



WHO WAS ROY LICHTENSTEIN?

Roy Lichtenstein was one of the great artists of the American Pop Art movement. He was born in New York in 1923 and spent most of his life living and working there. His art studies were interrupted when he was drafted into the army and sent to Europe during the Second World War. After returning to complete his studies, Lichtenstein worked in many different temporary jobs, including teaching art at several universities.

By the mid 1960s, Lichtenstein had found his style of mimicking commercial printing. He is best known for his large paintings and prints based on comic-strip illustrations. These works were controversial at the time and were criticised for using trivial objects as subject matter.

WHAT IS POP ART?

During a time of increasing economic prosperity in the 1950s and 1960s, young American and British artists made popular culture their subject matter. They looked to the popular arts of cartoons, movies, consumer goods and advertisements (then called 'commercial art', now commonly called 'graphic art'). Pop artists rebelled against the abstraction and large gestural brushwork that was prevalent in art at the time. They blurred the boundaries between art and everyday objects.

THE PRINTS

Lichtenstein intentionally made art that looked machine-made. He often worked with stencils to produce rows of oversized dots to make his prints look like enlarged versions of commercially printed work. He prepared and produced his works with great care and experimented with and investigated new ideas in printmaking. He particularly liked the control he had when making prints because they could be developed by using collage and by projecting images onto a canvas or sheet of paper. Adjustments could also be made during the printing process.

(over) Roy Lichtenstein using an electric hand tool to carve the woodblock for the black printing of his print *Reflections on conversation*, Tyler Graphics workshop, Mount Kisco, New York, 1990. Photograph: Jim McHugh

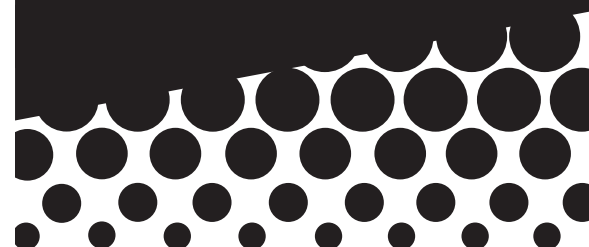
ROY LICHTENSTEIN

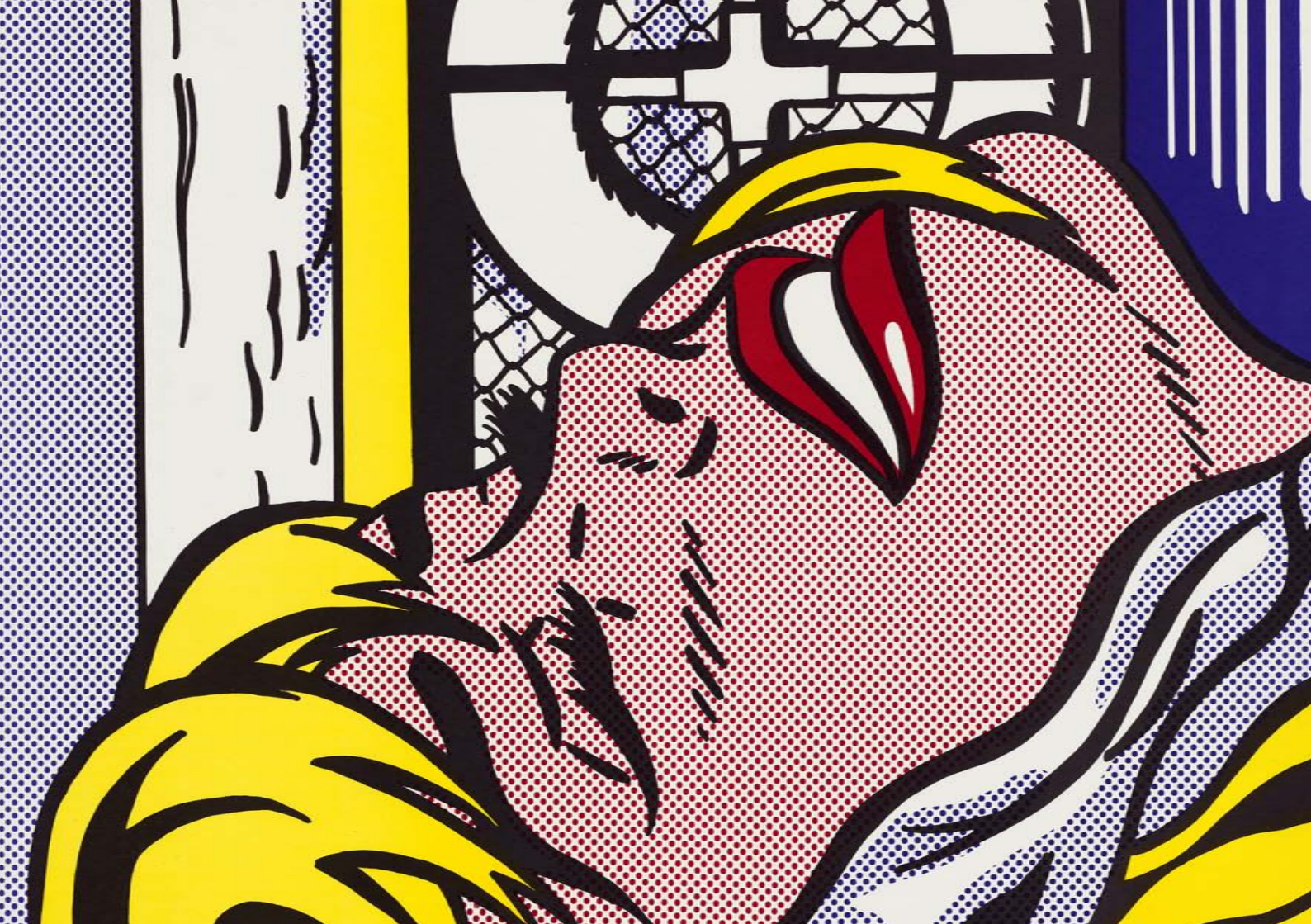
POP REMIX...

ACTIVITY

Printmaking appealed to Lichtenstein and other Pop artists, including Andy Warhol (1928–1987), Jim Dine (1935–) and James Rosenquist (1933–), because they could produce multiples copies of the same image. Look at some of their prints on the Tyler website listed on the 'Additional Resources' card to see a range of images created by these artists.

What is popular culture? Is it the same for everyone? In what ways has mass media changed since the 1960s? Consider new technologies (eg smart phones, social media) in your answer.







COMICS: BEN DAY DOTS

Shipboard girl 1965

lithograph

image 66.6 x 49 cm, sheet 69 x 51.4 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Felix Man Collection, Special Government Grant, 1972



Not only was Lichtenstein interested in the look of comic books but also in the way they were produced. He carefully studied the way in which small dots of ink, known as Ben Day dots, were printed. He then enlarged these dots in his art to give his works the appearance of mechanically printed commercial products.

Ben Day dots are the pattern of dots used in commercial printing to cheaply reproduce shading. They were named after their inventor, Benjamin Day (1838–1916), and were purchased in sheets of transfers and applied to the required areas. Before computer technology, graphic designers used dot-grid screens to create tones in images.

Shipboard girl shows Lichtenstein's visual vocabulary of flat areas of colour, bold outlines and Ben Day dots. It also depicts many of the characteristics of how women were often portrayed in the comics that Lichtenstein liked: young; usually blonde; in close-up; lips parted; head tilted; large, soft eyes; expressing strong emotion. Perhaps the woman in *Shipboard girl* is just enjoying the sun or perhaps she is thinking of a shipboard romance that has soured. In the background is a life buoy, a visual pun suggesting that she is longing for a boy to rescue her.

ROY **POP REMIX...**
LICHTENSTEIN

ACTIVITY

While the computer pixel has now replaced Ben Day dots, the visual codes of comic illustration remain. Read a comic book from your local bookstore, library or online. List the codes you can find, eg 'zzz' to indicate sleeping.

Make your own Ben Day dot stamps using various sizes of bubble wrap. Stick a square of bubble wrap to a square of heavy cardboard of the same size. Stick a smaller block of foam on the back to make a handle. Use a roller to apply ink or paint to the bubble wrap surface, then press it to the surface of your paper.





CRACK!

NOW, MES PETITS.
POUR LA FRANCE!



COMICS: TEXT BUBBLES

Crak! 1963–64

lithograph

47.1 x 68.6 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

purchased 1996

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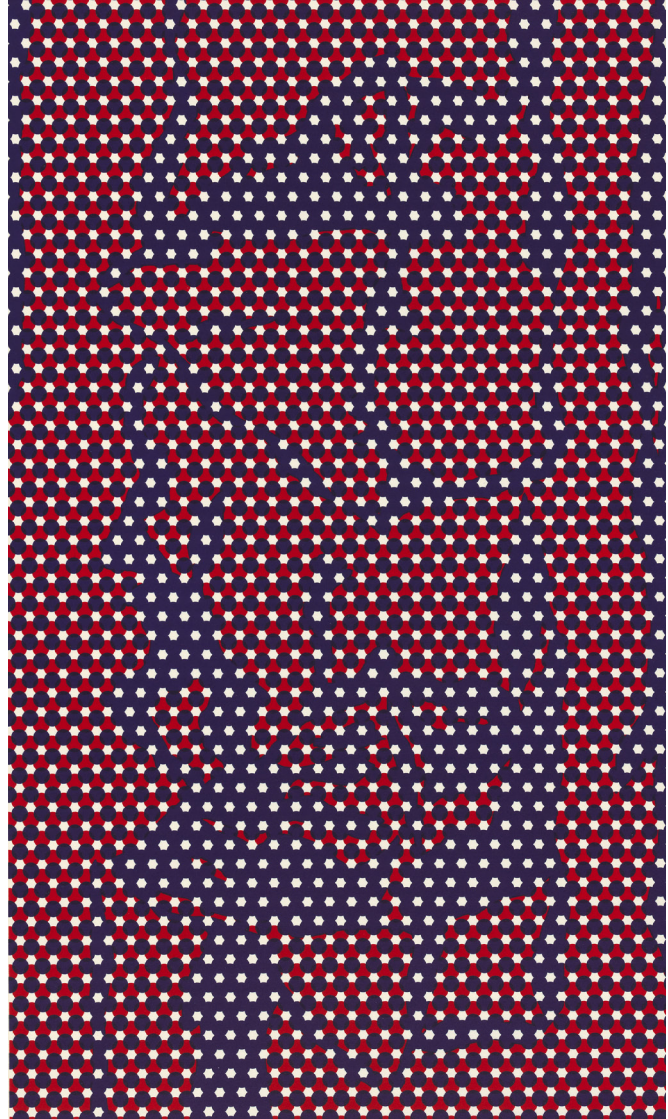
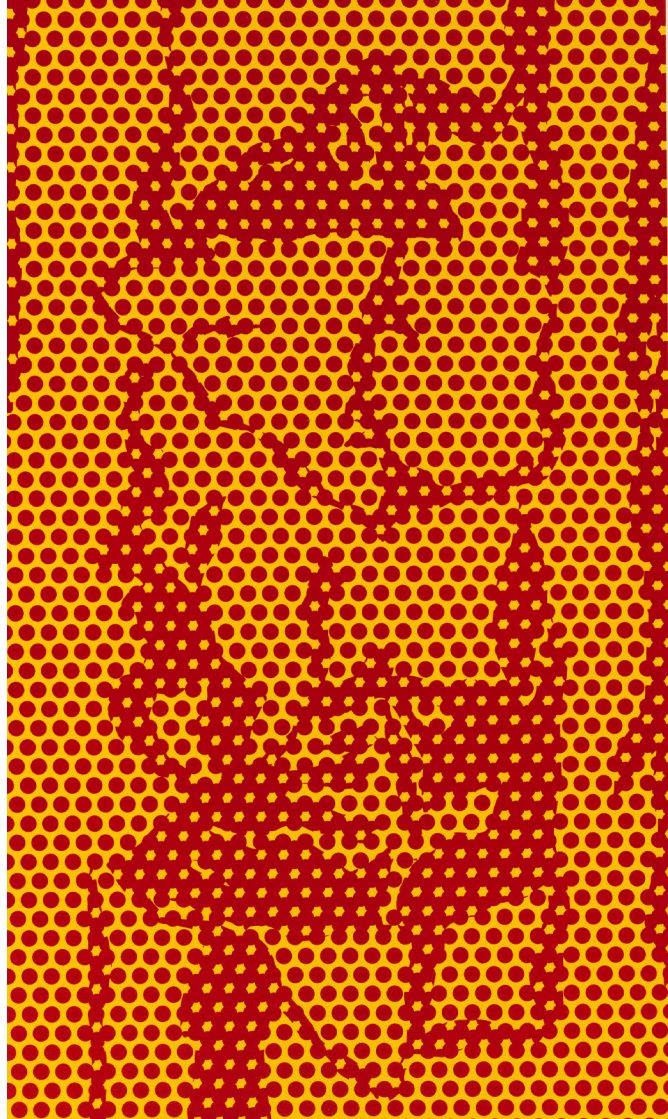
Comics about the adventures of superheroes, romances and war stories were widely read in the 1950s and 1960s. Lichtenstein admired the skill of the commercial artist who could condense complex stories of love and war into cartoon form using bold line, colour and text. He imitated their style and techniques and magnified them into large images. He developed his characteristic style by taking many elements from comic illustration. He took the bold outlines, text bubbles and visual codes of comic books, then turned the dull colours of cheap printing into bright primary colours and simplified and flattened the images.

The lithograph *Crak!* is based on one of Lichtenstein's paintings, and it was first published to advertise Lichtenstein's 1963 exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York. Lichtenstein was inspired by American comics about war when he made the painting, which is based on an image from a comic-strip.

ROY **POP REMIX...**
LICHTENSTEIN

ACTIVITY

Think about the concept of text bubbles and how the meaning changes depending on the position of the bubble, its size and shape as well as the style of the letters within it. Investigate different fonts used in comic books (**eg this is Comic Sans**). Devise another speech or thought bubble for *Crak!* by thinking of a short sentence then exaggerating it for dramatic effect.





LOOKING AT ART HISTORY: HAYSTACKS

(over) *Haystack #4* and *Haystack #6, state III*
1969, from the *Haystacks* series
lithograph, screenprint
image 34.2 x 59.8 cm, sheet 52.5 x 78 cm (approx)
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
purchased 1973

(left) **Claude Monet** *Haystacks, midday* 1890
oil on canvas
65.6 x 100.6 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
purchased 1979

Lichtenstein made images based on works from various twentieth-century art movements. He also made images of reproductions of paintings. How a work of art's meaning changed when it was reproduced and distributed as a commercial image was of great interest to him.

Claude Monet (1840–1926) was one of the many artists Lichtenstein referenced. He made a series of paintings and prints based on photographs of Monet's series of *Haystack* paintings, which he had seen in a book accompanying the 1968 exhibition *Serial imagery* at the Pasadena Art Museum. The *Haystack* paintings were an important series in early modern art. They were painted over four seasons and at varying times of day to explore the changing effects of light on a subject.

Lichtenstein represented his haystacks in an impersonal, manufactured manner. He said his prints are 'supposed to be times of day', running from yellow morning to black night. At the same time, the use of Ben Day dots hints at the Impressionists method of separating colour into primary components.

ROY LICHTENSTEIN POP REMIX...

ACTIVITY

Monet was a nineteenth-century French Impressionist. He applied paint in small brightly coloured strokes, which blended when viewed from a distance, much like Ben Day dots do. Look at Monet's *Haystack* paintings and at Lichtenstein's series; aside from the subject matter of haystacks, do you think Monet and Lichtenstein are exploring similar ideas? Why or why not?

Use a magnifying glass to highlight a small section of one of Lichtenstein's *Haystack* prints. Reproduce this with coloured pencils and textas. Use various colour combinations to explore different visual effects.





LOOKING AT ART HISTORY: STILL LIFES

Still life with portrait 1974
from the series *Six still lifes*
lithograph, stencil, debossing
image 97.2 x 72.6 cm, sheet 120 x 95.4 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra,
purchased 1980

Lichtenstein stopped working on paintings based on comics by the mid 1960s—although he maintained a lifelong interest in mass media. His later works of art often referred, in humorous and irreverent ways, to subjects and movements from art history. The appeal for Lichtenstein was the appearance of the art rather than art theory.

Lichtenstein explored the theme of still lifes, for instance, in his series *Six still lifes* (notice the plural of 'still life' is 'still lifes'). As well as using traditional compositions and standard still-life objects in these prints, Lichtenstein inserted representations of his own works or of works by artists such as Henri Matisse (1869–1954), Fernand Léger (1881–1955) and Morris Louis (1912–1962).

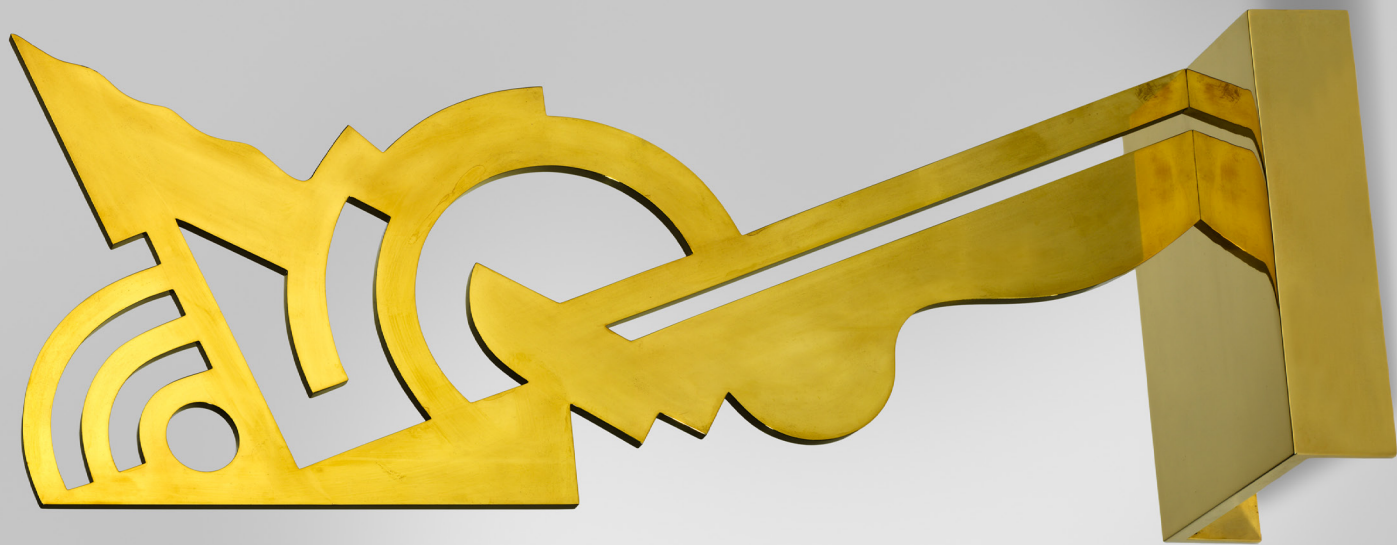
In *Still life with portrait*, Lichtenstein uses the conventions of still-life painting. A platter of fruit, a jug, a grapefruit and a lemon sit on a white tablecloth and a curtain frames the right-hand side. A portrait of a 1950s American homemaker hangs on the wall in an ornate frame.

ROY LICHTENSTEIN POP REMIX...

ACTIVITY

Research the rich history of still-life painting in European art. Refer to artists such as Jean Baptiste Simeon Chardin (1699–1779), Louise Moillon (1610–1696), Luis Egidio Meléndez (1716–1780), Willem Claesz Heda (1593–1680) and Paul Cézanne (1839–1906).

Set up a still life on a table. Give it a Pop Art feel by using contemporary everyday objects and bright colours. Include spotted or patterned paper or fabric. Pay attention to balance and colour in your composition. How could you include a reference to an artist or musician? Photograph your still life.





MULTIPLES

(over) *Untitled head I* 1970,

brass

65.6 x 26 x 15 cm,

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

purchased 1973

(left) *Untitled head II* 1970

California English walnut

77.6 x 30.2 x 20 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

purchased 1973

After seeing paintings of portrait heads by Russian artist Alexej von Jawlensky (1864–1941), Lichtenstein created a body of work that included sculpture, prints and paintings. With these works, he explored the process of turning two-dimensional images into three-dimensional objects. He also created images of human figures that look like machines. The idea of sculpting heads that look industrial and manufactured appealed to Lichtenstein because he had taken the same approach to his painting and printmaking. His sculptured heads were also editioned in a similar way to prints.

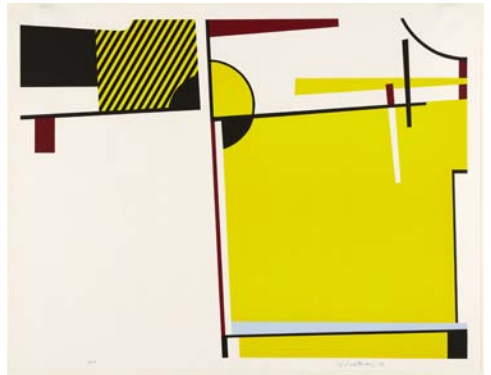
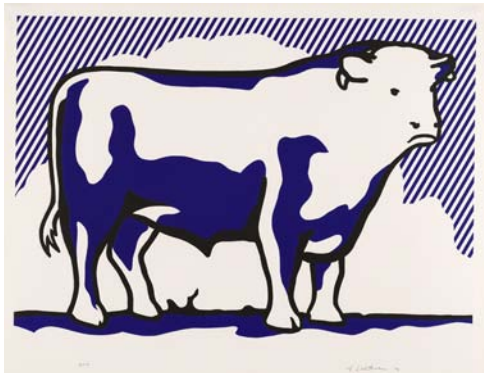
Lichtenstein originally created a cardboard maquette (scale model) for *Untitled head I*. He then collaborated with the workshop Gemini GEL in Los Angeles to produce editions of the sculpture. The brass heads were machine cut and specialist tools were used to cut the holes. These holes are considered important to the sculpture because they comprise its negative space (the area, often blank, around a subject that draws attention to the main subject).

ROY POP REMIX...
LICHTENSTEIN

ACTIVITY

Draw an abstracted head or figure, then construct a small sculpture based on your image. Use cardboard and foam and plastic packing materials. Paint it in gold or bright colours. You can refer to heads by artists such as Naum Gabo (1890–1977), FT Marinetti (1876–1944), Henry Moore (1898–1986) and Barbara Hepworth (1903–1975) for inspiration.

A ‘multiple’ is defined as any print, photograph, sculpture cast, collage or art object produced in more than one copy. Discuss why making multiples would appeal to many Pop artists.





BULL PROFILE SERIES

(over) *Bull I–VI* 1973
from the *Bull profile* series 1973–74
lithograph, screenprint, linecut
image 51.4 x 75.2 cm, sheet 68.6 x 89 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
purchased 1973



(left) *Bull head I–II* 1973,
from the *Bull head* series 1973
lithograph, linecut
image 54 x 75.2 cm, sheet 63.4 x 83.8 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
purchased 1973

The relationship between realism and abstraction is one of the basic issues of twentieth-century art. In these prints, Lichtenstein traces the movement of modern art between these styles. The recognisable form of the bull in the first print is transformed into a geometric abstraction by the last. Gradually, the animal is reduced to its core elements of horns, tail, spine and legs until only a small curved line suggesting a horn remains.

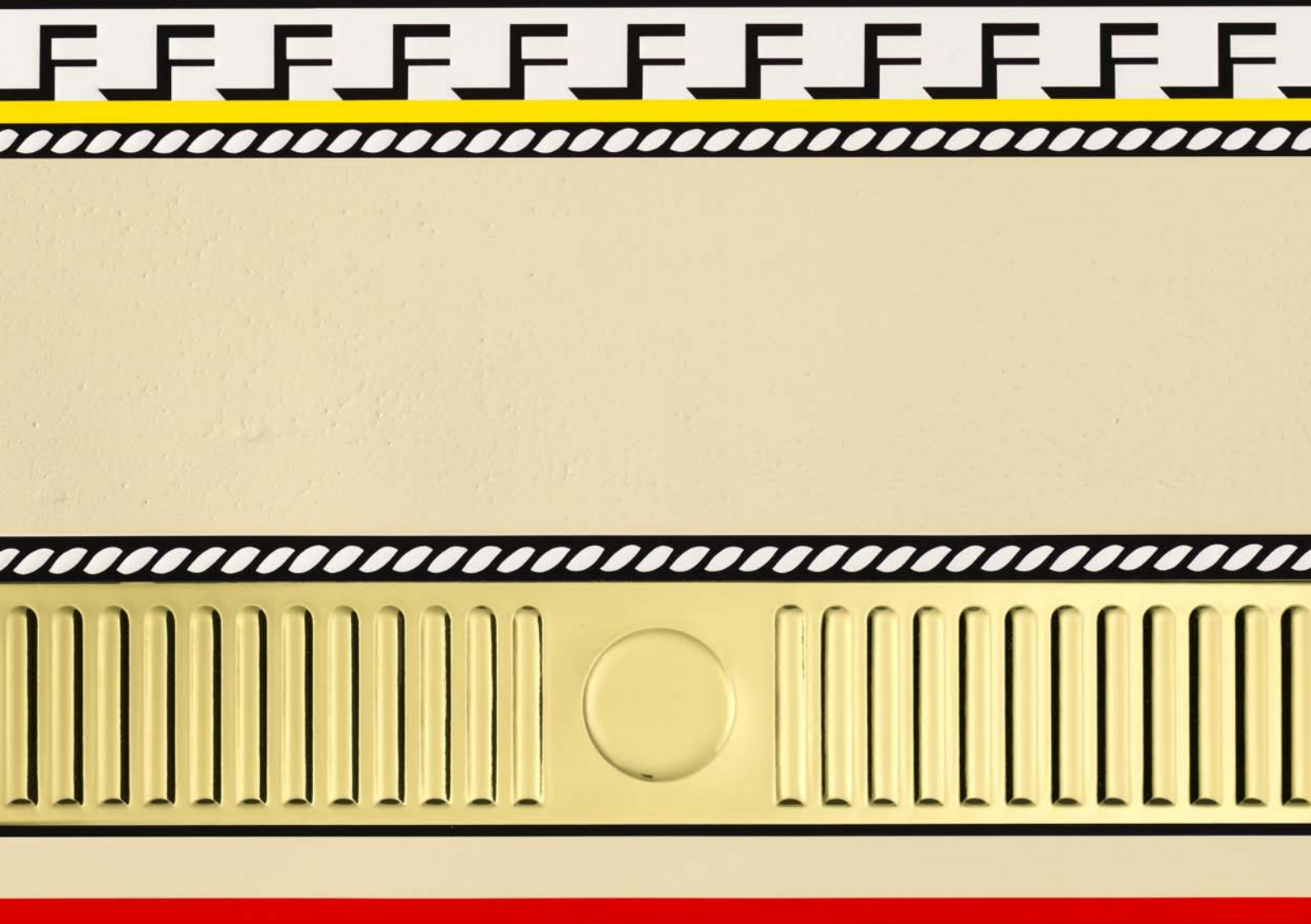
In this series Lichtenstein uses a combination of different printmaking techniques. He first worked out his images with a collage before making a lithograph. He then used screenprinting and linecut to develop the image.

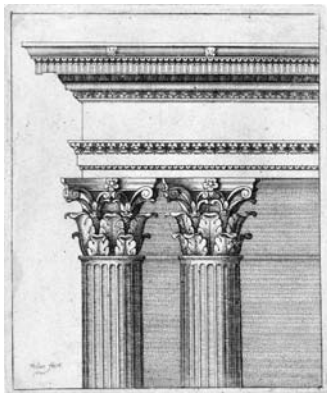
ROY LICHTEINSTEIN POP REMIX...

ACTIVITY

Research Theo van Doesburg's *Composition (The cow)* 1916–17 and Pablo Picasso's lithographic series *Bull* 1945–46 to see how Lichtenstein developed the idea for his series. Discuss what abstraction is.

Divide a large sheet of paper into four sections. Look closely at the series *Bull profile*, noting the changes in the images. Choose three colours and black and white in a medium of your choice, then select an animal as your subject. Draw the animal realistically in the first section and gradually abstract the image in the following three sections.





ENTABLATURES

(over) *Entablature I* 1976
from the *Entablatures* series
stencil, collage with embossing,
image 54.2 x 96.6 cm, sheet 74.2 x 114.2 cm
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
purchased 1976

(left) *Wenzel Hollar Columns and entablature*
1640, 10 x 8 cm, Wenceslas Hollar Digital
Collection, University of Toronto, USA

Entablatures are the decorative bands at the top of building columns. The designs are often based on those found on ancient Greek and Roman buildings. In the early 1970s, Lichtenstein walked around Lower Manhattan in New York photographing entablatures. He photographed them in bright sunlight to capture the patterns accentuated by the strong shadows.

Lichtenstein's entablature works were the most technical and complex prints he had ever produced. To help him create these works, he collaborated with the Tyler Graphics team of skilled printmakers. This gave him access to specialised equipment and assistance for his innovative ideas. He used screenprinting, hand-cut stencils, photo stencils, lithographs and collage as well as machine-cut coloured metal foils embossed and debossed with architectural motifs. The results were richly textured prints that imitate real architectural ornamentation combined with flat abstract pattern.

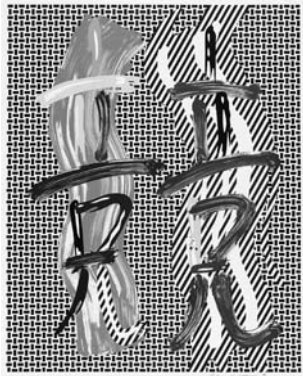
ROY **POP REMIX...**
LICHTENSTEIN

ACTIVITY

In pairs, research the various printmaking techniques mentioned on this and other cards in this education resource (techniques are listed after the titles of works of art). Include 'embossing' and 'edition' in your research. Present a brief explanation and discuss why artists would work with printmakers in a specialised print workshop.

See the 'Additional Resources' card for helpful online resources (including a glossary of printmaking terms).





BRUSHSTROKES

Brushstroke contest 1989

lithograph

image 120.8 x 96.8 cm, sheet 127 x 101.6 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

gift of Kenneth Tyler, 2002



The different ways in which brushstrokes can be applied result in different visual effects. For instance, large gestural brushstrokes made with the whole arm can convey a feeling of confidence.

In *Brushstroke contest*, Lichtenstein comments on the difference between the gestural marks of Abstract Expressionist painters and the mechanically reproduced images of Pop Art. He pokes fun at the seriousness of Abstract Expressionist art by depersonalising the brushstroke, isolating it from the painting and enlarging and simplifying it.

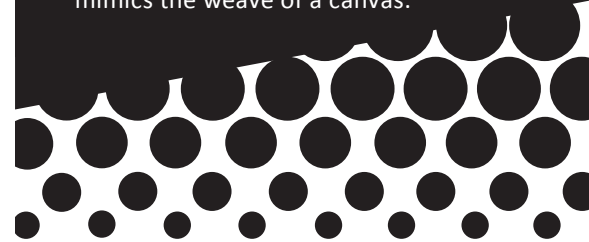
At first, reproducing a lively gestural brushstroke in print form proved a challenge—Lichtenstein's first attempts looked like slabs of bacon. He succeeded when he used India ink on transparent plastic, because the plastic repelled the ink. He then projected the brushstroke onto a large screen and traced it to obtain an image for printing.

ROY **POP REMIX...**
LICHTENSTEIN

ACTIVITY

Look at the gestural brushwork in paintings by Abstract Expressionist artists such as Willem de Kooning (1904–1997), Franz Kline (1910–1962), Lee Krasner (1908–1984), Joan Mitchell (1926–1992) and Cy Twombly (1928–2011).

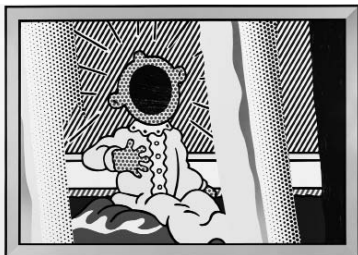
Collaborate to create a large collage of brushstrokes. Experiment with different brushes, paints and inks on different types of paper, canvas, plastic etc (note that a lightly loaded brush will give more detail). Photocopy them, enlarge some sections, cut them out and paste them on a patterned sheet of paper that mimics the weave of a canvas.



OUSAND P

CRASH





REFLECTIONS

(over) *Reflections on Crash* 1990

from the *Reflections* series

lithograph, screenprint, woodcut, metallised PVC

plastic film collage, embossing,

image 134.8 x 175.3 cm, sheet 150.2 x 190.5 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

purchased 1991

(right) *Reflections on The scream* 1990

from the *Reflections* series

lithograph, screenprint, woodcut, metallised PVC

plastic film collage, embossing,

image 107.3 x 150.6 cm, sheet 124 x 166.4 cm,

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

purchased with the assistance of the

Orde Poynton Fund, 2002

The series *Reflections* is a group of seven prints in which Lichtenstein reinterpreted his earlier paintings and prints. Each print refers to an aspect of Lichtenstein's iconic Pop Art and comic images. In this series, the images are partly obscured with painted 'reflective' streaks, as if they were behind glass or reflected in a mirror.

In *Reflections on Crash*, the emphasis is on the visual codes of comics rather than the character from a war-comic series published by DC Comics. The 'reflections' painted on the work hide parts of the action and speech bubble, leaving it up to the viewer to fill in the blanks.

In *Reflections on The scream*, Lichtenstein revisits his theme of looking at art history. The howling face of the cartoon character Swee'Pea (Popeye and Olive Oyl's baby boy) refers to the well-known Expressionist painting *The scream* 1893 by Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863–1944).

ROY **POP REMIX...**
LICHTENSTEIN

ACTIVITY

Refer to all the prints in this education resource and then remix your own comic image. Enlarge a photograph of yourself or an image from a magazine that shows an emotional moment or particular gesture. On a sheet of paper, using thick black lines, trace the outline and main features of your photograph, including frown lines and folds in clothing. Fill in various areas using pencils and patterned paper and your own Ben Day dot stencils. To make a dot stencil, punch holes in a thin plastic sheet. Add a humorous speech or thought bubble.





LOOKING AT ART HISTORY: NUDES

Nude with blue hair 1994

from the *Nudes* series

relief 146.7 x 93.5 cm

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

purchased with the assistance of the

Orde Poynton Fund, 2002

The works in the series *Nudes* are examples of Lichtenstein's late Pop Art style from the 1990s. The series refers to the nude genre in art history, and the setting for each print is a composition from Lichtenstein's earlier work.

Throughout his career, Lichtenstein took imagery from popular culture and mass media. He collected images, which he kept in scrapbooks as a resource, and referred to them when making this series.

The prints are composed with a lighter palette and the Ben Day dots are of differing sizes. These different sizes imitate a type of shading, traditionally known as *chiaroscuro*, which is an Italian word that means 'light-dark'. *Chiaroscuro* is a method that uses contrasts of light and dark tones to achieve a heightened illusion of volume or depth. The method originated during the Renaissance (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries).

ROY **POP REMIX...**
LICHTENSTEIN

ACTIVITY

Look at how Lichtenstein has used his signature dots in this print. What are the similarities and differences between *Nude with blue hair* from the 1990s and *Shipboard Girl* and *Crak!* from the 1960s?

For examples of the use of *chiaroscuro* look at works of art by Caravaggio (1573–1610) and Rembrandt (1606–1669).



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Henshaw, Mark, 'Reflections on Lichtenstein', *Artonview*, no##5, 1996, available at <nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler/Default.cfm?MnuID=6&Essay=artonview5>.

Kenneth Tyler printmaking collection, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, <nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler>.

Kinsman, Jane, *The art of collaboration: the big Americans*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 2002.

Roy Lichtenstein Foundation, New York, <lichtensteinfoundation.org>.

'Themes', *The art of collaboration: the big Americans*, exhibition website, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, <nga.gov.au/BigAmericans/Themes.cfm>. See the theme 'Typewriter Pointillism: Roy Lichtenstein'.

GLOSSARY

'Glossary', *Kenneth Tyler printmaking collection*, <nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler/Default.cfm?MnuID=9>.

PROCESSES

'Photographic archive', *Kenneth Tyler printmaking collection*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, <nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler/Default.cfm?MnuID=11>.

NUDES

Cohen-Tyler, Marabeth, *Roy Lichtenstein: nudes*, Tyler Graphics, Mount Kisco, 1994, available at <nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler/Pamphlets/Lichtenstein/Nudes.pdf>.

ENTABLATURES

Rose, Barbara, *Roy Lichtenstein: Entablature series*, Tyler Graphics Ltd, New York, 1976, available at <nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler/Pamphlets/Lichtenstein/Entab.pdf>.

BRUSHSTROKES

Tuten, Frederic, *Roy Lichtenstein: brushstrokes*, Tyler Graphics, New York, 1986, available at <nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler/Pamphlets/Lichtenstein/brush.pdf>.

(over) Kenneth Tyler and Roy Lichtenstein discussing the positioning of metallised PVC collage elements for the artist's print *Reflections on Crash*, Tyler Graphics gallery, Mount Kisco, New York, 1990 Photograph: Jacques De Melo

... A VIRTUAL-INSTITUTE FOR
FINE ART PRINTMAKING...

Kenneth Tyler, 2009

KENNETH TYLER PRINTMAKING COLLECTION

The Kenneth Tyler Printmaking Collection at the National Gallery of Australia comprises over 7000 editioned prints, proofs, drawings, paperworks, screens, multiples and illustrated books as well as a collection of rare candid photography, film and audio.

The collection website is a rich source of information on American printmaking and printmakers of the second half of the twentieth century.

nga.gov.au/InternationalPrints/Tyler