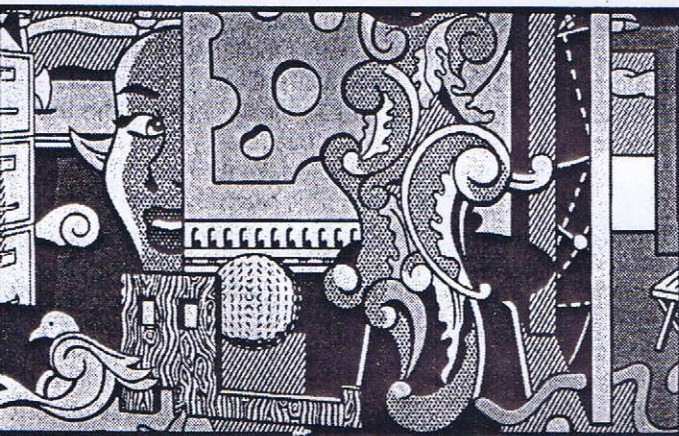


OUR TOWN

Lichtenstein Retrospectacle Zooms into the Guggenheim Pop Art's Living Legend Takes Manhattan



Roy Lichtenstein's 'Go for Broke,' 1979, oil and magna on canvas, is part of the Guggenheim retrospective.

By MARK HALLAMITIN

Roy Lichtenstein's work often flies in the face of what people think of as art, playfully reconstituting commercial objects (tires, toasters, golf balls, couches) and comic book-like characters on canvas. According to the artist himself, whose work also reinterprets and comments upon pre-existing art by others, his cartooning of art makes it "accessible to everyone."

Famous for his mocking simplifications done in bright, primary colors, Lichtenstein is also the creator of sculptures, which are essentially two dimensional "drawings in space." When looked at sideways, they are flat surfaces which in some ways make for an entirely new form of sculpture. Lichtenstein's earlier sculptures bear his brand of painted dots, sometimes cleverly created in metal by use of perforated steel. Only on rare occasion, as with *Modern Sculpture with Velvet Rope* (polished brass), has he chosen to work with more traditional mate-

rials and in Art Deco-like geometrics.

Among the most expressive sculptures on view at the Guggenheim retrospective is his sumptuous *Archaic Head VI* (1989), a classically-styled work, much in the mode of a Cocteau, round and florid bronze painted a deep green to give it an aged look.

Much of his work is laced with broad whimsy, poking fun at itself and at us, a highlight of which

might be his 1977 *Picture and Pitcher* or his *Cup and Saucer*. Here he captures steam rising, or water in the pitcher, an ephemeral image that disappears, turned into something solid by use of line and color.

The exhibition, which runs through January, covers his most prolific period, beginning in the mid-1960's through to canvases and sculptures from this year including the haunting *Bonzai Tree*. From these 30 years of output, one can see the continuity of Lichtenstein's lightness of touch and extremely American commentary on materialism — despite the fact that his pieces regularly sell for millions of dollars.

Lichtenstein recently spoke to *Our Town's* Mark Hall Amitin and discussed his approach to art.

OT: Why are the objects in your work

so big?

RL: I think the paintings are large often because the objects in it are oversized. I have done some rather small works, like in *Golf Ball*, for example, I magnify the size of the subject itself. The magnification has to do with the message in order to penetrate your brain more.

OT: One of the unifying parts of your work is its humor. Why is there no concern with any social content or outrage?

RL: You could see the work as critical of the commercial world. Why there's no outrage, I suppose, is rather just a product of me. I was always drawing things that were amusing or funny. There are plenty of things to be morally outraged about but this certainly can't be seen as the worst society in the world. So, it is what it is because of the kind of person I am. When I see objects I want to see something peculiar. Not just

funny, but strange or absurd use of material.

OT: It seems that your work is a precursor of "deconstruction," taking first from real objects then from works of other masters — Picasso, Leger, Cezanne, Matisse — and reducing it into something else. Is that meant as an homage or a take-off or both?

RL: I use it as subject matter. It's how you translate them into your own style using nature as a starting point. But my nature is two dimensional. I think it's not that benign. It makes a kind of stupid picture out of the painting. It isn't really a Picasso, it's kind of a shorthand, not very informed view of Picasso. And it's made into another painting, just using the most obvious aspects the way you might remember one if somebody explained it to you.

OT: Why is your color scheme so simple?

RL: To make the color complex when you had something that was very simple-minded would be inconsistent.