

HALL OF MIRRORS

ROY LICHTENSTEIN AND THE FACE OF PAINTING  
IN THE 1960S

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THE MIT PRESS  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS  
LONDON, ENGLAND

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This book was set in Bembo by Graphic Composition, Inc., Bogart, Georgia, and was printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bader, Graham.

Hall of mirrors : Roy Lichtenstein and the face of painting in the 1960s / Graham Bader.

p. cm. — (October books)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-262-02647-5 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Lichtenstein, Roy, 1923–1997—Criticism and interpretation. 2. Mirrors in art. 3. Pop art—United States. I. Title.

ND237.L627B33 2010

759.13—dc22

2009022527

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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LICHTENSTEIN BEFORE POP

*Gene Swenson:* Where did your ideas about art begin?

*Lichtenstein:* The ideas of Professor Hoyt Sherman on perception were my earliest important influence and still affect my ideas of visual unity.

*Swenson:* Perception?

*Lichtenstein:* Yes. Organized perception is what art is all about.<sup>1</sup>

—*Roy Lichtenstein interviewed by Gene Swenson, 1963*

The question of where to begin, we can see from the epigraph above, is easy enough. Hoyt Sherman—Roy Lichtenstein’s MFA advisor at Ohio State University and lifelong friend and mentor—not only provided the initial spark for Lichtenstein’s earliest adult work in the late 1940s, but continued to explain for the artist, even at the height of pop in 1963, “what art is all about.” Lichtenstein’s lifelong commitment to Sherman’s ideas was expressed in myriad forms up until the former’s death in 1997: Sherman is a constant presence in Lichtenstein’s interviews and statements, and he gave his name not only to the artist’s eldest son (David Hoyt Lichtenstein), but also to the recently christened Hoyt L. Sherman Studio Arts Center at Ohio State University, underwritten in large part by a gift from Lichtenstein himself.<sup>2</sup> And this is not to mention Lichtenstein’s art,

which betrays to the very end Sherman's foundational importance as so clearly expressed in the much-cited interview with Gene Swenson excerpted above.

Sherman, then, will be our starting point—as, it should be noted, he has become for an increasing number of Lichtenstein studies. Most notably, Bonnie Clearwater's 2001 exhibition catalog *Roy Lichtenstein: Inside/Outside* traces the significance of Sherman's perceptual theories throughout Lichtenstein's career, while Michael Lobel's 2002 book *Image Duplicator: Roy Lichtenstein and the Emergence of Pop Art* carefully dissects Sherman's complicated role in the emergence of early pop.<sup>3</sup> Both Clearwater and Lobel, however, move straight from Sherman's pedagogy to Lichtenstein's later (that is to say, pop and post-pop) work, paying only limited attention to the artist's initial contact with his mentor's aesthetic program in the 1940s and his gradual shift, a decade later, toward his first pop canvases of 1961. Accordingly, these two points of inquiry—initial contact and extended transition—will be the focus of the present chapter, which examines Lichtenstein's studies with Sherman at Ohio State from 1946 to 1949 and his conflicted move toward pop over the half-decade stretch of 1956–61. My central arguments can be stated right here at the outset: that Lichtenstein's earliest understandings of successful artistic work as outlined by Sherman held this to be rooted in a primary *corporeality* of the aesthetic act, and to have as its goal a program of integration that stretched from individual artist to social whole; and that the specific form of Lichtenstein's pop production resulted from his extended struggle, at the close of the 1950s, to reconcile his commitment to Sherman's seemingly anachronistic aesthetic program with the shifting realities of advanced painting as he encountered them in these years. If pop provided the eventual solution to this challenge, Lichtenstein only came to realize this after first discarding, and then radically reformulating, the lessons of Sherman's pedagogy. Just what those lessons were, and how pop emerged equally from their realization and refusal, will be the focus of the following pages.

## I PERCEPTION ORGANIZED

Lichtenstein's art studies at Ohio State spanned the better part of a decade: outside of a roughly two-year tour of service in World War II from 1943 to 1945,

he was at the university from 1940 to 1949, when he earned his MFA degree under Sherman's guidance.<sup>4</sup> His eventual advisor, it is clear, was an immediately powerful presence for the young artist. Discussing his own arrival at OSU in an extensive 1963 interview with the collector Richard Brown Baker, Lichtenstein commented that "this Mr. Sherman, Hoyt L. Sherman was at that time a sort of guiding spirit in the school. [. . .] I had the feeling he knew just what he was saying and if I could only find out what he was talking about I knew it would be important."<sup>5</sup> It took Lichtenstein, by his own admission, years to figure out just what Sherman was saying. And if the artist's eventual recognition thus likely occurred only after his return from military service, the reasons for this delayed reception are clear enough. Sherman published his most significant pedagogical primer, *Drawing by Seeing: A New Development in the Teaching of the Visual Arts through the Training of Perception*, in 1947, and Lichtenstein began a three-year stint as Sherman's teaching assistant—and thus initiated what was surely his most intense engagement with his mentor's ideas—first in 1946. These two developments are related: Sherman's 1947 book was an outline of the methods and goals of the very same pedagogical program in which Lichtenstein was teaching, the basic terms of which would come to dominate the latter's own pedagogical and artistic practice for decades to come.<sup>6</sup>

What were these terms? According to *Drawing by Seeing*, the "essential ingredients" of "great" art could be understood as follows: (1) "the chief element [uniting great works of art] is the degree to which drawings and paintings achieve a satisfactory pictorial organization"; (2) satisfactory pictorial organization "depends . . . upon seeing in such a way that all points are related to a focal point"; and (3) "The artist needs to be able to see the whole field at which he is looking and to see it in such a way as to place the parts in the whole through referral of the parts to a focal point."<sup>7</sup> So: pictorial organization; focal point; unified seeing and composition. These simple elements, for Sherman, constituted the cornerstone of both Western art history and contemporary art education. Successful contemporary artists, he concluded, had to learn to work as had Poussin, Rembrandt, and Cézanne before them: to pursue "unity in seeing, unity in the process of seeing-and-drawing, unity in the total creative act."<sup>8</sup> Figuration was implicitly at the center of all this; for the essential task of the

artist was not just to draw, but to draw *what is seen*—to leave a record of, and lesson in, integrated perceptual experience.

The centerpiece of Sherman's pursuit of these goals was the flash lab, a seventy-foot-long structure on the OSU campus specially converted for his teaching. The facility was so named because the instruction that took place there was built around the "flashing" of images with a tachistoscope (originally for a fraction of a second, progressively longer as the course continued) on a large screen at the front of the light-sealed structure. After each image was shown, students were asked to draw, in absolute darkness, the figure they had seen. Beginning with simple abstract configurations, these flashed images grew increasingly complex over the course of each class session and the six-week program itself, eventually including old-master drawings and three-dimensional constructions assembled by Sherman and his assistants (among them Lichtenstein himself). As outlined in *Drawing by Seeing*, a rigidly organized curriculum was necessary to guarantee the success of the flash lab course: classes met five times each week for a total of six weeks; each class began with a ten-minute "warm-up" period during which music was played and students would "sing, whistle, or beat time" in the pitch-black room; exact arrangements for the positioning of the projection screen and student drawing tables were preset and altered slowly over the course of the program; and, most important, there was to be "no talk about drawing, about great artists, about the history of art, or about any other subjects which tend to establish verbalisms instead of drawing reactions."<sup>9</sup>

Sherman's flash lab was to operate as a well-oiled machine for producing efficient and unified vision, a space free from both corrupting "verbalisms" and disharmonious optical intrusions alike. The flip side of this distrust of any form of intellectualization was a foregrounding of the role of the body in producing successful works of art. The music at the start of each flash lab session, for instance (which continued for the full thirty-five minutes of class time at the start of the program and was slowly phased out as the course progressed), served to establish "rhythm" and "keep the body attuned to its full possibility of movement."<sup>10</sup> And the very centerpiece of flash lab instruction—the split between



1.1 Students in the flash lab, Ohio State University, c. 1943. Photo: The Ohio State University Photo Archives.

the “flash” of vision and the tactile act of drawing in darkness—was to focus attention on these distinct sensual “channels” so that their integration could be achieved by course’s end. By the conclusion of the six-week class, the distinction between drawing and seeing was to have been abolished—both in the program of instruction itself (for the tableaux to be represented would finally be shown *as* the students drew them, rather than flashed beforehand) and in the perceptual and compositional habits of individual students (as successful flash lab participants, so the plan went, would by then be converting “visual relations and reactions into kinesthetic and tactile relations and reactions,” and thus producing images of exemplary vitality and pictorial organization).<sup>11</sup> The body, in fact, can be seen as *the* central term of Sherman’s flash lab program: for students who completed the curriculum, seeing was to become an act of “reaching out and seizing” an object or scene, and composition itself a “kinesthetic expression of the whole body” liberated from cultural interference.<sup>12</sup>

Lobel, in his recent discussion of the flash lab course and its relevance for Lichtenstein’s later pop production, has suggested that “mechanical” is more apt than “kinesthetic” to describe the function of the artist’s body within Sherman’s aesthetic program. For Lobel, the flash lab functioned to foster a mode of aesthetic vision that was equally, if not primarily, automatic—in which students were transformed into “machine[s] that might record nothing but pure visual form.”<sup>13</sup> Focusing on Sherman’s advocacy of “monocular” vision (in which, as we have seen, all points of reference are related to a single focal point) and interest in the literal integration of drawing and seeing, Lobel concludes that the program of perceptual unity was in fact rooted in an absolute rejection of the bodily basis of perceptual and aesthetic activity. Thus, he concludes, “in Sherman’s theoretical project . . . the human body is seen as fundamentally deficient or flawed; the very corporeality of vision must be overcome (or perhaps more accurately, repressed) in order to reach the transcendent ideal of aesthetic vision.”<sup>14</sup> Following from this reading, Lobel sees Lichtenstein’s early pop oeuvre as dominated by the artist’s confrontation with this tension—by his ambivalent (and, we can assume, unwitting) working-through of the implicitly mechanistic basis of “perceptual unity” itself.



Lobel is certainly correct to stress this aporia at the root of Sherman's aesthetic agenda and Lichtenstein's necessarily ambivalent relation to his mentor. But the status of the body in Sherman's program, as I have indicated, was far more ambivalent than Lobel contends, as was the response of Sherman's most famous student to it. Consider, for instance, the following poem from Lichtenstein's 1949 MFA thesis, intended (so the artist claimed) as "a general expression of my feelings about painting":

Therefore, you must use your hand  
 To make the felt thing seen,  
 Rather than your eyes  
 To see to say.  
 Nor can you feel what you have seen  
 Until you see what you have felt.  
 The truth of nature's structure  
 Comes to you through work,  
 And is then projected through your eyes.  
 So looking without touching would uncover for you  
 None of the world's structure,  
 And things would remain only  
 Incomprehensible colors;  
 But you could fathom out  
 And understand the existence of things  
 With touch alone.  
 You must first feel, then see.  
 You must feel until you see.  
 You will see what you feel.<sup>15</sup>

These lines are not great poetry, but their intent is certainly clear. Artistic practice is seen as above all a sensual act (note that Lichtenstein denotes the nine poems that accompany his thesis's twenty plates as an "expression of my *feelings*

about painting”), in which the work itself is to serve as a mediating force in the dialectical interplay between subject and object, vision and touch. The act of painting, as Lichtenstein elaborates in his other thesis poems, is rooted in both historical precedent and the specifics of experience, with the final goal of the work of art being to “explain again the full world” to the artist (this from the fourth poem of the thesis), to realize a fleeting unity of subject and object that exists beyond words, beyond any single sense.<sup>16</sup>

Sherman’s call for a unification of hand and eye in the act of “drawing by seeing,” then, was originally understood by Lichtenstein not as advocacy of an “automatism . . . fully aligned with the machine,” as Lobel has argued, but as a summons for the artist to “let go,” to dissolve the boundaries that divorce tactile from visual sensation and, above all, the artist from the world he or she pictures.<sup>17</sup> Sherman himself uses precisely this language near the end of *Drawing by Seeing*:

[In artistic production] one . . . lets *himself* go, while responding to a concourse of kinesthetic, tactile, psychological, auditory, and optical sensations which somehow take order without the ego being there to boss it. They discover a new center of focus in themselves which allows all of themselves to blend in a harmonious relation with the universe around them.<sup>18</sup>

The aesthetic act is described here as a kind of sensual overflow, of which the work of art remains as a synthesis and material embodiment. The final unity effected by the artistic process, accordingly, was not limited to the internal conditions of the specific work or individual creative subject. Rather, as in Lichtenstein’s thesis poem, the most significant unity thus formed was one of artist and external world; as the controlling authority of the ego was weakened and ultimately withdrawn from the creative process, a reconciliation of subject and object was realized in which sensations flow into and “complete” the artist, producing the experience, Sherman wrote, of “a special kind of happiness which comes when a harmony is established among the many parts of oneself and between oneself and the universe.”<sup>19</sup>

My point in revisiting these lines is not to argue that the mechanistic imperative identified by Lobel was absent from Sherman's program—for it most certainly was not, as we will consider in more detail shortly—but rather to stress that the “automatism” of the flash lab course, particularly as the latter was understood by Lichtenstein, was in fact obscured by a more central celebration of the primary *corporeality* of aesthetic activity. The act of “reaching out and seizing” the world in the creation of works of art, furthermore, was understood by Sherman (and, by extension, Lichtenstein) to be an act of almost insurmountable synthesizing force. The painted surface was the space where these elements came together. It was in the integrated—what Lichtenstein termed “ground-directed”—canvas, as a space in which distinct sensory channels were fused and the disparate forms of the perceived world were transformed into the interlocking planes of successful composition, that aesthetic unity was held to be both accomplished and carried forward: for each image would henceforth serve as a model of integrative thought and action, and as a record of such accomplishment for generations of viewers to come.<sup>20</sup> *This* was the idea that consumed Lichtenstein upon completing his studies with Sherman in 1949, and that served as the guiding force for his work of the following decade.

Lichtenstein's pursuit of these principles began during his student years with images of fantasy landscapes and lush natural scenes but quickly turned, after he earned his MFA degree in 1949, to an intensive investigation of the pictorial rhetoric of early Americana. By 1951 he was focusing almost exclusively on cowboys and above all Native Americans, with an occasional early American military or political hero popping up in subsequent years. Many of these early-'50s paintings were produced after canonical images from American history, which Lichtenstein radically flattened and simplified into interlocking blocks of color and pattern consistent with the goals of “ground-directedness.”

Though this use of preexisting images may seem an odd fit with the aesthetic imperatives from which he was working at the time, Lichtenstein's early-'50s turn to the pictorial vocabulary of early Americana was a perfectly logical move. For if the unifying drive of Sherman's aesthetics began with the fusion of sensory channels in the act of “drawing by seeing,” its reach ultimately



1.2 *The Last of the Buffalo*, ca. 1951–52. Oil on canvas, 20 × 24 inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

stretched to the much broader cause of *cultural* integration as well. Like many Dewey-inspired thinkers in the early postwar period, Sherman understood the unifying impulse of successful works of art as transferable to the social sphere—“the concept,” as he concluded in *Drawing by Seeing*, “is integration all along the line.”<sup>21</sup> Though Lichtenstein’s teacher himself never stated it so directly, the eventual product of this understanding was the widely held proposal that successfully integrated paintings and drawings functioned as both symptom and cause of a unified culture. It is just this proposal that we see motivating Lichtenstein’s early-’50s canvases: in their transformation of well-worn images of a mythical national past into what Lichtenstein understood as the integrated forms of advanced contemporary art, these paintings sought not just to realize a unity of sight and touch and past and present, but to further the cause of American *social* cohesion as well.<sup>22</sup> It is no coincidence that Native American cultures, Lichtenstein’s primary iconographic focus throughout the 1950s, were celebrated by several of Sherman’s aesthetic compatriots as models of just such successful cultural integration, precisely for the manner in which they supposedly fused artistic practice and the most basic activities of everyday life.<sup>23</sup>

Such claims of individual and cultural integration sound quite grand for what are, most often, slight and only mildly interesting compositions. But as Lichtenstein’s repeated statements make clear, his early dedication to Sherman’s ideas was unequivocal, and there is little question he was well versed in the broader social goals to which these were connected. The bibliography to his 1949 MFA thesis is filled with texts that elaborate on the essential relationship between compositional form, individual personality, and cultural cohesion, including much-discussed books by Henry Schaefer-Simmern, Viktor Lowenfeld, and Susanne K. Langer. Lichtenstein, we can assume, was directed to these texts by Sherman himself, and he understood them as foundational enough to his emerging aesthetic aspirations that he chose to list them as the basis for what was, in no uncertain terms, his first declarative statement as an artist.

Schaefer-Simmern’s 1948 pedagogical primer *The Unfolding of Artistic Activity*, among the texts Lichtenstein included in his thesis bibliography, gives us a more precise picture of just what these aspirations entailed. The book,

which advocates and lays out a program for lifelong creative education, opens by declaring that

since each artistically formed thing reveals the order and balance that its maker has given it, we may also say that things artistically created have a formative effect upon their surroundings. In a community in which the unfolding of innate artistic abilities becomes a general educational factor, and in which the balanced personality, the whole man and not the specialist, is the aim, the formative values within artistic processes may become of fundamental importance. The effect that genuine artistic work may have upon man . . . has always been a driving force in the creation of unified cultures.<sup>24</sup>

The aim of “genuine artistic work,” in other words, is understood by Schaefer-Simmern to be the salvation of social life itself: compositional order and balance both offer evidence of and produce subjective “wholeness” and, in turn, unified cultures. Aesthetic activity, he thus argues, functions “as a weapon against the danger of mechanization and disintegration,” for “only by trying to grasp processes in their totality, in which single phenomena are indivisibly related to the meaning of the whole, may one reach a better understanding of life.”<sup>25</sup> The central opponent in this process, Schaefer-Simmern continues, is contemporary mass culture, characterized by what he describes as “the ‘unbearable squalor of Main Street’ and the chaotic designs and shapes in most of our commodities.”<sup>26</sup> Against such squalor, he concludes, the creation of unified works of art is nothing less than a pursuit of “the great task which faces all of us, the resurrection of a humanized world.”<sup>27</sup>

Now, Lichtenstein is not Schaefer-Simmern and Schaefer-Simmern is not Sherman, but my point here is simply this: that Lichtenstein’s repeated emphasis of the primacy of “visual unity” and “organized perception” to successful artistic work was a complicated matter, encompassing an ambitious and far-ranging set of concerns that stretched from the specificities of painterly process and form

to the most utopian-minded of cultural aims. And at the root of these concerns was a belief in the essential bodily integration constituting the artistic act itself, in which—if successful—diverse sensations were almost magically fused and the creative subject found him- or herself in a newly harmonious relation to the world perceived. This process, furthermore, was explicitly understood as a counter to the dangers of “chaotic” consumer culture, itself seen as a force of both cultural and individual fragmentation. Such earnest and far-ranging propositions, we can easily recognize, sound almost diametrically opposed to pop. But they must have been precisely what Lichtenstein was looking for as he set out on his artistic career in the late 1940s, eager to identify an “underlying, difficult-to-grasp principle about art” and entranced by the assured authority of Hoyt Sherman, whose expert voice he would continue to champion for decades.<sup>28</sup>

What, then, are we to make of the fact that Lichtenstein’s oeuvre from 1956 to 1961—fragmented, ever-shifting, increasingly abstract—appears to be a systematic dismantling of everything Sherman had ever taught him? And what is the significance of pop’s emergence as the ultimate product of this half-decade-long process, particularly given Lichtenstein’s subsequent and repeated references to Sherman’s central importance for his pop work? These two questions follow on one another: the first must be considered before the second can be adequately addressed. If pop emerged directly from Lichtenstein’s extended passage away from Sherman’s aesthetic dictates at the close of the 1950s, then retraversing this passage—tracing its material forms and aesthetic motivations—will be an essential first step to understanding both the significance and the complications of that emergence.

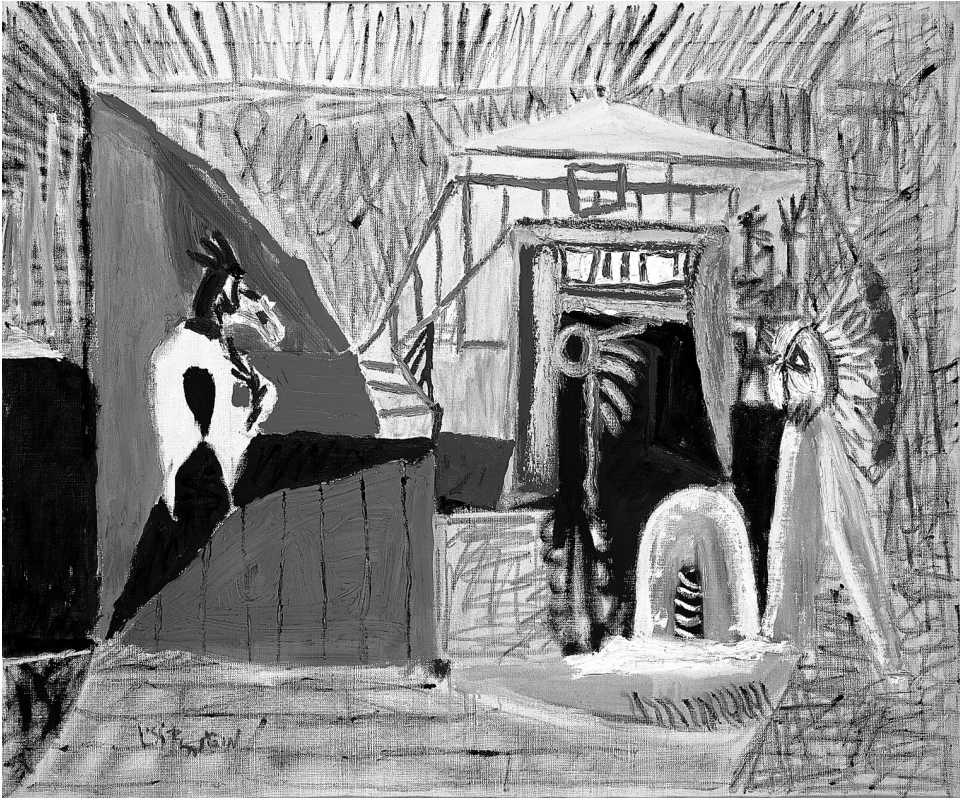
## II UNITY FRACTURED

Discussing his 1950s oeuvre with the critic John Jones in 1965, Lichtenstein described his developing realization of the limitations of his early work as a kind of trauma. “I got my Master’s in ’49,” he told Jones, “and I’ve been painting a long time, and you begin to believe in the qualities that you’re working

in and suddenly the change is really kind of traumatic.”<sup>29</sup> Although these comments have generally been understood as referring to the artist’s move into pop at the onset of the 1960s, their reference to Lichtenstein’s MFA degree of 1949 as a point of departure can more accurately direct our reading. The “traumatic change” of which the artist speaks is not his 1961 break with the abstract idiom he had then been working in only since 1958 (more on which later), but rather his initial moves, beginning in 1956, toward this very mode. For in the latter year, Lichtenstein initiated his definitive break from the tightly locked planar compositions that had occupied him since his earliest days with Sherman and began to explore his well-worn iconography of American heroes and Western landscapes through a rhetoric of planar *dissolution* rather than integration. Built around the artist’s familiar blocks of color and pattern, Lichtenstein’s 1956 paintings (first exhibited at Manhattan’s John Heller Gallery the following January) showed these elements not settling into place relative to a “focal point” to which they were all connected, but rather breaking apart under the touch of a newly introduced and often erratically applied freehand line.

These changes are perhaps nowhere so evident as in *Inside Fort Laramie (After Alfred Jacob Miller, 1837)*. If this painting’s central patchwork could be lifted from a Lichtenstein composition circa 1952, its perimeter fields of vigorous hatching, exposed canvas, and thinly applied color are unlike anything in the artist’s previous oeuvre. And indeed, the image appears to be built around precisely this opposition: the deep incisions by which these fields cut into Lichtenstein’s central form at top left and both lower and top right suggest an attack on the latter by the former, an attempt to infect the painting’s remaining flattened field with just such aggressive line and evocative depth. If this dramatic formal contrast follows from the nineteenth-century watercolor by Alfred Jacob Miller on which Lichtenstein’s composition is based, in which the spectator’s gaze into a busy and light-filled fort interior is framed by a spare and deeply shadowed entry portal, Lichtenstein has reversed the opposition of this original image.<sup>30</sup> For whereas Miller’s central courtyard illuminates its perimeter threshold and seemingly engulfs the two figures who stand before it—the work’s central tableau thus overwhelming and occupying this perimeter





1.3 *Inside Fort Laramie (After Alfred Jacob Miller, 1837)*, 1956. Oil on canvas, 30 × 36 inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

frame—Lichtenstein’s picture tells an opposite tale, one of perimeter blocks cutting into and seemingly dissolving the contiguous forms they surround.

This reversal of terms is particularly noteworthy because the subject of Miller’s image (and hence Lichtenstein’s as well) is not just the interior of Fort Laramie, but rather the act of looking—and particularly, *our* act of looking—at just this. Positioning its viewers behind two portal figures who clearly serve as spectatorial surrogates, the watercolor simultaneously invites us into and insists upon our separation from the courtyard it portrays. The image’s two foreground figures are equally absorbed within and paralyzed before this central scene, both engulfed in the fort’s streaming light and motionless before the barricade that blocks them from it. Even more specifically, we could speculate, Miller’s image concerns the act of looking at *painting*. For the space opening up at picture’s center resembles, more than anything, a painted image: just note the clearly delineated edges and resolutely frontal guardrail that frame this central tableau, making it appear to be stretched across, rather than flowing from, the architectural opening we see; or the disjunction in scale between the fort’s courtyard and the foreground portal (particularly evident if we consider the central foreground figure together with the donkey and rider visible through the guardrail to his left); or the shadows of the donkeys and figures in the left foreground of the courtyard, which simply stop once they meet the threshold of the passageway in which we (and our surrogate viewers) stand. These are speculative observations, of course; but regardless of what we consider the essential “subject” of Miller’s image to be, we can certainly describe the seeing it portrays as suggestive of what Lichtenstein might term painter’s vision: “organized perception” as a special mode of looking by which the world itself is seen as a prospective image, unified within the flattened field of the painted canvas.

Miller’s *Fort Laramie* could even be compared to photographs of Sherman’s flash lab at Ohio State, and the painting’s basic program—of figures looking from a darkened enclosure at an illuminated scene, the disparate figures of which have been unified within a single isolated tableau—understood as an illustration of his course’s essential conditions and goals. Seen in this light, the painting’s selection by Lichtenstein as a source betrays a moment of particular self-consciousness on the part of the artist, and the specific changes



1.4 Alfred Jacob Miller, *Interior of Fort Laramie*, 1858–60. Watercolor on paper, 11  $\frac{5}{8}$   $\times$  14  $\frac{3}{16}$  inches. Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.

made to it indicate something of his conflicted thoughts at the time. In place of Miller's absorptive and rigidly framed image-within-an-image—the painting's centrally placed fort interior, which flickers between two- and three-dimensionality and bathes our surrogates in its expansive light—Lichtenstein presents a flattened patchwork seemingly breaking apart under the force of surrounding line. Extrapolating from the parallels of *Inside Fort Laramie* to the basic scenario of Sherman's flash lab, we could say that Lichtenstein's painting tells a tale of the corrosion of “organized perception” itself: not of perceptual experience distilled and unified in the planar forms of integrated composition, but of these very same forms dissolving into a collection of smears and scribbles across exposed canvas.

All of Lichtenstein's 1956 paintings in fact pursue a similar formal program, portraying the artist's familiar blocks of color and pattern crumbling into patches of erratic line and bare canvas. What *Fort Laramie* specifically suggests is that Lichtenstein understood this newly adopted visual rhetoric as a means of interrogating the Shermanesque agenda that had driven his work to that point—of examining how far one could push the boundaries of Sherman's program without jettisoning its terms altogether. Hence, such canvases as *Inside Fort Laramie* or *Indian, Teepee, and Canoe* continue to explore clichéd Western iconography and employ the contiguous flattened forms of “ground-directed” composition, even as they appear to document the encroaching disappearance of both of these from his practice. James Schuyler, in his February 1957 *Art News* review of the Heller exhibition in which these works were first shown, isolated just this mix of intentions as the show's central revelation. Lichtenstein's newly loosened forms, Schuyler concluded, betrayed an “undigested derivative-ness of contemporary influence suggest[ing] . . . a transitional show.”<sup>31</sup>

Knowing that pop would emerge just four years later, we can immediately recognize the prescience of Schuyler's remarks. But identifying the specific “contemporary influence” to which he refers is a bit more complicated. For though our initial suspects in considering Lichtenstein's 1956 shift toward looser forms and greater abstraction might be such central historical figures as Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, a more likely spark for his newly transitional style was “abstract impressionism”—what Louis Finkelstein, defining the term



1.5 *Indian, Teepee, and Canoe*, 1956. Oil on canvas, 40 × 30 inches. Private collection.  
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

in a March 1956 *Art News* article that appeared just as Lichtenstein was embarking on these works, described as a “recasting [of] abstraction into something much more concerned with the qualities of perception of light, space and air than the surface of . . . painting.”<sup>32</sup> Lichtenstein almost surely saw Finkelstein’s article; art journals were his primary link to contemporary New York practice at the time, when he was still living and working in Cleveland, and Finkelstein’s essay, describing the turn to impressionist models by a number of contemporary painters including Robert Goodnough and Philip Guston (whose *Summer*, 1954, was reproduced with the article), was at the center of widespread discussions of impressionism’s legacy following the Museum of Modern Art’s 1955 acquisition of Claude Monet’s late *Nymphéas*.<sup>33</sup>

Lichtenstein would have been particularly drawn to Finkelstein’s claim that abstract impressionist work, while “grow[ing] out of the implications of Abstract Expressionism,” was grounded in just the kind of integrated sensory experience that he had long understood to be the primary goal of successful painting. Artists such as Goodnough and Guston, Finkelstein contended, had managed to forge aesthetic directions pointing beyond both watered-down cubism and copycat gestural abstraction by returning to “the world of the senses,” focusing on the specifics of perceptual experience rather than the exploration of “abstract concepts” or painted surface as such. Stressing the primacy of “optical unity” and the central opposition of “sensuous response” (good) to “conceptual control” (bad), Finkelstein’s article would have pushed all the right buttons for Lichtenstein in early 1956, illustrating the continued relevance of Sherman’s thought—or at least vocabulary—for the appraisal and production of new art. Indeed, Lichtenstein’s 1956 canvases explore just the tendencies Finkelstein describes, as if made with the critic’s article in mind. He turns in these paintings from an exclusive concern with “the austerities of flat-pattern abstraction” to an exploration of “the spatiality of landscape” (to borrow the language of Finkelstein’s piece), integrates thinly applied washes of high-value yellows and violets evocative of “the lushness of flowers and foliage” (Finkelstein again), and embraces, for the very first time, the expressive potential of both unmarked canvas and freely sketched line.



1.6 Philip Guston, *Summer*, 1954. Oil on canvas, 63 × 60 ¼ inches. Collection of Marguerite and Robert Hoffman. © The Estate of Philip Guston, courtesy McKee Gallery, New York.

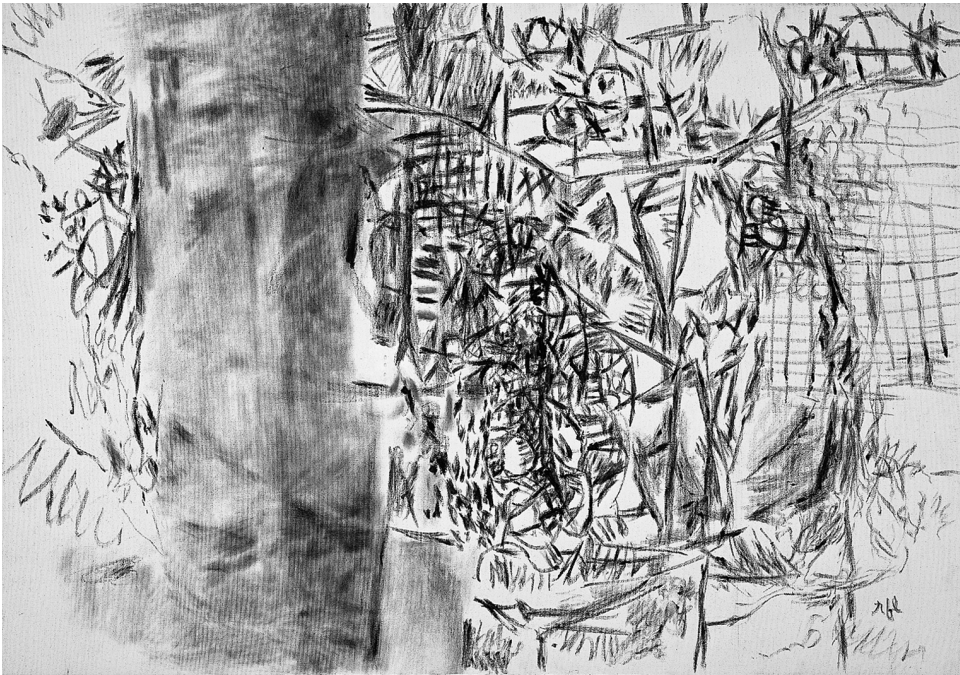
Finkelstein's rubric of abstract impressionism would have particularly attracted Lichtenstein's attention in 1956, a historical juncture at which he felt trapped between the twin siren calls of diluted pseudo-cubism and a dominant abstract expressionist mode that he had never fully embraced. If Picasso was the artist Lichtenstein most admired—"I think really the painter I like best is Picasso," he told Jones in 1965—Lichtenstein also increasingly understood his own work by the mid-1950s to be little more than an Americanized Picasso redux. "What I was doing wasn't a play on Cubism," he later told Diane Waldman, "It *was* Cubism. [. . .] I guess the paintings I had been doing lost their vitality for me."<sup>34</sup> At the same time, Lichtenstein's engagement with abstract expressionism remained equivocal: not only did his residing in Ohio (where he remained until the fall of 1957) greatly limit his firsthand knowledge of such work—which, by his own admission, he knew largely in the form of "three-inch square reproductions"—but, perhaps most significantly, he would have understood much gestural abstraction to be diametrically opposed to his own practice.<sup>35</sup> For beyond his regular trips to New York and review of the major art journals, Lichtenstein's thinking about contemporary art continued to be guided by his commitment to Sherman's pedagogy and the broader context of Gestalt-minded aesthetics in which this was based, within which gestural abstraction was mostly seen as a chaotic and self-destructive practice—one that betrayed, in Rudolf Arnheim's words, "a willingness to accept the façade of shapelessness as the intrinsic substance and nature of our world."<sup>36</sup> Such painting, in other words, was seen to stand precisely *against* the emergent integration of self, work, and culture so central to Sherman's aesthetic motivations, what Viktor Lowenfeld (in a text also cited in Lichtenstein's MFA thesis) described as the "harmonious organization of expression in which feeling, perceiving, and thinking are completely integrated" that was understood to be the primary goal of successful artistic work.<sup>37</sup>

This picture of Lichtenstein's aesthetic understandings and interests circa 1956 is admittedly both speculative and highly general—but such, I want to propose, was the nature of his own thinking at the time. From the distance of Cleveland, abstract expressionist work loomed for him more as a vaguely formulated notion of "the latest trend from New York"—and one that would



have appeared largely at odds with his own work—than as any concrete body of practice.<sup>38</sup> In this context, Finkelstein’s conception of abstract *impressionism*, rooted in compositional unity and the primacy of perceptual experience, must have been an immediate and intense draw, opening up channels informed by both historical precedent and contemporary practice, and still functioning within an essentially Shermanesque framework of “integration all along the line.” Indeed, Finkelstein’s article even concluded with what reads as a clear echo of Schaefer-Simmern’s plea for the redemptive power of unified composition, presenting abstract impressionist practice as a remedy for “visual sensibilities become . . . flabby through looking at television and living in ugly apartments.”<sup>39</sup>

In the wake of his January 1957 Heller show, Lichtenstein clearly recognized and remained ambivalent about the steps his 1956 canvases had taken. Refraining from painting altogether for much of that year, he completed fewer than a dozen images over the subsequent eleven months.<sup>40</sup> The limited number of paintings he did produce—modeled after French rather than American pictorial sources and built from contiguous fields of freely sketched line—betray an increasing engagement with Finkelstein’s ideas; one such work, *Untitled (Reclining Woman with Sculpture)*, even appears to directly mimic an untitled 1954 painting by Miriam Schapiro that appeared with the critic’s 1956 *Art News* piece.<sup>41</sup> By early 1958—following his mid-1957 move from Cleveland to upstate New York to begin teaching at the State University of New York at Oswego that fall—Lichtenstein had gone so far as to abandon figuration altogether, turning to abstract compositions combining irregular linear webs and erratic hatchings, rubbed-out patches of hazy coloration, and small gobs of viscous oil paint in broken allover fields (*Untitled*, reproduced here, is a representative example). While these paintings arguably continue his probing of Finkelstein’s abstract impressionist framework—hovering on the brink of figuration, their bits of color and mistlike passages occasionally suggest the exploration of light and space the critic describes—it is fragmentation rather than integration that drives their visual program. Their composition is characterized by a rhetoric of dissolution, of the wiping and falling away of surface, above all else.



1.7 *Untitled*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 34 × 48 ¼ inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

Lichtenstein's numerous sketches of crumbling grids made throughout 1958 rehearse and repeat these paintings' surface fragmentations, illustrating the deliberateness with which he pursued their joint eradication of figuration and the integrated picture plane. Indeed, if we look at Lichtenstein's 1958 painting illustrated here with these drawings in mind, we see their fragmented surfaces echoed in what appears to be a smuggled-in campfire burning away a flattened grid near the painting's right edge. This passage in turn rhymes with the wiped-away surface on the opposite side of the canvas, suggesting that such self-conscious formal disarticulation is the primary concern of both this individual work and, as illustrated by Lichtenstein's concomitant drawings, the series of which it is a part.

All of these works demonstrate the degree to which Lichtenstein was consumed at this point with issues of surface and surface dissolution—with what was, and must have appeared to him at the time, a complete reversal of both his own earlier work and Sherman's guiding pedagogy. Further demonstrating the self-consciousness with which he pursued these moves (no doubt intensified by his recent relocation to upstate New York), he also began signing his 1958 abstractions with "rfl," for "Roy Fox Lichtenstein," rather than just his last name. This change of signature betrays Lichtenstein's recognition of the new path he was then forging. But just where this path would lead remained fundamentally unclear. As he later recounted, he found himself repeatedly thinking, at precisely this moment, of the most banal imagery of elementary art instruction manuals: "I thought," he told Diane Waldman in 1971, "of doing . . . a window with curtains on either side, and making things out of 'how-to-draw' books. Those ideas kept coming up in my mind, I don't know why."<sup>42</sup>

The reason for such thoughts, in retrospect, appears simple enough: Lichtenstein by 1958 was himself unsure just "how to draw." Abstract impressionism, in short, had functioned as something of a Trojan horse: having opened his gates two years prior to Finkelstein's premise of an abstract mode rooted in sensual experience and optical unity, Lichtenstein found himself confronted with a barrage of practices whose connection to Sherman's program was—to say the least—somewhat more tenuous. This would have been particularly



1.8 *Untitled (Drawing)*, 1958. Charcoal and pencil on spiral-bound sketchbook paper, 11 × 14 inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

the case after his mid-1957 move to Oswego enabled easy trips to New York City and greater exposure to contemporary work. But already at the time of his Heller show in January of that same year, two concomitant exhibitions of recent abstraction must have made an immediate and intense impact: Jackson Pollock's posthumous MoMA retrospective—barely a five-minute walk from Heller's East 57th Street outpost and on view until February 3—and Cy Twombly's third solo show running concurrently at the Stable Gallery that January, also just blocks from Heller, which included such canvases as *The Geeks*, *Academy*, and *Freewheeler*.

Encountering the work of Pollock and Twombly just as he himself was exhibiting his transitional 1956 canvases and confronting an increasing sense of the “lost vitality” of his own practice, Lichtenstein would have been hard pressed not to follow their lead. As he later told Jones:

[If you're not] showing yourself something that you're not aware of [. . .] you're repeating the art idea which is better than not being in the realm of art at all but it's a way of just incessantly increasing your own competence in pictorial organization or something. That's fine but not interesting enough anymore, I think.<sup>43</sup>

The problem for Lichtenstein circa fall 1957 was that however “interesting” his newly diversified work had become, much of it—having abandoned figuration and Shermanesque pictorial organization alike—must have been increasingly unrecognizable to him as *art* at all, even as, in his continuing focus on issues of surface composition and dissolution, he remained mired in his engagement with the same basic terms of Sherman's teaching rather than showing himself something he was “not aware of.” This situation came to a head the following year, when his so-called stain paintings (whose express goal, Lichtenstein later stated, was to be “ugly”) pushed his anti-Sherman drive to its breaking point.

The stain paintings are built from jagged and mostly symmetrically arranged patches of color set across largely empty canvas grounds, their paint alternating between thinly applied washes, textured clots, and wispy calligraphic marks. Frequently, as at the lower left of *Untitled* (1959), coffee stains



1.9 Cy Twombly, *Freewheeler*, 1955. Housepaint, crayon, pencil, and pastel on canvas, 68 ½ × 74 ¾ inches. Marx Collection, Berlin. © Cy Twombly.



1.10 *Untitled*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 28 × 34 inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

dribble down their open surfaces, suggesting crude material detritus rather than willed compositional content. These works' smears and scrawls of paint clearly evoke Twombly's concomitant canvases—*Untitled's* dribbling stain appears almost directly lifted from a similarly marked painting included in Twombly's 1957 Stable show (today at the Menil Collection in Houston)—pointing once again to his central importance for Lichtenstein's development at the time. The unedited transcript of Lichtenstein's 1971 interview with Diane Waldman contains a particularly interesting exchange in this regard:

*Waldman:* Where were you when you did the Abstract Expressionist things?

*Lichtenstein:* In Oswego, New York. Still not in New York City.

*DW:* And were you working again from reproductions or had you seen Pollock and de Kooning?

*RL:* Of course I'd seen them all. I saw a lot of it. We'd come in every week or something. [. . .]

*DW:* You did those paintings from what, '57?

*RL:* From '57 to '60.

*DW:* And then what again brought about that change?

*RL:* Some of those are very close to Twombly, some of the scribblier ones. Then there were some more brushstroke with heavier paint. They're, in some way, close to some Johns things in a strange way. I wasn't aware of it then. I'm more aware of it now.<sup>44</sup>

Waldman's questioning here is noteworthy not only for the way in which it aims to confine Lichtenstein's thinking to the standard references of abstract expressionism, Pollock, and de Kooning, but for the uncertain referent of her final question, "and then what again brought about that change?" Though "that change" appears to refer here to Lichtenstein's first moves toward abstraction in 1956–57, the fact that Waldman's query follows the artist's statement "from '57 to '60" implies it is the change between *these* years that her rather unclearly



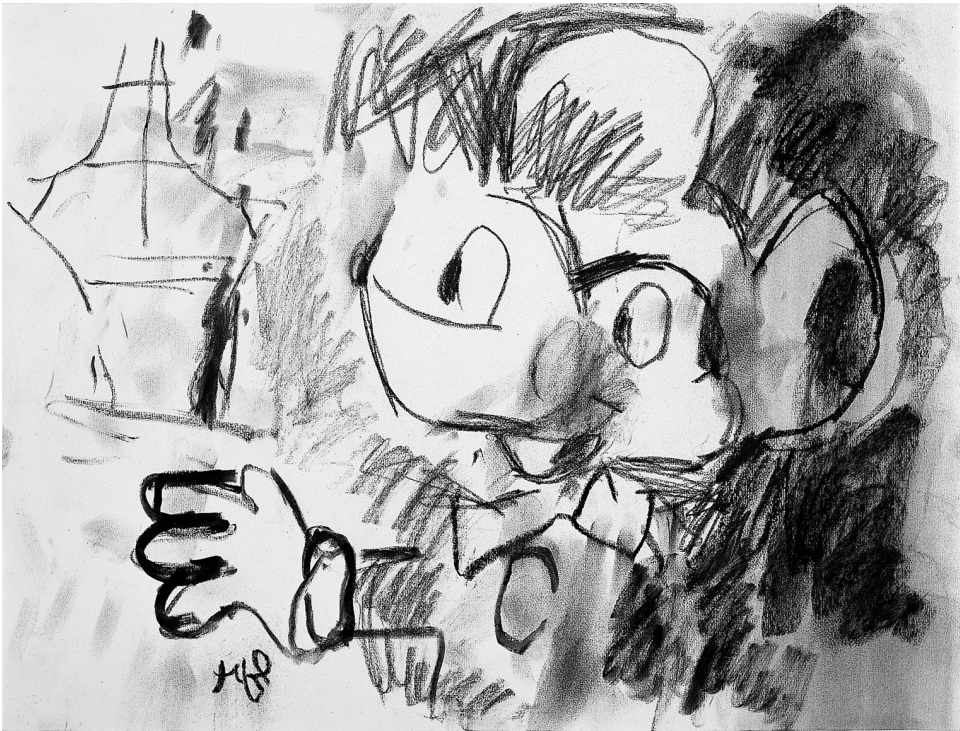
formulated question in fact concerns. Lichtenstein, I believe, heard it just this way—and his immediate reference to Twombly in his answer points to the latter’s increasing significance for Lichtenstein over the course of 1958 and 1959, as he searched for direction following his initial processing of abstract impressionist precedents. We can imagine, given the conflicting pulls on Lichtenstein by 1959, that Twombly’s negotiation between art historical tradition and painterly negation must have held a particular fascination for him. But if Twombly’s canvases most often suggest bodily excretions or crudely rendered script, Lichtenstein’s 1959 paintings resemble nothing so much as the convulsed faces of his own early flat-pattern compositions (or, for that matter, of the contiguous patchworks of color comprising such abstract impressionist works as Guston’s *Summer*), whose integrated forms we thus see scattered and fissured across their surfaces like just so much discarded matter. The stain paintings, that is, not only reject Sherman’s integrative program but, with nudging from Twombly, take its violent eruption as their primary subject.

In moving so rapidly through Lichtenstein’s development of 1956–59, I’ve left out what are arguably his most compelling works of these years, images that provide a crucial clue in piecing together the motivations behind his late-’50s development. In 1958, concomitant with his inaugural abstractions, Lichtenstein made his very first drawings from comic book sources, presaging by nearly three years his eventual move into pop. These images—around half a dozen charcoal sketches featuring Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse and rendered in a loosely gestural style—were apparently intended for an audience of only one; kept hidden from view for years, many were simply discarded on Lichtenstein’s studio floor as so much trash.<sup>45</sup>

Beyond the fact that they mark Lichtenstein’s first known use of cartoon iconography, these drawings are striking for the manner in which they explore the essential premises of Sherman’s pedagogy at precisely the moment Lichtenstein was effectively abandoning his mentor’s aesthetic program. Consider *Donald Duck* and *Mickey Mouse I*, two of his 1958 sketches. Do they not portray their eponymous subjects in the very process of “drawing by seeing,” their wide-open eyes, jutting snouts, and outstretched hands (fused, in Donald’s case,



1.11 *Donald Duck*, 1958. India ink on paper, 20  $\frac{1}{16}$   $\times$  26  $\frac{1}{16}$  inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.



1.12 *Mickey Mouse I*, 1958. India ink, pastel, and charcoal on paper, 19 1/8 × 25 inches. Private collection.  
© Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

with the window before him) encapsulating precisely the integration of sensory channels—the process of “feeling what is seen and seeing what is felt”—that Lichtenstein, following Sherman, had understood to be the fundamental aspiration of aesthetic practice?<sup>46</sup> Their curtained windows as if borrowed from the elementary art instruction manuals he would later describe to Waldman, Donald and Mickey are drawn here as precisely the “how-to-draw” diagrams Lichtenstein found himself pondering at just this moment.

Viewing Lichtenstein’s 1958 comic sketches in this light—as his response to the pressing question of “how to draw”—betrays the complexity, and contradiction, of his motivations in that year. Having reached an evident point of professional crisis, he sought to reengage Sherman’s promise of an art rooted in compositional and corporeal integration by seizing upon precisely the sort of industrialized media icons to which such thinking had ostensibly long been opposed. There is little question that Lichtenstein, in 1958, would have understood Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse as emblematic of just the sort of “modern mechanized life” excoriated by Schaefer-Simmern and others. Both characters—along with the rest of the Disney crew—were widely discussed symbols of the crass industrialization of American culture in the late 1950s, due in large part to the dual sensations of the Disneyland amusement park (opened in 1955) and television’s *Mickey Mouse Club* (debuting the same year) on ABC. In no less establishment a journal than *Time* magazine, Disneyland’s first two years of operation were marked by a July 1957 article entitled “How to Make a Buck,” focusing on the park’s functioning as an integrated marketing and sales tool for a range of corporate interests, from Pepsi Cola to American Motors. A major reason for the park’s success, *Time* concluded, was the role played by Disney’s *Mickey Mouse Club* program on ABC as a tool of quasi-indoctrination into the Disney myth; as the article quoted one parent, “Disneyland may be just another damned amusement park, but [. . .] after years in front of a television set, the youngsters are sure it’s a fairyland before they even get here.”<sup>47</sup> *Time*’s writers were far from alone in stressing such sentiments—they could be found, in 1958, in the pages of *The Nation* and the *Wall Street Journal* among other sources—and it’s unlikely they were far from Lichtenstein’s mind when he made these drawings.<sup>48</sup>

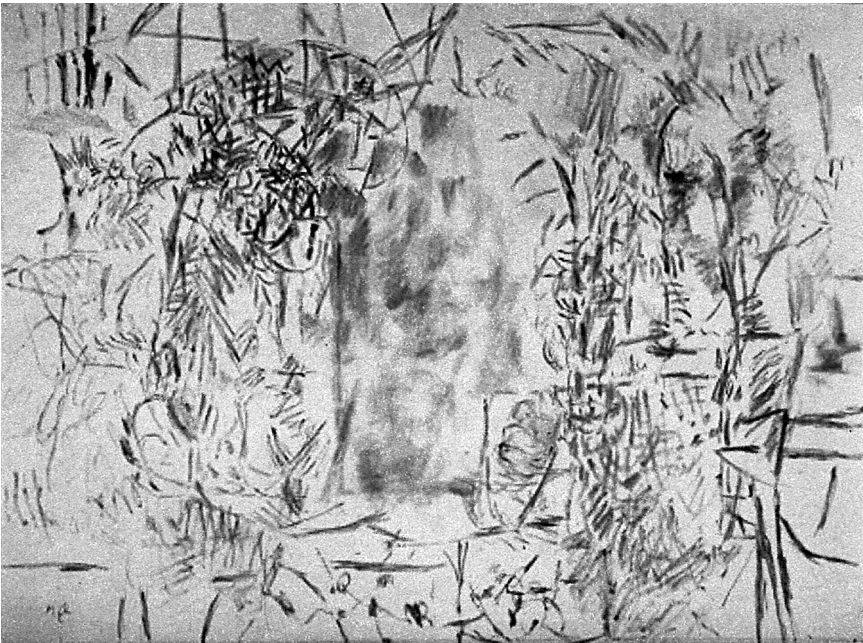
What the 1958 sketches thus reveal is Lichtenstein's dawning realization that the true unifying forms of American culture circa 1958—and hence the most efficacious means with which to continue his pursuit of Sherman's aesthetic goals—were nothing other than the programmed figures of Disney's make-believe world. Sherman's goal of an art of *corporeal* integration here shifts effortlessly into one of *corporate* integration, as the unification of sensory channels at the root of Sherman's aesthetics is visualized as a process of interpellation such as that at the very center of Disney's business model, in which subjects are unified by a shared craving—as at Disneyland and on the *Mickey Mouse Club*—to themselves become Disney creations, to enter into the programmed fairyland of Disney's empire. Painting Donald and Mickey in the act of “drawing by seeing,” Lichtenstein portrayed his own aesthetic aspirations as realized in their example. The answer to his question of “how to draw,” in short, was to don a pair of mouse-ears: to enter into the Disney myth and imagine himself transformed, just like TV's Mouseketeers or the droves of television-sated visitors crowding Disney's California park, into none other than Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck.<sup>49</sup>

This is as good a place as any to revisit Lobel's discussion of the mechanizing drive at the root of Sherman's pedagogy. Sherman's course, as Lobel and others have rightly stressed, began as a training program for military pilots in World War II—the explicit goal of which was to produce more efficient, and literally lethal, modes of viewing the world—and borrowed many of its means and goals from advanced consumer research (the tachistoscope, for instance, had long been used to test consumer responses to packaging and logo design).<sup>50</sup> In turning to Disney as a means to continue the pursuit of Sherman's aesthetic principles, Lichtenstein essentially declared, at least to himself, his recognition of this history, as well as of the seamless continuum between Sherman's and Disney's integrative programs and the ease with which the former's “aesthetics of unity” merged with the latter's program of mass market homogeneity. Lichtenstein's comic sketches mark the artist's location of his own future path at just this point of merger, as a subsumption of aesthetic by industrial aims. But in explicit contrast to Sherman's lethally effective warriors, Lichtenstein thus

saw himself—in the guise of Donald and Mickey—reduced to a kind of children’s toy, trapped in a world of stunted desires and possibilities. An even more extreme position is suggested by his 1958 painting *Untitled (Painter in the Garden)*, in which a curtained window at upper left, clearly echoing Lichtenstein’s concomitant comic drawings, is paired with a dissolving central field ostensibly meant to mirror the artist himself—who is thus presented, at the very center of his own work, as an emerging void.

The 1958 sketches, this is all to say, are much more than incidental foreshadowings of Lichtenstein’s pop work to come. Drawn at a time of professional crisis, responding to the specific question of “how to draw,” and engaging the specific terms of Lichtenstein’s foundational aesthetic precepts, the images constitute a self-conscious reevaluation of the essential terms and direction of his practice, as well as a recognition of his reformulated authorial role within this. They are, it is fair to say, his first meaningful efforts within a pop mode—owing not just to their comic borrowings but, more significantly, to the fundamental aesthetic and social tensions that structure them. The stain paintings that immediately followed the 1958 sketches, we can now recognize, are an immediate result of, and natural pendant to, this development: they constitute Lichtenstein’s final rejection of the viability of any painterly rhetoric of “creative unity” that did not equally share these tensions, that sought to remain untouched by Mickey’s and Donald’s industrial logic.

Despite the evident import of his 1958 sketches, Lichtenstein (who kept them private for years) clearly felt their comic iconography strayed too far from acceptable taste. In his next—and final—pre-pop series, the so-called ribbon paintings of 1959–61, he sought to develop their lessons within his continuing abstract mode. Beginning with open canvases in which a few slight wisps of color are sandwiched between thick bars of viscous oil paint, these paintings evolved over the course of 1959 into seeming battlegrounds between erratic, highly charged line and deliberately arranged stripes of color. By 1960, Lichtenstein had jettisoned line entirely, creating canvases of tightly locked color bands made by methodically wiping a paint-soaked rag across their surfaces. These



1.13 *Untitled (Painter in the Garden)*, 1958. Oil on canvas, 42  $\frac{1}{8}$   $\times$  55  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

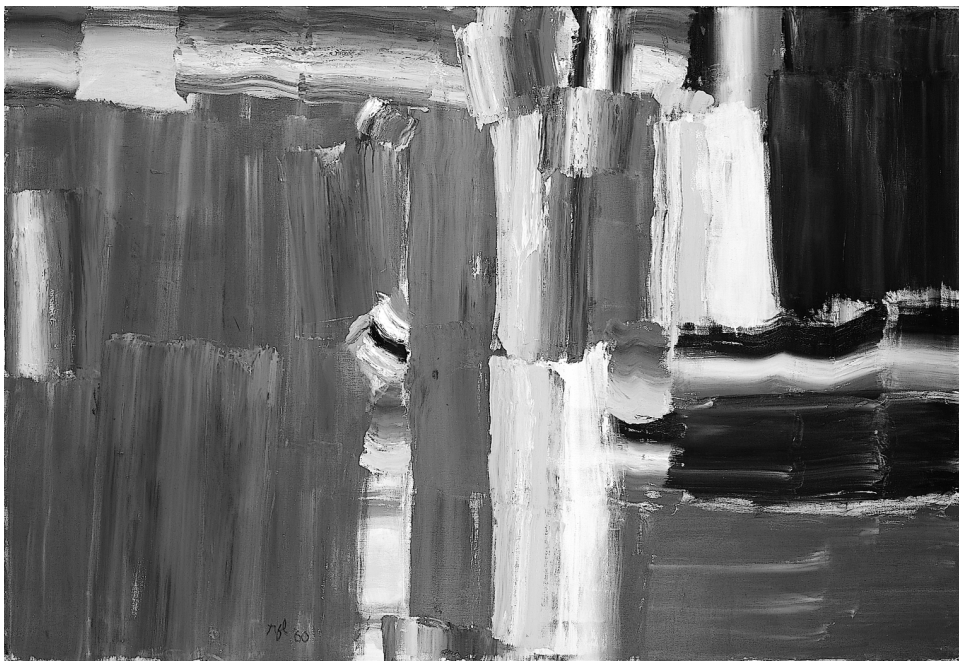


1.14 *Untitled*, 1959. Dimensions unknown. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.



paintings, in essence, reenact Lichtenstein's formal development of 1956–59 in reverse: they move from the gestural line that had uprooted his practice in the former year to just the sort of tightly locked contiguous color fields that had dominated his early-'50s practice. By 1960, Lichtenstein had returned to the “unified” patchwork composition of his earlier work, but had done so—guided by the concomitant and highly visible work of Frank Stella and Jasper Johns—through an abstract iteration of the industrial logic of his 1958 sketches, applying his paint in rigid, workmanlike bands without so much as touching a brush. If, in his early-'50s works, Lichtenstein had understood the painted canvas as a space in which to contemplate the essential unity of one's experience as a sensory and social being by distilling the “multidimensional quality” of the world perceived into the two-dimensional forms of the unified surface, his 1960 ribbon paintings presented something like the “meaningless, dumb, and blind wall” described by the Soviet critic Nikolai Tarabukin in reference to Aleksandr Rodchenko's seminal 1921 trio of paintings *Pure Red Color*, *Pure Yellow Color*, *Pure Blue Color*: the painted image as blatant surface and dumb matter, a record not of integrated perceptual experience but of an apparent exhaustion of painting itself.<sup>51</sup>

We are close, it should be evident, to pop. Indeed, Lichtenstein himself—in marked contrast to the many commentators who insist on seeing all of his early abstraction as “abstract expressionist” in form and intent—understood the ribbon paintings to be of a piece with his later constructed brushstrokes of 1964–66. As he told Diane Waldman, in painting them he “was still making an object almost. [. . .] It was making a brushstroke, building a brushstroke. That's what it was about.”<sup>52</sup> If these 1960 works thus functioned as a hinge between Lichtenstein's 1950s and 1960s production by looking both backward (in their ironic play on Shermanesque unity) and forward (in their anticipation of self-consciously constructed pop form), it was only in 1961's *Look Mickey* that Lichtenstein would definitively find his way forward. For this painting—repeatedly identified by the artist as his first pop work and emerging, as we shall see, from Lichtenstein's close contact to happenings and so-called junk art toward the end of 1960—comprised a fusion of the ribbon paintings' mechanical planes



1.15 *Untitled*, 1960. Oil on canvas, 48 × 70  $\frac{1}{16}$  inches. Private collection. © Estate of Roy Lichtenstein.

of color with the comic book iconography that had briefly occupied him in his discarded 1958 sketches. *Look Mickey*'s industrialized forms not only revive Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse—the two stars of Lichtenstein's 1958 comic efforts—but continue from these earlier drawings by focusing on issues of seeing, touching, and painting, the very same concerns that had been at the center of the artist's aesthetic thinking since the days of Sherman's flash lab at Ohio State.

Heading into the new decade, then, Lichtenstein managed to reinvent his practice (for this was, in no uncertain terms, the accomplishment of his earliest pop works) by integrating two pictorial modes that simultaneously embraced and negated the principles of "aesthetic unity" to which he had long been committed, and over whose place in his painting he had battled for half a decade. Combining mechanized figures and forms with a rhetoric of integration, sensory experience, and unified composition, Lichtenstein's ribbon paintings and early comic sketches together contain all of the dialectical tension that would come to characterize his work of the subsequent decade: they are driven by a desire both to emulate Sherman's aesthetic program and to diagram its imbrication within the industrial logic of contemporary spectacle. *Look Mickey*'s primary achievement—as we shall examine in detail in the following chapter—was to transform this tension from stumbling block to motivating force, one that would continue to drive Lichtenstein's oeuvre for many years, and works, to come.

