

## DALLAS MUSEUM OF ART

### *A Conversation with Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rosenblum*

May 28, 1995

Deedie Rose: ...Kimberly Clarke Corporation. Kimberly Clarke has established and is the lead donor to the Fund for Exhibition Excellence. This fund provides seed money in the very early stages of organizing and attracting exhibitions of great quality and I want to thank them and I'd like for you to join me in thanking them for being such a great partner to the museum in this and for being outstanding citizens of this whole Metroplex.

I also want to thank Annegreth Nill who is our curator of Contemporary Art and the whole staff at the museum for this wonderful installation. I think it is a particularly fine one and some have said may be even as good or better than the National Gallery, I hope it is. Now I want to introduce Annegreth who will introduce our guests. Annegreth Nill.

Annegreth Nill: Welcome to the DMA. We had sent out word that we were overbooked and oversold and so there are empty seats and that makes me very upset. But I'm glad that those of you who are here and ventured in in spite of all the noise that we made this afternoon and we will get going very, very quickly. I would like to add to Deedie's thanks, some more today.

First on my list are Jan and Henri Bromberg who have so generously underwritten this Distinguished Lecture series. They cared deeply about making the visual arts understandable and accessible to large numbers of people by sponsoring events like today. We are most grateful to them and their dedication to the education -- educational programming at the DMA.

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For much of the footwork of organizing today's event, I thank Stone Savage, Director of Special Programs and his staff Grizzly Taylor and George Danielson and my own assistant Tara Keating, but our deepest gratitude goes to Mr. Nasher.

It was his idea to celebrate the exhibition *The Prints of Roy Lichtenstein* by inviting Roy Lichtenstein to speak and it is his past association with both Mr. Lichtenstein and Mr. Rosenblum that was instrumental in luring both the artist and the scholar to Dallas for today's program.

Mr. Nasher, with whose brilliant sculpture collection most of you are familiar, has been an avid collector of Mr. Lichtenstein's sculpture. He has generously lent *Head with Blue Shadow* and *Double Glass* to this exhibition. These were works that were not shown at the National Gallery and we added them and I hope you will enjoy them. He has also lent numerous other works to the permanent collection and you may look for them like Easter eggs in the Quadrant Galleries.

To further enhance your contemporary art experience this summer at the DMA, we are opening selections from the Patsy R. and Raymond D. Nasher collection in the Barrel Vault and Quadrant Galleries in July. Besides prints by Jasper Johns and Frank Stella, which we wanted to show to sort of round out the picture, to show little bit of context of Roy Lichtenstein's prints, there will be a few other very seminal works that have never been seen in Dallas before; but I don't want to mention them yet, they will be surprises.

So we hope you will come back to the DMA to see that exhibition for which we thank Mr. Nasher from the bottom of our heart.

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But to recap the Nasher/Rosenblum connection, when Mr. Nasher's collection was shown at the DMA in 1987, the exhibition was accompanied by a wonderful catalog and a brilliant essay by Robert Rosenblum entitled "Between Apocalypses: Art After 1945."

Of course, without the participants of today's conversation there would be no event. So we are very much indebted to Mr. Lichtenstein and Mr. Rosenblum for taking the time off their extremely busy schedule, and believe me it is busy, to share with us today their ideas about art and life.

In retrospect, Roy Lichtenstein hit the art world floorboards running in 1961 with a painting that shows Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse on a fishing expedition. Mickey is cracking up because Donald Duck is unaware that he has just hooked himself his tailcoat and is therefore unable to land his catch. The words he is uttering, prophetically for Mr. Lichtenstein I think, are, "Hey Mickey, I've just hooked a big one" and some of you may be familiar with that work.

He had indeed--this is Mr. Lichtenstein--and he continues to do so. Mr. Lichtenstein's first so-called Pop Art show was held at Leo Castelli's Gallery in 1962. Only seven years later he had his first retrospective exhibition at the Guggenheim curated by Diane Waldman. He had his second major retrospective at the Guggenheim also arranged by Diane Waldman last year and that has traveled to L.A., Montreal.

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It has gone to Munich, Hamburg, and will open in Brussels this week, this coming week, and then will return to the United States and be featured at the Wexner Center which is connected to the Ohio State University where he received most of his art education and received his MFA in 1947.

Today's conversation celebrates the other major retrospectives that opened last year at the National Gallery of his prints, ably curated by Ruth Fine and accompanied by a major catalogue raisonné of his prints. Taking the two exhibitions together confirms our belief that Roy Lichtenstein is one of the

more important and imaginative artists working in the latter half of the 20th century.

And now to Mr. Rosenblum, who is someone who has sort of featured in and out of my art education all along. He is Henry Ittleson, Jr., Professor of Modern European Art at New York University. He is the author of many, many books including one that is seminal, *Transformations in Late Eighteenth Century Art* from Princeton University Press 1967; *Cubism and Twentieth Century Art*, 1960. So that gives you already the range from 18th century to Cubism, but he also has worked as late as publishing a book on Jeff Koons. So he has a broad range which makes him very, very unusual.

He was the Slade Professor of Fine art at Oxford in 1972 and those lectures resulted in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko*, which was nominated for the National Book Award.

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It really for the first time paid, I guess, homage in a way to northern art and the northern tradition feeding into American Abstract Expressionists and of course it is something that we all have worked on and read.

There were other seminal essays and one I would like to mention in the light that we had Clement Greenberg here and we discussed the "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" essay. An essay that he took on straight was the essay entitled "Collage" which asserted that the print in the Cubist collages was there because it was to assert the flatness of the picture plain and some of you remember all those discussions that we had earlier.

But Mr. Rosenblum began to debunk that and said in an essay called "Picasso and the Typography of Cubism," really reading these collage elements and working with iconography. It was very daring, wonderful essay that had a big influence on my own work.

So as I said he is wide ranging, very interested and one of the books that he recently published which I think maybe will make him the most appropriate person to interview Mr. Lichtenstein on stage is that he was daring enough to write a book called *The Dog in Art: From Rococo to Post-Modernism*. So we're going from high to low art to dog art. Thank you very much.

[00:10:00.20]

Robert Rosenblum: This welcome is leaving me speechless, which is very rare for me. I should just say that for me as well as for many people here, this is a kind of reunion as Annegreth just mentioned, that was last year in 1987 and I should add as a footnote, I am very excited by some of the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19th century European acquisitions, but that's not what we came to talk about today. And just one more thought, I have never spoken on top of such a beautiful rug.

And this is going to be kind of a memory lane for Roy and me because this is a Proustian experience. Way back in the middle of the 1950s, in one of the very first reviews I wrote--in the back pages of *Arts Magazine*--I wrote a review of a show of his, and I didn't say too much about it except that it was quirky and interesting and then I forgot about him entirely until 1961 and 1962, when he seemed to be born for the first time.

Now that has something to do with the first thing I am going to bring up and you're probably curious about the format here and this is what it will be. I am going to be myself, that is, I am going to play the role of an art historian, and Roy is the living organism, the artist. I am the parasite, who feeds on him.

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And I am going to show just a series of slides rapidly and then he is going to be stuck with having to comment on whatever comes into my startled mind. So let's see what happens.

Now as I just mentioned when I first saw Roy's work, which was plus or minus 1956, the pictures looked like this and they tended to be totally forgotten about until, in fact, this print show because in the major retrospectives that I have seen--first a early one and the one last year that's still circulating, going Brussels--Roy as it was, was born as a Pop artist and suddenly this exhibition of prints revealed this prelude to his work which either stands by itself or looks like something that we can integrate into the later development.

Anyway these are pictures which have a School of Paris look, not all that original for the mid-1950s, but what in retrospect -- and art historians are always looking for clues to the future -- what seems to be curious about them is the choice of the theme, that is, they mainly deal with a kind of Ye Old Americana, especially wild western patriotic themes.

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And you may remember that in the 1950s, the big thing to do is to be an Abstract Expressionist and to be universal and cosmic like Rothko and Newman, but the young Roy Lichtenstein was doing things like cowboys and Indians, or a figure in a canoe, or a paraphrase of George Washington crossing the Delaware, a very famous American icon. Then, looking back to the '50s, what one realizes is that may be he wasn't alone.

Larry Rivers, just a couple of years after Roy did this--this is about 1953 I would recall--was also reviving these Americana motifs. So this whole question of Pop Art being suddenly very American as opposed to international and spiritual, is something that seemed to be an undercurrent in the 1950s and I for one I am very happy to see it taken out of the closet again in terms of Roy's early work in this print show. So now that I have said that, the poor artist is going to have deal with this sweeping generalization.

Roy Lichtenstein: Well, let me see. I should just say that some of these early paintings, about a dozen of them, are attached to the retrospective at the Guggenheim and were shown in Munich, and Hamburg, and will be shown in Brussels, so they are being -- now they are part of the show. And they are at least traveling in Europe.

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These, which look highly influenced by just about everybody to me, were still done usually from history book paintings like *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, and there is a few things that it has in common with my current work in that they come from two dimensional sources rather than nature, and I didn't get it quite right, as you can see, but I tried.

But I don't know, I think if you are an Abstract Expressionist, you have to prove that you can really draw something and if you can draw something vaguely the way I do in my work, now you have to prove you are actually an artist, so these are the artist's part where you can see brushy colors, and colors that modulate, and things like that, but it is pretty late. And I didn't really get to what I thought was full-fledged Abstract Expressionism until about 1959. So I was very far behind the time then.

Robert Rosenblum: And did you catch up? It's like a quantum leap, but I can indicate how much he caught up. Oh! Here by the way, is just one more art history slide comparison, a *Death of General Wolfe* after the famous Benjamin West but -  
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Roy Lichtenstein: I think I even got the wrong country because I think I have got an American flag up there.

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Robert Rosenblum: Oh, we'll see one of those again too. But, I mean, always trying as we historians do to establish continuities, one of the things about these pictures is that already for the 1950s, they are art about art. That is, they are very self-conscious in terms of taking venerable images from history books and so on, and rephrasing them, translating them into some kind of modern idiom, but that is Part II.

We have already dealt with what happens before the curtains go up, and the curtains went up as you know in 1961-1962, and again in retrospect, the pictures that I recall seeing then looked so startlingly unfamiliar, so really ugly, abrasively new, that one tended to forget a lot of things about them. But one of the things that begins to surface now is the fact that they seem to mark--I hate the word "Postmodern" because it means everything and nothing--but we're all sort of groping around trying to find what to call the condition that we are living in.

And it seems to me that whatever that condition is, at least having to do with the history of art, it probably happened around the time that Roy Lichtenstein emerged on the scene in the early '60s and what it means

among other things is quite literally, after the triumph of Modern Art and Modernism, a forward march movement, and suddenly one seemed to be on the other side of the big gulf and one was looking backwards.

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That whole sense of piety about Art, that is, something that you worshiped at the Museum of Modern Art on West 53rd street or the masters you talked about with a hallowed tone of voice, that was something that was threatened. And it was really threatened head on in Roy's early works in a much more modest form, of course, in those '50s Americana pictures. But look at how outrageous the one on the left is, art turning up as a billboard--a prophecy, I might add, of the way that modern art is advertised or art exhibitions are advertised in the late 20th century. There is always a billboard to tell you about the show we have in the subway in New York.

Other pieties about Modern Art began to be assaulted by Roy. There was the famous or infamous attack on--well, I wouldn't call it an attack, it was much too light in touch and witty--on a famous, high, serious book by Erle Loran called *Cezanne's Composition*, in which that art historian out in California organized these incredibly complicated diagrams with all kinds of arrow thrusts of plastic tension to indicate the structure of a Cezanne portrait like the one on the left.

And Roy suddenly found that this was an image that he could translate into his own kind of art, which not only came out looking like a comic strip, but also, as it were, dethroned that feeling of complicated, intellectual struggle that people used to endure in order to understand the complexities of say the likes of Picasso or Cezanne or a Mondrian.

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Here, he has on the right cleaned up another Erle Loran diagram and once again when you look at a picture like the one on the right, you have the feeling that that whole glorious and hallowed history of Modern Art is something of the past; this is a kind of stake driven through its heart.

And the assault was even more emphatic just a couple of years later when none other than the greatest of Modern Art sacred cows, Picasso, was turned into a comic script by Mr. Lichtenstein, something that seemed to be particularly outrageous because the kind of Picasso that he chose was grotesque, brutal, barbaric, etc. and to transform it into Ben-Day dots in printer's ink, red and yellow and black outlines and so on, somehow took the very edge off this feeling of Picasso's grotesque.

So this is on another wave length, a very, very precocious contribution to this sense of burying once and for all the sanctity of these early twentieth-century modernists, and letting us know that we're living in a new age of reproduction.

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These things, incidentally, have very funny domino series effects because last night at Ray Nasher's I was looking at some of the Picasso's there, which are in a fact late Picassos, and they look--those portraits--as if they were influenced by Roy Lichtenstein. Our works of art affect each other.

Here is just yet another example of Roy's version of a Picasso Algerian Women series, a work which Picasso himself had swiped from Delacroix, so Picasso was doing it as well. In any case, this is a long genealogical table and Roy belongs to it, but there is a particular edge in these works of the 1960s that really seem to say that we had better stop bowing and praying before the Museum of Modern Art and its affinities and that something new has happened in the Western world, call it Postmodernism or whatever. Another void I leave for Roy to fill.

Roy Lichtenstein:

Oh, well. I think that Picasso was doing just about the same thing. Certainly the Velazquez is an old master and his must have looked in just about as a vernacular as mine looked in comparison with Picasso. So I don't think there is a great deal of difference, but I do think that it just goes further probably in that maybe mine looks more tawdry or whatever than the Picasso.

But I think both Picasso and I, not that we were working together or that he wouldn't throw-up if he heard my name if he were living, but we're just translating another artist into our own style and realizing that it had humorous overtones and that certain aspects of my work always tell you that it's not a genuine work of art or that it's only a reproduction, it's a fake, it's not worth much, all of that.

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And I think that printed dots, which are not too visible in this because they are small but they are there, are part of the symbol of that and plus the fact that the way they're done looks the way cartoonists work by making a dark outline and then filling it in with colors that are easily related to the printer.

I mean, you hardly, you don't really have to put the red in. You say you want it red or you want a 50% red, which translates--that's the dot with a 50% red or the diagonals later--and that translates it into a mathematical rather than an aesthetic problem. So I was trying to rid art of anything that seemed aesthetic or artistic or sensitive.

I wasn't really trying to get rid of this in art, but I was trying to get rid of the look of it, and it just relates more to the culture we were living in the '60s, I think, than work of the School of Paris which relished in thick and thin paint and a calligraphic brush stroke. So if mine has all the quality of a ballpoint pen and none of the colors is modulated and therefore presents no sense of atmosphere or remove, let me get into that one a little bit.

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The Greenberg idea that the newspapers in Cubism and theater tickets and so forth made a flatness, reasserted the plane, was something I can't say I

really thought of it or the relationship there, but that by always working from two dimensional sources, you're immediately not working from nature. Then nothing in my work symbolizes that there is any space between you and the painting, or that the painting is looking out into nature and drawing the way this seems to be a view of people. This is a view of a flat piece of paper, a Picasso, and the dots keep referring to the plane. The fact that there is no modulation in the color means that it seems to be a flat thing because modulation is often read as atmosphere.

And so I am reasserting that. Now why am I reasserting that, you might ask, because what difference it makes if it looks flat or illusionistic? And I think it's because the organization of a work, no matter whether it's a flat or illusionistic, is two dimensional and I think the point is pretty understood—I don't think it has to be repeated endlessly—but I think the fact that it makes a *thing* out of it, rather than a picture of something is something that I work for.

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And it isn't something I thought up beforehand; the comic strips were just perfect vehicles for this. They were a discrete box with something happening in it and my picture of it isn't a view of it lying on the table, it's up there, there is nothing between it and you. It's not a view of something in three dimensions, it is a thing and certain paintings like entablatures or mirrors or the outside of the stretcher frames, the painting itself is the outside of the picture and it makes an object.

That idea of object wasn't only mine. Frank Stella was doing rectangles within rectangles and shaped canvas was something being done in the early '60s. There were many -- it was an aesthetic idea that comes from the history, probably the history starting with Cézanne possibly. Anyway I don't know if that explains it, but that's part of my thinking in doing this.

Robert Rosenblum:

Well it's among other things that I think you were so aware of this new world of reproductions of reproductions of reproductions. I mean, it was like Chinese boxes and I just, because the history of art is continuous as well as interrupted. This is an exhibition of Leo Castelli Gallery a couple of years ago; a Picasso Women show except that it's by Mike Bidlo and these are all hand painted copies of works by Picasso.

So this, in a way, pushes what Roy was doing and in the '60s and aware of-- this whole world we live in, in which nothing is the original, everything is virtual or second degree reality.

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I mean it goes on, but that is something that, again, has a long history and this is my art historian's hat on again, in looking back at Lichtenstein's work, instead of being startled by them in the '60s as I and my generation were, one finds all kinds of art historical precedents.

And one of the most fascinating to me at least is the work of Seurat, especially his late work from the very end of his short career when he is known to have been influenced by new reproductive techniques of chromolithography--that is, very simple color reproductions in which you just had primary colors and they had to be filtered out and organized in a way that would produce a recognizable image.

So that on the right is a detail from Seurat's last not quite finished painting of the circus, which in retrospect certainly seems to be a preview of the way in which Roy Lichtenstein translated the printing techniques into an aesthetic language to be savored and reconstructed according to his own taste.

Another art historical precedent comes out very strongly in the work of Leger who then, in the 1920s especially, has this tough machine age look in which things aren't pretty and handmade, but seem to belong to a commercial world of manufactured objects. This is by now a classic art history comparison, a Leger *Siphon* on the right, which seems to have been inspired by a 1920s Campari ad in which you have similarly a kind of disembodied human hand working on what seems to be a mechanical utilitarian function, which is what Roy did earlier in the '60s.

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This is a black and white slide, so you won't see how wonderful the color of red nail polish is, but as you can see the idea really springs from this tree although I don't know whether he was conscious of these specific decks of cards that I'm pulling out. Or, and this is one of the things that's always stuck in my head, none other than the very, very elite and aristocratic Kenneth Clark, writing an essay on the 1890s aesthete Aubrey Beardsley commented--it was a total aside, but it just blew my mind--that Aubrey Beardsley was the sort of Roy Lichtenstein of the 1890s. A point that you can judge for yourself here.

But whatever you might think about it, Beardsley, too, in the '90s took some of the simple graphic punch--just black, yellow, dark, light, no shading modulations etcetera--and turned it into something that which was really a very, very precious aesthetic vocabulary. That was the last thing that one would have thought of back in the early '60s when one saw that, but in retrospect, at least for me, Roy Lichtenstein turns out to be very much of an aesthete because he has turned this vulgar language of commerce, the lowest kind, into a very, very refined sort of art. So there I am flattering you and you can take it or leave it. Anything to say about your ancestors?

[00:36:26.26]

Roy Lichtenstein:

No, I mean I think you sort of completed the thought and I don't know what to do with it exactly. There are all of these precedents which people see now, which they didn't see then and I don't think I saw them then either. I thought that the simple way the comics were made in the '60s, which is not the way they are done now because the kind of color reproduction you can

get doesn't necessitate black lines that hide the fact that your registration of color wasn't quite right.

And the idea of making--of course in a painting you don't really have that kind of problem, that of limiting the colors and using a line that had a utilitarian reason, I mean, a printing reason or a commercial reason to build the picture. But actually the commercial art was building an art vocabulary that you could liken to Classical art which refined how people should look, the glorious athlete and the perfect woman and all of that in Classical art.

Comic books kind of made everything--comic books and other kinds of commercial art--made things ideal. The clean plate, I mean, the way a plate should look--certain symbols for it being very bright, which would be sort of bright marks sticking out of it like halos or something which this doesn't have.

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Anyway, there was a kind of classicism created, but it was kind of funny. It wasn't one that people believed in as being serious beauty. That style, when used in painting, was humorous because there was no reason to be that restrictive in color and modulation and all of that in a painting. It had strength—I like the strength of the images, even the images of simple things--and of course the complete straightforwardness of it and lack of aesthetic detail.

But I don't think the aesthetic comes from making calligraphic-looking lines necessarily, I mean, I think the aesthetic comes from having the right color in the right place and the right line in the right place, the right contrast. The way you would write music, it could be very complicated or very simple and so long as there's a sense through it of unity, that's what's required. But this would make a ready-made style for me.

It was concocted by someone else, I mean generations of comic book writers and things, but when used the way I do it for totally different purposes, it became viable style.

Robert Rosenblum:

I am just looking at this amazed at--I hate to use the word for you, because your whole position used to be anti-sensitivity, but it really -- I mean, when I look at the contour of the halo that goes around the hand and the plate and the head. I mean, it is just such an incredible sinuous line and it is just the right shape and the right width, and it has that kind of refinement that, well, is not that different from Beardsley. But it is incredible, these subtle details, or the wedding band is fabulous, I love that.

[00:40:25.24]

Roy Lichtenstein:

You had to have one yellow- gold. She is not a house person, she is definitely a housewife.

Robert Rosenblum: We'll go on to that. And something I have always been fascinated with as well as in your work is it's -- I suspect that you were one of the earliest artists to use Art Deco. I seem to remember in the 1960s that what people were excited about in terms of revival styles was Art Nouveau and in a way that very sinuous line of yours sometimes reflects that. But the antithesis to that, these exact geometric lines, is something that you really began to explore in the 1960s. I think that was very precocious, and it can be seen in sculptures like this, which always look to me as though they would be in perfect place at Radio City Music Hall in Rockefeller Center, one the world's great Art Deco complexes. I mean, were you aware in the 1960s of Art Deco was something that was hot and new and viable from the past style?

Roy Lichtenstein: I don't think I thought of it that much, I mean, as being hot or viable. I just thought it looked like very simple-minded Cubism. Some of it was elegant and beautiful but that was kind of -- well, mostly I saw it in movie theaters and things like that--the railings--and I thought that would make interesting sculpture, because it has that certain predictable geometry, three kind of quarter-round pieces that come together that make a shape.

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It was the Cubism for the home in my mind and it was tame and there was much more of it than I realized. I mean, they hadn't really -- people hadn't come upon it yet, I don't think very much. I mean, there was enough of it around for me to see, but I didn't have any idea of the range of what was done which came out later, and I thought it would make interesting sculpture because it would -- to me it had a humor because the style itself was humorous.

It doesn't really look that way in this photograph, it looks very elegant. But I think that because it was rational and I don't think art is rational, I liked it in that way--everything had a mathematical reason, three or five of certain things that would repeat themselves and certain simple geometric shapes were--I don't know--and then the kind of glorious metals they were in. I did most of mine in brass and some in chrome color.

[00:44:03.23]

And black glass and sort of rose glass that has, I think it's a mirror. It just -- I don't know, there was a style there, that's all I can say, and I tried to use that.

Robert Rosenblum: Roy, it's amazing because it keeps living the way you translated Art Deco motifs into, well, our version of contemporary art because I remember this morning when I passed the Greyhound Bus terminal in Dallas, just a few blocks from the hotel we were staying at, I thought it looked exactly like a Roy Lichtenstein does today...neon pattern on one of the skyscrapers here.

So it's amazing the way you managed to appropriate, devour, the style and turn it into your own. I mean, now Art Deco looks like Roy Lichtenstein very often. It must have for you that same kind of elementary quality as Ben-Day dots, just the kind of simple primal language, but then you sure refined it.

Then there is another big question which again is about art history and that is the way--so it now seems in retrospect and somehow even at the time that pictures were done--Roy was always, as it were, having a dialog with his contemporaries. One of the most astonishing early examples of this, after putting Picasso to rest, was dealing with the haunting ghost of Abstract Expressionism which really was all over the place still in the late '50s and early '60s, and a lot of younger generation artists like Roy thought it finally had to be exorcised.

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And it seems that one of the most definitive exorcisms was the series of brush strokes that Roy did in 1964-65, which took on the likes of de Kooning and Hoffman and translated this brawny action-packed personal handmade rough and tumble style into a completely impersonal comic strip mode. It's interesting too that this is an idea that was also explored by other artists of Roy's generation, such as the wonderful German artist Gerhard Richter, who translated Abstract Expressionist language into something that looks as though it was machine-made instead of a handcrafted.

But there are many other kind of dialogs back and forth between his contemporaries in the '60s and '70s that have always made me sit up and wonder, among other things, whether he was doing it consciously or whether it was just the spirit of the time. For instance, those pyramids, the tourist ads for going to Egypt that he did like the one on the left, which had a kind of uncanny formal resemblance to some of the works that were being shown in his own gallery, Leo Castelli, by Frank Stella.

Or--sorry about the smudges there--the way the entablature paintings of the '70s seemed to be, as it were, a kind of response to the sweeping velocities of Kenneth Noland stripes only in terms of a decorative strip. Or, something that really startled me--and I'd love to know more about this--this painting of 1980, which is a much more obvious salute to Jasper Johns. What happened to that painting by the way?

[00:48:21.20]

Roy Lichtenstein: I have hidden it away.

Robert Rosenblum: I am very sorry. You didn't ever want it to be seen again? I was never aware of it...

Roy Lichtenstein: I did a version that had the dots and diagonals that looks like a flag in spite of the fact that they are diagonals. I prefer that one because it has two of my clichés in it and looks just as much like the flag as that does. But I wonder where I got the idea.

Robert Rosenblum: But I am assuming, I mean knowing you through the decades, I mean, you've always had your eyes going left, right, and center in terms of contemporary artists, no or --

Roy Lichtenstein: Yes. I do whenever I --

Robert Rosenblum: I was always curious when you did the Entablature, were you really thinking of Noland or is that just -- --

Roy Lichtenstein: No, I thought of Noland. I also thought of Judd. Way back in Greco-Roman times, they repeated things and they're called entablatures or freezes or things like that and I saw the similarity between that and Don Judd or Andre. I repeated Minimalist work, but it was completely in terms of those people that I did this.

[00:50:04.18]

It also again makes a *thing* and I was looking at that Stella that you had before, where the canvases were triangular and made whole paintings. It's a good illustration of what I meant by other abstract people doing *things*. They're not views, they are paintings and that's something that I keep repeating for some reason.

Robert Rosenblum: I think it's an important point insofar as, I mean, I was raised in a very kind of black and white tradition from the '60s; that is, there was Pop Art and then there was on the other side of a barbed wire fence, Minimal art or Abstract art or what have you, and now again looking backwards, there is really a broader community of look to the period, so that when one sees a Roy Lichtenstein's *Pyramids* next to the Frank Stella or the Noland next to *Entablature*, one realizes that the dividing line, the antagonism, the civil war between Pop Art and Abstract art and Minimal art is really just a kind of polemic that may have vanished and that there really is a group look and style that transcends whether or not you're painting comic scripts or tourist posters or not. So I think it's something that helps to heal the wounds of the divisions that were made in the '60s when people were very, very angry-- being pro or con of the insolence of artists like Roy Lichtenstein.

[00:52:03.07]

Speaking of the American flag, another way in which I was trying to integrate Roy into a broader pattern has to do with his more recent work, which as you have noticed in the print show or in any survey of his work that tends to have in the last 10 years especially a kind of backward look, a kind of retrospective mode. This is something that seems to be very true of the many other artists of his generation who made it big in the late '50s and '60s.

For instance, there is a Johns on the right, in which he, like Roy Lichtenstein in 1980, is redoing his own early flags-- one with 48 by the way and one with 50 stars, so there is an extra layer of memory. This is a very much the case,

so it seems, in many of Roy's works of the last decade, especially a series which comes, I think, under the general title *Reflections*, in which there are many prints of this kind in which he takes a theme, a fragment often from an earlier work like the early Pop picture on the right and resurrects it, but sees it, as it were, through the streaks of light of a mirror.

So it has a kind of a poetic quality of looking backwards, a kind of retrospection which refers in fact to a series of paintings that he did—I think it was the early '70s--of mirrors. So he combines, as it were, two different works from his past or from the 60s and 70s, and they have this kind of layered, very, very complex look visually, which in turn is a kind of look of memory.

[00:54:21.06]

Roy Lichtenstein: It's supposed to be a picture under glass and I painted the frame on and then the mat even in this case, and the glass is supposed to be preventing you from seeing the painting. I was trying to do a photograph of someone's artwork and I kept getting reflections of the window in back of it, and it made it very hard to photograph the painting—it was a print under glass. Then I thought, that's kind of a nice idea to have a picture of something you can't quite see, and so I started to put these streaks, which are really just abstract marks but they are supposed to remind you of reflections. It was a way of making an abstraction, and then reflections on early work. They started with actual works that I had done before, and then they got to include works that I should have done or might have done or something like that.

Robert Rosenblum: But they are so visually complex, like seeing things through a screen or scrim or something, but they, again, they strike me as having that look of nostalgia. Here is another example in one of your contemporaries, a later Johns that is a blurry recycling of this, or the way Warhol in the '80s recycled again in a kind of blurry, negative image some of his famous early works of the '60s. So I, in trying to see the forest as well the trees, think about these picture's reflections as part of that mode.

[00:56:29.00]

Just to be politically correct in 1995, it seems that I have to bring up a topic that to my surprise has suddenly caught the attention of lots of younger generation students, my own and others, in looking back to your work and other work of the 1960s, and that is the whole question of Gender Roles, with a capital "G" and a capital "R." Now, although I never thought about it certainly at the time, now looking back 30-odd years, your pictures of the early '60s seem to be absolute hilarious caricatures of at least American social ideals of extreme macho behavior for the guys, and housewifely, house personally duty for the married woman, like the ones who were keeping their house clean.

That slide is so dirty, she should sponge away the dots on her hair.

[00:58:03.24]

Or else not quite married, but going through all of the social rituals of engagements and broken hearts and so on. So that, suddenly looking backwards, you seem to have pinpointed in the most focussed and light-touched way, something of the extraordinarily caricature role models of the male and female that American society produced way back in the early '60s. Now that is quite load to take on, but if you have any thoughts about what you were doing then and whether you ever dreamed that they would be seen as way now...

Roy Lichtenstein: I think that people were aware of clichés like that, even back in those days. The comic books were really written either -- things like *Men at War*, that would be for men, and *Teen Love*, that would be for woman. They were entirely different books, but both were-- not so much in this case--but they were tremendously emotionally charged. They were either at war or they were crying about something, rather, and it was that idea to show great emotion in this rather dispassionate style. That was part of what I was trying to do, but the roles were very separate then I think--maybe everyone might read *X-Men* now or something like that--but I don't think that comic books were read -- same books were read by men and women.

Robert Rosenblum: But it's even not only the comic books, it's as well the commercial illustrations, which always show women doing this kind of thing at the home. So younger students today very often, so it seems think that either you were affirming these divisions of male and female in America and supporting them perhaps, or else that you were, in a very clandestine way, exposing these inequities of American society, probably you were doing neither.

[Audio Gap 01:00:39 – 01:00:40]

Roy Lichtenstein: ...and aware of this, I think.

Robert Rosenblum: Well I have just one last pair of slides, which is the phenomenon of art about art and art about life and that is the amazing way in which, while in our lifetimes the style of Roy Lichtenstein--which was based on commercial imagery--got to be a kind of high art, a recognizable modern master that in turn could be translated into commercial art as demonstrated by this cover of *New York Magazine* which is a very conscious rip-off. You are supposed to get the style quotation of what Roy Lichtenstein did and the comic strip sources probably almost totally forgotten.

So this is a wonderful kind of reversal, a paradox of art that comes from below that moves to the Highs and then in turn is translated but in quotation marks into the "Low." So I am sure that all of you are flipping through this or that magazine looking at this or that ad have noticed how many commercial artists rip-off Roy Lichtenstein style, sometimes hoping to be recognized as learned and sometimes hoping just to pass as good graphic artists.

But that is, I guess, the price of being a terrific artist who managed to digest and recreate all of these lowly sources so that he could end up in a

pantheon in turn to be imitated. That is a very fulsome statement and I don't know what poor Mr. Lichtenstein can do with it, but how do you feel about this?

[01:03:00.04]

Roy Lichtenstein: Well, I don't know. I mean, I guess it's flattering really that that it's gotten back into commercial art. Then I notice that cartoons were never done ironically, I mean, comic books or commercial art cartoons were not ironic, whereas they're ironic now, I think, even about the style when it's done for a commercial reason. So it has -- the style means much more than it meant before and that's sort of flattering.

Robert Rosenblum: Well, it doesn't, it just speaks your name. Nobody ever talked about it. They say that looks like a Roy Lichtenstein, not like a comic strip, which is of course exactly the opposite of what people were saying in 1960, "that doesn't look like art, that looks like a comic strip" So that is quite a conquest and I think we can only applaud it. So that's the last of my visual comments.

You want to have any questions?

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Male Speaker: Sure, sure, I mean if anybody...

[01:04:42.20]

Audience Member: Could you comment on [inaudible]?

Roy Lichtenstein: The mermaid for the Americas Cup boat? It didn't win you noticed. It wasn't paddling hard enough underneath there. Well, I was asked to do it and I thought about it. I mean, I didn't know what I would put on the boat and I thought it'd be interesting to see it out there in the ocean and I did the hull of the boat and a spinnaker, which they didn't show very much because the spinnakers are engineered to a degree and this was a kind of illustration of a sunset or rise, depending on optimism and so they didn't use the cell except for show. But anyway I did both of those and I just thought it would be nice to see it out there and it did well for quite a while. Yes sir.

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Roy Lichtenstein: The interiors are usually large paintings that... It began with very uninteresting part of motel room-looking things with a bed, and a table, and an ashtray, and just about whatever minimal things you could think of to put in a room and they got more and more complicated as they went. They began to have paintings of people on the wall—I mean, other artists--

[01:06:37.09]

And this series began really with prints and decided to make because they -- it's a kind a of phenomenon if someone took your picture in front of the print, it would look as though you were in the room in a funny way, but the

room didn't really look real, but it looked kind of plausible and that led me to make them larger and because they're kind of life size, the paintings I did.

But very artificial so it kind of in a way invited you to come in, but you realize it's not real, so you can't. So it had that kind of tension, I thought anyway, and I decided to do one of the prints slightly differently large as wallpaper. So it's about 8 feet high and 13 feet long and it's in the show actually, so.

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Roy Lichtenstein: I think, maybe, I don't feel influenced by them and I think it's a little different. I mean, it's an interesting idea and I think it may have come from Pop, but there is a difference between translating another artist into your own style--even if it looks something like the original artist--and say a photograph of a photograph, which is a much more mysterious idea which they do. What is it? Is it an original? There are a lot of questions about that, but I bet Bob would like to get into that one.

[01:08:49.01]

Robert Rosenblum: Well, I already did with one image which was the Picasso retrospective, but it's one of those things, I think, familiar to the history of art, that is, we are always tracing genealogical tables and the whole idea of art that is a reproduction of other art, whether it's a reproduction of Walker Evans' photo by Sherrie Levine or a hand-painted picture by Mike Bidlo.

This is something that is very much with our age, a world of facts and virtual reality and so on, but when you are looking for ancestors figures, Roy was doing this in early 1960s, was aware of this whole new world. These younger artists are doing it differently, but they also have to look backwards as well.

So it's not same, it's not totally different. It's just related and it's a mutation from this tradition. How it's different is complicated and worth long discussions, but he is a parent figure for sure.

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Roy Lichtenstein: I did some woodcut-- oh you mean because the early ones of woodcuts. So, some of the prints are woodcuts, or partly woodcuts. Some of the more recent ones were; the German Expressionist group was one, and I think the brushstroke landscape group, I think it's part woodcut.

[01:10:48.04]

I like it because it's a tough medium, it's very hard. It's fairly easy to get regular lines and things like that in silk screen, but it's very hard to cut them and I like that resistance and that they're not always perfect is nice too. But I don't try to get woodcut in the sense of the German Expressionists

because the medium meant so much and it was, it became, well too beautiful for me or too much of an aesthetic statement. Yeah?

Audience Member: What kind of art do you like to live with? [Inaudible]

Roy Lichtenstein: What kind of art do I like to live with? Let me see...good art? No, I don't mean to be too flip, but I guess the art that I'd like to live with and the art I live with may be two different things. I'd like -- I would like *Girl Before a Mirror*, that nice Picasso would look great and there's hundreds of paintings I am sure that would be good, but I have mostly drawings of people ranging from--and not a great deal of these drawings, I must say--ranging maybe from the Picasso to modern, I mean contemporary artists. I don't try to collect a lot and the collection is haphazard.

Audience Member: [inaudible]

[01:12:43.19]

Roy Lichtenstein: The difference in feeling or how has printmaking affected me? It's had an effect. I really don't know because sometimes I think of an idea in printmaking that becomes something I use in painting and usually it's the other way around. You make the form in printmaking. I mean, maybe you make it in black, say it's a lithograph but you can print it in yellow or blue or any color and that ease of being able to just, "well, let's try this in another color," it maintains the same shape but you can try any kind of color with it. It is an easy kind of thing.

I think a little differently when I work with prints, but I don't really have it well worked out in my own mind. I like to do them every once in a while and there is something different about working -- I just might pick up something working in a different medium. But as I said, it's very hard to think of a tangible reason and I don't really know, except I do think I gain something from working and from changing the medium. I don't want them just to be a copy of something I did in painting. I may use the same themes, but I never use the same image. I did nudes in printmaking and nudes in painting, but they are different, different pictures.

Audience Member: I was curious as to the transition... [inaudible]...in '61 it was kind of reborn. What was it that spawned it at that time? I notice that you use a lot of colors that you use are primary colors... [inaudible].

[01:14:21]

Roy Lichtenstein: The transition between the early work that was --

Audience Member: [inaudible]

Roy Lichtenstein: I think there was a lot of various things. Happenings and then products from Happenings and things like that were a big influence. They were also trying to get away from European art. They were more trying to get away from Cubism in a way and they were trying to expand Pollock, I think, you know?

At the time, the paintings very large and felt like environments in some way and then to make a whole environment might bring that further.

They used American things sometimes that we think of--this, I mean, tires aren't necessarily American, but at that time they a symbol of production, but Oldenburg things, frankly Pop a little earlier, that were bacon and eggs and things that were really meant to be commercial signs or kind of or like art versions of commercial signs. But there were -- it was so much, I mean, there was Stuart Davis, I mean, he wasn't an immediate influence, but he did practically the same thing with Cubism. But even the Expressionists, De Kooning put women's lips cutout of a magazine on to one of his abstractions and Picasso made objects, the absinthe glasses.

[01:16:40.02]

There were just things--I think Cubism was maybe a very big influence. Then Johns and Rauschenberg had done the flags and there were things. Again, Rauschenberg did things with American products like Coco Cola. It wasn't Pop, but it was something about objects and something that -- because I wonder had I thought of this and I had actually, but they were pretty Expressionist, the things of doing Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse which I did a few years earlier--but they were very Expressionist. The idea of using something that looked like graphic art, I mean commercial art, didn't occur to me--and if I had thought of it years earlier, would I have used it or would it have just not meant anything to me, I really don't know.

But there were also people even doing cartoons in a way. Johns had something with cartoons--it was sort of encausticked over. What was it, Popeye or something? I am not sure what the cartoon was, and there were things in the air that allowed me to think this was okay to do.

Audience Member: Thank you very much.

Audio file: LichtensteinRosenblum\_public.mp3