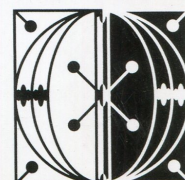




Blast past: from the Art of the 1960s

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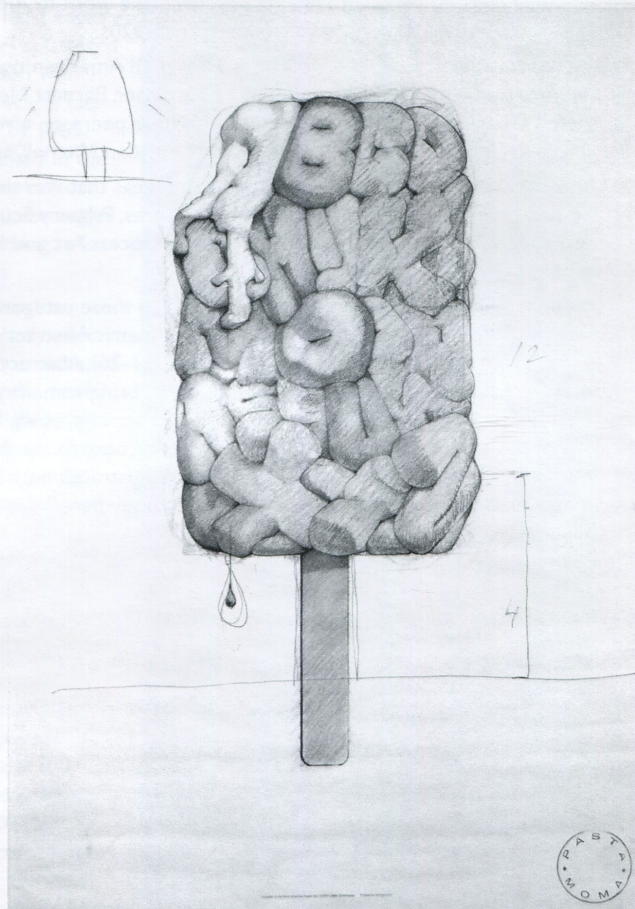
INTRODUCTION

In the 1950s Abstract Expressionism ruled. You were either completely or partially with it, or you were marginalized and ignored. But the 1960s was a very different story. Pop art popped up in 1962 and has been going strong ever since. Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist, Jim Dine, and Jasper Johns kept the painterly brushwork of Abstract Expressionism in their rendering of popular culture materials and objects well into the 1960s, but Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Indiana, and Mel Ramos went toward the cartoon/illustration side of drawing for the look of their imagery. A slight to intense surreal aspect appears in the works by Marisol, Claes Oldenburg, and Alan Kaprow. Andy Warhol is in a class by himself, manipulating pre-existing images from soup can labels to newspapers, transferred photographically to the paint or print surface by silkscreens. No matter how simple or direct a Pop subject might seem to be, it isn't. It always has a complex inner life full of irony, cultural criticism, and sometimes personal pain.

Pop was not alone. Taking cues from the pouring techniques of Jackson Pollock and the staining process of his friend James Brooks, Color Field Abstraction was born in the early 1960s. Morris Louis, Kenneth Noland and others formed the Washington School of Color Field painting, while Jules Olitski, Theodoros Stamos, and Paul Jenkins among others, were based in New York, but all were aware of what the others were doing. Many, along with their mentor Clement Greenberg, came to Michigan State University to talk, teach and visit with Charles Pollock, brother of Jackson and a member of the group. Donations of their art formed the initial core of the Kresge Art Museum collection in the 1960s.

Geometric Abstraction began to make an appearance around the same time. Josef Albers brought Bauhaus systemization to painting and taught it and the *Interaction of Color* at Black Mountain College and Yale. Fritz Glarner and Ilya Bolotowsky brought different aspects of Dutch artist Piet Mondrian and De Stijl, into American mainstream abstraction, while contrarians Ludwig Sander and Jimmy Ernst pursued independent geometrical forms of their own. Alfred Jensen mysteriously transformed Mayan numerics and hieroglyphics into thickly painted abstract grids and Ad Reinhardt reduced everything to a grid of close-valued black hues. They were precursors for the Minimal art of the mid to later 1960s which is not represented here, but which led to Conceptual Art.

Then, too, in mid-decade there was Op Art, mixing geometry with optical illusions and effects to bring art alive in viewers' eyes. Richard Anuskiewicz and Joseph Levi both silkscreened bright yellows, reds, and oranges interspersed with complementary hues so finely onto the surface that the interaction between the colors seems to give off light as well as vibrations. Bridget Riley's bold zig-zagging black lines twist space dramatically in the first ever prints on plexiglass.



Claes Oldenburg
(American, born 1929)

Alphabet in the Form of an Ice Cream Bar, 1970.
Lithograph and pencil,
30 x 21 inches. Gift of
the artist, 73.20

The back-to-the-figure movement that started in the later 1950s gained momentum in the 1960s adding three strains to the mix: 1. Figurative Expressionism, which retained the energetic brushwork of Abstract Expressionism and used it in service to or as a counterpart to the figure. Robert Beauchamp, Elaine and Willem de Kooning, Lester Johnson, Grace Hartigan, Robert de Niro, Sr., and Nick Marsicano from the New York area, and Richard Diebenkorn, Nathan Oliveira, and Paul Wonner from California. 2. Painterly Realism, which was loosely, but not intensely vigorous brushwork in a realistic context represented here by Nell Blaine, Mary Frank, and Fairfield Porter. 3. Illustrational Realism—super-simplification without cartoon overtones epitomized by Alex Katz, who is often included with the Pop artists. They continue older traditions, as does the work by Alexander Calder, who started the modern tradition of Kinetic Art in the 1920s.

By the 1960s Abstract Expressionism itself was an American tradition with first generation artists like Robert Motherwell, Lee Krasner, Barnett Newman, Esteban Vicente, and Adolph Gottlieb having an effect, along with their peers, on a younger generation including Sam Francis, Budd Hopkins, Richard Hunt, Joan Mitchell, and Angelo Ippolito.

Others parts of the wild mix of art forms and ideas that was the 1960s that can't be represented here were Happenings and Performances, Primary Sculptures (which are generally super-sized), Art and Technology events, Process Art and Earth Art. For that, you had to be there!

This publication has been organized according to these categories—Color Field Abstraction (pages 5-8), Pop Art (pages 9-14), Geometric Abstraction (pages 15-18), Op Art (pages 19-20), Figurative Expressionism (pages 21-26), Abstract Expressionism (pages 27-29), and traditional art—as has the exhibition, to bring some order to what would have been chaotic if unordered. Still there are a few overlappings, as we hope you will note. The checklist of the exhibition at the back has an asterisk next to the 25 works discussed in this *Selections* catalogue. Four additional pieces are illustrated here but have been published in previous *Selections* from the Collection issue or elsewhere.”

April Kingsley
Curator