

Draw Like A Machine

Pop Art
1952-1975



Draw Like a Machine: Pop Art, 1952–1975 explores the innovative methods of draftsmanship pioneered by the leading practitioners associated with American Pop, one of the most significant art movements of the 20th century. During this time, as gestural and expressionistic mark-making became less prominent, artists experimented with commonplace images and processes borrowed from print advertising in their work. At times, these strategies were intended to obscure the hand of the artist in unique works that can appear to be made by mass reproduction. This exhibition brings together drawings that bridge the seeming contradiction between the manual and the mechanical, upending the traditionally assumed connection drawing has to the hand of the artist. The exhibition primarily features works from the museum's permanent collection, alongside select local loans.

In a 1963 interview, Andy Warhol declared that he wanted to “be a machine” and “machine-like” in his art practice. To this end, he pioneered the use of the blotted line in works like *Standing Man*, ca. 1952, in which he laid a sheet of paper against a freshly inked mark, removed the paper, and then continued drawing atop a now pressed and faded line. Warhol repeated this action dozens of times, uniting both drawing and printmaking in the single sheet. As unique drawings that resemble printed images, Warhol's blotted line drawings both engage and mimic the ephemera of consumer culture.

Roy Lichtenstein similarly brought together drawing and printmaking in works like *Steak*, 1963. Here, a thick and continuous contour line sets off a single object from the blank paper. Details are omitted and replaced with Ben Day dots of equal size and spacing, which are typically used to create tonal ranges in mechanical printing processes. In this particular drawing, Lichtenstein drew the dots through a perforated screen placed upon the sheet to provide texture and variation. The final effect is an image that hovers between the lush surfaces of hand-applied graphite and rote reproduction.

Warhol and Lichtenstein, alongside other artists of this movement like James Rosenquist, Ed Ruscha, and Idelle Weber, were of a generation of students in the United States who emerged from colleges and universities that increasingly bridged the disciplines of fine art and industrial design, especially in foundational courses like drawing. This

approach made them well versed in the art of commercial illustration, and many graduated to hold jobs in this field alongside their art practices. For instance, Rosenquist worked for years as a sign-painter, reproducing well-known slogans and imagery onto billboards. In *Untitled*, 1975, he displays this skillset by including an image of Pegasus, the mythological flying horse, in its stylization as the logo for Mobil Oil. Here, Rosenquist placed this symbol, which adorned all of the company's products and gas stations for decades, atop a rocker base as though it were a child's toy.

Other drawings in the exhibition foreground the alluring visual advertising strategies that were developed by leading marketing firms of the day to direct consumer spending amidst the postwar proliferation of available goods. These include extreme close-ups and the juxtaposition of textures. For example, Tom Wesselmann's *Study for Small Smoker No. 4*, 1969, depicts a mouth releasing a plume of smoke, both fragmenting and eroticizing the female form. Marjorie Strider, in her drawing *Party*, 1973, contrasts a gleaming aluminum soda can with an unidentifiable pink substance foaming out and around the container.

Other artists during this era further investigated and entangled these lines between art and commerce. For her work *The Stock Market*, 1962, Chryssa took a discarded newspaper printing plate that detailed the daily financial returns and used it as a stamp across the sheet. Decontextualized from their attendant commodities and companies, the values take on an absurdist quality in their hand-wrought repetition. As another example, Ed Kienholz began a series of drawings like *For \$16.00*, 1969, that solely feature a stenciled dollar amount on paper, with the intention of the work being sold for that price. Acts such as this, where the aesthetic of the art became secondary to the idea driving the work, paved the way for artists to extend the conceptual bounds of their practices.

Informed by an era in which visual art was integrated into popular culture, artists exploited graphic strategies harnessed by the working creatives of the day—the admen, the illustrators, the sign painters—to critique and subvert the very authority of the medium. “I am for an artist that vanishes, turning up in a white cap painting signs or hallways,” commented Claes Oldenburg in 1961 on this subsuming of art into life, of artist into art worker.

Curated by Kelly Montana, Assistant Curator, Menil Drawing Institute.

This exhibition is generously supported by Angela and William Cannady; Catherine Miller in memory of Marcy Taub Wessel; Indigo Natural Resources; Ann and Mathew Wolf Drawing Exhibition Fund; Clare Casademont and Michael Metz; John R. Eckel, Jr. Foundation; Linda and George Kelly; Susanne and William E. Pritchard III; Leslie and Shannon Sasser; and the City of Houston through Houston Arts Alliance.

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Exhibition Dates

October 29, 2021–March 13, 2022