

LESSON FIVE: Artist's Choice: People



IMAGE FOURTEEN: Willem de Kooning. American, born the Netherlands. 1904–1997. *Woman, I*. 1950–52. Oil on canvas, 6' 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 58" (192.7 x 147.3 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase. © 2007 The Willem de Kooning Foundation/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



IMAGE FIFTEEN: Roy Lichtenstein. American, 1923–1997. *Drowning Girl*. 1963. Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 67 $\frac{3}{8}$ " x 66 $\frac{3}{4}$ " (171.6 x 169.5 cm). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Philip Johnson Fund (by exchange) and gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bagley Wright

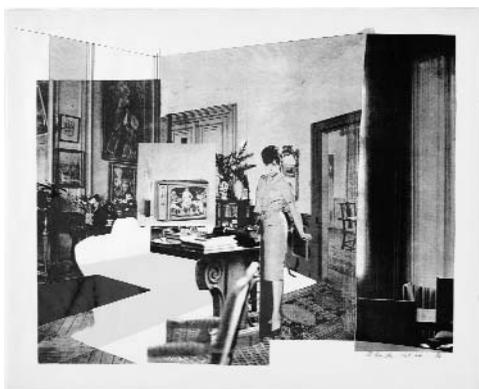


IMAGE SIXTEEN: Richard Hamilton. British, born 1922. *Interior*. 1964 (published 1965). Screenprint, composition: 19 $\frac{5}{16}$ " x 25 $\frac{1}{8}$ " (49.1 x 63.8 cm). Publisher: Editions Alecto, London. Printer: Kelpra Studio, London. Edition: 4 (final state, edition: 50). The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Dorothy Braude Edinburg Fund. © 2007 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/DACS, London

INTRODUCTION

This lesson examines three different representations of women. Willem de Kooning used expressive brushwork to create a distorted image of a woman surrounded by violent, layered, and scraped strokes of paint. With cool detachment, Roy Lichtenstein presented a cropped comic book image of a woman drowning. Richard Hamilton created a print out of a collage, using existing imagery to make a comment on domestic life. This lesson examines the radically different artistic styles of these artists and considers the stereotypes they present.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Students will consider the choices artists make when creating works of art that include people. They will consider **style, medium, background, color, technique, and composition**.
- Students will compare images of women as represented by different artists.
- Students will learn about where artists get their sources and inspiration.

INTRODUCTORY DISCUSSION

- Ask students to discuss the various choices an artist makes when creating an image of a person. They can talk about subject matter, style, composition, background, color, technique, and medium. They can consider why an artist might choose to create an artwork about a person.
- Ask students to imagine a “traditional” portrait of a woman. What would this look like? What makes it traditional? A portrait usually represents a specific person and gives some information about her personality. In this lesson, students will look at three paintings that have women as their subject matter, but which do not represent specific individuals.

IMAGE-BASED DISCUSSION

Willem de Kooning, *Woman, I*, 1950–52 (Image Fourteen)

- Ask students to spend some time looking at this image. Ask them what they notice. Ask them to consider what materials this artist used. What do they notice about the process? How do they think de Kooning may have painted this? What do students notice about the application of paint and brushwork? The colors? The background?

De Kooning painted and repainted this work, working slowly and deliberately over a period of two years. A critic referred to de Kooning’s way of working as “almost like a birthing process.”³¹

- Tell students the title, *Woman, I*. How is this woman different from traditional representations of women? How is she similar?

This is the first of a series of six paintings of women de Kooning created. He was influenced by images including Paleolithic fertility sculptures, American billboards, and pinup girls. He reversed traditional representations of women, which he called, “the idol, the Venus, the nude.”³² De Kooning said that the Woman’s form reminded him of “a landscape—with arms like lanes and a body of hills and fields, all brought up close to the surface, like a panorama squeezed together.”³³

31. David Joselit, *American Art since 1945* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), p. 14.

32. Willem de Kooning, quoted in *MoMA Highlights*, p. 206.

33. Willem de Kooning, quoted in *An Invitation to See: 150 Works from The Museum of Modern Art*, p. 151.

Roy Lichtenstein, *Drowning Girl*, 1963 (Image Fifteen)

- Tell students the title of this piece, *Drowning Girl*. Ask students to compare this work with de Kooning's *Woman, I*. What is similar about the two works? What is different?
- How are the two artists' styles different? How does their use of paint differ? Background? Treatment of subject matter?
- Ask students to focus on the composition of this piece. How has Lichtenstein chosen to portray this person?

Drowning Girl is one of many canvases Lichtenstein created that is based on characters from comic books. This **composition** is taken from one frame in a comic book that shows a girl in the **foreground** with her boyfriend looking at her from a capsized boat.

To see the original illustration, published in November 1962 in the DC Comics series *Run for Love*, go to <http://academics.smcvt.edu/gblasdel/slides%20ar333/webpages/t.%20abruzzo,%20run%20for%20love.htm>. Ask students to compare this image to the Lichtenstein painting.

- Ask students why Lichtenstein might have chosen to include only the girl's head. Why might he have wanted to show only part of the picture?
- This is one of many paintings Lichtenstein created depicting women as helpless, desperate, and passive figures. Ask students how this might relate to what they know about the women's movement of the 1960s.
- Ask students to consider the effect of the words in the bubble. In the original comic book picture, the caption read, "I don't care if I have a cramp." How has Lichtenstein altered the meaning of the image by changing the caption? How might their understanding of this be different if the words were not included, or if different words were used?
- Ask students to write their own caption. How do their words change the way in which the work can be interpreted?
- Ask students to describe the way they think this was painted.

Lichtenstein said, "I was very excited about, and interested in, the highly emotional content yet detached, impersonal handling of love, hate, war, etc. in these cartoon images."³⁴

In order to imitate the "impersonal" process of commercial printing, Lichtenstein transferred a sketch onto a canvas with the help of a projector. He then drew in black outlines and filled them with primary colors or with **Benday dots** through a screen.

- How does the way in which this was painted contrast with the emotional content of the image?

Lichtenstein's image in *Drowning Girl* comes directly from a comic book. He appropriated it into his own work by cropping, enlarging, and painting it. Richard Hamilton, a British artist, also reinscribes images from popular culture in his print, *Interior*.

34. Roy Lichtenstein, quoted in *Pop Art Selections*, p. 50.

Richard Hamilton, *Interior*, 1964 (Image Sixteen)

- Ask students to look carefully at this image and then write a short paragraph about the woman in the center of the picture. They can consider the following questions: How might you describe this place? Where is this person? What might she be thinking? What might have happened before this moment? What might happen after? Who might be in the next room?
- Ask students what stereotypes they see represented in this work. How has the artist chosen to depict this woman? Where is she? What is she doing?

This work is by the British artist Richard Hamilton. He was interested in the impact of popular and commodity culture—such as television sets, movie marquees, vacuum cleaners, and comic books—on art. This print is based on one of three collages Hamilton made from newspaper and magazine advertisements. The woman is taken from a washing machine advertisement and the interior is taken from a photographic reproduction of Claude Monet’s daughter’s drawing room.³⁵

Hamilton took many steps to create this work of art. First, he created a collage. Then he took a black-and-white photograph of the collage and changed the color by using photographic screens. Then he layered screens of Benday dots under the photographic screens. From this layered image, he created a screenprint.³⁶

- Ask students how to compare and contrast how women are represented in the three works in this lesson.

ACTIVITIES

1. Comic Influence

Ask students to bring in a comic book. Ask them to pick a frame and create their own work of art inspired by that frame. They may want to reference contemporary artists who are inspired by comic books, including Inka Essenhigh, Barry McGee, Takashi Murakami, Yoshitomo Nara, Rivane Neuenschwander, Phillipe Parreno, Raymond Pettibon, or Gary Simmons. How have these artists taken ideas from comic books and transformed them?

2. Self-Portrait

This lesson looked at three different ways to represent people. Ask students to choose one of the styles discussed here and a particular medium and to create a self-portrait. Consider the following questions: What do they want to tell the viewer about themselves? What medium, style, and composition will they use? What will they include in the background? Foreground?

3. Collage

Ask students to create their own collage of an inside space that features a person and tells something about the consumerism of the present time. Have them think about subject matter, style, and composition. They can cut out images from magazines and newspapers. Have the students come up with a title for their work.

35. Weitman, *Pop Impressions Europe/USA*, p. 43.

36. *Ibid.*