

# **Art in the mirror : an exhibition**

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Author

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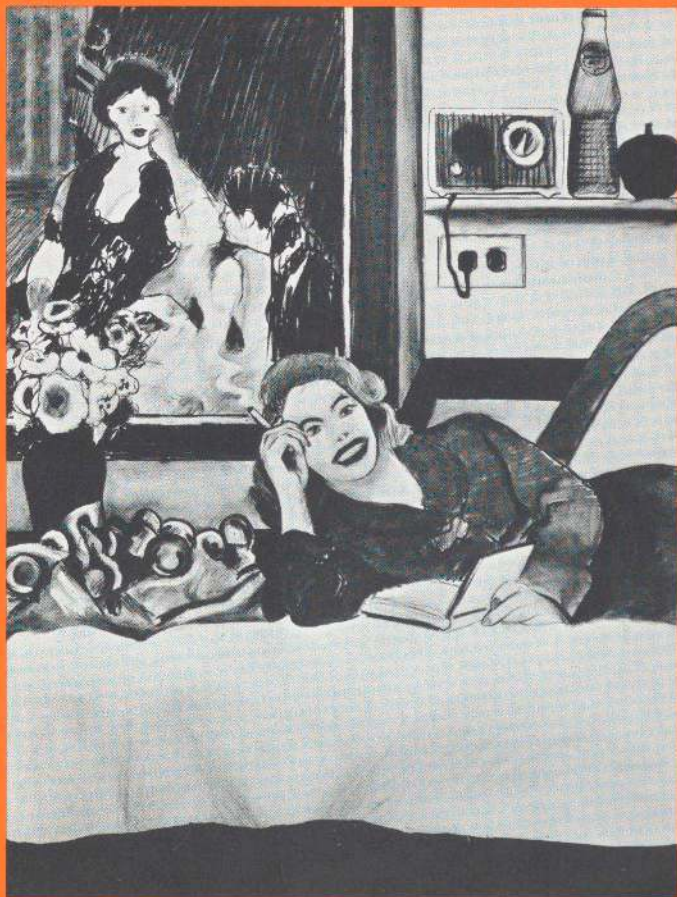
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# ART IN THE MIRROR



### Art in the Mirror: a Metaphor

Art, in at least one of its traditions, is a mirror reflecting current attitudes, interests, and fashions; the spirit of the times. One of society's interests, if not fashions, in the twentieth century is art. The works in this exhibition reflect art itself, and its place in the world both as a subject and a point of departure.

These works direct questions, insults and homages toward art; they often have an untraditional and witty air about them, from Marcel Duchamp's mustachioed Mona Lisa to Andy Warhol's silk-screened Mona Lisa as movie star. A good number, perhaps a majority, of artists and critics have been proclaiming art as a religion; but sensitivity and passion have their limits, and so, even, does art. The phrase, "We are all too sensitive," might make a healthy punch line for many of the tales told about art.

Comedy, one hears, survives less well than tragedy, although it may be as profound; comedy is usually tied to its own time. We often worry so much about the future that we have no time for laughter in the present. What will future critics say, we fuss. Yet we must always take chances when betting on the opinions of future critics and historians (we never seem to credit them with fallibility). My neighbor or fellow critic or grandson may not take me seriously, but—what the hell!—once in a while art makes me smile.

All art is to some extent about itself, about form and color and materials. Paul Signac, in 1902, wrote, "The subject is nothing,

or at least just one of its parts, no more important than the other elements—color, design, composition." Recently some critics and painters have taken that dictum to extremes where the only permissible "subject" is color or paint. The Jasper Johns and the Robert Indianas are in large part about paint and surface, and color and form; their fascination and beauty lie behind the skin and mask of their subject. The Wesselmann drawing surely reveals an artist equipped with technique, and respect for art; but the wisps of smoke which curl before the Renoir (and Redon and Cezanne), artful as they may be, are not without a sense of humor.

The range of artists' attitudes toward art defies the many dogmatists who today claim to define them. This show is a small personal selection; it does not include any work without an image of art, that is, none whose subject is "pure" paint or color or line. Yet the scope of a single painter, Robert Rauschenberg, here encompasses the ironic *deKooning Erased* (literally exemplifying what artists of the time called a need to erase the past), the beautiful yet amusing Mona Lisa drawing, and the large, even grand, Rauschenberg painting with Rubens' own metaphorical comment on the goddess of beauty and love (contemplating her own image).

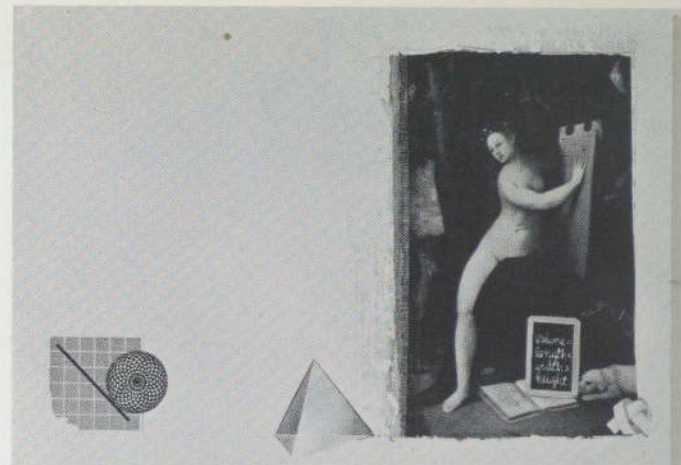
Joan Gris literally opens a window in the plane of his Cubist composition. Picasso, Miro, and Hirschfield all rework old master paintings, or just plain old paintings, "modernizing" and rehabilitating them; Picasso even does this with his own work. Art turned inward upon itself (with a touch of hubris?) is a theme of modernism; Robert Morris, presumably with tongue in cheek, used as his theme an illustration of the very box which holds the photograph. Paul Thek's work, one of the least charming in the show, makes explicit the terror of Warhol's artistically "empty" Brillo box; but its limp tubes suggest a scatological black humor. (The box itself is the design of the late James Harvey, an action painter who also worked as a commercial artist.)

Life is full of peculiarities and contradictions. Pop art, which first seemed a realistic relief, is slowly revealing itself as a return to metaphor. If the sledge hammer sound of its images penetrates our consciousness, it then continues to reverberate with increasing subtlety.

Several centuries passed before the Mona Lisa became a symbol of mass culture and boredom. Today the mass media, museums without walls, and a bourgeois awe of artists have a similar abrasive effect after only a few months. We must, in other words, take care that the "boredom" we may feel in the presence of familiar artists and images is not in ourselves and our own careless visual habits. In this sense familiarity is dangerous; it puts us out of focus. A moratorium on photographs, literature about art, even exhibitions might refresh us and make us responsive again. Without it, however, one way to approach art is through the eyes of artists; Rauschenberg may clarify the myth of Leonardo, and Lichtenstein the clichés surrounding Picasso, thereby improving our focus on painting of both the past and the present.

Opinion grows like hot air between us and the work. The sense of proportion and of humor in most of these works is like a needle—a far more dangerous instrument to an inflated balloon than is a baseball bat. The Mona Lisa, if examined with care and love, can still revert to an object of wonder. For me, the mirror of these works helps return art to delight.

G.R.S.



Joseph Cornell: *Circe III*. (1965)

### Catalog of the Exhibition

Measurements given in inches of works unframed; height precedes width.

Bacon, Francis. British, born 1910.

- 1 *Head of Man—Study of Drawing by van Gogh*. (1959). Oil on canvas, 26¼ x 24¼. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harry C. Cooper, New York.

Cornell, Joseph. American, born 1903.

- 2 *Circe III*. (1965). Collage and tempera, 8¾ x 11½ (sight). Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York.
- 3 *Mica Magritte II*. (1965). Collage, 12½ x 9½. Robert Schoelkopf Gallery, New York.

Dali, Salvador. Spanish, born 1904.

- 4 *Portrait of Gala*. 1935. Oil on wood, 12¾ x 10½. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller.

Dine, James. American, born 1935.

- 5 *A 1935 Pallet*. 1961. Oil on composition board, 72½ x 48½. Lent by Franklin Königsberg, New York.

Duchamp, Marcel. American, born France, 1887.

- 6 *Valise*. (1943). Leather case with constructions and moveable screens, containing reproductions of Duchamp's works, 16½ x 14¾ x 4½. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. James Thrall Soby Fund.

Ernst, Max. French, born Germany, 1891.

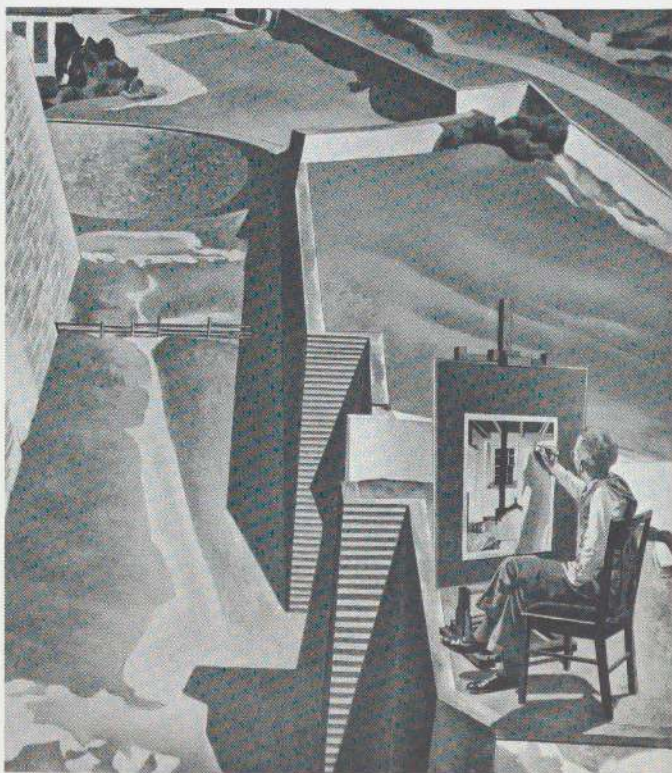
- 7 *Untitled*. (1920s). Collage on color reproduction of a painting, 7½ x 9½. Lent anonymously.

Gablik, Suzi. American, born 1934.

- 8 *Pastoral*. 1964-65. Collage and oil on canvas, 24 x 24½. The Alan Gallery, New York.

Gottlieb, Adolph. American, born 1903.

- 9 *J.M.W. Turner—The Grand Canal, Venice*. (1963). Synthetic polymer paint on postcard, 5½ x 3¾. Lent by the artist.



Charles Sheeler: *The Artist Looks at Nature*. 1943



- 10 *Sir J. Reynolds—Georgiana Elliott*. (1963). Synthetic polymer paint on postcard,  $5\frac{3}{8} \times 3\frac{1}{2}$ . Lent by the artist.
- 11 *Watteau—L'Indifférent*. (1963). Synthetic polymer paint on postcard,  $5\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ . Lent by the artist.
- Gris, Juan. Spanish, 1887-1927.
- 12 *Violin and Engraving*. 1913. Oil and collage on canvas,  $25\frac{5}{8} \times 19\frac{5}{8}$ . The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Bequest of Anna Erickson Levene in memory of her husband, Dr. Phoebus Aaron Theodor Levene.
- Hirshfield, Morris. American, 1872-1946.
- 13 *Beach Girl*. 1937. Oil on canvas,  $36\frac{1}{4} \times 22\frac{1}{4}$ . Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
- Indiana, Robert. American, born 1928.
- 14 *To The Bridge* (after Joseph Stella). 1964. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas,  $70 \times 60$ . Lent by Mrs. Walter Landauer, Toronto.
- 15 *The Diamond Five* (after Charles Demuth). (1963). Synthetic polymer paint on canvas,  $51\frac{3}{8} \times 50\frac{3}{4}$ . Lent by John A. Kloss, New York.
- Jacquet, Alain. French, born 1939.
- 16 *Man's Portrait* (after Manet, *Déjeuner sur L'Herbe*). (1964). Silkscreen on canvas,  $18\frac{1}{8} \times 13\frac{1}{8}$ . Lent by the artist.
- Johns, Jasper. American, born 1930.
- 17 *Canvas*. 1956. Encaustic, wood and collage on canvas,  $30 \times 25\frac{1}{8}$ . Lent by the artist.
- Johnson, Ray. American, born 1927.
- 18 *Comb*. 1966. Collage,  $24\frac{7}{8} \times 19\frac{7}{8}$ . Willard Gallery, New York.
- 19 *My Funny Valentine*. 1965. Collage,  $9 \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ . Lent by Joe Raffaele, New York.
- Levine, Les. Canadian, born 1936.
- 20 *S-10* (from the portfolio *LXVI*). (1966). Color halftone print,  $9\frac{3}{8} \times 9\frac{3}{8}$ . The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Fischbach Gallery.
- Lichtenstein, Roy. American, born 1923.
- 21 *Femme au Chapeau* (after Pablo Picasso). 1962. Synthetic polymer paint on canvas,  $68\frac{7}{8} \times 56\frac{1}{8}$ . Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Meriden, Connecticut.
- Magritte, René. Belgian, born 1898.
- 22 *La Cascade*. 1961. Oil on canvas,  $32 \times 39\frac{1}{2}$ . Alexander Iolas Gallery, New York, Paris, Geneva.
- 23 *L'Eternité*. 1935. Oil on canvas,  $31\frac{1}{2} \times 25\frac{1}{4}$ . Lent by Harry Torczyner, New York.
- Miró, Joan. Spanish, born 1893.
- 24 *Personage in the Night*. 1944. Oil on canvas,  $6\frac{1}{2} \times 9\frac{3}{8}$ . Private Collection.
- Morris, Robert. American, born 1931.
- 25 *Box with Photo of Door*. 1963. Wood construction with photographs,  $15\frac{1}{8} \times 11\frac{1}{8} \times 2\frac{1}{2}$ . Dwan Gallery, Los Angeles.
- Picabia, Francis. French, 1878-1953.
- 26 *"Tableau Dada par Marcel Duchamp."* Newspaper illustration for "Dada Manifesto" by Picabia, from "391," issue 12, March 1920,  $21\frac{3}{4} \times 14\frac{5}{8}$  (sheet). Library of The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

- Picasso, Pablo. Spanish, born 1881.
- 27 *The Family*. 1964. Drawing on linoleum cut, 24½ x 29½. Galerie Beyeler, Basel, Switzerland.
- 28 *Portrait of an Italian Girl* (on a lithograph by Victor Orsel). 1953. Lithograph, 30½ x 24¾. Galerie Louise Leiris, Paris.
- Raffaele, Joe. American, born 1933.
- 29 *Couples*. 1966. Oil and collage on canvas, 40¼ x 36. Stable Gallery, New York.
- Rauschenberg, Robert. American, born 1925.
- 30 *Erased deKooning Drawing*. (1953). Eraser, 11⅞ x 15⅞. Lent by the artist.
- 31 *Mona Lisa*. (1958). Transfer drawing with gouache, graphite, watercolor and blue crayon, 22¾ x 28¾. Collection Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Scull, New York.
- 32 *Persimmon*. (1964). Silkscreen and oil on canvas, 66¼ x 50¼. Lent by Mrs. Leo Castelli, New York.
- Rivers, Larry. American, born 1923.
- 33 *Study for "George Washington Crossing the Delaware"* (after Emanuel Leutze). 1953. Pencil, 13⅝ x 11¼. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Given anonymously.
- Schwitters, Kurt. British, 1887-1948.
- 34 *The Action Takes Place in Thebes*. (1918-19). Collage, 6⅝ x 7⅞. Galerie Chalette, New York.
- Sheeler, Charles. American, 1883-1965.
- 35 *The Artist Looks at Nature*. 1943. Oil on canvas, 21 x 18. The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of the Society for Contemporary American Art.
- Soviak, Harry. American, born 1935.
- 36 *Double Window Still Life*. 1966. Collage, 18½ x 24¾. Lent by the artist.
- Thek, Paul. American, born 1933.
- 37 *Meat in a Warhol Brillo Box*. (1965). Construction of wood, plexiglas, wax, rubber tubing and hair, 14⅞ x 17⅞ x 16⅞. Pace Gallery, New York.
- Warhol, Andy. American, born 1930.
- 38 *Mona Lisa*. (1964). Silkscreen on canvas, 40 x 29⅞. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Henry Geldzahler, 1965.
- 39 *Violin with Numbers*. 1962. Oil on canvas, 54¼ x 72¼. Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Burton Tremaine, Meriden, Connecticut.
- Wesselmann, Tom. American, born 1931.
- 40 *Drawing for "Great American Nude #50."* (1963). Charcoal on paper, 48 x 36⅞. Sidney Janis Gallery, New York.
- 41 *Great American Nude #36*. 1962. Collage and enamel and polymer paint on composition board, 47¼ x 59⅞. Worcester Art Museum.

Tom Wesselmann: *Drawing for "Great American Nude #50"*. (1963)

The exhibition was selected by G. R. Swenson. 1966