

The Museum of Modern Art

For Immediate Release
March 1987

THE DRAWINGS OF ROY LICHTENSTEIN March 15 - June 2, 1987

The first major exhibition devoted to the drawings of American artist Roy Lichtenstein, who gained international attention as one of the leading figures of the Pop art movement, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on March 15, 1987. THE DRAWINGS OF ROY LICHTENSTEIN, including approximately 275 works from private collections and museums throughout the world, surveys the artist's entire career through studies for paintings, prints, and sculpture.

Organized by Bernice Rose, curator, Department of Drawings, the exhibition has been made possible by a generous grant from The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States. After its New York showing, it travels to Israel and several European cities before returning for an additional national exhibition (details to be announced).

Beginning with independent black-and-white drawings from the early sixties, the exhibition includes color studies for the famous Pop comic-strip paintings of the same decade. Studies for Lichtenstein's parodies of Surrealism in the seventies and of Expressionism in the eighties are represented as are studies for the Artist's Studio paintings (1974) and for major mural projects of the eighties. Four related paintings from the sixties are also included.

Because of the large size of Lichtenstein's painting, only at the scale of drawing is it possible to have in a single exhibition a comprehensive survey of his work. Bernice Rose writes in the catalog accompanying the exhibition,*

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"Lichtenstein's reliance on drawing is crucial to his style. Drawing is both the core of his aesthetic and an essential part of the making of his art. It is the point of departure for a new order in painting." Appropriately, in the work of an artist who has said that "unity in the work itself depends on unity of the artist's vision," an essential continuity of thematic concerns--over a twenty-five year period--is affirmed.

In 1961, a critical year in the artist's career, Lichtenstein radically changed his style from one that had depended on abstraction and color to one that parodied representational linear drawing. He began to take subjects from clichéd forms of printed mass communication: comic strips, newspaper advertisements, even the Yellow Pages. He approximated the impersonal, "unartistic" look of such imagery by employing outline drawing and by reproducing the mechanical-looking Benday dot code used by printers to represent tonal values.

By the mid-sixties Lichtenstein turned his attention to the analysis of high art styles, and isolated the prime fine-art sign: the brushstroke. Formerly a vehicle of expression, the brushstroke was made the subject of expression, ironically signifying "fine art" and representing the material element of painting--the paint itself. The black-and-white Brushstrokes (1966-68) is the first drawing in which he parodied the painterly gesture, floating it as an object in its own right against a field of dots.

During this time Lichtenstein began making study drawings by selecting motifs from printed illustrations or other second-hand sources and recomposing them into small-scale sketches. Using an opaque projector, he enlarged these sketches transferring them to the canvas. He has continued to use this method, as Rose states, "The studies document the changes in his work from year to

year, while at the same time they ensure that the initial stylistic cliché--the cool and reductive cartoon style--continues as a unifying thread throughout the changes."

Since the late sixties, Lichtenstein has conceived his work in sets or series, which were created on the basis of theme and variation: the Modern style (Art Deco), Architectural Monuments, Entablatures, Artist's Studios, the Cubist series, Landscapes, Office Still Lives, the Surrealist series, etc. (a chronology of works is attached). By the early seventies, having established an extensive personal vocabulary of images, he began to appropriate and parody familiar styles and specific images from the major styles of twentieth-century art. Rose writes, "Working from slick reproductions of art instead of from cartoons, Lichtenstein at this time completes a shift of his focus from low art to high style, and from high style to high art as subject."

In the eighties, Lichtenstein returns to the depiction of the brushstroke as a full-fledged subject, initiating a major new cycle in his work that extends through several series into 1986. In a series of studies in the early 1980s, landscapes, still lifes, and figures are constructed solely of "real" or cartoon brushstrokes. De Kooning's Women, for example, are presented as absurdly exaggerated cartoon creatures of the paintstroke, and brushstrokes appear in the guise of apple parings as Lichtenstein "peels" Cézanne's apples.

Lichtenstein's two recent mural projects, represented in the exhibition by collage studies, are important public summations of the artist's career. The Greene Street Mural (1983), a wall painting almost ninety-six feet long, occupies the north wall of Lichtenstein's dealer Leo Castelli's gallery at 142 Greene Street in New York City (the work is presently behind a false wall). Mural with Blue Brushstroke (1986), in the lobby of The Equitable Center, New

York, deals with the history of modern art and its transformation by Lichtenstein into an up-to-date "cartoon" of the modern world.

Born in 1923 in New York City, Roy Lichtenstein studied art with Reginald Marsh at The Art Students League of New York (1940) and with Professor Hoyt L. Sherman, author of Drawing by Seeing, at Ohio State University, Columbus (1940-42). After serving in the army, he earned his B.F.A (1946) and M.F.A. (1949) degrees at Ohio State. During this time he worked in Cleveland as a graphic and engineering draftsman, a window designer, and a sheet-metal designer. For the next several years he was an assistant professor at the State University of New York, Oswego (1957-60), and Douglass College, Rutgers University, New Brunswick (1960-64).

Lichtenstein's first individual show was held in 1951 at the Carlebach Gallery in New York. In 1962 he had his first individual exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York, which continues to represent his work. After moving to New York City a year later, the artist was commissioned by Philip Johnson to make large-scale paintings for the New York State Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, and received his first exhibition in Europe at Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris. During the sixties, his work was the subject of museum exhibitions at The Cleveland Museum of Art (1966), the Pasadena Art Museum (1969, toured nationally and internationally), and The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (1969). In 1977 Lichtenstein received the Skowhegan Medal for Painting and in 1979 he was given his first public sculpture commission for the Theater of the Performing Arts, Miami Beach. He moved to Southampton, Long Island, in 1970, and since the early eighties has maintained a studio in Manhattan as well.

In conjunction with the exhibition, the Museum is presenting a ten-minute videotape including interviews with the artist with the exhibition curator. Coproduced by Checkerboard Foundation, Inc., and The Museum of Modern Art, the video is shown continuously in the Edward John Noble Education Center.

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*Catalog: The Drawings of Roy Lichtenstein by Bernice Rose. Includes chronology of works; biographical outline; and bibliography. Catalog of works in exhibition by Elizabeth Richebourg Rea. 86 color and 79 black-and-white illustrations. 200 pages. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Clothbound, distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, \$37.50; paperbound, \$17.95.

No. 20

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