

!HIGH & LOW!

MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE

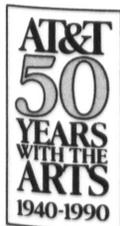
For Immediate Release
October 1990

HIGH AND LOW: MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE OPENS OCTOBER 7 AT THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

HIGH AND LOW: MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE, a major exhibition addressing the relationship between the individual artistic imagination and the world of popular and commercial culture in the modern era, opens at The Museum of Modern Art on October 7, 1990, and continues through January 15, 1991. The exhibition was organized by Kirk Varnedoe, director of the Department of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art, and Adam Gopnik, staff writer and art critic, *The New Yorker*, and is sponsored by AT&T. An indemnity for the exhibition has been received from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

HIGH AND LOW: MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE begins in Paris prior to World War I and continues to New York today, recounting a dialogue central to the modern visual experience. The exhibition concentrates on painting and sculpture and is divided into four categories: graffiti, caricature, comics, and the broad domain of advertising, including newspaper ads, billboards, catalogues, and sales displays.

In conjunction with the exhibition is SIX EVENINGS OF PERFORMANCE: LAURIE ANDERSON, ERIC BOGOSIAN, BONGWATER (WITH ANN MAGNUSON & KRAMER), DAVID CALE, BRIAN ENO (A LECTURE), SPALDING GRAY. Organized by RoseLee Goldberg, author of *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (1988), the performance series features artists whose work in the media of performance explores the relationship between art and popular culture.



The Museum of Modern Art, New York
October 7, 1990-January 15, 1991

The Art Institute of Chicago
February 23-May 12, 1991

The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles
June 23-September 15, 1991

Richard E. Oldenburg, director of The Museum of Modern Art, stated, "Once again, we take great pleasure in saluting AT&T for its extremely generous support of our programs. In 1984, AT&T sponsored AN INTERNATIONAL SURVEY OF RECENT PAINTING AND SCULPTURE and, in 1989, AMERICAN MOVIEMAKERS, a major film retrospective and restoration program. It now makes it possible for us to present to the public not only the HIGH AND LOW exhibition and publications, but also the performance series."

Robert E. Allen, chairman and chief executive officer of AT&T, said, "AT&T is pleased to join once again with The Museum of Modern Art. HIGH AND LOW: MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE is the highlight of our fifty-year celebration of AT&T's association with the arts. This long-awaited and thought-provoking exhibition is certain to be a source of major interest and discussion for years to come."

In HIGH AND LOW, over 250 works of painting and sculpture by approximately fifty artists are shown in relation to examples of newspapers, advertisements, sales catalogues, and comics. Installed on both floors of the Museum's temporary exhibition galleries, the exhibition demonstrates 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.

According to Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, "The story of the interplay between modern art and popular culture is one of the most important aspects of the history of art in our epoch. It was central to what made modern art modern at the start of this century, and it has continued to be crucial to the work of many younger artists in the last decade."

The advertising section of HIGH AND LOW begins on the Museum's main level with Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque and their contemporaries, who first directly incorporated into art elements of advertising, the popular press, and everyday objects. In contrast to the small, private world of the Cubists, artists such as Robert Delaunay and Fernand Léger were attracted to billboards, with their raw color and huge letters, as oversized forms of public communication. For them, this medium of advertising epitomized the competitiveness and dynamism of modern times.

In the early part of the century, advertising seemed an effective new way of changing society for a generation of artists who were trying to create a new style in the context of an emerging modernity. During the 1920s, the Russian Constructivist Aleksandr Rodchenko turned modern art to the service of the state by creating advertisements and packaging for Soviet products.

The advertising section establishes a lineage from Picasso's collages through the work of Kurt Schwitters and Joseph Cornell to early Pop art. Similarly, the descendency of Marcel Duchamp's readymade objects is traced through Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup to the everyday products transformed into sculpture by Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg and into monuments by Claes Oldenburg. Installed in the final gallery in this section is James Rosenquist's *F-111*, a room-sized masterwork of the mid-1960s that draws directly on advertising techniques and images for a powerful social message.

Beginning the Museum's presentation on the second level is graffiti, a type of seamy, untutored public "writing," which had been all but ignored by artists prior to the advent of Surrealism in the 1920s. It was not until the 1940s and 1950s that graffiti came to develop its most pointed connections

with modern art. Jean Dubuffet associated the crude language of anonymous street vandals with the most basic energy of art. The advent of Abstract Expressionism helped such artists as Antoni Tàpies, Cy Twombly, and Robert Rauschenberg to see in the gestural freedom of graffiti the possibility of a new artistic language. Rather than identify with new forms such as advertising, these artists saw the potential for poetic expression in something perhaps older than writing itself.

Although caricature, like graffiti, is a language that has existed, it has its origins within art, as the artist's alternative language. In the *Portrait of Gertrude Stein*, Picasso brought to painting the kind of physical deformations he had been practicing in his sketchbooks, creating a revolution in face-making that blurred forever the line between caricature and conventional portraiture. His example allowed for artists to turn the low or entertainment side of their work into the serious or high side. Portraits by Dubuffet of the late 1940s, the mirror of France after the occupation, use a caricatural style to convey an extreme psychic intensity. René Magritte and Constantin Brancusi employed the caricatural tradition in a different way in their "body/face transformations," making faces in the shape of human bodies as a way of expressing a vision of the unconscious.

The exhibition returns to a specifically modern phenomena by considering comic strips and comic books. It explores the affinities between Joan Miró's Surrealist nocturnes and the simplified language of George Herriman's *Krazy Kat* cartoons. It shows how Roy Lichtenstein found source material in *True Romance* and the *Fighting G.I.'s* comics, and further manipulated the images to make them more powerful. In the next decade, another comic vein of burlesque realism began to attract "underground" cartoonists, in particular R. Crumb.

The late paintings of Philip Guston also explored the potential of this imagery. Guston's adaptation of the comic-strip vernacular to conjure a personal sense of melancholy reveals how the language of comedy can become the language of tragedy.

The final section of the exhibition is devoted to contemporary work, indicating the dramatic changes in the way artists have invoked popular culture over the past two decades. Elizabeth Murray's paintings with their elements of comic drawing, Jeff Koons's paralyzed and armored metal objects, and Jenny Holzer's electric display boards reveal old forms reincarnated in a changed spirit, often reflective of a shift toward a skepticism about the mass culture that had previously seemed so energizing.

The exhibition curators write, "We have seen that high art in our century, far from having a unified 'project' or direction, has always included the most disparate attitudes, intentions, gestures, and critiques; and that the forms and intentions of advertising, graffiti, or comics have been diverse, and subject to varying rhythms of change. Between these two general zones there has been, instead of a rigidly fixed line, a constant series of transgressions and redirections, in which the act of an individual imagination has been able to alter in a moment the structure of the high-to-low relationship."

In conjunction with the exhibition, a Thursday-evening lecture series will be held at 8:30 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Scheduled are Mr. Varnedoe (October 25), Mr. Gopnik (November 1), and Robert Rosenblum, Professor, The Institute of Fine Arts, New York University (November 8). Tickets are \$8, members \$7, and students \$5. For more information, call the Department of Education, 212 708-9795.

The schedule for SIX EVENINGS OF PERFORMANCE is as follows: Brian Eno (October 23), Bongwater (October 30), Spalding Gray (November 6), David Cale (November 20), Eric Bogosian (December 4), and Laurie Anderson (January 8). All performances take place on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. in the Roy and Niuta Titus Theater 1. Tickets, which go on sale October 7 at the Museum's Lobby Information Desk, are \$15.00.

Following its New York opening, the exhibition travels to The Art Institute of Chicago (February 23 - May 12, 1991) and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (June 23 - September 15, 1991).

This year, AT&T celebrates fifty years of association with the arts -- a partnership that formally began in 1940 with the birth of *The Telephone Hour* on radio. HIGH AND LOW: MODERN ART AND POPULAR CULTURE represents the centerpiece exhibition in this celebration.

* * *

PUBLICATIONS *High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* by Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik. 464 pages. 220 color and 405 black-and-white illustrations, with three foldouts. Extensive bibliography by Matthew Armstrong and Fereshteh Daftari. Published by The Museum of Modern Art. Hardbound, distributed by Harry N. Abrams, Inc., \$60.00; paperbound, \$29.95, available in The MoMA Book Store.

Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low. Edited and with an introduction by Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik. Essays by John Bowlt, Lynn Cooke, Lorenz Eitner, Irving Lavin, Peter Plagens, Robert Rosenblum, Roger Shattuck, Robert Storr, and Jeffrey Weiss. Copublished by The Museum of Modern Art and Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Paperbound, \$29.95, available in The MoMA Book Store.

Contact for The Museum of Modern Art: Jeanne Collins/Jessica Schwartz/Edna Goldstaub, Department of Public Information, 212 708-9750.

Contact for AT&T: Zack Manna, corporate marketing services director, AT&T, 212 605-6721, or Pamela Johnson/Alan Cohen/Lucy Kraus, 212 490-8200. No. 80