

Roy Lichtenstein : functional multiples, multiple functions

Author

Lichtenstein, Roy, 1923-1997

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Roy Lichtenstein

Functional Multiples/Multiple Functions

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Dishes. (1966). Six-piece place setting of glazed ceramics. Various dimensions. Publisher: Durable Dish Co., Villanova, Pennsylvania. Fabricator: Jackson China Co., Syracuse, New York. Edition: 800. Gift of David Whitney, 1966

Wrapping Paper. (c. 1968). Screenprint, printed in color. Sheet (roll width): 30 $\frac{3}{16}$ " (76.7 cm). Publisher: Bert Stern, for On 1st, New York. Printer: unknown. Edition: unknown. Gift of Martin Stevens, 1966

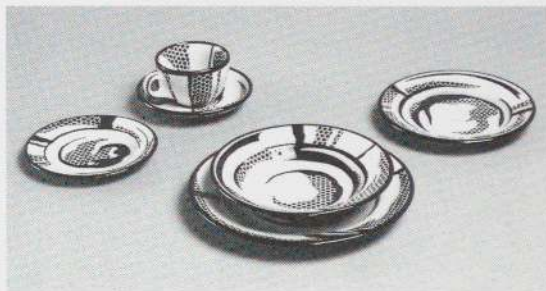
Hat from the portfolio **S.M.S.**, no. 4. 1968. Photolithograph, printed in color, on plastic sheet laminated in plastic. Folded and upright: 7 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{15}{16}$ x 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ " (18.5 x 35.4 x 11.5 cm). Publisher: Letter Edged in Black Press, New York. Printer: Omega Graphics, New York. Edition: approximately 2,000. Gift of Carol O. Selle, 1977

As with prints, the reproducibility, commerciality, and affordability of the multiple made it a natural outgrowth of the Pop movement. Multiples, or three-dimensional objects published in editions, blossomed in the United States in the mid-1960s as American Pop artists embraced the culture of postwar consumerism and blurred the boundaries between high art and everyday commodities. For Roy Lichtenstein, whose painting, sculpture, and printmaking investigated notions of the manufactured and replicable, and whose subjects were drawn from advertisements and commonplace objects, multiple-making was intrinsic to his artistic ideology.

The development of the multiple went hand-in-hand with the start-up of innovative publishing ventures and workshops. As well, new and inexpensive manufacturing technologies fostered the artistic use of nontraditional

materials ranging from the technically simple, such as the paper shopping bag, to the more complex, like vacuum-formed plastic. Between the years 1960 and 1975, Lichtenstein created more than twenty multiples, both aesthetic and functional, the results of a unique collaboration between artist, publisher, and fabricator.

Among his earliest multiple works was *Dishes* of 1966. The project was the brainchild of Joan Kron and Audrey Sabol of the Beautiful Bag Co., a homespun business that specialized in artist-designed multiples. Drawing upon his unique ceramic sculptures of dishes, Lichtenstein created design maquettes using prefabricated durable dishes (from

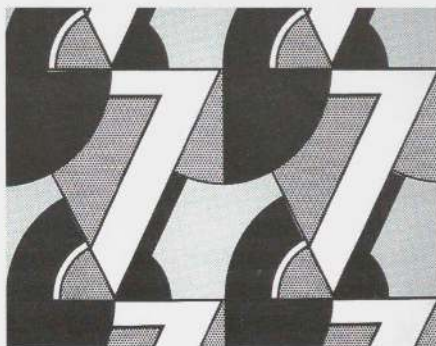


Dishes

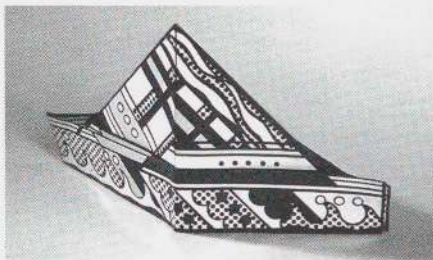
which the publishers took the name Durable Dish Co.), which were then mass-produced in an edition of 800 by the Jackson China Company. Combining the playful, aesthetic, and functional, the dishes were purchased in six-piece sets for \$50 through two New York galleries or a mail-order brochure. In addition to their whimsical nature, the dishes furthered Lichtenstein's investigation into the issue of representation, specifically his translation of three-dimensionality onto two-dimensional surfaces, which he now, in a sophisticated twist, reapplied to its original form.

Two years later, Lichtenstein was approached by Bert Stern to create products for On 1st, his hybrid gallery, store, and club (located at 1159 First Avenue in Manhattan and operational 1968–70) which sold mass-appeal everyday objects, typically in unlimited editions, by contemporary artists. For On 1st, Lichtenstein made designs for wrapping paper (pictured here), wallpaper printed on metallic foil, and paper plates sold in packets of ten and based on his 1966 ceramic multiples, each available for \$1. The design for the wrapping paper and wallpaper demonstrates Lichtenstein's interest in re-coding different art-historical styles, here Art Deco. These affordable, ephemeral formats made Lichtenstein's projects for On 1st among his most widely sold and, therefore, democratic works of the period.

Also in 1968, Lichtenstein participated in an unusual venture coordinated by painter William Copley, who invited artists to use his New York loft as an open workshop for experimenting in-between and around the boundaries of traditional mediums. Artists created original works in a kaleidoscopic range of formats to fit the dimensions of small folded portfolios. Produced in editions of 2,000 and titled *S.M.S.* (*Shit Must Stop*), the portfolios were disseminated



Wrapping Paper. Photo: Robert McKeever



Hat. Photo: Robert McKeever

through the mail to subscribers. A total of six were completed within the year, with contributions by Pop, Fluxus, Surrealist, and Conceptual artists. Production methods ranged from handwork by students to commercial processes by professional fabricators. For *S.M.S.* no. 4, Lichtenstein created *Hat*, a photolithograph on a plastic sheet folded in the form of a paper hat. Too small to be worn, and reminiscent of a ship with its printed waves, port-

holes, railing, and steam, *Hat* was not so much functional as it was representative of the type of freedom, humor, and experimentation the *S.M.S.* project fostered.

Employing a wide range of industrial materials and techniques, Lichtenstein used multiple-making to give literal form to the issues of reproduction and representation he pursued in his other work. The cross-fertilization of process and subject from medium to medium evidenced in this early period, and throughout his career, demonstrates how editioned work helped to sharpen the questions that Lichtenstein, and the entire Pop generation, raised for art.

Judith B. Hecker
Curatorial Assistant

This card is made possible through the generosity of Marian and James Cohen in memory of their son Michael Harrison Cohen.

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