes. His performance works usually mix professional, trained dancers with non-dancers (and sometimes even with chickens, birds, turtles, dogs, or inanimate objects) in an effort, comparable to his paintings, to break down the barriers between art and actual experience. In all of Rauschenberg's work, whether it is for the theatre or in painting, there is an absence of hierarchy of significant experience; that is to say, no particular experience is given priority or importance over another. His idea that 'there is nothing that everything is subservient to' has been one of the most seminal in contemporary art. It means that each element has equal importance and must sustain itself in time. There is no climax, only equally relevant details. The Pop artist who documents the most ordinary scenes from daily life views the world as a total and inclusive unity in which all parts have total relevance – not just some relevance to the whole. Thus, for the Pop artist, there are no irrelevant details. Objects are particularized, often isolated rather than juxtaposed, in a non-associative and abstract way which has the effect of converting the familiar into the monumental. This

ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG *Spring Training* 1965, performed at the New York Theater Rally. Rauschenberg, wearing a white dinner jacket and with a bucket strapped to his waist, pours hot water from a kettle into the bucket which is filled with dry-ice. As the vapours spread, he strums the strings on his jacket to the music of a Hawaiian Hula. Photo Elisabeth Novick





ROBERT MORRIS *Site* 1964, performed in 1965 at the New York Theater Rally. Morris is wearing a rubber mask of his own face made by Jasper Johns. Photo Elisabeth Novick
Morris unveils Carolee Schneeman, posing nude as Manet's *Olympia* behind one of the white construction panels in *Site*. Photo Elisabeth Novick

'non-objective' use of objects emphasizes their physicality and their actual form, and the often life-size or enlarged scale reduced compositional elements to a minimum.

Art, then, must have a manifest connection with the environment; it must act directly on experience, instead of being something that stands for it. These were the rudimentary notions from which Pop emerged, together with Happenings and the idea of a painter's theatre in America in the late 1950s. These two phenomena have continued an active co-existence and are strongly related.

Artists as unalike as Morris and Fahlström, whose work has had a tangential relationship with Pop, have been involved in multi-media performances. In the early days of Pop, Dine and Oldenburg were both particularly interested in the idea of a non-verbal theatre, and organized a number of Happenings together. The first was an evocation of the Street. The sources for Dine's Happenings, like *Car Crash*, were American vaudeville (and a desire to show off) and his own nightmares. For Oldenburg, on the other hand, 'the stage=the place where I paint.' In 1961, inspired by the stores in Orchard Street near where he lived, he transformed his studio into a store (i.e. a total environment) and made saleable objects (mostly food and clothing) out of cardboard, old newspaper, burlap, chicken wire, muslin, *papier mâché* and enamel paint. For Oldenburg, this was the ideal situation 'halfway between art and life'. 'Some came in and said: "This is not art, it's a hamburger"; and others said: "This is not a hamburger, it's art."' It was a way

OYVIND FAHLSTRÖM *Kisses Sweeter than Wine* 1966 Robert Rauschenberg as the 'idiot-savant', performed in 9 Evenings: Theater and Engineering at the 69th Regiment Armory, New York City, October 1966. Photo Peter Moore

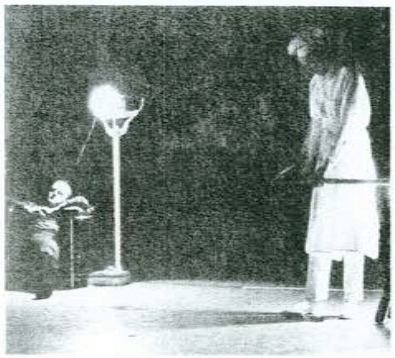
Demonstration on Sixth Avenue arranged by Oyvind Fahlström. Tape and film of the demonstration were used as part of *Kisses Sweeter than Wine*. Demonstrators are holding placards of Bob Hope and Mao Tse Tung. Photo B. Glushakow

of coming to terms with all the stereotypes and clichés of urban life and extracting some value out of them. In 1962, he staged a Happening there called *Store Days*, billed under The Ray Gun Manufactuing Co. The Store was a place where many things happen, and there were thirteen incidents: 'A customer enters/Something is bought/Something is returned/It costs too much/A bargain!/ Someone is hired (Someone is fired)/The founders. How they struggled. ·/Inventory/Fire Sale/ Store closed on acct of death in family/The Night Before Christmas/Modeling clothes/A lecture to the Salesmen.' For Oldenburg and other Pop artists, Happenings are one means of relating art more and more to daily experience. 'I'd like to get away from the notion of a work of art as something outside of experience,' Oldenburg has asserted, 'something that is located in museums, something that is terribly precious. . . . I don't think the notion of the detached work of art – this aristocratic work of art – is a very useful notion any more. People don't want that. They suffer with that notion and they would prefer to have a re-definition of art in something closer to themselves.'

Happenings are like a panoramic view of life, but they also assert the autonomy of objects. Although they are essentially independent of conventional art materials, and often involve all the senses at once (synesthesia), Happenings represent a moral and an existential stand even more than a new art form, according to their chief mentor Allan Kaprow. Kaprow, who has been making Happenings since 1957, was active during the perind of the Reuben and Judson galleries in downtown New York during the early sixties, where he and Dine, Brecht, Drexler, Segal, Oldenburg, Whitman and Grooms all showed environmental works and staged Happenings. These spontaneous, improvisational, essentially plotless, 'generated-in-action' theatrical performances were partly inspired, in Kaprow's view, by the work of Jackson Pollock, who had transformed the gestural tactics of Abstract-Expressionism into something like an actual performance. The work of nearly all the Judson and Reuben gallery artists from this period is tinged with left-over Expressionism – a kind of action painting with living materials. Although traces of a vital and organic connection with Abstract-Expressionism remained in strong evidence, these rudimentary beginnings of what subsequently emerged as Pop Art also embodied new values intended to reject the art of the past. The personal hand of the artist was de-emphasized, for example, and

as Lawrence Alloway has pointed out: 'The city with its inhabitants was not only the subject of much of this art, it was also literally, the *substance*, providing the texture and bulk of the material itself.' It was a radical move to leave behind the whole aesthetic baggage of Abstract-Expressionism, in favour of a 'dirty' and ephemeral art. 'I am for an art,' says Oldenburg, 'that embroils itself with the everyday crap and still comes out on top.'

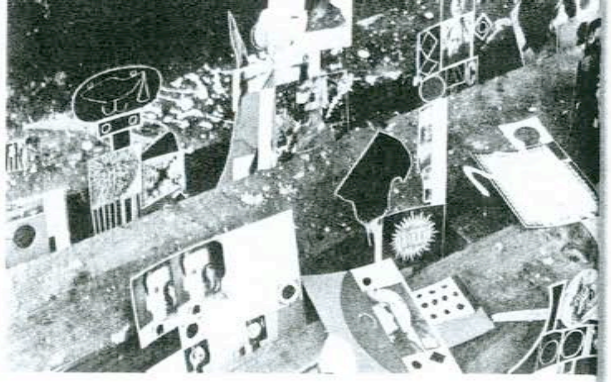
Pop began in America as a phenomenon barely distinguishable from the environment and from random events. It has since evolved a more pragmatic relationship with reality, and assumes forms of extreme literalness and comprehensibility which are directly related to the explicitness of technology. 'Found' and 'ready-made' images borrowed from the mass media are one way for an artist to escape the limitations of his own personality: he is no longer bound by ideas belonging only to him. Comparable to the use of 'found' images and mechanical techniques is the deliberate use of chance methods as still another means of getting away from personal bias. Chance as a planned mode of operation and as a vehicle for the spontaneous derives as much from the improvisational techniques of Pollock on the one hand, as from the ideas of John Cage on the other, whose views on indeterminacy have been so influential. The work of artists like George Brecht and Ray Johnson is important in this regard. Johnson's work has always depended on chance encounters and odd connections. Until recently, he never exhibited in galleries or museums, but would only show his work in places like Grand Central Station or the street. The random arrangement of 'moticos' (a self-invented name for his collages which he stored in cardboard boxes, often cutting them up again later to make new ones) on a dilapidated cellar door in lower Manhattan (see p. 18) may even have been the first informal Happening. Johnson is also responsible for a continuous 'postal Happening' in the form of the New York Correspondence School, whereby cryptic messages are sent out, via the U.S. mails, in the form of clippings, bits of collage, found articles and photographs, all related to the recipient. He was also a pioneer in the use of graphic techniques and images. In 1955, during the heyday of Abstract-Expressionism, he altered a photograph of Elvis Presley (ill. 50) by dripping red paint from the eyes. He called it 'Oedipus' and said, 'I'm the only painter in New York whose drips mean anything.' George Brecht had turned to chance



JIM DINE *The Natural History of Dreams* Performed at the New York Theater Rally. Photo Elisabeth Novick

JIM DINE *Car Crash* 1960 Photo John Ross

View from the street of Claes Oldenburg's Store, December 1961 Photo Robert McElroy



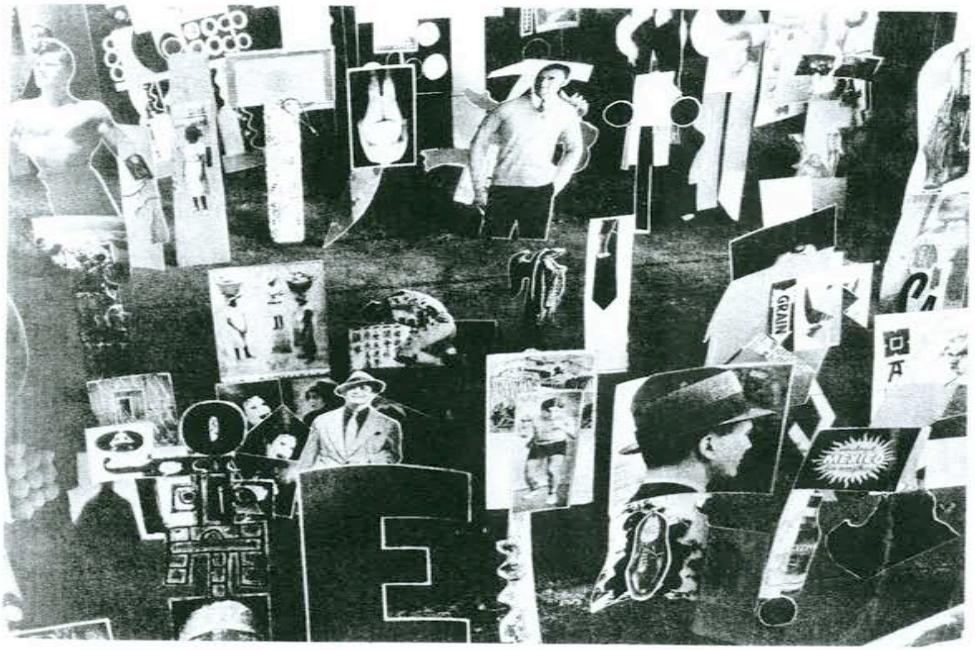
RAY JOHNSON *Moticos* photographed on the street, 1955 Photo Elisabeth Novick

methods in 1955 under the influence of Cage, using random numbers, tables and dice. His work has a special relationship with music. He devises events for which he writes the 'scores', and, since these events are without any prescribed time or place at which or where they are to occur, they are subject to a great many independent chance influences.

To sum up, what I am attempting to suggest here is that the use of chance techniques, or of 'found' rather than invented images, represents in America what really amounts to a moral strategy. In fact, a moral strategy of this kind can be found in all the best American art, whether Pop or not, and is the basis of its strength. By moral strategy I mean any means used to achieve a tougher art, to avoid tasteful choices, and to set the stakes higher. The use of chance for example, means greater risks for the artist, as he willingly forfeits his autonomy and control. The passion to take risks and to relinquish all the controlling factors of one's ego, which is the underlying dynamic of the most high-powered American art – whether abstract or otherwise – runs counter to the basic English character, which is by nature cautious and self-restraining. It makes for an altogether different sort of art, with the one exception of Francis Bacon. Bacon's images are bare and immediate (not unlike American Pop, although different), and bear the high-wire tension of risk and desperation. A gambler by nature, he likes to throw his lot each time on the wheel of fortune, in the hope that he may win. If he does win, and the painting is successful, he thinks of it as the result of luck and chance, but not as something *he has achieved*. Rather, he puts himself in the hands of fate, and for him this represents a way of raising the stakes, so that he just might – if he is lucky – achieve something better by calling into play factors outside of himself.

We can more easily discern the differences between English and American art in general, and Pop art in particular, if we establish that, in America, impersonality as a style is the governing principle, whereas English art is essentially *subjective*. Although there are many iconographic analogies between English and American Pop, the work is basically quite different in character. Compare, for example, Warhol's multiple images of Marilyn with one of Peter Blake's pin-up walls, or 'On the Balcony' (p. 39). The Warhol image is stripped bare of association and metaphor. It appears uncontaminated by history, just as it was 'found' in the mass media. The Warhol takes its chance on an uncertain artistic identity, sacrificing the hand-made original for commercial industrial techniques and mass-production (Warhol does not even need to make them himself). In short, he renounces all the conventions by which art has previously been made. Blake, on the other hand, has carefully chosen the images in 'On the Balcony' and places them so as to give free run to their picturesque and evocative associations. The result is discursive, anecdotal and biographic. There is a

RAY JOHNSON *Moticos* photographed on the studio floor, 1955 Photo Elisabeth Novick



distinct conflict between what is read and what is seen. Artists like Paolozzi and Kitaj, for example, are concerned with the manipulation and transformation of images, which function in the end like coded messages. In general, English Pop is a subjective synthesis of imagery derived from streamlined technology, car styling, sex symbols, cybernetics, and movies – a hybrid overlay of techniques and points of view. American Pop tends to be emblematic and frontal, with non-associative images seen in isolation rather than juxtaposed. English Pop uses multi-evocative, metaphoric and multi-focus imagery rather than whole thematic entities. It sprang originally from polemical debates about American advertising and mass-produced urban culture. It has continued, within the conventions of painting, to deal with the *themes* of technology. As such, it *reflects* the changes in the content of culture since the mid-1950s. American Pop, on the other hand, sprang from the direct experience of Pop culture and technology, and has adapted and incorporated actual industrial processes and techniques into its production. Lichtenstein, for example, uses the commercial Ben-Day technique from photojournalism; Rosenquist, a trained billboard artist, has adapted the technique and scale for his own work; Warhol, after a brief inroad with painting (ills. 77 – 'Popeye' – and 97 '4 Soup Cans') relied wholly on silk-screening and never lifted a brush to canvas again. And therein lies the crucial difference.

The validity of a given cultural style depends largely on its ability to establish fields of potential action for the future. Pop introduced an objectivity into art that is basic to technology, but it simultaneously asserted a vital continuity between life and art that has been radically rejected in the purist attitudes of certain Abstract artists. Already its main methodological assumptions are being expanded into a new dimension by the Minimalists, who have reduced its iconographic content to the essential structures which constitute the language of technology, and by the Situationalists, who explore industrial materials for their inherent properties and act directly upon the environment – by digging a 'sculpture', for example, directly in the desert. An art seems to be evolving now that integrates itself *totally* with the environment. It also integrates conceptual with actual experience, and a high degree of specificity with abstraction. The formal and psychological implications of this are such that perhaps the schizoid splitting which I referred to earlier will eventually be healed.

GEORGE BRECHT *Drip Music (Drip Event)*

For single or multiple performance

A source of dripping water and an empty vessel are arranged so that the water falls into the vessel

Second version : Dripping

G. Brecht
(1959-62)