

The Museum of Modern Art

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OLDENBURG SHOW AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

An exhibition of 116 three-dimensional objects and over 100 drawings executed by Claes Oldenburg since his first one-man show in New York ten years ago will be on view at The Museum of Modern Art from September 25 through November 23.

Directed by Alicia Legg, Associate Curator in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, the exhibition has been drawn from more than 100 public and private collections in eight countries.

Oldenburg, 40-year old artist, has chosen the themes for his work in terms of environments, particularly The Street, The Store, and The Home. In treating these subjects he allows his fantasy free play, as he also does in his projects for imaginary monuments. The sculptures are on view on the first floor; most of the drawings, including pages from Oldenburg's notebooks, are on view in the third-floor Paul J. Sachs galleries.

"Oldenburg's art is a challenge to the viewer," Alicia Legg says. "Its celebration of the commonplace upsets traditional values. Taking as his subject contemporary products that meet the basic needs of life -- food, clothing, and shelter -- he endows them with wit and even compassion. His approach, however, goes beyond subject matter. Scale is an original concept in his production. His treatment of a wide range of materials brings out his extraordinary sensitivity to form and surface; his craftsmanship, whether in three-dimensional objects or in his light-filled drawings, commands admiration."

The figures, signs and objects relating to The Street (1959-60) are made of various discarded and often fragile materials -- cardboard cartons and used garbage bags. Oldenburg developed these reliefs from sketches made along the Bowery and Lower East Side where he lived. Besides such subjects as the Street Head and the Street Chick, Oldenburg represented the Ray Gun -- an invincible weapon (adapted from comic strips)

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that became his personal emblem and alter ego -- in such objects as the "Empire" ("Papa") Ray Gun and in numerous drawings and posters.

For The Store, which he opened in December 1961 in a non-gallery situation, a former store on East 2nd Street, he made his own version of the food and merchandise displayed in neighborhood shops. These works, such as Girls' Dresses Blowing in the Wind; Red Tights; Two Loaves of Bread -- One Cut; and Pastry Case, II, were made of muslin soaked in plaster over wire framework and brightly painted with enamel. In 1962 Oldenburg began to make similar objects in giant scale and of soft material, usually canvas stuffed with foam rubber. These include the Floor-Burger, 7 feet in diameter, the Floor-Cone, a 10-foot long ice-cream cone, and Giant Blue Men's Pants.

The Home environment began with the Bedroom Ensemble, a room-size tableau based on a motel, with bed, chair, dresser and night tables constructed of wood and other materials in false perspective, first constructed in Los Angeles in 1963. Later objects for The Home include the complete "soft" furnishings for a bathroom -- washstand, toilet, medicine cabinet, scale and tub made of vinyl filled with kapok and painted. Oldenburg also made hard (wood, cardboard, or formica), soft (vinyl filled with kapok) and "ghost" (canvas or muslin) versions of such familiar electrical and mechanical objects as a pay phone, a typewriter and a toaster, some of normal dimensions and some greatly enlarged.

In 1965 Oldenburg began to concentrate on The Car, which he regards as a typical American icon and also as an environment in itself. In this series, based specifically on the Chrysler Airflow of 1935, Oldenburg dissects the car and its parts - engine, tires, etc. - rendering them in hard, soft and "ghost" versions and in six different scales, the largest over life-size. In the exhibition, this series culminates with a large, recently completed multiple, Profile of Chrysler Airflow, of molded polyurethane over a two-color hand-painted lithograph.

The first of Oldenburg's proposals for colossal monuments date from 1965. They originally took the form of drawings, over two dozen of which are in the show. Among

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them are Proposed Colossal Monument for Central Park North; New York: Teddy Bear and Proposed Colossal Monument for Ellis Island" Frankfurter with Tomato and Toothpick.

Subsequently Oldenburg began to construct three-dimensional models, such as the Proposed Colossal Monument for Coronation Park, Toronto: Drainpipe.

The only monument actually erected so far is the Lipstick unveiled on the campus of Yale University in May 1969, its costs contributed by a group of faculty, alumni, and students. Represented in the exhibition by models showing its three stages of extension, this lipstick, mounted on a tractor, is also a phallic symbol and a missile. It exemplifies Oldenburg's critical stance toward certain aspects of American life, the erotic content that pervades his work, and his recent interest in objects fabricated by factory techniques.

A consciously vulgar, representational art of formal significance, Oldenburg's work raises virtually every significant critical question involved in a discussion of contemporary art, Barbara Rose says in the introduction to her major monograph* on the artist to be published by the Museum this winter. She defines these critical questions as "the interaction of form and content, the relation of representational to abstract art, and the nature and importance of formal radicalism in new art. With a thorough knowledge of the art of the past and an extreme consciousness of contemporary relevance, Oldenburg calls into question the very concept of style itself, by proposing a rampantly eclectic style that in essence presupposes all the historical movements preceding it. An understanding of Oldenburg's art, therefore, is absolutely crucial for an understanding of what is at stake in the art of the 'sixties."

The drawings in the exhibition include some early works of the 1950's as well as notebook sketches. Their subjects relate in general to the same themes as do the three-dimensional objects, but there are also several costume and theater sketches, suggesting Oldenburg's deep and continuous interest in the theater, environments, happenings, and films. During the course of the exhibition, the Museum will show special films,

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including some of happenings that he himself has created, and some that other film-makers have made of his work.

A modified version of the exhibition will travel to Europe next year under the auspices of the Museum's International Council and will be seen in London, Amsterdam, and Dusseldorf.

In 1961 The Museum of Modern Art acquired Red Tights, the first work by Oldenburg to enter the collection of any Museum.

Checklist, photographs and additional information available from Elizabeth Shaw, Director, Public Information, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53rd Street, New York, N. Y. 10019. 956-7501, 7504.

*Claes Oldenburg by Barbara Rose; 168 pages; 224 illustrations (54 in color); flexible binding of vinyl over foam-rubber padding, with a silk screened inscription. \$15