

Art and Idea After WW II

Pop Art and the rise of
consumerism.

REVIEW_MODERNISM

While European Modernism (Cubism, Surrealism, Dada) thrived in Europe, The New York School (also called, Abstract Expressionism) is often considered the first truly 'American Movement'.

Because WW I and WW II were both fought as ground wars in Europe, European cities were destroyed.

New York became the center of the art world as artists in Paris, London and Germany fled Europe to escape the Nazi's and came to New York.



**Jackson Pollock, *Number One, 1950*
(*Lavender Mist*) 1947 and 1950**

Painted in an old barn-turned-studio next to a small house on the East End of Long Island.

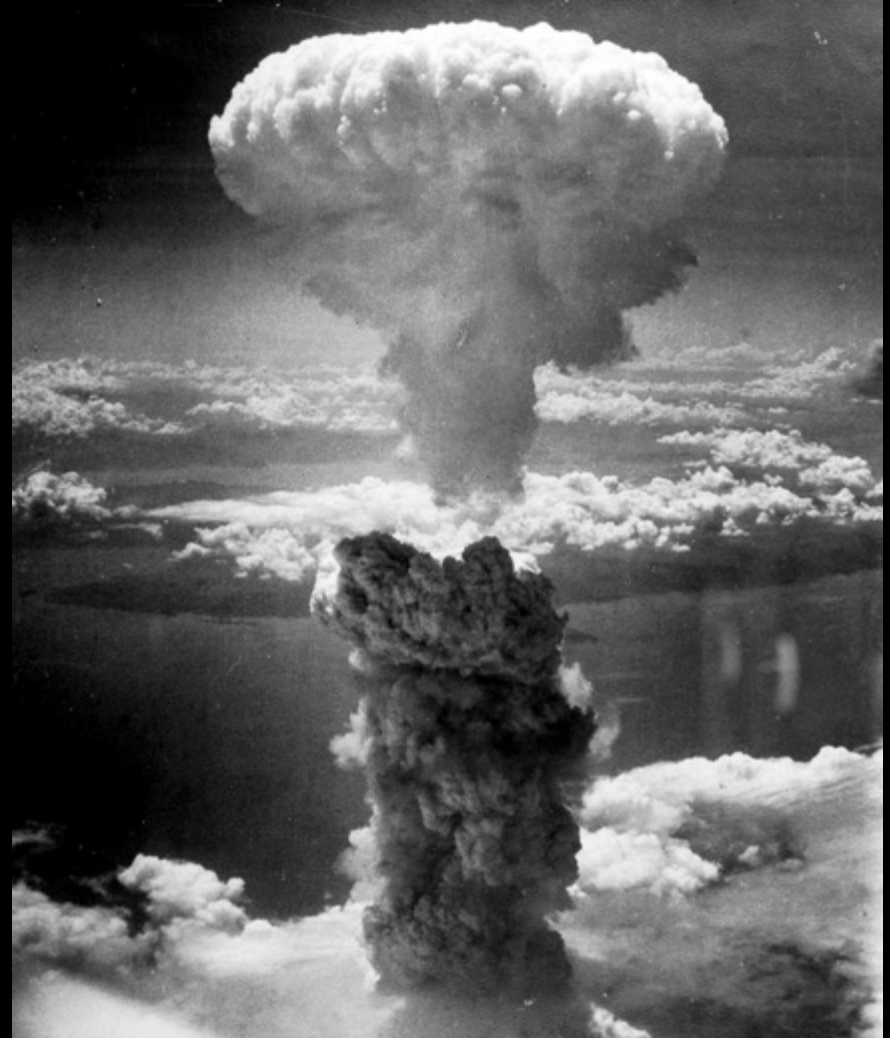
New York School or Abstract Expressionism

REVIEW_ NEW YORK SCHOOL

Birthered out of the **atrocities of the Second World War**, including the **atom bomb** and the horrors of the **Nazi Holocaust**, the New York School (or Abstract Expressionism) was also influenced by **European avant-garde** ideas as they bumped up against the more pragmatic social and political ones in America of the 1940's.

Prior to the War, the Ashcan School was thought to be the most radical in the U.S.

A new style emerges after the War.

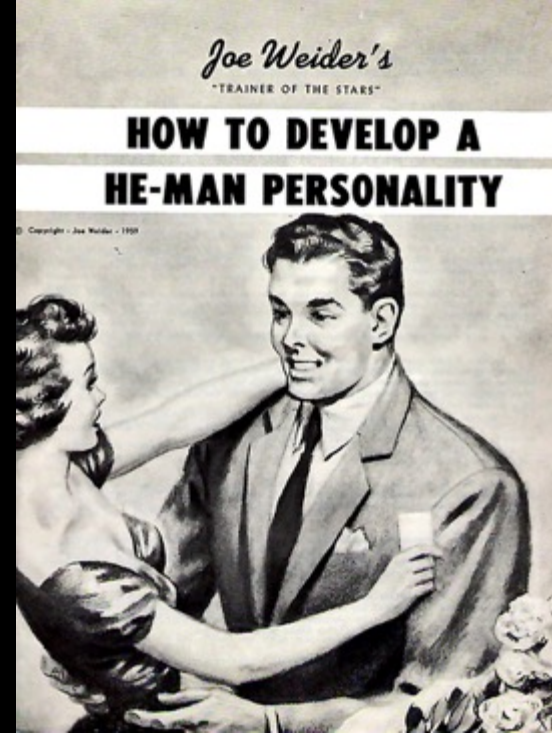


HISTORIC CONTEXT

For the politically uncertain times of the cold war and nuclear power, Existentialism's emphasis on the development of **the individual** human being who was trying to live fully in an absurd world, **fueled nationalistic ideals**.

At the same time, **the Modern Man** subject which reinforced models of self as essentially autonomous, integral, rational, and effectual was actually faltering under pressure from political and social conflict and change.

This meant it needed to be shored up. **That happened in films, advertising books and art.**



Popular book from 1959 by well-known body builder and Western Movie still.



CONTEXT

Five million women entered the workforce between 1940 and 1945.

Jobs were available because men had left to fight in World War II.

Women held jobs in defense plants, aircraft industry and factories as well as office jobs.

After the war, they were expected to return to their 'rightful place' in the home even though 75% wanted to continue working.



Women leaving a factory and Eastine Cowner working on the SS George Washington.



The New York School

Last class we ended with these two directions in Post War art that were the New York School- Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting.

These movements were not influenced by Dada. But we see the influence return in the the next generation.



©Estate of Hans Namuth



Mark Rothko, Orange and Yellow, 1956

Pollock's canvases became surfaces, which simply recorded his passage. Using fluid paint poured from the can, unconscious processes, as opposed to conscious ones, were accessed.

Pollock working, his wife, the artist Lee Krasner sitting in the background.

CONTEXT: 1950s-60s

The artists of the second generation post WWII, rejected the idea of personal expression (as in Abstract Expressionism) and devised ways to reinsert life into art.

The ideas of Dada, especially chance encounter and reinserting life into art, manifests in of the late 50's and early 60's.

Media, particularly TV and magazines influence artists of the post war era.

From 1947-1957 the number of televisions in the US jumped from 10,000 to 40,000,000, putting Sema, Alabama and Saigon, Vietnam in everyone's living room.



Here's Mr. Showmanship himself - Cecil B. DeMille - with the Magnavox Big Picture TV at home with his family.

Magnavox graces America's finest homes

Things which makes many American homes envious is television, and magnificent Big Picture TV ranks highest in the list. Living is a daily habit. For Magnavox, the showpieces inside and out, combining advanced engineering with stunning cabinetry of heirloom quality. Each superb furniture piece is the ideal sounding chamber for glorious Magnavox tone. Sharp, clear Magnavox pictures are specially filtered for pleasing contrast. No matter how proud your home, or how much you'll find a Magnavox meant just great value at one of the finest Magnavox in your classified room. The Magnavox Company, Fort Worth, Texas.

Better sight...better sound...better buy

the magnificent
Magnavox
television radio-phonograph

Ultra High Frequency Units Readily Attachable

Ads in the 1950s were sexist to say the least, but reflected mainstream middleclass white values.



If your husband ever finds out
you're not "store-testing" for fresher coffee...



It's nice to have a girl around the house.

Though she was a tiger lady, our hero didn't have to fire a shot to floor her. After one look at his **Mr. Leggs** slacks, she was ready to have him walk all over her. That noble styling sure soothes the savage heart! If you'd like your own doll-to-doll carpeting, hunt up a pair of these he-man **Mr. Leggs** slacks. Such as our new automatic wash wear blend of 65% "Dacron" and 35% rayon—incomparably wrinkle-resistant. About \$12.95 at plush-carpeted stores.

Dacron For Fall!

Get yourself a new pair of **Mr. Leggs**

© The Dacron Regenerators Trade Mark

THOMSON COMPANY, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York 19, N. Y.

CONTEXT_SEGREGATION

Levittown was the first truly mass-produced suburb (1947-51) and is widely regarded as the archetype for postwar suburbs throughout the country. It reflected this mainstream mentality that exemplified the attitudes of post war US.

In accordance with this policy, the buying agreement signed by all those who purchased homes in Levittown stated that the property could not be used or rented by any individuals other than those of the Caucasian race.



HISTORY—Beat Poets

To understand the next art movement in the U. S. it's important to look at some more history.

Rather than Painters, it was poets, who set the stage for the next direction. The “Beat” generation rejected the existential motives of the Abstract Expressionist artists. They railed against mainstream American values in poems and life style.

The poets raged against mainstream America.

*“I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked...Burned alive in their innocent flannel suits on Madison Avenue...or run down by the drunken taxicabs of Absolute Reality”
Howell--Ginsberg 1955*

In 1965, Ginsberg was ejected from both Czechoslovakia and Cuba—the latter for allegedly hitting on Che Guevara.

ALLEN MEETS THE BEATS

SHORTLY AFTER ARRIVING AT COLUMBIA, Ginsberg met Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs, who would become his lifelong friends and greatest influences. Both were older than him (Kerouac by four years and Burroughs by 12), and they introduced young Allen to the fast-paced New York nightlife. During the next few years, Ginsberg developed a love for jazz, experimented with drugs, and became openly homosexual. He also became passionate about writing poetry—dashing his father's hopes for law school to pursue the artistic life, now known as Beat.

If you were expecting this to be the part where Ginsberg gets famous, then you're thinking of the wrong literary movement. The Beat lifestyle promised adventure and artistic wanderlust, not pop stardom. Ginsberg finally graduated from Columbia in 1948 (six years after he started), but the dead-end jobs he cycled through afterward didn't signal much professional promise. His love life around that time wasn't any better. Abortive love affairs with the likes of Burroughs and Beat icon Neal Cassady eventually drove Ginsberg into the Merchant Marines in an attempt to escape a persistent melancholy.

Then things hit rock bottom. Caught with a car full of stolen goods belonging to his roommate, Ginsberg was court-ordered to spend eight months in a psychiatric ward. In true Ginsbergian style, however, he managed to turn institutional lemons into lemonade. He met Carl Solomon, a fellow



Many of these poets were openly gay.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

These poets saw a dehumanizing prison of mainstream values reflected in advertising, TV and media, in which the underside of society was defined out of existence.

Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and Ferlinghetti--raged against the complacent duplicity of fifties mass culture. The beats, aided by alcohol, drugs, jazz and Zen Buddhism, dropped out of America celebrated by the Saturday Evening Post.

In the process, they created their own vocabulary to reappropriate their American experience---**the struggle against conformity, mechanization and materialism**



Post Magazine covers, 1950s.

The white American middle class dream.

CONTEXT_SEXUALITY

In New York City in the 1950s, there were laws against homosexuals. The law against 'degenerate disorderly conduct' applied to those perceived as appearing homosexual through dress, hairstyle, deportment or topics of conversation. Two men were actually arrested on what they were discussing at the opera.

Sexual secrecy in general and the secret of homosexuality pervaded postwar American culture.

Robert Rauschenberg's work promoted an openness to external events, including references to his own sexuality.



Many male artists were open and or closeted homosexuals in the 1950s and 60s.

Tennessee Williams— Writer
Robert Rauschenberg, Artist

Jasper Johns— Artist

John Cage— Musician

Merce Cunningham— Dancer

And most were acquainted with each other.

Before full blown Pop emerged, we see the work of the Pre-Pop or Neo-Dada artists like Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns

Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns believed that humans don't originate subject matter but rather process it...interpret it. Subject Matter is influenced by CULTURE. (mass media)

Influenced by semiotics, the idea that **signs** mean different things in different contexts.



This painting by Jasper Johns uses the image of the American Flag as it's subject but the large scale encaustic painting looks textured and aestheticized. On a flagpole, it's a flag. In a museum it's art.

JASPER JOHNS, Flag, 1954-1955, dated on reverse 1954. Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric mounted on plywood, 3' 6 1/4" x 5' 5/8". Museum of Modern Art, New York (gift of Philip Johnson in honor of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.). Copyright © Jasper Johns/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.

JASPER JOHNS

The the flag is a sign, the target is a sign.

However, the plaster casts of bits of the human body, set in their boxes above the painting, are specimens, like fossils or even more, like words, signs that stand for classes of things.

"Ear", "hand", "penis": one would like to see them as elements of a portrait, but they cannot be read in that way.

They are images turning into signs.

Johns, *target with plaster casts*, 1955



PRE-POP OR NEO DADA

The reaction against what was thought of as the internal expression of the New York School, together with mainstream American values, emerged as Pop art.

Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, both gay men, began creating artworks about everyday subjects out of everyday materials.



In this work, *Bed*, Rauschenberg is mocking Abstract Expressionism's painting style, while attempting to bring the real world back into art. This piece, as many others of his, can also be read as referencing his own sexuality. Commenting on the bed as a place of sexual connection, as a closeted gay man, the drips of Abstract Expressionism are now used to imply bodily functions.



Robert Rauschenberg, *Bed*, 1955, pillow, bedding, paint, graphite.
MoMA— go see it.

Rauschenberg did his own version of the 'Odalisk,' a theme seen in earlier art history. He knew what he was doing. Only this time, using images from 'girlie' magazines, commercial symbols, comics, and a stuffed chicken and pillow, he references art, popular culture and sexist advertisements like this one.



This is a Sculpture. That means it is 3 dimensional. Not flat like a painting.

Rauschenberg, *Odalisk*, 1955-8.



7.6 Old Gold cigarettes advertisement, *Life Magazine*, April 27, 1953, p.3.

Sexist Cigarette Advertisement, 1953



Rauschenberg using found objects from real life together with printed media images and hand-made elements addressed a reality that everything (all signs) come together to create meaning. Each has the same importance.

His work also promoted an openness to external events. Highly influenced by Duchamp, he used everyday objects.

His work brought art and life together in one event.

Rauschenberg, Canyon,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SSulycqZH-U>



Two other important figures were John Cage and Merce Cunningham. Friends with Johns and Rauschenberg, Cage was influenced by Eastern philosophy and experimental music of Arnold Schonberg. Based on the work of Marcel Duchamp, the IChing (Book of Changes) and Zen Buddhism, he emphasized the element of 'chance' in art.

Cunningham formed Merce Cunningham Dance Company at Black Mountain College in 1953. With a radical approach to space, time and technology, the Company has forged a distinctive style, reflecting Cunningham's interest in illuminating the near limitless possibility for human movement.

Both were interested in infusing art with life.



Go to the next lecture to read about full blown POP.