

Art of the 1960s

Background

The end of WWII in 1945 brought about a post-war economic boom in the U.S. It also brought about an enormous spike in the birth rate, known as “the baby boom.” Between 1945 and 1957 nearly 76 million babies were born in America. By the middle 1960s, most of these kids were young adults.

As young people do, these “baby boomers” questioned America’s materialism and conservative cultural and political norms. During the 1960s a true youth movement emerged, seeking to create a more equal society free from discrimination. Young Americans in the 1960s and ‘70s addressed many controversial issues — from civil rights, the Vietnam War, nuclear proliferation, and the environment to drug use, sexual freedom, and nonconformity. In the words of the Students for a Democratic Society, they sought to “replace power rooted in possession, privilege, or circumstance by power and uniqueness rooted in love, reflectiveness, reason, and creativity.” Many youth were drawn to spiritual experiences through Eastern Mysticism and psychedelic drugs to aid them in reaching this utopia.

Psychedelic Art

Psychedelic:

1. *Pertaining to or characterized by hallucinations, distortions of perception and awareness, and sometimes psychotic-like behavior.*
2. *A drug that produces such effects.*
3. *An art style influenced by the prevalence of hallucinatory drugs, especially LSD, with typical designs featuring abstract swirls of intense color with curvilinear calligraphy reminiscent of Art Nouveau.*

The psychedelic movement began in the mid 1960s and had an effect, not just on music, but also on many aspects of popular culture. This included style of dress, language and the way people spoke, art, literature and philosophy.

Psychedelic Art generally refers to art that has been influenced by hallucinogenic drugs. It may also refer to the art of the 1960s counterculture movement. Posters for rock concerts tried to visually express the feeling of tripping out.

The discovery of LSD and its subsequent popularity as an agent that produces altered states of consciousness was at the core of the Psychedelic Art movement; however, other drugs were also used as a means of inducing certain types of artistic expressions. The psychedelic style peaked between 1966 and 1972. Many works, especially evident in concert and event posters, depicted a strong color palette—usually of contrasting colors—along with ornate lettering, and kaleidoscopic swirls.

Spirals could often be found in Psychedelic works as well as concentric circles and a repetition of motifs or symbols. Collage is important to the Psychedelic style and many works could also be included in the collage genre. Surrealist subject matter was another major component of the style. Certain exotic motifs like paisley were also at the heart of many Psychedelic works.

Many Psychedelic works are famous for their visually captivating styles, but the movement also generated considerable controversy for its links to illicit substances. Posters for music festivals like Woodstock are typical examples of



Psychedelic Art posters. Bands like The Who and the Jimi Hendrix Experience also featured Psychedelic Art on some of their album covers.

Influential Designers

Wes Wilson: one of the best-known designers of psychedelic posters. Most well known for designing posters for Bill Graham of the The Fillmore in San Francisco, he invented a style that is now synonymous with the peace movement, psychedelic era and the 1960s. In particular, he is known for inventing and popularizing a “psychedelic” font around 1966 that made the letters look like they were moving or melting.

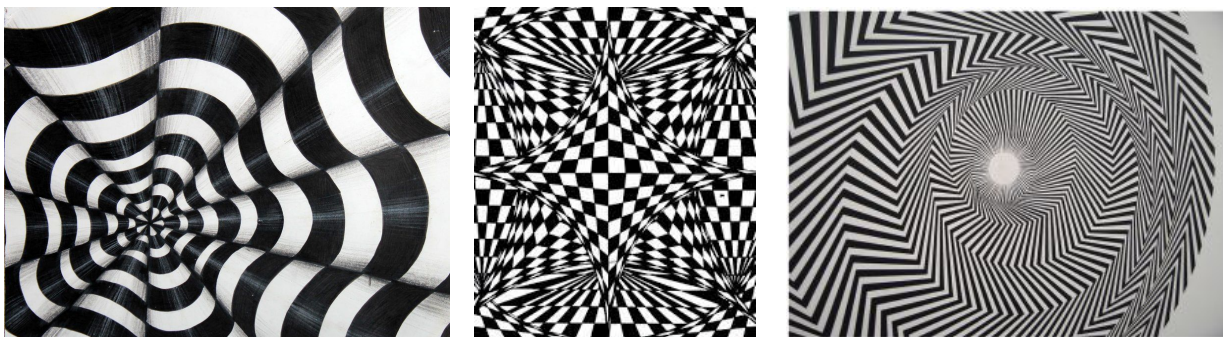


Victor Moscoso: a formally trained graphic designer who borrowed from comic books, Victorian images, Art Nouveau, and pop art. He used the concept of vibrating colors to create the ‘psychedelic’ effect in many of his pieces. The vibration is achieved by taking colors from the opposite end of the color wheel, each one having equal value (dark to light) and intensity (brightness).



The Influence of Op Art & Pop Art

Op Art, short for Optical art, is a style of abstraction that relies on geometric shapes, lines, and color juxtapositions to create optical illusions for the viewer. Gaining popularity in the 1960s, such art often features patterns, grids, and effects like curving or diminishing objects. The Op art movement was driven by artists who were interested in investigating various perceptual effects.



One of the goals of the **Pop Art** movement was to blur the boundaries between 'high' art and 'low' popular culture.

Pop Art was one of the United States' major artistic movements of the 20th century. It was first coined in Britain in 1955 but the Americans took up the consumerist cause with much greater effect and conviction, and became the pioneers of the movement. Although the British artists influenced American ones, the American style was distinct. Some artists played on common objects such as flags, soup cans, and beer bottles or combined them with unrelated items to produce an ironic effect, usually on a very large scale. Strengthened by the upheavals of the '60s, this artistic movement protested the "plastic" nature of society.

Pop art refers to the works of art that draw upon popular culture – packaging, television, advertisements, comic books, and the cinema. Pop art was the medium that made real the breaking down of barriers that had existed for hundreds of years between high art and mass culture.

Pop Art emphasized the kitschy elements of popular culture as a protest against the elitist art culture and the seriousness that surrounded it. It marked a return to sharp paintwork and representational art and glorified unappreciated objects and ordinary business. In doing so, it aimed to make art more meaningful for everyday people and came to target a broad audience.

What are the characteristics of Pop Art?

Pop Art uses images and icons that are popular in the modern world. This includes famous celebrities like movie stars and rock stars, commercial items like soup cans and soft drinks, comic books, and any other items that are popular in the commercial world. There are a number of ways that artists use these items to create art such as repeating the item over and over again, changing the color or texture of the item, and putting different items together to make a picture.



Response to Pop Art

Pop art baffled and awed critics. Some critics believed the style signified the decline of art in general. However, those in favor of it included prominent figures of the New York art world who recognized the cheekiness and freedom of pop art. Due to the relationship of pop to the culture of mass advertising, the popular press accepted the style with ease and wrote glowing reviews of it. It gained many supporters for the way it was easy to comprehend and pop art infiltrated *Life* and *Vogue*, using the magazines as a vehicle to reach the public, which allowed for its quick ascent into popular culture promote.

The artists of pop art furthered its fame, as their creative and distinctive styles permeated the art scene. Main artists included Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenberg, Jasper Johns, and Robert Rauschenberg.

Roy Lichtenstein was a painter, sculptor, printmaker, and decorative artist. His work is most distinctive for its use of comic book and advertisement style and content involving the patterns of colored circles that replicate benday dots used in newspapers. His most popular paintings are *Spray*, *Wbaam!*, *As I Opened Fire*, and *Drowning Girl*. His *Mirrors* series questioned whether representational art directly represented reality. Lichtenstein became a household name for the way he used stencil-like dots, thick lines, bold colors, and thought bubbles to represent the comic book style. He used the grand scale of billboards to display his work.

Andy Warhol was the leading artist of American pop art, known as the "Pope of Pop." Known mostly for his silk screens of consumer culture and celebrities, he also produced drawings, sculptures, audio recordings, television shows, films, fashion, performance art, theater, photography, and early digital art. His first exhibition featured his famous cans of Campbell's Soup, and he later created art pieces of Coca-Cola cans and Brillo boxes at his "Factory" studio in New York City. His most famous pieces are 10 silk-screen prints of Marilyn Monroe entitled *Marilyn* and eight prints of Elvis Presley, *Eight Elvises*. Warhol also coined the term "fifteen minutes of fame." His works shocked audiences accustomed to appreciating art in an emotional and sentimental way.



Both Warhol and Lichtenstein brought together elements of sign painting, commercial art and literary imagery in their work, they became renowned for erasing the boundaries between popular and high culture.

Claes Oldenburg is a sculptor, draughtsman, printmaker, performance artist, and writer of Swedish birth. He was involved in happenings, a form of performance art with his first canvas sculptures. As a form of installation art, he preferred commercial fabrication by using soft canvas props to represent monumental and sagging common objects, as seen in *Floor Cone*, *Floor-burger*, and *The Home—Bedroom Ensemble* being the largest and most complex of the series. He moved on to permanent outdoor installation art monuments such as *Giant Three-way Plug*, *Scale A, 1/3*, *Giant Trowel*, *Crusoe Umbrella*, *Screwarch*, and *Stake Hitch*. His monumental sculptures, sometimes fragmented, add to the abstract element of his version of art.



Jasper Johns and **Robert Rauschenberg** shared the title "Neo Dadaist," although their work often included images from popular culture. Johns was primarily involved in painting and printmaking, and is best known for his painting *Flag* and *Map*. Robert Rauschenberg was an American painter, sculptor, printmaker, photographer, and performance artist and is well-known for his "Combines," which involved the mixture of nontraditional materials and objects. Pop art, like the counterculture, critiqued mass consumerism and thus became a significant part of the social upheaval of the 1960s.



Art of the 1960s - Reading Response

Drawing off of what you learned in the reading, in the table below, list the characteristics of psychedelic art and pop art.

- What is the goal of each art form?
- What are some of the common themes, characteristics, subjects, etc.?
- How is each art form in some way a reflection of the values/norms of the times?

Psychedelic Art	Pop Art
Goal:	Goal:
Characteristics/Themes:	Characteristics/Themes:
Connection to the '60s:	Connection to the '60s: