

The Museum of Modern Art

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FACT SHEET

EXHIBITION HIGH AND LOW: MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE

DATES October 7, 1990 - January 15, 1991

ORGANIZATION Kirk Varnedoe, Director, Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art; and Adam Gopnik, Art Critic, The New Yorker

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FOCUS This exhibition addresses the relationship between modern art and popular and commercial culture. From Paris prior to World War I to New York today, this dialogue has been central to the modern visual experience. Although many historians have attempted to analyze this subject--especially since the advent of Pop art--this is the first exhibition to examine in depth this pervasive phenomenon.

CONTENT Concentrating on painting and sculpture, the exhibition is divided into four basic themes: Graffiti, Caricature, Comics, and Advertising. Over 250 works by approximately fifty artists show the varieties of appropriation on the one hand, and transformation on the other, through which "high" art has borrowed from "low," and vice-versa, throughout the twentieth century.

HIGH AND LOW begins with the Cubists--who first directly incorporated into art elements of advertising, popular press, and everyday objects--and continues through the past decade, in which the imagery of consumer society and the modes of mass communication have been of central importance to younger artists.

The exhibition establishes the lineage from Picasso's collages to the work of Kurt Schwitters and Joseph Cornell to early Pop art and eventually to such recent work as that of Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. Similarly, the lineage of Marcel Duchamp's readymade objects is traced through Surrealist works such as Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup to Claes Oldenburg's object-monuments to the recent appropriation works of Jeff Koons.

In relation to modern artists' attention to graffiti, the exhibition examines in depth those instances--as in work by Robert Rauschenberg and Cy Twombly--in which the formation of new artistic languages has had a fundamental connection to sources in popular culture. In treating a theme such as

