The Politics and Aesthetics of American Art during the Cold War: Commissions for Philip Johnson’s New York State Pavilion at the 1964-1965 World’s Fair

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The Politics and Aesthetics of American Art during the Cold War: Commissions for Philip Johnson’s New York State Pavilion at the 1964-1965 World’s Fair

by

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Introduction

More than 50 years after the 1964 New York World’s Fair, the New York State Pavilion is one of the few remaining ruins of the once monumental grounds. Designed by Philip Johnson as a three-part showcase for the cultural, environmental, and technological exports of the state of New York, it positioned art and architecture as one of the state’s greatest resources. Philip Johnson, along with Governor Nelson Rockefeller, commissioned ten of New York’s rising artists including Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and John Chamberlain to design artworks to be displayed on the exterior of the Theaterama, the smallest of Johnson’s structures.¹ These commissions, ranging from sculpture to screen prints to paintings, encompassed the art historical era from the Abstract Expressionist style of the 1950s into Pop Art of the 1960s while also responding to the political and social climate of the 1960s. The Pop works, specifically those by Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, dealt with consumer culture, combating contemporaneous criticism that Pop Art merely reflected popular culture rather than critiqued it.² It is my contention that the very context of these works displayed on Johnson’s pavilion and embedded within the Fair itself allowed them to take on unexpected critical stances towards the content of the Fair, particularly the commercial atmosphere.

By its very nature, the 1964 World’s Fair dealt directly with themes of industrialization and unequivocally advanced the spread of consumer and cultural

¹ Model of the New York State Pavilion 1963, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

products. By examining the art and architecture at the World’s Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens we are able to see how the various art commissions and exhibitions both supported and undermined the views of the Fair and its organizers. The focus on consumer products influenced not only the displays within the built environment of the Fair but also the architecture itself. In buildings like the IBM Pavilion designed by Eero Saarinen and Charles Eames and the Uni-Royal Ferris Wheel, corporations and their architects embraced pavilion designs that embodied the products that they sold; in other words, architecture became a commodity itself in the Fair context. ³ This function of architecture in the Fair context has been explored in the scholarly output of Robert Rydell, specifically in *All the World’s A Fair* (1984), *World of Fairs* (1993), and *Fair America* (2000). In Rydell’s view displays and their supporting architecture “cohered as symbolic universes” that “affirmed fairgoers faith in American institutions.”⁴ When exploring how architecture can confer value Rydell cites the American Pavilion at the Brussels 1958 Fair, which was designed by its architect Edward Stone “to resemble a Roman Coliseum” making vital links at the Cold War era Fair between America and democracy’s ancient birthplace. ⁵ In *Fair America* Rydell interprets the spatial organization of the 1964-1965 Fair with the Unisphere at its center and “avenues radiated outward in various directions, taking visitors to different zones” as highlighting the ways in which “transportation, industry, government and amusement” all worked together to

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⁴ Ibid.

support the theme of “Peace through Understanding” on a global scale. Rydell connects this symbolic and value based layout to the corporate presence at the Fair citing the whimsical designs of IBM, Bell Systems and General motors, as a conflagration of entertainment, high design, and commercialism. It is against this backdrop that we can see Philip Johnson’s New York State Pavilion, which acted as a forum for contemporary artworks on its frieze and historical exhibitions within, as becoming an advertisement for art in New York State.

In *The River* and *The City*, two exhibitions organized for the interior of the Theaterama, the history of American painting was shown beginning from New York State’s colonial period through the 1950s. In these works Americans were represented as industrious in their relationship to their environment—whether it was pastoral communities or New York City. The modestly scaled vernacular paintings included in *The River* depicted how denizens (of European stock) of pre-industrial America had farmed their land so as to be able to live off of it, thereby historicizing America’s first commodities. Larger Romantic paintings in the same exhibition showed the volatile landscape of America, suggesting that a fearlessness and strong moral composition were needed by early Americans to survive. The artworks in *The City* exhibition were devoted to Americans’ move to urban metropolises and the art forms that sprang forth such as the New York School and the Ashcan School. In total, these two exhibits furthered an image of Americans as both resourceful and brave while also suggesting that, chronologically,

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7 Ibid., 115.
the nexus of art-as-export in America had moved from provincial American cities to urban New York following the rise of industrialization.

The artworks commissioned for the exterior of the Theaterama, however, called into question the analysis put forth by the interior exhibitions and the general tone of the Fair as it related to consumerism. The commissioned works aesthetically rose to the celebratory occasion of the Fair through their use of dynamic materials, intermittent bright splashes of color, and recognizable or familiar imagery characteristic of Pop Art; all of these aesthetic features made the Theaterama a focal point of the Fair. Despite this, their subtext, as this thesis will argue, examined the negative aspects of the mass proliferation of images in advertising and the industrial advancements that facilitated it—in other words, the very subject of the Fair. This created an inherent tension in the work; it was suited for and therefore allowed into the very visual culture that it called into question.

The critical capacity that the Fair context revealed emerged between Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism, the formerly dominant outlet for addressing either ambiguous or negative reactions to post-war industrialization and commercialization. Historically, Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism have been represented as diametrically opposed movements—Abstract Expressionism dealt primarily with the solitary experience of the artist while Pop Art tackled postmodernist themes concerning the nature of images in popular culture. By closely examining the works commissioned for the Theaterama, however, we discover ways in which Philip Johnson wanted to draw formal connections between the two movements. In the years intervening between Pop Art and Abstract

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Expressionism, styles like Neo-Dada and Hard-edge painting proliferated, navigating the thematic and formal differences between Abstract Expressionism and Pop. Looking at the Neo-Dada and Hard-edge works commissioned for the Theaterama helps us to see how both Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism dealt with distinctly post-war themes, often mixing personal narratives with public histories while also exposing the human touch present in the works that could reveal the conditions of their creation.

Perhaps because New York played host to the 1964-1965 Fair historians like Morris Dickstein, Helen A. Harrison, Robert Rydell, and Joseph Tirella have predominantly written about the New York State Pavilion and the art it hosted rather than displays installed at other state or national pavilions. As for other displays of art on the grounds of the 1964 Fair, this subject has been discussed primarily in comparison to the art present at the 1939 Fair held on the same site and organized by many of the same individuals in New York’s state bureaucracy. In *Remembering the Future* Helen A. Harrison she outlines how New Deal attitudes towards art resulted in art being integrated into every aspect of the 1939 Fair, including murals and sculpture on the grounds as well as in venues for historical and contemporary artists. In total there were 158 murals and 173 sculptures chosen by New Deal administrators, more than had been displayed at any other World’s Fair. Harrison contrasts this with the 1964 Fair, which saw a larger

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11 Ibid.
corporate and private influence on the selection of artworks and less emphasis on art in
general as a result of Moses’ personal tastes and his desire to rely on private funders.12
Harrison does, however, see the artists commissioned for Johnson’s Pavilion specifically
as responding to images from everyday life in the way that WPA muralists hired for the
1939 Fair had but does not emphasize this as a tool in a critical stance.13 Both Harrison
and Lawrence Samuel in his book The End of Innocence focus on how Moses’
conservatism and preference for older forms of art manifested in efforts to secure
European collections for display at the 1964 World’s Fair, revealing that the New York
State Pavilion was alone in its emphasis on American artists dealing with American
themes.14 15 Meanwhile in Joseph Tirella’s 2014 Tomorrow-Land, the author discusses
Moses’ failure to secure art for the Fair (as a continuation of Harrison and Samuel’s
scholarship) focusing on Moses’ interest in exhibiting Joseph Hirshhorn’s collection that
eventually ended up in Washington, DC.16 Tirella goes on to chronicle Moses’ public
spat with Emily Grenauer, the art critic for the New York Herald Tribune, and August
Heckscher, a cultural advisor to the Kennedy administration who hoped to dedicate a
building at the Fair to contemporary American art.17 Rydell notes that this conspicuous
absence set the 1965-1965 Fair apart from “most previous fairs” who all had dedicated

12 Ibid., 142.
13 Ibid., 157.
14 Ibid.
xix.
17 Ibid., 104.
fine arts pavilions, whereas the 1964-1965 Fair addressed the issue by directing visitors to New York’s museums instead. Tirella writes that because Hirshhorn’s collection heavily favored canonized European artists like Rodin, attempts to display it at the Fair signify Moses’ conservative tastes and explains his reluctance to accommodate a forum for contemporary American art. Rydell also notes the presence of predominantly Eurocentric art, specifically that the “highlight of the fine arts display was Michelangelo’s sculpture La Pieta shown for the first time outside of Vatican City” as well as “the Spanish Pavilion featuring artists ranging from El Greco to Salvador Dali.”

Tirella, however differs from his fellow historians in his belief that that the commissions for Johnson’s pavilion served as a substitute for a formal American fine arts pavilion and that critics might have been assuaged by the commissions had they taken notice of the 1963 announcement in the New York Times which briefly described what each of the artists was planning. Though it was the only forum for contemporary American art at the Fair, it nonetheless suggests a response to Grenauer and Heckscher’s calls.

Johnson’s New York State Pavilion was one of several New York State sponsored pavilions at the Fair yet it received more fanfare contemporaneous to the Fair itself and even now in extant materials on the Fair. As Samuel writes, in addition to the New York State Pavilion, there was also a New York City pavilion with displays relevant to New York State history, as well as Port Authority and Long Island Rail Road Pavilions and yet

18 Rydell, Fair America, 118.

19 Tirella, Tomorrow-Land, 104.

20 Rydell, Fair America, 118.

none was as studied in regards to architecture as Johnson’s buildings.  

Samuel focuses on the building logistics of the Pavilion, including the materials and engineering, but not on how the components of the Pavilion interacted with the commissions of artwork.  

In Samuel’s view, the panorama film shown within the Theaterama depicting a virtual tour of New York’s national and local parks, as well as the Texaco-sponsored tile map of New York State inside of the Tent of Tomorrow were a nod to Moses’s contribution to New York State infrastructure.  

Samuel also argues that the observation towers, adjacent to the main structure (the Tent of Tomorrow) served as a way for visitors to get the widest view of Moses’ creation, the Fair itself.  

Tirella, on the other hand, discusses Johnson’s Pavilion in regards to the censorship controversy over Andy Warhol’s commissioned piece. He considers the work in relation to the “most celebrated” and “postmodern” structure as a way of emphasizing the potential reach of the work Johnson placed there.  

Tirella, like Samuel, emphasizes the view that the Pavilion provided of the Fair and the fact that Moses liked the building so much “he earmarked it for his post-Fair park,” explaining why it still stands today.  

Bill Cotter’s 1964-1965 New York World’s Fair (Images of America) featuring images of the Fair’s attractions taken by Fair visitors, offers two novel approaches of reading the architecture of the fair and of Johnson’s pavilion in particular. The author describes the architecture of the Fair as “Popluxe and

22 Samuel, The End of Innocence, 132.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 137.

25 Tirella, Tomorrow-Land, 100.

26 Ibid., 205.
Pop Art” seeing the “hodgepodge of shapes and designs” as a result of Moses’ rejection of a “donut shaped pavilion” that would allow exhibitors to rent homogenous spaces.²⁷ Like Tirella, Cotter regards the New York State Pavilion “as one of the masterpieces of the Fair” but introduce a new interpretation of the Tent of Tomorrow in particular as a “county fair of the future [which] combined the activity and excitement of traditional local fair with a dramatic and unique architectural design that envisioned a world of tomorrow.”²⁸ This view confers a new reading of the carnival-like tent coupled with the technological advents that brought it’s futuristic appearance forth suggesting that Johnson wanted to juxtapose the notions of the local with the global, the past and the future. Still Cotter does not explore how the Pop commissions functioned within the context of their pavilion and the fair itself. Perhaps because art in general was not an emphasis of the Fair there has not as of yet been a significant body of work devoted to its study specifically as the commissions related to other art at the Fair and how the pavilion itself related to other buildings present on the grounds of the Fair.

Within art historical contexts, Pop Art has been discussed most widely in regards to its use of commercial and mass consumer tropes, and less commonly in terms of how those tropes contribute to a critique of commercialism and mass media. The art historical narrative has designated that Pop functions both formally and thematically in relation to popular and mass culture manifesting either as direct reproductions of commercial images or as a thematic relationship to the social, political, and economic climate of the


²⁸ Ibid.
1960s. Writers such as Diane Waldman, Lawrence Alloway, John Coplans, and Michael Lobel have all written about Pop Art’s use of commercial techniques as a function of form in the work. Alloway, writing in the 1970s, felt that the invocation of commercial images was related to the word “commonality,” which in military parlance signifies “a piece of hardware common to different operations”—suggesting that the use of commercial images and techniques was a means for Pop artists to connect to mass audiences perhaps with different motivations than advertisers who used the same images. Michael Lobel has explored the ways in which the techniques of Pop Art—color schemes, screen printing, Ben-Day dots—allowed Pop artists to explore the economy of means that commercial production necessitated. This allowed Pop artists to explore the possibilities within a limited toolbox, encouraging more creative uses of materials in the development of each of the artists’ styles and allowing them to use these techniques as modules within their compositions.

Pop Art has also often been aligned with the postwar economic and political trends of the 1960s. David McCarthy studied how Pop Art’s use of images from popular and consumer culture was related to a “growing emphasis on image recognition…and packaging” that started in advertising but came to the fore in politics during Kennedy’s campaign. McCarthy’s study examines the ways in which Pop Art’s source material was derived from trends in political campaigns but does not emphasize the ways in which


Pop Art’s affinity with political or commercial images fostered a critical capacity.\textsuperscript{32} Christian Mamiya’s book \textit{Pop Art and Consumer Culture} examines Pop Art’s ideological ties to economics; in his book he argues that Pop Art’s success was due to the economic climate of its time.\textsuperscript{33} In Mamiya’s view, Keynesian economics—which posited that, “in order to ensure a healthy Gross National Product and full employment, consumption must be stimulated”—provided the framework for Pop to flourish.\textsuperscript{34} That John F. Kennedy was the first president to “accept wholeheartedly the Keynesian analysis” and apply it to his economic policy made it clear why he became Pop Art’s poster boy.\textsuperscript{35} Mamiya’s study suggests that the climate of consumption in the late 1950s and early 1960s provided Pop with a forum in which its images could be consumed and distributed.

However, in the early 1960s, Pop’s detractors and its supporters did not initially see the use of commercial imagery and techniques as critique of commercialism. Pop Art’s mingling with popular culture both formally and thematically irked such critics as Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Hilton Kramer, and Max Kozloff.\textsuperscript{36} Greenberg’s 1962 essay \textit{After Abstract Expressionism} asserts that Pop Art was “too close to safe taste.”\textsuperscript{37} Kramer felt Pop Art was only capable of “reconciling us to commodities,

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{36} McCarthy, \textit{Pop Art} 34.

banalities, and vulgarities.” Critical responses such as these have been examined in David Cateforis’ exhibition and accompanying catalogue *Decade of Transformation: American Art in the 1960s.* Max Kozloff, for instance, condemned Pop Art for having encouraged the surge in the attendance of “bobby soxers and delinquents” to New York galleries. Kozloff’s castigation was based in the notion that Pop Art was changing the demographics of the art-viewing public. Conversely, Pop Art’s supporters, including Lawrence Alloway, Lucy Lippard, and Gene Swenson “recognized Pop’s capacity to articulate realities of a society thoroughly permeated by mass culture” but haven’t addressed how the work translates an articulation or reflection of reality into a critical stance. To date there have not been any studies that have explored the commissions for the Johnson’s Theaterama at the World’s Fair as an important moment in the formation of Pop Art or as necessarily related to Pop’s commercial and social themes. A consideration of the commissions for the Theaterama and their context at the Fair allows us to further explore Pop Art’s attitudes towards commercialism and Pop artists’ intent in so closely aligning themselves with commercial visual culture. The fact that critics on both sides of the Pop Art debate seldom discussed Pop’s presence at the 1964 World’s Fair leaves a significant gap where Pop Art may have been seen as a viable form of dissent.

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38 McCarthy, *Pop Art*, 35.


repositioning it as not as clear a rupture, in ideology at least, from Abstract Expressionism as generally thought.

Contemporaneous critiques of Pop Art were based in Pop Art’s seemingly straightforward similarity to commercial images. However, as recent critics have shown, there are ways besides outright rejection of popular imagery to engage social and political issues.\textsuperscript{42} Kenneth Silver has argued that in the case of Warhol, “his use of anonymous commercial imagery” allowed him to adopt the voice of normative culture and the female voice to which commercial images were targeted “as an expression of camp sensibility.”\textsuperscript{43} Richard Meyer has commented on the homoerotic subtext of Warhol’s contribution to the Fair, \textit{Thirteen Most Wanted Men}, finding that the “punning title and the gazes exchanged by the wanting men” was possibly an affront to Fair Officials and visitors.\textsuperscript{44} Several approaches have been taken toward investigating Lichtenstein’s work as social critique in regards to women. In Eva Wattilock’s analysis, Lichtenstein’s slight altering of source material was a device with which to make the women in his images appear more contorted and thus, more manic as a comment on the “contemporary cliché of the housewife obsessed with cleanliness”—a sort of precursor to second wave feminism.\textsuperscript{45} She also sees Lichtenstein’s depiction of comic book women (especially

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Richard Meyer, \textit{Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Early Warhol} (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 128.

\end{footnotesize}
when coupled with his “parodies” of paintings by Cézanne, Monet and Picasso) as a strictly formal analysis of how artists had historically treated the female figure.\textsuperscript{46} Though these studies make important steps in understanding Pop’s critical capacity, a study of Lichtenstein and Warhol’s role in the Fair explores how these artists would have taken these critiques into the public domain and the implications of Pop Art in a public context.

Historically, Pop Art has not been directly linked to Abstract Expressionism and therefore granted none of its political gravitas. Most historians of Pop Art placed its origins in Dada, Surrealism, and even Cubism, feeling that Pop Art’s only relationship to Abstract Expressionism was reactionary. Critics interpreted Pop Artists’ engagement with commercial images and artifacts as a direct affront to the formal and ideological values of Abstract Expressionism. This challenge to Abstract Expressionism took visual form in Lichtenstein’s \textit{Brushstroke} paintings, which “treated Abstract Expressionist painting as a …cartoon image…instead of the traces of individual engagement….it was intended to be.”\textsuperscript{47} Pop Art was seen in its time primarily as a method to combat the notion that “modern art was supposed to be difficult to understand” and its artists were “neither radicals, nor non conformists but rather non dissenters,” contrasting greatly with the myth of the Abstract Expressionist artist as a loner on the fringes of acceptable society.\textsuperscript{48} This sentiment, formulated by Lee Strasberg at the symposium on Pop Art at the Museum of Modern Art in 1963, was echoed by Barbara Rose, who when comparing Pop Art to

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} McCarthy, \textit{Pop Art}, 24.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 35.
Dada, said it was “too little interested in protest to have anything to do with its historical predecessor.”

However, Nancy Jachec’s *The Philosophy and Politics of Abstract Expressionism*, 1940-1960 provides a model for how we might examine the use of art in a World’s Fair context and also underscores the lack of consideration of Pop Art’s political utility at the Fair. In order to examine how Pop Art has historically been linked to Abstract Expressionism, we must first understand which values of Abstract Expressionism its supporters most valued and how those values were used to further ideological goals in the politically tense context of the Cold War era. Jachec explores the ways Harold Rosenberg’s notion of Abstract Expressionism was based on a Marxist vision of the artist. Rosenberg believed that Abstract Expressionists worked from the fringes of society, embodying Marx’s view of the artist as working “directly with the materials of his own experience and transforming them,” emphasizing both the solitary pursuit of art as well as the experience itself of making. This belief worked to set Abstract Expressionism apart from its successor, Pop Art, which was largely considered to be made from collective cultural artifacts and in which the process of making was not always emphasized. The values ascribed to Abstract Expressionism were on full view in an exhibition titled *Fifty Years of Modern Art* at the Brussels’ World’s Fair in 1958—the “first successful transfer of the ideological associations of American Abstract

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51 Ibid.
Expressionism” from an American context to an international stage in the form of a fair exhibition.\textsuperscript{52} The exhibition represented Abstract Expressionists as obliged to “conduct their struggles of intellect outside of conventional society” echoing Rosenberg’s sentiments.\textsuperscript{53} That no study like Jachec’s examining the politics and philosophy of Pop Art in a World’s Fair context exists suggests an underestimation of Pop Art’s role at the 1964-65 World’s Fair.

Meanwhile Robert Rydell’s 1993, \textit{World of Fairs}, provides context for the 1965-65 Fair and it’s veiled response to cold war themes by examining the motivations of organizers of the American Pavilion at the 1958 Brussels Fair.\textsuperscript{54} Much of the book focuses on the ways in which World’s Fairs and International Expositions were colonialist endeavors that historically marginalized groups of people by commoditizing them in the form of ethnographic or overtly sexualized displays, however, Rydell in his investigation of the Brussels 1958 Fair explores themes of technology, democracy and visual culture relevant to inquiries raised in this thesis.\textsuperscript{55} Rydell writes that leading up to the 1958 Fair, “instead of realizing ‘Peace and Freedom,’ the theme of the 1940 New York World’s Fair, Americans found themselves ensnared in a cold war and leading lives filled with deepening anxieties about nuclear conflagration and racial conflict.”\textsuperscript{56} As a means of quelling the perception of these anxieties by a foreign audience, the American

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 205.
\item \textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 206.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Rydell, \textit{World of Fairs}, 11.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 139.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 193
\end{itemize}
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Pavilion “trumpe[ted] the openness of American Society and the material plentitude of American life” by displaying artistic, social, and technological advents. In Brussels as in New York in 1964-65 the arts was seen as a viable vehicle for the exportation of American values on a global stage and as a way to diminish the impression of racial and political conflict. The belief that art could be useful on such an occasion is seen in the selection of Howard Cullnan (Director of the Metropolitan Opera) and James Plaut (Director of The ICA in Boston) to act as commissioners of the American Pavilion at the Brussels Fair. In addition to the Abstract Expressionist works on display the American Pavilion also housed “art produced by Native Americans…[embodying] universal themes” drawing broad strokes between disparate modes of visual production. Despite Abstract Expressionist’s personal beliefs about technology and its effects, in accompanying displays at the Brussels Fair technology was shown as a “friend not a foe to culture and democracy.” Most notably American voting machines were exhibited and visitors were invited to “vote” for their “favorite American President, movie star, and musician” perfectly summing up the marriage of technology, democracy, and popular culture that would be capitalized on by the organizers of the 1964-1965 Fair. Both Jachec and Rydell in their analyses of the 1958 Brussels Fair and the role of art and culture there provide a model in which we can think of presentations of art that melded

57 Ibid., 194
58 Ibid., 196
59 Ibid., 204
60 Ibid., 201
61 Ibid.
images of technology, democracy, and popular culture as a viable mode of representation for American values in the Cold War era.

The conspicuous absence of the Fair from discussion of Pop Art’s legacy despite its major debut at the Fair suggests the need for a re-examination.\textsuperscript{62} Only in contemporary criticism has Pop’s subversive subtext been acknowledged and the form itself been seen as more than a direct and safe reflection of consumer culture.\textsuperscript{63} Had the Fair been closely and clearly examined, however, critics on both sides might have been able to reconcile a coherent notion of the public and political functions of Pop Art and the belief systems of its artists. Doing so now may link Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art in previously unforeseen ways. If we examine the commercial context of the Fair, we can see past the usual interpretations of Pop Art’s reliance on commercial appearance, instead viewing its integration into the Fair’s visual landscape as an opportunity to criticize the Fair itself. Such an examination, including an analysis of the total effect of artworks on the pavilion, especially the works’ formal links to Abstract Expressionism, as well as the interaction between the interior and exterior exhibitions, allows us to recognize an argument about Pop Art’s utility in the context of the Fair. This study is devoted to examining the ways in which the display of contemporary sculpture, painting, and collage on Johnson’s Pavilion (contrasted with the interior displays of domestically scaled paintings from the earliest days of America’s existence) was able to assert a critique of the commercial values on

\textsuperscript{62} Lichtenstein’s contribution to the Fair is discussed briefly in the catalogue for a 2002 exhibition at Mitchell Innes and Nash on Lichtenstein’s Times Square Mural, but only as a precedent, not necessarily in its own right.

\textsuperscript{63} Meyer, \textit{Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Early Warhol}, 129.
full view at the Fair in the form of consumer displays, corporate-sponsored architecture, and popular amusements in flagrant denial of the social and political issues of their time.
Chapter 1
The Cold War Politics of the Fair

Though the art at the 1964 Fair had the art of the 1939 Fair as its direct precedent, the greatest contributing factor to the message of art at the Fair, and particularly the commissions for Johnson’s pavilion, was the social and political climate of 1960s New York. Moreover, the logistics of the Fair’s organization gave rise to an outsized commercial presence at the Fair. Within this commercialized but socially tense environment, Johnson’s pavilion, both in its style of architecture and presentation of art, was visually integrated into the landscape of the Fair with which it was ideologically at odds.

Art on the grounds of the 1939 World’s Fair in Flushing Meadows embodied the ideals set forth by the New Deal both in content and organization. Under Franklin Roosevelt’s sweeping domestic program, centralization of federal authority resulted in an array of government initiatives sponsoring the arts as a way of providing relief to out-of-work artists and craftsmen. The program resulted in the ubiquity of images in federal buildings which related directly to the local community, countering what Roosevelt felt was the mistaken belief that “art was something foreign to America and to [Americans] themselves—something imported from another continent.”64 As a result of the belief that art should be accessible to people in every social stratum, art was integrated into every aspect of the fair, from sculptures on the grounds to venues for historical and

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contemporary art with works by Stuart Davis, Arshile Gorky, and Willem de Kooning.\textsuperscript{65}

Given that the Fair’s opening coincided with the ascendancy of many of these artists, it is clear that art at the 1939 Fair represented the cutting edge. For the inaugural 1939 season, the Contemporary Arts building (Figures 1 and 2) hosted the exhibition \textit{American Art Today} organized by Holger Cahill, an administrator of the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and acting director of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA).\textsuperscript{66} In 1940, the Contemporary Arts Building held an exhibition of works by American abstract artists and members of the National Society of Mural Painters.\textsuperscript{67} The Fair’s emphasis on integrating aspects of the WPA (including muralists hired by the WPA and hiring a WPA administrator to curate its contemporary exhibitions) enforced the values of Roosevelt’s arts initiatives on a world stage rather than in a local context. Though later—specifically under John F. Kennedy—public art would depart from the homogeneous and conformist images that proliferated under the WPA, public art in the 1930s and art in the 1939 Fair gave rise to the belief that art could center on the ideals of everyday American experience.

The vision of America presented to visitors at the 1964 Fair was much less homogenized and idealized than at the 1939 Fair largely because the world itself and New York as its microcosm had changed drastically since 1939. Overall, it seems art was


\textsuperscript{66} National Art Society, \textit{American Art Today} (Stamford: National Art Society, 1939), 4-7.

given a less prominent role at the 1964 Fair. The artwork that was present on and within
Johnson’s pavilion suggested that though the United States was in a politically
progressive era, the country was rife with civic and social unrest and was largely driven
by commercial interests. In contrast, most displays at the Fair were tied to commercial
interests and designed to glaze over civic and political strife in New York and beyond.

The artwork at the 1964 Fair was less influenced by European precedents than art
at the 1939 Fair, and by that token also less avant-garde. This was partly because of the
political and financial conditions under which the fair was organized. The 1964 World’s
Fair was conceived as early as May 1958 by a Manhattan real estate lawyer named
Robert Kopple as a way of encouraging a younger generation to become interested in the
world at large, suggesting that perhaps the Fair’s genesis as a form of youth
entertainment could account for its general lack of incisive critique of American
society.\(^\text{68}\) Shortly after Kopple courted interest and investments in the Fair, New York
Park Commissioner Robert Moses, who had proposed the site of Flushing Meadows Park
in Queens, took over its organization.\(^\text{69}\) Moses forwent the support of the Bureau of
International Exhibitions (BIE) feeling that their rules on corporate sponsorship, opening
and closing date requirements, and guidelines about whether or not individual countries
would pay for their own pavilions were too restrictive.\(^\text{70}\) He instead sought private and
governmental funds to build his Fair, departing from the methods of the 1939 World’s

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\(^{68}\) Samuel, _The End of Innocence: The 1964-65 World's Fair_, 3.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 8.

Fair, which was largely government sponsored. That the 1964 Fair was to a great degree privately funded came to influence every aspect of the Fair, something that was reflected in the art eventually chosen for the New York State Pavilion.

By the time John F. Kennedy was elected president, he sought to support the Fair and a Federal pavilion to ensure that the US government’s presence was at least equal to what was already being planned by the Soviet Union and to ultimately convey his hope that the Fair could be a forum for people to gain the “true impression of what can be accomplished when the people of the world are given the chance to work in an era of peace and understanding.”\textsuperscript{71} Shortly before the Fair opened, however, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, altering the course of the country as well as the themes and reception of the Fair.

Moses was motivated to make the Fair as large and as popular as possible through corporate sponsorships as a way to validate the pro-development stance he had taken throughout his time in New York City bureaucracy, which was one cause of protests throughout the city. Prior to becoming president of the Fair, Robert Moses had held a number of titles in his forty-plus years of service in New York. He had worked as City Parks Commissioner, Chairman of the Mayor’s Committee on Slum Clearance, head of the State Parks Council, and chairman of the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority. From the mid 1920s through 1968, he helped build 13 bridges, 416 parkways, 658

playgrounds, and 150,000 housing units.\textsuperscript{72} It was felt by a number of architecture and development critics that Moses’ approach to slum clearance was directly tied to the resulting social unrest felt in New York and beyond. Moses’ hoped that a fair could save his deteriorating reputation and allow him to build up Flushing Meadows Park once the Fair was over, leaving him a lasting and positive legacy.

In order to do so, however, Moses would have to contend with the race riots and civil rights protests that, by the summer of 1963, began to spread across New York. In June 1963, shortly after the temporary resolution of integration at the University of Alabama, Kennedy delivered a speech via radio and television from Washington on his intentions in regards to civil rights. He reiterated his belief that the “right of equality could no longer be denied to the nation’s twenty-two million African Americans.”\textsuperscript{73} He continued on to say that “we face therefore a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be faced with repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets.”\textsuperscript{74} That same summer protests organized by Northern sections of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and the Urban League materialized in response to employment policies at the Harlem Hospital and housing policies at the

\textsuperscript{72} “The Legacy of Robert Moses,” PBS, accessed May 5, 2015, \url{http://www.pbs.org/wnet/need-to-know/environment/the-legacy-of-robert-moses/16018/}.

\textsuperscript{73} “Radio and Television Report to the American People on Civil Rights June 11, 1963,” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed April 4, 2015, \url{http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/LH8F_0Mzv0e6Ro1yEm74Ng.aspx}.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Rutgers Housing project on the Lower East Side. One of the most outspoken activists in New York, author and journalist Louis Lomax, foretold the “desire among young activists to embrace radical tactics and move away from the approach of national civil rights groups.” As an outlet for the feelings of the African-American population in New York City, Lomax devised what he called a stall-in, which entailed clogging the “arterial highway system” leading to the Fair that Moses had built. By having drivers run out of gas or stop their cars at key entrances and exits, Lomax hoped to cause a significant traffic jam, reducing the impact and visitor count for the Fair’s opening day. The stall-in had little impact on the Fair’s opening day attendance as few people participated and highway patrolmen were on hand to ensure traffic was moving; their presence alone, however, showed that Lomax’s threat had reached Moses who had taken measures to prevent the stall-in’s success.

These social and civic issues accounted for much of the criticism of the Fair; many felt that despite the typically international themes of World’s Fairs in general, the low participation of foreign countries (likely because of Moses’ refusal to engage with the BIE) and the high visibility of American corporate life resulted in the Fair appearing as “a piece of white bread America—religious, conservative, middle class—plunked down in the middle of ethnic New York … where any hint of inequality or conflict was

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75 Tirella, *Tomorrow-Land*, 76.

76 Ibid., 81.

77 Ibid., 82.
excluded from the social purview of the fair.” 78 The fraught social and political climate, largely ignored by the majority of displays focused on selling a vision of a United States bound for social and domestic progress, would find its voice in the art Johnson commissioned for the New York State Pavilion.

Though it may seem counterintuitive that artworks commissioned for the celebratory forum of the World’s Fair criticized the context of the fair, this dynamic reflects changing ideas about the capacities and responsibilities of art in the public sphere between the 1939 Fair and the 1964 Fair. On the occasion of Kennedy’s inauguration Robert Frost wrote “Summoning artists to participate/in the august occasion of the state/seems something for us all to celebrate,” helping Kennedy to establish that the arts and artistic community would be a major force in the affairs of his administration. 79 After commissioning reports on the state of the arts in America, Kennedy concluded that the arts were an important forum for dissenting views, particularly in the Cold War era. Kennedy affirmed the importance of the artist to society as based in the artist’s ability to “question power,” helping to determine whether in a great society “we use power or power uses us.” 80 He argued that artists, “solitary figures” unique in their “individual minds and sensibilities,” were distinguished by their ability to resist being dictated by an


“officious state.” For Kennedy, the artist as unpopular, dissenting individual offered a model for how America might project itself as a freethinking player in the Cold War era despite the fact that as a president and public figure, his own persona was one of full integration with youth and mass consumer visual culture.

Though Abstract Expressionists were thought to embody this archetype, there are ways in which we can view Pop artists, within the context of the fair, as embodying such an ideal. Kennedy saw in artists the ability and responsibility to reflect values back to the American public, which Pop artists were also capable of doing visually. The didactic function of the artworks displayed both within and without the New York State Pavilion was not to necessarily instruct visitors on precisely what they should think, but only to suggest that they should turn a critical eye to the environment of the Fair. In Kennedy’s view artists’ pluralistic, individual views would be a foil to the conformity valued in the Soviet Union that Americans so feared. Pop artists superficially reflected this conformity, but within the context of the fair could offer a criticism of conformist culture at large.

Whereas Roosevelt’s administration, in the form of the WPA, argued for the viability of American Art, Kennedy’s administration argued for its necessity in a democracy, explaining why the art at the 1964 Fair was generally much less avant-garde and European influenced than art at the 1939 Fair. The 1964 Fair in all its ventures—art, technology, and industry—sought to distinguish itself from Soviet ideology just as displays of Abstract Expressionist art at the Belgian World’s Fair in 1958 also sought to do. Within the context of the Fair, the commissions for Johnson’s Theaterama heralded

81 Ibid.
American capitalism while also embodying Kennedy’s ideas regarding the responsibility of artists in the Cold War Era.
Chapter 2
Philip Johnson at the Fair

In order to properly represent the grandeur of New York State, Robert Moses and Governor Nelson Rockefeller had one architect in mind with whom they were both familiar: Philip Johnson. Before Johnson was approached for the commission, he was an accomplished curator and architect, well known for Glass House, his private residence in Connecticut as well as for designing integral parts of the Seagram building in New York City. Rockefeller was personally familiar with Johnson because of Johnson’s time as the architecture curator at the Museum of Modern Art, the institution Rockefeller’s mother help to found.82

Johnson, whose sensibilities had been shaped by principles of the Bauhaus, first met German American architect Ludwig Mies Van der Rohe in 1928 while Van der Rohe was working on his German Pavilion for the 1929 Barcelona International. Over the next ten years, with his colleagues Alfred Barr and Henry Russell Hitchcock, Johnson came to outline what would be called the International Style. Exemplified by architects like Walter Gropius, Mies van der Rohe, and Frank Lloyd Wright, the style was introduced in a 1932 exhibition titled The International Style: Architecture Since 1922 at MoMA. The International Style, Johnson felt, was the first style “since Gothic to be developed on the basis of a new interpretation of structure… steel and concrete became the essence of the

new style.” Beyond these material concerns, the style was defined by 1) an emphasis on architectural volume over mass or planes rather than solidity, 2) a rejection of symmetry and, 3) a rejection of applied decoration. It is within the parameters of this style that Johnson designed the New York State Pavilion.

The New York State Pavilion (Figure 3) was built into the southwest corner of Flushing Meadows Park, in direct view of the Unisphere. It consisted of three main parts: the Theaterama, the Sky View Towers, and the Tent of Tomorrow, all constructed out of poured concrete. One of the Fair’s themes was “Man’s Achievement on a Shrinking Globe in an Expanding Universe,” which Johnson aimed to visualize formally in his design. Components of the International Style allowed Johnson to “create an unengaged free space as an example of the greatness of New York, rather than a warehouse full of exhibit material.” Like Glass House, the components of the pavilion relied on volume over mass, using columns to elevate planes from the ground. Though each of the components was essentially round and symmetrical, the composition formed by the three structures was asymmetrical and graduated, in accordance with the second rule of the International Style. Most importantly, Johnson took one of the founding tenets of the Bauhaus (from which the International Style was descended)—the unity of parts in

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85 New York World’s Fair 1964-1965—Summary of Plans, Box 3, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

the visual field—and extended it to create the three-part Pavilion. Where most Pavilions on the fairgrounds consisted of one building which served multiple functions, Johnson built a three-part Pavilion whose individual parts (though visually unified by material) served different programmatic functions.

Johnson appeared to depart from the International Style by not using sheet glass anywhere on the pavilion and, more importantly, by not adhering to the final tenet of the International Style which addresses applied ornament. For example, rather than build a flat roof for the Tent of Tomorrow as was common on the most famous International Style buildings, Johnson chose to use a multi-colored suspended tent, giving the building a carnival feel (Figure 4). At the time it was the largest suspension roof in the world. In addition, Johnson invoked the Googie style of architecture that had been popularized by diners on America’s west coast since the 1940s and in the television show The Jetsons (Figures 5 and 6). Comparing images of the buildings within the show and Johnson’s Pavilion, it is clear he was taking the features of modern architecture to their kitschy end while simultaneously referencing popular culture. For Johnson, the pastiche of historical styles was typical to his work; he considered himself “buttoned into tradition” aiming “to improve it, twist it and mold it; to make something new of it; not to deny it.”

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87 “Construction at the New York World’s Fair,” Construction Craftsman, September 1963, Box 4A, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.


integration of historical styles into the total effect of his work would find its way into his choices for the commissions for the exterior of the Theaterama.

Though Johnson felt he was not one to work in “straightjackets,” in his interpretation of the rejection of applied ornament we can understand one way in which he may have felt his New York State Pavilion did ultimately conform to the International Style’s parameters. Johnson believed that the rejection of applied ornament was an expression of the “social responsibility” of the building; in other words, the building had a responsibility to its programmatic function and that the “beauties of the exterior must be developed after the assurance of the fullest functional fulfillment.” In one sense then, since the Theaterama was conceived as a forum for the artwork commissions, the fact that they became its most prominent feature elevates the artworks to more than just applied ornament and shows Johnson’s commitment to the idea that form should follow function.

The Theaterama, a single story drum measuring 44 feet tall and 100 feet in diameter, was the smallest of the three components (Figure 7). The paintings and sculptures by artists including Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Indiana, and Robert Rauschenberg were displayed around the cylindrical face of the building just above its colonnaded lower half. Within the Theaterama, a 360-degree film was shown, taking

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92 Ibid.

93 World’s Fair Brochure, Box 4A, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
visitors on a tour of New York State’s natural landmarks. The panoramic film shown within the Theaterama was produced by Coleman Productions and featured six 35mm projectors whose edges were perfectly and seamlessly aligned to produce a panoramic effect.94

When facing the complex from the direction of the Fair’s Unisphere, the center of the Fair itself, the Theaterama was at the forefront of the complex while the Tent of Tomorrow and the Astro-View Observation Towers were recessed. The Tent of Tomorrow was a large ellipsis measuring 350 feet by 250 feet featuring a terrazzo tile road map of New York State, funded by Texaco and showing the company’s gas stations across the state (Figure 8).95 The lower walls were painted red and white reinforcing the carnival feel of the structure’s roof. The three Astro-View observation towers rose as high as 226 feet; the uppermost tower was reached by an elevator giving visitors a panoramic view of the fairgrounds as they ascended (Figure 9).96 The tiled floor of the Tent of Tomorrow showing the map of New York State’s highway system shrank the viewer in relation to the ground, echoing the “shrinking globe” aspect of the Fair’s theme. In contrast, the Astro-View Towers expanded the visitor’s view over the fair, echoing the “expanding universe” component of the phrase. Within different components of the New York State Pavilion, the visitor would feel both large and small. However, the Astro-View Towers and the Tent of Tomorrow were open and airy structures offering little

94 “A 360 Degree Tour ‘Around New York,’” Business Screen Magazine no. 3, April 1964, 21, Box 4A, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

95 “Preview: New York World’s Fair, 1964-65,” Architectural Record, February 1964, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

96 Ibid.
opportunity for programmed content. Rather, their function was to act as a lens through which to view New York State, both in the form of maps of the state itself and from the vantage of the towers. By contrast the Theaterama, with its theater and interior exhibition areas, served foremost among the structures to act as host to the pavilion’s programming, which focused on both historical and contemporary artwork as the resource most emblematic of New York State.

While Johnson’s pavilion heralded art first and foremost, other buildings and displays at the Fair used similarly spectacular styles of architecture in the service of commercial ventures. Their outsized presence at the Fair accounted for much of the negative critical response. Because Robert Moses had not engaged the international community, few foreign countries built pavilions, leaving most displays to be created and financed by the 23 participating states and 28 private American companies. RCA, US Royal Tires, Eastman Kodak, and, of course, General Motors, Chrysler, and Ford were all represented. Two such examples of these corporate displays were the Uni-Royal Ferris wheel and the IBM pavilion, which was designed by Charles Eames and Eero Saarinen. The Uni-Royal Ferris wheel was capable of carrying up to 100 passengers at a time and was shaped like an enormous tire, advertising the company’s product (Figure 10). Meanwhile, the IBM Pavilion was shaped like a giant egg perched upon a low forest of

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100 “Let’s Go to the Fair and Futurama,” *General Motors*, 1964, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
branches (Figure 11).\textsuperscript{101} The ovoid pavilion was emblazoned with hundreds of IBM logos and was said to resemble the “type ball” element within the newest IBM Selectric typewriter.\textsuperscript{102}

All three buildings—Johnson’s New York State pavilion, the IBM pavilion, and the Uni-Royal Ferris wheel—presaged the work of Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi, who in their 1972 book \textit{Learning from Las Vegas} explored the nature of architecture as symbol. Brown and Venturi differentiate the ‘decorated shed,’ which is essentially an unadorned construction “where systems of space and structure are directly at the service of program, and ornament is applied independently of them” from the ‘duck’ where “the architectural systems, space, structure, and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form.”\textsuperscript{103} They used the example of a duck-shaped building in Long Island that sold ducks and other poultry (Figure 12). In all three works, the sign that would normally explicate the function becomes the architecture. In their example of Las Vegas, the proliferation of ‘ducks’ is necessitated because of the physical layout of the city, which is predominantly reached by highway, rising out of the desert that surrounds it. In their view the buildings themselves must act as billboards advertising the services offered within and must also be visible from the highway.\textsuperscript{104} This is similar to the way structures at the World’s Fair needed to attract attention to themselves in the

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{102} “IBM Pavilion,” \textit{Constructioneer Magazine}, March 23, 1964, 29, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.


\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 88.
crowded visual field of the fairgrounds. The Ferris wheel advertised a tire company and the IBM building publicized the latest model of typewriter while Johnson promoted New York by constructing a building that looked like the future ascending toward literal and proverbial space.

With the exception of Johnson’s New York State Pavilion, architecture at the Fair was generally a critical failure. Moses’s reluctance to institute a central plan on the basis that the “Fair administration belongs to no architectural clique, subscribes to no esthetic creed” paved the way for the blatantly commercial displays. As Vincent Scully, America’s most well known architectural historian, wrote in his review of the Fair in *Life*, “World’s Fairs give architects a chance to do two things: to put up more advanced buildings than can be easily constructed elsewhere and to group them in ways that suggest solutions to city planning as a whole.”¹⁰⁵ He believed that both the World’s Fair in London in 1851 and the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago had successfully accomplished this. The fact that none of the buildings at the New York World’s Fair offered widely applicable material innovations or bore a strategic plan that could be applied to urban design constituted a failure.

However, Scully wrote that Johnson’s Pavilion was “almost great” and that the suspended roof of the Tent of Tomorrow represented the “Fair’s only significant technical achievement” despite its lack of potential for widespread implantation.¹⁰⁶ Similarly the editors of *Architectural Record* felt that the Pavilion was “in the best

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¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
tradition of Fair design,” representing the “gaiety of the circus” while also acting as a contextual contrast to the Pop Art commissions themselves. In their view, the “sinister overtones” of the Pop Art works present on the frieze of the Theaterama enhanced the “transient grace of the pavilion,” a contrast that found its equal in Johnson’s own New York State Theater at Lincoln Center where he had installed a roughly hewn Lee Bontecou sculpture. Further to this, Johnson, in accordance with his beliefs about the relationship of form and function, curated a body of work for the Theaterama that enhanced his architectural contribution to the Fair.


108 Ibid., 145.
Chapter 3
Art at the New York State Pavilion

The same year Johnson completed designs for the New York State Pavilion, he also designed Lincoln Center and the Museum of Modern Art, demonstrating his growing interest in public buildings. In Johnson’s view, his particular style of architecture was moving out of the private sphere and towards “government sponsorship.”109 His goal was to “take the dirty connotations out of the words ‘official’ and ‘academic’” all the while becoming “l’architecte du roi” or “official architect for the state,” bringing formerly private interests and tastes to the public sphere.110 Johnson extended this top down ethos of taste to the selection of artists for the World’s Fair. The group of artists commissioned were personally known by Johnson, if not personally collected by him, rather than the result of a public competition.111

With New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, Johnson commissioned ten artists with the aim of displaying ten works that, when lined up, would fill the circumference of the Theaterama’s upper façade. The final list of artists included Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Mallary, Andy Warhol, Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Indiana, Peter Agostini, Ellsworth Kelly, John Chamberlain, Alexander Liberman, and James Rosenquist. In early models of the Theaterama the maquettes of the buildings show works that were much larger in scale

110 Ibid.
111 Harris, “It Just Had Something To Do With New York,” 9.
than what was actually realized (Figure 13). Still, because each work was just under half the total height of the building, each would have been large enough so as to be visible from the Unisphere, which was connected to the New York State Pavilion by one of the Unisphere’s radial walkways.

The works ranged in media from sculpture to painting to screen-printing and were realized in fine art and industrial materials. Each of the works generally fit within the 20 feet by 20 feet dimensions that Johnson specified and was presented in a square or rectangular format. The only departure from the assigned format was John Chamberlain’s work—an abstract sculpture constructed from automobile parts that was much smaller than the rest of the other commissions. While an early maquette shows uncredited artworks in high relief, in the final version of the installation only the works by Chamberlain, Robert Mallary and Ellsworth Kelly protruded significantly from the curved façade of the building. Interestingly, these works encompass both the Abstract Expressionist and Pop styles, blurring the lines between which materials belonged to which styles. Most of the works, such as those by James Rosenquist, Robert Indiana, John Chamberlain, and Robert Rauschenberg, contained references to food, technology, and outer space, motifs present in other forms on the Fairgrounds. Rosenquist and Chamberlain’s work related to automotive displays such as the Uni-Royal Tire; Robert Indiana’s work was visually similar to the brightly lit signs present at the Fair;

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112 Model of the New York State Pavilion 1963, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

113 See Figure 13.

114 Highlights of the Fair, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
Rauschenberg’s work related directly to the ideological aims of the Fair with images of Kennedy and space crafts. In addition, most of the works were abstract rather than figural, only Rauschenberg, Mallary, Lichtenstein, and Rosenquist made direct reference to the human figure.

The works were arranged in a loop echoing both the cylindrical forms of the other components of the Pavilion as well as the panorama display within the Theaterama itself. The resulting effect was that of a filmstrip, or slides in a carousel, evenly spaced from one another and narratively arranged so as to suggest narrative across the expanse of the façade. The arrangement ultimately served as what Harrison calls an “aesthetic billboard advertising the up to date tastes of Nelson Rockefeller announcing that New York was to be identified with the very latest trends.”

An October 1963 article in the *New York Times* summarily described the art works on the frieze of Johnson’s Theaterama as “avant-garde” while historically the group has been regarded as Pop Art in texts on the Fair. Johnson at times also described the work as Pop and felt that that “Pop Art was the most important art movement as a sharp reaction against Abstract Expressionism [and that] it was such a great relief because we recognize the pretty girls and pop bottles.”\(^{116}\) Notwithstanding his oversimplification of its themes, Johnson clearly understood Pop Art’s relationship to Abstract Expressionism and sought to represent each of the movements that spanned the era between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art by dividing the works into three

\(^{115}\) Harrison, “Art For the Millions?” 160.

stylistic categories: Neo-Dada, Hard-edge, and Pop Art. Despite their disparate aesthetics each style represented attempts to reject and synthesize Abstract Expressionism. Chronologically, Pop Art was the most recent of these, with Neo-Dada and Minimalism representing earlier reactions to Abstract Expressionism during the 1950s and into the 1960s. Rauschenberg, Mallary, Chamberlain, and Agostini’s works can be seen as Neo-Dada, the contributions of Kelly and Liberman are Hard-edge works, and the pieces by Lichtenstein, Rosenquist, Indiana, and Warhol fall into the Pop Art category.

Despite these categorical and thematic groupings, Johnson’s installation was neither straightforwardly linear nor chronological. From the entrance of the Theaterama moving counterclockwise, the sequence of works offers a synthesized narrative that describes the rarely linear relationship between different movements in art, thereby suggesting a more complex relationship between artists and their predecessors. Johnson chose to begin with Rauschenberg’s Neo-Dada painting Skyway, contrasted with Liberman’s Hard-edge steel sculpture Prometheus; next was Mallary’s Neo Dada felt and steel sculpture Cliffhangers. Johnson continued the sculpture sequence with Chamberlain’s Untitled crushed steel work that held in common both elements of Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. The sequence then transitioned into Lichtenstein’s Pop Art painting Girl in Window contrasted with Agostini’s Neo-Dada cast plaster sculpture A Windy Summer’s Day. Johnson then placed Warhol’s Pop Art silkscreen Thirteen Most Wanted Men next to Rosenquist’s Untitled Pop painting of collaged cars, food, and stars-and-stripes imagery.

Finally the sequence ended with two sculptural works: Kelly’s Hard-edge painted-steel *Blue Red* and Indiana’s Pop light-bulb *EAT*. Looking at the Theaterama from the Unisphere, the sequence begins with Rauschenberg and ends with Indiana, juxtaposing the works by these two artists next to each other on either side of the Theaterama’s entrance (Figures 14 and 15). When considering the group as a whole and in the counterclockwise sequence described above, one can read the group as showing a transition between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. This formal arrangement argues visually that the two groups were ideologically linked contrary to contemporary evaluations of the relationship between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. In fact, many of the works combined the brashness of Abstract Expressionism with the collage aspects of Dada and popular imagery of 1950s and 1960s America. The fact that the group wasn’t distinctly Pop or distinctly Abstract Expressionist suggests that Johnson wanted to combat contemporary criticism and make visual the thematic, formal, and ideological thread between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art.

For the nearly 20 years before the Fair opened, Abstract Expressionism dominated any discussions of American art. Spanning a variety of media, artists like Mark Rothko, Willem de Kooning, and Jackson Pollock aimed to offer a meditation on the artist’s inner life. Tapping into surrealist notions of the unconscious, Abstract Expressionists viewed their paintings as an artifact of the event of their contemplation or a witness to their experience. The resulting paintings often bore violent marks, dark

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119 Ibid., 23.
abysses, and abstract shapes as a metaphor for the destruction caused by World War II as well as a return to primitive and more spiritual modes of communication. The artworks presented at the World’s Fair in 1964 hoped to offer an alternative to the legacy of Abstract Expressionism by appearing formally cleaner and brighter and less emotionally fraught. The new styles displayed at the Fair superficially offered a more optimistic view of American identity as a metaphor for post World War II American exuberance.

The group of works that were chronologically closest to Abstract Expressionism were the Neo-Dada paintings, sculpture, and assemblages by Robert Rauschenberg, Robert Mallary, John Chamberlain, and Peter Agostini. Robert Rauschenberg (b. 1925) created a silkscreened and painted canvas titled *Skyway* containing collaged images of moon landings, New York City streets, geometric diagrams, classical style paintings and several images of John F. Kennedy (Figure 16). Rauschenberg used clippings in a red, white, and blue color palette interspersed with black and white images of moon landings and solar systems. Rauschenberg’s use of large swaths of white or empty space implied that the work and indeed history itself, was a work in progress. In the October 1963 preview article from the *New York Times*, the work that would become *Skyway* was described as containing “fragments of blown up photographs of the Sistine chapel, a bald eagle, the statue of Liberty, and an astronaut capsule” with no mention of images of Kennedy. Since Kennedy was killed between October 1963 and April 1964,

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122 “Avant-Garde Art Going to the Fair,” 22.
Rauschenberg likely edited his piece to make it a living document of history as it happened, ultimately depicting the iconography that would most come to define the era. Likely Johnson’s installation began with *Skyway* because it was most thematically linked to the Fair itself. Rauschenberg, along with Jasper Johns (who was not commissioned for the Theaterama), formed the link between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. Both artists used found or familiar images as a way of focusing on things the “mind already knows”—many of which came from popular culture. By substituting personal experience for images from the public consciousness, Rauschenberg allowed the viewer to infer connections from the juxtapositions of images and to project their personal associations of the images onto the work.

Robert Mallary’s (b. 1917) *Cliffhangers* similarly dealt with charged if ambiguous imagery. Mallary was best known during the 1960s for his inclusion in the *Art of Assemblage* exhibition in 1961 at MoMA and his role in the “Neo-Dada or junk art movement.” Mallary used “discarded pieces of cardboard, wood, cloth rags and clothing—and occasionally store-bought items like tuxedos” and assembled them into sculptures that “veered between the angst of Abstract Expressionism and the insouciance of Pop Art.” *Cliffhangers*, which he made for the Theaterama, featured a suspended

123 “Art: His Heart Belongs to Dada,” *Time*, May 4, 1959, 58.


125 Ibid.
ladder with hardened tuxedos hanging from it (Figure 17). Mallary saw the splayed and hanging figures as a “collapsed vaudeville act, a cluster of mountaineers in disarray. Harold Lloyd is hanging there by the hands of his clock,” referencing a legendary comedian of the silent film era. Cliffhangers represents both the passage of time and the artist’s anxiety about nuclear disaster in the Cold War era; Mallary often referenced Abstract Expressionist and Art Brut styles for their primitive forms that suggesting what the world might look like after nuclear warfare. Cliffhangers was partially obscured by the Tent of Tomorrow perhaps suggesting that the sculptures black, carbonized appearance against the white surface of the pavilion was not in keeping with the celebratory air of the Fair. By the 1970s, Mallary was well acknowledged as a having picked up the threads of Abstract Expressionism when he was included in an exhibition titled Younger Abstract Expressionists of the 1950s. He was thought to have shared an affinity with Franz Kline in his tendency to use resin to combine dirt, wood, and other detritus in “intuitive, dynamic, and experiential” ways, “surmounting their effects … [assimilating] time and entropy as subjects, claiming them as part of the content of the work,” much like the Abstract Expressionists. Johnson seemed to have intuited the ways in which Mallary related to Abstract Expressionism prior to the 1970s when the

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connection was being formalized in the MoMA exhibition featuring Mallary’s work. In Mallary’s commission for the World’s Fair the figures hang in the balance of time and space, not safe from falling yet held still by resin; Mallary successfully scaled his formal engagement with entropy heightening the drama of the scene relative to the scale of the architectural context.

John Chamberlain (b. 1927), like Agostini, presented a sculpture descended from ideas of Abstract Expressionist painting. His *Untitled* work was created from discarded car parts, a practice he had begun as early as 1957 (Figure 18). The *Untitled* piece was the smallest of all of the commissions, measuring only 8 feet by 14 feet by 4 feet, though it was the largest work Chamberlain had made up to that point in time. In 1960 Chamberlain had his first exhibition at the Martha Jackson Gallery and the following year was exhibited at MoMA in *The Art of Assemblage* alongside Duchamp and Picasso.

Chamberlain’s sculpture, much of its orange, yellow, and blue enamel paint still intact, combined the forceful acts of Abstract Expressionism with an engagement in American consumer culture in the choice of his medium. Though the individual pieces of the sculpture are recognizable as automotive parts, it’s clear the sculpture was never a complete car. Chamberlain did not crush an automobile so much as build up car parts, making the work less an object to which force was applied and more akin to a Neo-Dada

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collage made of components “the mind already knows.””

By the spring of 1963, Chamberlain was so well regarded as the missing link between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art that the *New York Times* referred to him as a “junk sculptor with Pop tendencies.” Chamberlain’s work was displayed on what would have been perceived as the back of the Theaterama in a narrow space abutted by the pillars supporting the Tent of Tomorrow, drawing a connection between the object’s crushed appearance and its close quarters. The work was hung relatively low in its allotted space on the frieze of the pavilion making it appear diminutive, especially when paired with Lichtenstein’s *Girl in Window*. Nonetheless, the work effectively appeared as though it was bursting from within the surface of the pavilion, growing in width the farther it protruded.

Chamberlain’s work most actively engaged the surface of the architecture of the Theaterama making the building itself appear as though it enacted force on the work.

Peter Agostini’s contribution, even now, is the most ambiguous of the works, acting more as a formal catalyst for the architecture than as a carrier of narrative content. Agostini (b. 1913) had worked as a cast maker for the WPA during the Depression and was a contemporary of the most well known of Abstract Expressionists despite never exhibiting with them. He never functioned as part of a group and felt that as soon as Abstract Expressionists were identified as a group that the movement was rendered

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133 "Art: His Heart Belongs to Dada,” *Time*, May 4, 1959, 58.

134 “Avant-Garde Art Going to the Fair,” 22.

toothless since it was predicated on the artist as individual.\textsuperscript{136} He viewed the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Pop Art as a turn from “being deadly serious” to being “deadly funny” both characterizations suggesting a dire attitude.\textsuperscript{137} Agostini “created plaster casts of beer cans, light bulbs, sausages, egg crates, pillows and balloons that were exhibited with similar works by Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg.”\textsuperscript{138} For the Theaterama, Agostini created an organic-looking plaster cast sculpture made up of six parts (Figure 19).\textsuperscript{139} Though most of the commissions did not engage the surface onto which they were affixed, Agostini succeeded in making his multi-part sculpture look as though it was crawling upward in the space it was allotted. The white color of the piece further melded it with the Pavilion’s surface so that it activated the architecture in the same way Chamberlain’s work did. The same year Agostini was exhibited at the Fair, John Canaday wrote: “Mr. Agostini, a sort of short-order Bernini, consistently delights me in spite of the fact that I would find it easier to pick him to pieces than to say exactly where the source of this delight lies, a perplexity that I regard as an accolade.”\textsuperscript{140} Canaday suggested Agostini was clearly technically skilled but difficult to pin down to

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{137} Ibid.


any of the movements with which he was sometimes associated, a common impression of the artist. This stylistic ambiguity is perhaps what drew Johnson to him.

The artists Alexander Liberman and Ellsworth Kelly represented another movement that followed Abstract Expressionism, which can best be described as Hard-edge abstraction, characterized by the use of industrial materials often lacquered in contrasting solid colors comprising works with strongly delineated lines. Ideologically these Hard-edge works departed from Abstract Expressionism and Neo-Dada because they were manufactured based on the artist’s design, leaving little to be revealed or discovered in the process of their making. However, a connection could be made to Neo-Dada’s engagement with common materials. Though Hard-edge works were made with industrial materials, the formal characteristics of these materials would have been recognizable to the lay-person. Primarily a photographer, Alexander Liberman (b. 1912) created *Prometheus*, a white and grey geometrical sculpture inspired by the scale of industrial buildings he encountered in New York when he moved here from Russia in 1941 (Figure 20). The black and white sculpture, which featured steel circles and a long rectangular strip curving away from the facade, echoed the form of the pavilion—it is almost as if you could reassemble the forms of Liberman’s sculpture into the circular drum shape of the pavilion. The black rectangular background helped to delineate these shapes from the white walls of the pavilion and helped to push the floating white forms forward, mirroring the elevated appearance of the Astro-View Towers and the raised frieze of the Theaterama.
Ellsworth Kelly (b. 1923), who had been exhibited at MoMA in 1958, created two 18 feet curved panels that protruded from the building and joined at their respective apexes (Figure 21). The sculpture, which featured one red and one blue semi-circular panel, was a three-dimensional extension of the Hard-edge paintings Kelly was making at the time (Figure 22). Kelly was inspired to create these shapes after seeing how letters on billboards and signs were framed and cropped to the point of abstraction when looking out of the window at his friend Robert Indiana’s apartment. Kelly stripped away the “frame” for his World’s Fair commission relying only on the abstracted shapes themselves. In Kelly’s paintings, featuring similar designs, it is the frame that pushes the shapes together, causing the tension between the highest points of the ellipses. In the New York State Pavilion commission, the building itself appears to push the shapes on their flat sides causing the central tension. The shape of the two ellipses echoed the cylindrical shape of the Theaterama, while the blue and red colors contrasted with the white of the pavilion itself. The pureness of the forms against the Pavilion recalls simplicity of shapes one might see on a billboard. The color contrast allows the work to be viewed as pure form and to recall the visual clarity and effectiveness of advertising in a way neither Abstract Expressionism nor Neo-Dada works with their complex, multi-colored appearance would have. Like Chamberlain, Mallary, and Agostini’s works, Kelly’s acted upon the formal and structural

141 Highlights of the Fair, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Pop Art, however, perhaps because it was the newest of the styles represented, stood out as the dominant presence on the frieze of the Theaterama. The Pop works superficially reflected the themes and visual aesthetic of the Fair while also commenting on commercialism as a force driving the Fair. Formally introduced in 1962 at the Pasadena Art Museum in an exhibition titled *New Painting of Common Objects*, Pop Art was represented at the Fair by Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol, James Rosenquist and Robert Indiana. James Rosenquist (b. 1933), who until 1960 had worked as a sign painter, created a large-scale painting with images of a car and its chrome tires, the moon, cocktail peanuts, a woman’s legs, and an American flag top hat (Figure 23). The individual images—all in similar color palettes of either red, white, or blue—are collaged together and converge on one another forming a snapshot of the products and attractions that would have visually littered the fair. The composition is dominated by a silver spoon at the forefront shown to be scooping up the images behind it, a metaphor depicting the World’s Fair as offering a taste of consumer and technological advents. Rosenquist’s painting was one of the lesser physically integrated works, laying flat against the pavilion and thereby mimicking a commercial billboard, an effect heightened by the artist’s flattened rendering of different textures including chrome, skin, fabric, and plastic without use of perspective to differentiate between the objects. The scale of the composite parts, the tire and cocktail peanuts specifically, were larger than life, mimicking not only the effect of a billboard but also the scale of the total work itself relative to the building and the viewers. Rosenquist’s work has certain affinities with

Rauschenberg’s collage aesthetic but its lack of physical layers and its clean edges set it apart from Neo-Dada influences and place it more in the realm of advertising.

Robert Indiana (b. 1928), who by 1964 was famous for his LOVE painting, created a black and white illuminated sculpture, which, like Rosenquist’s work, took aesthetic cues from advertising. Inspired by roadside signs and the lights of Times Square, Indiana created a lit sign depicting the word “EAT” (Figure 24). He had created unlit versions of the work but felt that in order to “elevate it to the spirit of the occasion it [should become] an electric EAT, flashing its imperative with real energy.” After the first day of the Fair, however, the lights of the piece were turned off as people showed up to pavilion looking for food, a comment itself on the public’s suggestibility in regards to commercial advertising. In Indiana’s view, after the work’s lights were shut off, the piece was “emasculated and tame.”

Rauschenberg and Indiana’s work framing the entrance to the Theaterama enforced the overall narrative arc helping viewers to visualize the transition from Abstract Expressionism to Neo-Dada to Pop Art and the common threads that ran through these stylistic eras. Heavy with historical images, Rauschenberg’s work bears the human touch of collage and thoughtful juxtaposition of images representing human achievement in the form of science, architecture, and art while also depicting civic and political failure in the dual portraits of John F. Kennedy who was assassinated the year

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144 ART ‘65, Box 5, Robert Moses Papers (MS 360), Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.


146 Ibid.
before. By contrast, Indiana’s sculpture appears as pure commercial mimicry offering a directive to act rather than an invitation to think. Indiana felt his work, with its use of industrial materials and stark, graphic lines, was more related to Hard-edge painting than to Pop Art, justifying its placement next to Kelly’s sculpture. Furthermore, Indiana, though emulating commercial signage, derived the subject matter of *EAT* from his final conversation with his mother before she died in which she asked for something to eat. This, for the artist, perfectly articulated the succinctness of human experience: eat, die. Rauschenberg and Indiana’s work coupled together comment on the capacity of an artwork to appear personal but represent public history and, conversely, to appear mechanized or commercial while representing personal history. This duality is demonstrated in the installation of the works that depicted a synthesized view of the styles of art that spanned the period between Abstract Expressionism and Pop. Johnson’s staggering of styles demonstrates his understanding of the ebb and flow of influence and the realization that artistic styles are constructs that don’t always apply to the works defined by them.

Together the ten commissions approximated the effect of a white-walled gallery inverted so as to face outward. The sculptures, on the whole, engaged the surface of the Johnson’s Theaterama much more successfully than the primarily flat paintings; the fact that many of the sculptures ended up being reinstalled on other public buildings in their

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147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
post-Fair existence, while the paintings ended up in museum collections, can be seen as testament to this. The flat works, however, did succeed in mimicking commercial billboards, bringing to the light the subtext the formal construct of large-scale images on a blank wall. Johnson’s installation of the works around the curved surface of the Theaterama, rather than on the interior walls, forced the viewer to move around the building in order to see the works, turning the pavilion itself into a sculpture around which the viewer must migrate. This made the building itself the center of the project and forced viewers to round the edges of the pavilion as they discovered the thematic and spatial relations between each of the individual works. The New York Times critic John Canaday, in his well-circulated article criticizing the role of art at the Fair, argued that the commissions were among the only successful displays of art at the Fair precisely because of their context. He wrote that “with any luck people won’t think of it as art and it will be spared this hurdle of self consciousness,” foretelling the way in which the works, as a result of their integration into the architecture successfully mimicked commercial.

The works Johnson chose to feature on the exterior of the Theaterama whether sculpture, painting, or collage, succeeded in demonstrating the complex relationship between Pop Art and Abstract Expressionism and the years of stylistic hybridization that occurred between them. They took from private, inward thoughts and personal, outward

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150 Colleen J. Sheehy, “A Walrus Head in the Art Museum: Mark Dion Digs into the University of Minnesota,” in Cabinet of Curiosities: Mark Dion and the University as Installation, ed. Colleen J. Sheehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 19.

experience, they engaged in hand-made and industrially manufactured aesthetics, and related both formally and thematically with the Fair and Theaterama context. Thus, the works demonstrated previously unseen formal and ideological links between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art. The installation of the works also succeeded in making a spectacle of their context, the Theaterama, which became the locus point, an effect Johnson no doubt intended. Johnson used the installation to make an art historical argument about the positioning of Pop Art as it related to Abstract Expressionism and Neo-Dada. The Pop Art movement was historically represented in the work of Lichtenstein and Warhol whose personal motivations, source materials, and formal techniques embodied the critical capacity of Pop Art displayed at the Fair.
Chapter 4
Roy Lichtenstein’s Girl in Window and Andy Warhol’s 13 Most Wanted Men

On the frieze of the Theaterama, Roy Lichtenstein’s Girl in Window best exemplified Pop Art as a style. The painting was seamlessly integrated onto the surface of the pavilion, thematically suited to the occasion of the fair and therefore most capable of demonstrating Pop Art’s ability to parody commercial imagery (Figure 25). The work was first described by the New York Times as showing a, “comic strip red head laughing her head off.” The 20 feet painting depicts a woman leaning out of an illusionistic window in Lichtenstein’s classic Ben-Day dot style in a limited color palette of red, blue, yellow, and green. Lichtenstein painted the image on panels of wood that were later mounted together to form the completed painting (Figure 26). Girl in Window has a trompe l’oeil effect on the surface of the pavilion, as the figure appears as if she is leaning out of a green shuttered window that is part of the Theaterama. The environmental effects of wind from the “outside” blow through her hair and cause the curtains to billow out of the shutters into the viewer’s space. It is the only two-dimensional work that activates Johnson’s Theaterama; it appears as much more than merely a billboard affixed to the white cement surface of the building.

In terms of content, Girl in Window is relatively opaque. The viewer does not know what the figure is responding to or what lies just behind her. The work abandons Lichtenstein’s use of text boxes, which up until 1963 he had used frequently. The result is a closely cropped image without any textual or contextual clues as to the work’s inner


\[153\] “Avant-Garde Art Going to the Fair,” 22.
narrative. With her eyes closed and arms crossed in a coy gesture, the figure appears to be both looking out over the Fair from the vantage point of the Theaterama with amusement and to be delighted to be gazed upon. The viewer’s gaze seems almost overwhelming to the figure; as she sinks into her own shoulders, she simultaneously protrudes outward and pulls away. Lichtenstein relished the thin line between manic fear and controlled exuberance within a narrative. Both formally and thematically, *Girl in Window* recalls Lichtenstein’s *Drowning Girl* from 1963 and Ann Margaret’s depiction of a distraught teenager in the hit film *Bye Bye Birdie*, which premiered the same year *Girl in Window* was made (Figure 27). In the film, young Ann Margaret is seen against a blue background, singing plaintively directly to the camera while wearing a yellow dress as the wind blows through her red hair. She alternates between running toward and away from the camera. The film immortalized the classic teen melodrama genre of the era and the formal parallels *Girl in Window* are striking, suggesting an inherent melodrama to *Girl in Window*.

Whether intended or not on part of the artist, *Girl in Window* is lent some of the manic energy the film imparts. In Lichtenstein’s own *Drowning Girl*, also from 1963, the blasé attitude of the protagonist is at odds with the exposition of the image and the text. What should be a distressing scene in which a woman is crying and drowning is rendered neutral by her flippant and ambiguous comment—“I don’t care, I’d rather sink than call Brad for help!” This juxtaposition demonstrates Lichtenstein’s ability to “express violent emotion and passion in a completely mechanical and removed style” which he felt should
“trigger in the viewer a realization of his own disquieting lack of concern.” The “mechanical and removed style” Lichtenstein referenced was based in commercial tropes and techniques and, for Lichtenstein, was entirely germane to his ability to summon ambiguous emotions and a “disquieting lack of concern” from his viewers. Lichtenstein engaged commercial images in the way that many Pop Artists did: for content in regards to source images, and for form in regards to technique. This reliance on commercial images set Pop Artists apart from Neo-Dada and Abstract Expressionist artists. Lichtenstein chose to base his works off of commercial images as an act of personal rebellion against the art world establishment; he once stated that it was difficult “to get a painting that was despicable enough so that no one was would hang it … It was almost acceptable to hang a dripping rag . . . The one thing everyone hated was commercial art” showing a propensity to rebel against what in the art world would have been seen as acceptable. Besides this added benefit of using commercial images Lichtenstein preferred commercial images because they functioned as an expedient signifier that the content of his work dealt in commercial themes. Where Abstract Expressionists turned inward to create original works that expressed an individual's otherwise hidden inner life, Lichtenstein turned to highly visible popular images so as to access American collective experience and deploy it as a ready-made object.

Lichtenstein was interested in how in the public conscience these images related

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155 Ibid.
to and replaced the referent. One example of this is found in Lichtenstein’s *Temple*
works, which were inspired by signage in a Greek café rather than the ancient Greek
temples in Athens.\textsuperscript{157} In the case of *Girl in Window*, Lichtenstein may have used the
cover of the July 1963 issue of the comic *Heart Throbs* as his source material (Figure
28). Though the inner pages of the comic are commonly cited as inspiration for *Kiss with
Cloud* from 1964, its cover featuring a girl leaning out of a window waving bears an
obvious resemblance to *Girl in Window* (Figure 29). In fact, the figure from *Girl in
Window*, who has red hair and is wearing a yellow dress, represents a composite of the
two women on the cover, one of whom has brown hair and a yellow dress and the other
who has red hair and a purple dress. The comic features storylines of misplaced and
unreturned affection further complicating the narrative of *Girl in Window* and calling into
question her exuberant appearance. As Lichtenstein’s wife Dorothy wrote: “Roy often
chose cartoons that had a lot of emotional charge—the woman disappointed by love, the
war hero in the heat of battle . . . these are typically American and it is a typically
American way of glorifying them.”\textsuperscript{158} This statement makes it clear that Lichtenstein’s
subject were not only the narratives themselves, but also how they were represented in
popular culture. In the context of the Theaterama commissions, Lichtenstein’s work
acted as Trojan horse, appearing to herald commercialism through imitation but actually
criticizing it.

From the very beginning of his training as an artist Lichtenstein was interested in


\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., 15.
popular images and their subtexts. While at Ohio State University, Lichtenstein studied under Hoyt Sherman, a professor who taught using a “flash lab” which was essentially a classroom in which an image was projected against a large screen for a few seconds.\textsuperscript{159} Sherman would then turn the lights off and instruct his students to draw what they had seen from memory. It is possible this experience impressed upon Lichtenstein the effects of iconic, graphic images. Lichtenstein drew upon his experiences in Sherman’s courses during his 1958 experimentations with comic book images, specifically when taking images of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse from how-to-draw instruction manuals. Since Disneyland opened in 1955, Disney figures were ubiquitous in the public consciousness.\textsuperscript{160} Lichtenstein kept these sketches to himself, treading lightly before fully committing to this style of work a few years later, perhaps feeling “their comic iconography strayed too far from acceptable taste.”\textsuperscript{161}

What Lichtenstein began doing as an extension of Sherman’s teaching and as a continuation of his 1958 sketches became his first foray into Pop Art. By 1961 Lichtenstein made his first Pop Art painting, \textit{Look Mickey}, within which we can see the genesis of the artist’s use of popular source material (Figure 30). At a cursory glance the painting appears as a comic book image of Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck fishing while standing on a foreshortened pier. Donald Duck exclaims, “Look Mickey, I’ve hooked a big one!” as he peers into the water. In fact, his fishing line is hooked to his


\textsuperscript{160} Ibid, 25.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 36.
own tail. Mickey looks on with his hand over his mouth as he realizes Donald Duck’s mistake. In the extant source material, a Golden Books illustration, we can see that Lichtenstein added in the text, cropped the image and altered the vantage point (Figure 31). As Graham Bader writes, in Look Mickey, the “object presented is an image itself [making it] a semiotic cousin of the painted target by Jasper Johns.” Lichtenstein’s painting is “both a comic and a picture of one—the joke . . . is no less effective painted on a canvas than printed on the cheapest comic book pages.” In other words Lichtenstein was experimenting with reproducibility of images and questioning whether meaning was changed or lost in reproduction. The work can also be seen as an indictment of the distinction between fine and commercial art and as a challenge to Abstract Expressionism’s disavowal of mimetic paintings.

*Look Mickey* also marked the genesis of Lichtenstein’s painting method, wherein he mimicked commercial methods as means of retaining the parallels between his work and commercial imagery, ultimately contributing to the critical subtext of the work. In *Look Mickey*, Lichtenstein combined the formal methods that would come to define his work: Ben-Day dots, a limited palette of primary colors, and speech bubbles. Ben-Day dots, invented in 1879, are characterized as dots of color that are used to create images, shading, tones, and shapes via variations in their spacing, size, and density. The dots, when used in commercial contexts, are only visible upon close inspection and were originally laid down by commercial illustrators using sheets with pre-printed dots.

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162 Johns’ painted target appeared on the 1958 cover of ArtNews and was considered revolutionary for being both a painting of a target and an object that functioned as a target.

163 Bader. *Hall of Mirrors*, 54.
Lichtenstein enlarged these dots, “replacing dabbed brush marks” typical of paintings such that the dots “became a metaphor of mechanization and plentitude,” making “the subject, object, and technique formally unified.”

Though in some instances Lichtenstein could be rather obtuse about the critical content of his work, he was ultimately trying to emulate the emotional remove his work was capable of projecting. Mirroring this remove was a function of Lichtenstein mimicking the works’ formal and thematic qualities. Where Lichtenstein himself was coy about the critical content of his work, the work often spoke for itself. *Girl in Window* engaged what had become Lichtenstein’s trademark process of selecting and then altering popular source material as a way of criticizing the conditions and context of the material. In *Girl in Window* then, the object of his criticism is a body of widely disseminated images that commercialize human experience in the form of comic books and commercial artifacts.

This objective differentiates Lichtenstein’s work from Rosenquist and Indiana’s. Indiana’s work, though it read as signage, was more about the artist’s personal experience. Rosenquist’s work, on the other hand, lacks narrative and instead reads as a simulacrum of “American” images and consumer objects. *Girl in Window* refused to be read as either; instead its meaning materialized only to those viewers willing to engage with it long enough to be disquieted by its comforting resemblance to comic book imagery and to realize its role as critic of the commoditization of human experience.

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Lichtenstein’s ability to produce parodies of commercial art was integral to his ability to comment on it. As he said, “the closer my work is to the original, the more threatening and critical the content.”

Lichtenstein was fond of distancing himself personally from his work, perhaps to strengthen the notion that the work had commercial and mechanized rather than personal origins. He espoused the notion that though he “personally cared about society” he didn’t think his “art is involved in it.” Despite this self-neutralizing comment, he also said he “would still prefer to sit under a tree with a picnic basket rather than under a gas pump” but that he “didn’t really know what to make of [industrialization],” adding vaguely that “there is something terribly brittle about it,” hinting that he felt industrialization could take a sinister turn if it hadn’t already. Because of Lichtenstein’s dedication to mimicking commercial art, a viewer may be inclined upon first glance to believe that Pop Art necessarily represents a straightforward celebration of American values and commodities without understanding the ways in which the work reveal the artist’s attitudes toward industrialization and the historical events that brought it forth. Though Lichtenstein once claimed that “he didn’t think Pop Art was a way of reaching larger groups of people,” he must have been aware that Pop Art preternaturally reached large groups of people as a function of its similarity to commercial imagery and that the Fair

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166 Swenson, “What is Pop Art?” 53.

167 Ibid.
could be a platform for him and his ideas.\textsuperscript{168} By design, Pop Art spoke loudly to the masses while covertly conferring its views about the state of human experience in an increasingly homogenized world, a world ushered in and celebrated by the Fair itself.

While Lichtenstein’s \textit{Girl in Window} took commercialism as both subject and means to critique the Fair, Andy Warhol revealed an overtly sinister side of American culture by using found images of New York’s 13 most wanted criminals within the formal framework of Pop Art. Warhol’s piece, \textit{13 Most Wanted Men} (Figure 32)\textsuperscript{169} was described by the \textit{New York Herald Tribune} as “early Rikers Island Style.”\textsuperscript{170} The work however never quite made it to the viewing public on opening day April 22, 1964. Johnson, who knew Warhol and collected his work, positioned the artist approximately one year prior to the Fair’s opening date to create a 20 by 20 foot work for the frieze of the Theaterama.\textsuperscript{171} Warhol solicited advice from friends for the commission and found that one of them had a contact in the New York Police Department who could procure for Warhol an illustrated list of New York’s most wanted criminals. As with the rest of the works on the Theaterama, the Fair-going public and the Fair organizers had some idea of what works would be submitted due to the 1963 preview article. However, it wasn’t until April 1964, that Johnson and other fair officials laid eyes on what Warhol


\textsuperscript{171} Harris, “It Just Had Something to do with New York,” 9.
had created. Warhol, who had a background in commercial illustration (like many in his Pop Art cohort), created 25 silk-screened panels emblazoned with the mug shots of thirteen criminals wanted by Police in New York. Like Lichtenstein’s work (the only other two-dimensional figurative commission), Warhol based his work on pre-existing images, treating New York’s Most Wanted Men and their likenesses as readymade artifacts. The works were certainly in the vein of what Warhol had been working on up to that point, specifically works from his “Death and Disaster” series and his silver, silk-screened, life-size Elvis paintings; thus, the work he delivered to the World’s Fair should have come as no surprise.

Critical and civic response to Warhol’s work was nonetheless immediate. During the week between the installation of the panels and the opening of the Fair complaints were lodged by the editorial team of the New York Journal-American and by members of the New York Arts Commission. However, the New York Herald Tribune wasn’t overtly critical, they observed that, “Mr. Warhol seems to be against commerce, industry and society in general.” Johnson, for his part, went on record to the publication saying, “he was delighted with the work” and went so far as to say it constituted a “comment on the sociological factor in American life.” Johnson made no mention of complaints from within the Fair organization and maintained that even if there were complaints he would not remove the work. Just a few days later, however, the work was painted over with a

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174 Tirella, Tomorrow-Land, 54.
coat of silver paint, supposedly by Warhol’s request. After it was altered Warhol went to visit the site of the painting and declared that it was more to his liking now that “the images were showing through like ghosts”\textsuperscript{175} beneath the paint (Figure 33).\textsuperscript{176}

Warhol’s work was now formally as opaque as Lichtenstein’s was narratively. Both works hinted at underlying tensions between their appearance and what lay beneath as source material as well as tensions between beliefs of the artist and the values of the forum for which they were commissioned. Though there is no official record tying Moses’ distaste for the piece to its removal, it is easy to imagine how the work might have been a reminder to Fair visitors of social and civic issues in New York at the time. Warhol targeted Moses almost immediately as the force responsible for having his work altered and in response created a work called \textit{Robert Moses Twenty Five Times} as a proposed replacement for \textit{13 Most Wanted Men}.\textsuperscript{177} Johnson expectedly declined to exhibit the work. In later years when asked about \textit{Robert Moses Twenty Five Times} Warhol replied, “I thought Moses would like it” in the blasé style typical to his persona.\textsuperscript{178} He maintained that as far as he knew \textit{13 Most Wanted Men} had been censored because the list off of which he based the work was no longer valid after some of the suspects were pardoned.\textsuperscript{179} It wasn’t until many years later that Johnson divulged that the

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\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 155.


\textsuperscript{177} Tirella, \textit{Tomorrow-Land}, 53.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 156.

\textsuperscript{179} Harris, “It Just Had Something to do with New York,” 14.
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real catalyst behind the work’s removal had been Nelson Rockefeller, who was concerned that the Warhol’s painting may offend Rockefeller’s Italian supporters given that most of the *Wanted Men* were Italian-Americans. Though fair organizers succeeded in censoring Warhol and preventing the work from being seen by millions of Fair visitors, the controversy dominated discussion of Johnson’s commission project and the silver altered canvas remained installed, reminding visitors of the controversial issue.

Both Lichtenstein and Warhol within the framework of Pop Art were able to convey unease with the social and commercial climates of the Fair. Warhol and Lichtenstein’s works functioned between what WJT Mitchell (quoting Jurgen Habermas) calls the “bourgeois public sphere” and what Vito Acconci has called “a wart on a building, a leech on an empty wall, a wound or burrow” heralding utopian views on the premise of art in the public sphere but functioning in reality as the “voice of marginal cultures.”  

WJT Mitchell relates public art as historically linked to violent acts, much like the crimes of burglary and murder for which some of Warhol’s *Wanted Men* were indicted. The subversive result of public art in the form “Ozymandias” and monuments to “Caesar, Napoleon and Hitler” is to “offend the sensibilities of the public committed to the repression of its own complicity in violence.”  

Since Warhol’s *Most Wanted Men* was a transcription of its original source, it was able to effectively confront this repression, recalling Lichtenstein’s belief that the less altered his source material, the more incisive his commentary. Since Warhol was aware of the audience that would

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181 Ibid., 35.
eventually view his work, one can see his decision to go through with the work as a transgressive act and as “a strategy for dramatizing new relations between the traditionally timeless work of art and the transient generations, the publics, that are addressed by it.”\textsuperscript{182} The lay public who visited Johnson’s Theaterama intuited the commissioned artists’ intentions; in Mallary’s work they saw “fossilized tuxedos,” in Rauschenberg’s, “fragments of things we revere from the Sistine Chapel to the Statue of Liberty” and in Chamberlain’s, “smashed automobile parts.”\textsuperscript{183} They felt these odd and avant-garde displays were equal to “junk that reflects not only on good art but on New York State itself,” “horrors and oddities” without the decency to be relegated to a “side show.”\textsuperscript{184} Even Adolph Block, Editor of the \textit{National Sculpture Review}, felt that a World’s Fair sponsored by a national government should “honor its past and glorify its achievements” rather than present “self ridicule, parody, and irreverence,” revealing that perhaps the commissions’ critics understood the work’s subtext better than anyone.\textsuperscript{185}

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 34.


\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.

Conclusion

While the artwork commissions on the frieze of Johnson’s Theaterama represented a view of American culture as vested in themes already present in the context of the Fair such as commercialism, technology, and industry, the interior spaces within Johnson’s pavilion hosted two exhibitions which positioned American culture as firmly planted in a simpler past represented by canonized traditional works of art. In two exhibitions, one during the 1964 season and another during the 1965 season, artworks descended both visually and thematically from early American history were shown. The first exhibition, titled *The River: Places and People*, focused on modestly scaled landscapes from the first two centuries of New York State history. The second, titled *The Cities: Places and People*, focused on artwork created in or inspired by life in cities. Both exhibitions were funded by the New York State Council of the Arts and featured works borrowed from New York-based public and private collections.186 While *The River* contained work spanning from the 17th to the 19th century, *The City* featured work beginning from the late 19th century up to the New York School of painters from the 1940s and late 1950s.187 The exhibitions sought to demonstrate that even within the short history of American Art, artists making work in and around New York State and New York City often set the course for how American art was perceived across the country and by the rest of the world. Establishing this premise and then furthering it by exhibiting artists based in New York on the outside of the pavilion helped to cement New York in the context of the fair as the nexus of American art movements. The exhibitions

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on the interior of Johnson’s Pavilion also offered a contrast to the works commissioned for the exterior by demonstrating a narrative wherein art went from small to large scales in private then public spaces. By contrast, the exterior commissions reflected a young, brash, and colorful society. Both exhibitions, however, sought to represent American identity as based in the everyday. While the exterior commissions focused on commonplace objects, the interior exhibition focused on the quotidian experience of early Americans, establishing a dichotomy between experience and objects, past and future.

The River exhibition contained portraits of early colonists and war heroes and their families but ultimately focused on how the Hudson River itself “doubled as a lifeline for commerce and an inexhaustible stimulus to painters.”[^188] The varied resources and landscapes of New York State are described in terms of consumption, in the form of both physical and spiritual sustenance. This view offers a somewhat straightforward celebration of capitalism contrasted with the commissions on the frieze of the Theaterama, which, as has been discussed, expressed a more ambiguous view of industrialization. Organizers viewed the first iteration of the exhibition, The River, as a window into New York’s pastoral past, when Americans’ existence was based in a concrete relationship with the land. Beginning with portraits from the “first indigenous schools of art in this country . . . devoid of aristocratic overtones” the exhibition chose works where sitters are shown against natural landscapes or with artifacts of the natural world in their hands (a bird, a flower etc.), conveying the reliance of identity on the

[^188]: Ibid., 25.
landscape (Figures 34, 35, and 36).\textsuperscript{189} In works by James Bard from 1858 and William Sydney Mount from 1845, the land itself is the subject with the figures shown working within it, demonstrating a reciprocal relationship between man and nature (Figures 37 and 38). In Bard’s painting, a commercial boat is shown, while in Mount’s a woman procures crops from a field. The River exhibition was framed by its organizers as a way for contemporary viewers to see a foil to the then “deserted houses overlooking the Hudson [which could] evoke nostalgic memories of a life that only paintings of the period can now recapture.”\textsuperscript{190} The exhibition was meant to remind viewers of a different time in New York State history of which there were scant physical reminders.

In The River, nature was viewed as a life source as well as a source of spiritual inspiration. The vernacular paintings showed a pastoral America while paintings by artists like Thomas Cole and his followers demonstrated that they “loved and understood the wild natural beauty of America,” choosing to embellish it with romantic and dramatic symbols of God’s intervention into it. In Thomas Cole’s paintings from 1841, the outsized and surreally colored landscapes were framed as a metaphor for the “brash, fast growing country” itself (Figures 39 and 40).\textsuperscript{191} The City, the second iteration of the exhibition, similarly focused on New York-based schools of art, such as the Ashcan School, and positioned them as the genesis for art all over the country. The exhibition featured art of the 75 years prior to the Fair as a metaphor for the migration of New

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\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 27.

\textsuperscript{190} Kuh, Art in New York State, 11.

\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 3.
York’s population from the pastoral to the urban. Of course, artists were still working in rural areas but the organization of the exhibitions suggested that the nexus of artistic creation in New York had shifted to urban environments.

In John Canaday’s article arguing that artwork should not be part of the Fair’s purview unless in an openly commercial context, he made an exception for the New York State Pavilion’s interior exhibitions, calling The River “an absolutely first-rate collection.” He suggested that the exhibition had a historical significance to what he called “its special pavilion” feeling that the exhibitions’ context helped the exhibitions “make stronger sense as art than if it were an isolated show.” Canaday felt that its context within the New York State Pavilion excused it from concerns over overt corporate branding and commercial interests and that its architectural context offered a contrast which heightened its meaning. However, one could still view the exhibitions, as a kind of propaganda promoting a vision of New York State’s past as a peaceful, pastoral ideal devoid of the issues of starvation, disease, and hostile relations with the native populations that early Americans faced. The interior exhibitions, The City and The River, formed an image of early Americans as having braved the proverbial wilderness of uncharted and unhewn environments and presented how art was able to document the narrative from provincial colonial life to modern day cities. Meanwhile, the commissioned works displayed on the exterior of the Theaterama seemed to echo the celebratory tone but in reality questioned the ultimate effects of the same pattern of

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192 Canaday. “Pardon the Heresy.”

193 Ibid.
industrialization that originally drew people into cities. Johnson’s pavilion then became host to a tension between a culture that had been brought forth by industrialization and the artists that chose to document and ultimately challenge it.

By featuring works by American artists (and artists that had made America their home) on the exterior and interior of the New York State Pavilion’s Theaterama, Johnson drew parallels between American art and the art of New York State, suggesting that they were analogous. The exterior commissions argued that Pop Art was the newest iteration of American art, a tradition that could trace its roots to the very beginning of American history. However, Pop Art contrasted with the vernacular and Romantic painting within the pavilion by focusing on conveying American experience as based in popular culture rather than on individual experience and identity in a pastoral context. Upon closer examination we see that the works that were chosen to represent Pop Art at the Fair succeeded in revealing a darker side of popular culture and mass-consumption that was so prevalent on the grounds of the Fair. They showed Pop Art as critical of consumer culture, even while ostensibly celebrating the commercial culture of the Fair.

As a forum, a World’s Fair is designed to showcase industrial progress and laud the achievements of its constituent cultures. In the case of the 1964 World’s Fair, we see how the commissions for Philip Johnson’s Theaterama ostensibly served this purpose but in reality questioned the viability of the straightforward commercial aims of its organizers. These aims pervaded every aspect of the Fair from commercial displays of consumer technology to the built environment itself, where architecture and commodities became interchangeable. The interior historical exhibitions, film of New York’s natural
resources, the panoramic view of the Fair itself, and commissions of art on the exterior of the Theaterama all contributed an interpretation of the New York State Pavilion as an advertisement for New York State. As we have seen, the commissions in particular, in their content and in their relationship to one another within art historical contexts changes both the perceived relationship between Abstract Expressionist art and Pop Art as well as the role of Pop Art at the Fair.

Pop Art’s critical capacity, which is revealed within the context of the Fair, links it to Abstract Expressionism, which in its ideology also contended with a tenuous relationship with post-war commercialization. Despite the fact that early critics of Pop Art felt it was reactionary in regards to Abstract Expressionism, the installation of artwork’s on the frieze of the Johnson’s Theaterama proves that even a reactionary response can constitute a link between styles. Johnson aimed to show formal similarities as a way of hinting at ideological connections. In presenting works that spanned artistic styles and organizing them in ways that illuminated their differences and their similarities, Johnson challenged the viewer to question the art historical narrative delineating Pop Art from Abstract Expressionism. At the same time, by choosing Pop Art for the highly visible commissions on the Theaterama, Johnson presented Pop Art as the most up-to-date version of New York State and New York City’s artistic legacy.

Though it may seem odd that works critical of consumerism would have been chosen for the celebratory occasion of the Fair, this mode of public art falls neatly into Kennedy’s conception of the artist in the Cold War era. Despite his presence in popular culture, he felt that artists should adopt an outsider’s stance in their work because, as
artists, they were able to find meaning in ways ordinary people may not and thus, had a moral responsibility to share their views. His conception of artist as individual set apart from the proverbial herd was a metaphor for how American democracy was seen as contrasting with communism, in which the group was emphasized over the individual. Before Pop artists, Abstract Expressionists had been operating within this model, often withdrawing from conventional society and popular imagery. Pop Artists, however, because they dealt with popular source imagery, could reach the public in ways Abstract Expressionists could not. Pop Art present at the 1964-65 World’s Fair occupied a role as public art while simultaneously revealing the more personal motivations of its artists and their stances toward commercialism. For Pop Artists, this stance centered around mass media’s translation of human experience into marketable images. Pop Art at the Fair highlighted the ability of a modern society to exhibit a disquieting lack of concern when it came to the needs and experiences of the individuals within it. Thus, Pop Art mirrored the contentiousness of the Fair itself, which was an extravagant distraction from the civic and social problems occurring on the site on which it was placed, a community full of people who were still waiting for the better life it promised.
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