

**AB EX**

# AB EX

## background information

Hitler Defeats France in 1940:

Many of the artists of France fled to New York in an attempt to avoid Hitler's Nazi regime.

Andre Breton, the Pope of surrealism, also came to America and soon after became a close friend of Arshile Gorky. He then introduced the group of exiled artists to the American Painters.

Surrealism had a major impact on many of the Ab Ex painters.

## background information

Roosevelt's WPA: The Federal Art Project

Created during the depression

Designed to help artists make a living while still creating their artwork.

Involved hiring unemployed artists to decorate schools, bus stops and other public buildings throughout the United States. The fact that these artists were required to paint very large scale murals had a lot to do with the monumental scale of the paintings that the AB EX artists were creating on canvas,

## background information

The New York School: Hans Hoffman

This new generation of radical artist congregated in New York City, America's safe haven for the revolutionary. Just as Paris had nurtured the artists like Picasso, Gris, Miro, Modigliani, Chagall, and DeChirico, New York would nurture this new group of intellectuals and painters.

**Hans Hoffman** was the major teacher of this new approach to painting. He taught that the painter should evoke a sense of depth while affirming the two dimensionality of the actual surface. He also warned his students against allowing pre-conceived formulas to take control of their creations. Instead, “**A picture should be made with feeling, not with knowing**”. The possibilities of the medium must be sensed.”

## background information

Harold Rosenberg: “The American Action Painters”

This term was coined by him in the December issue of *Artnews*.

The article stated that the canvas is now “an arena in which to act” rather than a place to reproduce. Paintings are no longer pictures, but events. The artists approach their canvases with no image in mind and the image is conjured through a series of reactions with the canvas. Therefore the paintings are really only records of events.



## Jackson Pollock

### *Pasiphae*

1943

Oil on canvas

### About The Artist

He was inspired by Navajo Sand Painting, in which the process of making the art is far more important than the final product.

He worked as a muralist for the Federal Art Project during the recovery from the Great Depression, which had a direct influence on the materials and scale of his work.

His work is categorized as “**Action Painting**” due to the rigorous manner in which the paint was applied to the surface.



## Jackson Pollock

### *Lavendar Mist*

1950

oil, enamel and aluminum on canvas

### About The Painting

Number 1 (Lavender Mist), one of Pollock's most important **"drip"** paintings, attests to the artist's pure virtuosity of paint handling. One can trace his rhythmic movements in the long arcs, staccato dribbles, or coagulated pools of color that accrue into a rich, shimmering interlace. With only a few hues he achieved a soft tonal effect, not by the actual use of lavender but with aluminum and salmon-colored paint. The weave of long black and white strokes implies an inherent linear structure, but **the "allover" composition exhibits an even density throughout, with no discernible focal points.** Pollock, who spoke of being "in" his paintings, left very literal traces of his presence in the multiple handprints at the upper edges of the canvas.



# AB EX



## Mark Rothko

1969

### About The Artist

He used rags more than he used brushes. The purpose for this was to stain the canvas and create areas of color that float on the canvas. He wanted no clearly defined space.

His work is categorized as “**Color Field Painting**” due to its large bands of color stacked horizontally on the picture plane. These works were very large and were meant to engulf the entire vision of the onlooker.

“ I am not interested in relationships of color or form or anything else.... I am interested only in expressing the basic human emotions- tragedy, ecstasy, doom and so on.. And the fact that a lot of people breakdown and cry when confronted with my pictures show that I communicate with those basic human emotions. The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experiences I had when I painted them. And if you , as you say, are moved only by their color relationships, the you missed the point.”

- Mark Rothko



**POP**

THEN AND NOW

# POP

## THEN AND NOW

### CONCEPTS YOU WILL KNOW

Have a general understanding about the aim of the Abstract Expressionist Painters.

Be able to explain how and why the center of the art world ended up in NYC, and understand where that center existed prior to WWII.

Be able to discuss how Rauschenberg's work acted as the bridge between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art

Be able to discuss the types of materials and subjects that Rauschenberg's work contained.

Be able to recognize the work of Rauschenberg, Rosenquist, Warhol, Lichtenstein, and Jeff Koons (whether you've seen it before or not)

Be able to explain how a lot of Lichtenstein's work can be described as "paintings about painting".

Be able to explain how the Pop artists' ideas were driven by mass production and the media.

Be able to compare and contrast the "Factory" of Andy Warhol to the studio of Jeff Koons.

Be able to discuss the artists who influenced Jeff Koons, and how the popularity of his work is somewhat tied to his former job as a commodities broker on wall street.

### WHAT YOU WILL PRODUCE

Each student will produce a collage (digital or traditional) that reflects a contemporary theme. Collages will be inspired by the artists we studied in this unit.

Each student will create a 16" x 20" painting of his or her collage using acrylic paint. Images will be projected, traced, and will then be meticulously painted. All paintings should contain a high degree of craftsmanship and observation.

# POP

## THEN AND NOW

### PROCEDURE

We will begin this project by discussing possible themes for your work. Today's art world celebrates ideas above all else, so we will be sure to make art that is idea driven with plenty of personal meaning.

We will begin by working in teams to mind map, on large sheets of paper, to discuss, and record possible contemporary themes that could be used in your collage. As you discuss, think about the major events that have happened recently. Use the following list as a springboard:

Politics, Environment, Sports, Culture, Cinema, Natural Disaster, Scientific Discovery, Technological Trends, Education, Television, Memes, and YouTube.

After the mind mapping and discussion session, each of you will be required to make a list of ten contemporary themes that interest you. Once you have made that list, you will need to rank those themes according to your interest.

After you have ranked your themes, you need to make a big decision. How will you approach your theme as a whole.

Will you create a collage that has a central theme, with all images being conceptually relative to one another?

Will you create a collage that amalgamates a number of images from multiple themes?

**Once you have finished your collage, you will need to turn in a well-written artist's statement that explains what your work is about and why you chose to explore that theme.**

**ROBERT RAUSCHENBERG**

*"There is no reason not to consider the world as one gigantic painting,"*

## **Robert Rauschenberg**

### *Canyon*

1959

Combine painting: cloth, paper, stuffed bird, pillow, rope, wood strip, and oil paint on canvas.

### **About The Artist**

Robert Rauschenberg began using mass-media images in his work in the 1950s. He set out to create works that would be open and indeterminate, and he began making “combines”, which intersperse painting passages with sculptural elements. Combines are, in a sense, Rauschenberg’s personal variation on “assemblages”, artworks constructed from already existing objects.

At times, these combines seem to be sculptures with painting incorporated into certain sections. Others seem to be paintings with three-dimensional objects attached to the surface. In the 1950s, assemblages usually contained an array of reproductions, magazines and newspaper clippings, and passages painted in an Abstract Expressionist style. In the early 1960s, Rauschenberg adopted the commercial medium of “silk-screen printing first in black and white and then in color, and began filling entire canvases with appropriated news images and anonymous photographs of city scenes.



*"There is no reason not to consider the world as one gigantic painting,"*

## **Robert Rauschenberg**

### *First Landing Jump*

1961

Combine painting: cloth, metal, leather, electric fixture, cable, and oil paint on composition board, with automobile tire and wood plank

7' 5" x 6' 8"

### **About the artist**

American painter, sculptor, printmaker, photographer and performance artist. While too much of an individualist ever to be fully a part of any movement, he acted as an important bridge between Abstract Expressionism and Pop art and can be credited as one of the major influences in the return to favor of representational art in the USA. As iconoclastic in his invention of new techniques as in his wide-ranging iconography of modern life, he suggested new possibilities that continued to be exploited by younger artists throughout the latter decades of the 20th century.

### **About this work**

He composed *First Landing Jump* out of a rusted license plate, an enamel light reflector, a tire impaled by a street barrier, a man's shirt, a blue lightbulb in a can, and a black tarpaulin, as well as paint and canvas. Jasper Johns coined the term "Combine" for such works, which he described as "painting playing the game of sculpture." Though the taut metal coil alludes to the motion of a parachute jump, referenced by the title, and the lightbulb is lit with electricity, in their second lives these items are divested of their original purpose and fixed into the work of art..







## Robert Rauschenberg

### *Bed*

1955

Combine painting: oil and pencil on pillow, quilt, and sheet on wood supports

### Key Facts

Regarded as principal bridge between Abstract Expressionism of the 1950's and Pop Art of the 1960's.

Reflects his personal attitude towards modern art  
Mocks the seriousness of this ambitious art  
Bed loses its function, but not its association with the private, inner life of human beings.  
(sleep, dreams, sex)

### About this Piece

Bed is one of Robert Rauschenberg's first Combines, the artist's term for his technique of attaching cast-off items, such as tires or old furniture, to a traditional support. In this case he framed a well-worn pillow, sheet, and quilt, scribbled on them with pencil, and splashed them with paint, in a style reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism. Legend has it that these bedclothes are Rauschenberg's own. The work is thus as personal as a self-portrait, or more so—a quality consistent with Rauschenberg's statement, "Painting relates to both art and life.... (I try to act in that gap between the two.)"

### About the artist

American painter, sculptor, printmaker, photographer and performance artist. While too much of an individualist ever to be fully a part of any movement, he acted as an important bridge between Abstract Expressionism and Pop art and can be credited as one of the major influences in the return to favor of representational art in the USA. As iconoclastic in his invention of new techniques as in his wide-ranging iconography of modern life, he suggested new possibilities that continued to be exploited by younger artists throughout the latter decades of the 20th century.

*"There is no reason not to consider the world as one gigantic painting,"*

**JAMES ROSENQUIST**



## James Rosenquist

### *Nomad*

1963

Oil on canvas, plastic, and wood

90 x 144 inches

### About the work

“The composition of *Nomad*, in part, reflects the fascination Rosenquist holds for the way people are constantly bombarded with images, through printed materials, signs, television, movies, and so on. It can be distracting and hinder the ability to focus. No element in *Nomad* stands out as a focal point of the composition. This is due to the artist’s skillful manipulation of scale, color, and repetition of shapes such as Xs and Os. Choosing the word *Nomad* for the title might reflect the way our eye roves around the painting trying to make sense of the fragmented information that he presents.

Another important factor that influenced the appearance of *Nomad* was Rosenquist’s earlier career as a commercial billboard painter. Since billboards are read very quickly as cars drive by, there is no need for a lot of detail. Objects must be large and easily identifiable. Rosenquist became intrigued by the fact that while painting a billboard, he could only see a fragment of it at a time. Also, he realized that even an everyday object could attain a certain visual power when enlarged.”

— Mariann Smith

[Retrospective @ Guggenheim](#)

### About the artist

James Rosenquist was a major figure in the 1960s movement known as Pop art. The term “pop” refers to popular culture, which was used as subject matter for both painting and sculpture. In this painting, Rosenquist combines consumer items, such as the laundry detergent Oxydol and the bright red canned spaghetti sauce, with things related to leisure time activities, such as ballet dancers and a picnic table. Seemingly unrelated are a plot of grass, a microphone, and an electric light bulb. A gray wallet and the word “new”, which is placed on a bright yellow background and done in relief, reflect important aspects of 1960s America. Everything was “new” in this affluent, mass-producing, and consumer-oriented society.



## James Rosenquist

### *President Elect*

1961

Oil on masonite

7' x 12'

### About the work

“Since the late 1950s, James Rosenquist has been creating an exceptional and consistently intriguing body of work. In the 1960s, following his early days as a billboard painter in the Midwest and New York City, he gained fame as one of the leaders of the American Pop art movement. Along with contemporaries Jim Dine, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Andy Warhol, Rosenquist drew on the iconography of advertising and mass media to conjure a sense of modern life. Rosenquist's paintings directly allude to the cultural and political tenor of the times in which they were created. From his renowned Pop canvases to his billboard-sized works and continuing with his recent use of abstract painting techniques, James Rosenquist: A Retrospective presents the artist's enduring interest in and mastery of texture, color, line, and shape that continues to dazzle audiences and influence younger generations of artists.

[Retrospective @ Guggenheim](#)







**James Rosenquist**

*I love you with my Ford*

1961

Oil on masonite

6.5 x 7.5 feet



## James Rosenquist

### *F-111*

1965

Oil on masonite room installation

10' x 86 feet overall



**JEFF KOONS**



## Jeff Koons

### *Triple Popeye*

2008

Oil on canvas

108x 146 inches

### About the Artist

Jeff Koons was born in York, Pennsylvania in 1955. He studied at the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He received a BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in 1976. Mr. Koons lives and works in New York City and York, Pennsylvania.

Mr. Koons's work has been exhibited internationally and is in numerous public collections, including the Museum of Modern Art (New York, NY), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York, NY), Guggenheim Museum (New York, NY), The National Gallery (Washington, DC), Hirshhorn Museum (Washington, DC), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, CA), The Eli Broad Family Foundation (Santa Monica, CA), Tate Gallery (London, UK), Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam, the Netherlands), Museum Ludwig (Köln, Germany), Tokyo Metropolitan Museum (Tokyo, Japan).

Because Postmodern culture is inextricably linked to consumer society and mass culture, several postmodern artist have delved into the issues associated with commodity culture. American Jeff Koons art first began with purchased objects such as vacuum cleaners. Clearly following in the footsteps of artists such as Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, Koons made no attempt to manipulate or alter the objects. Critics and other art world participants perceived them as representing the commodity basis of both the art world and society at large. Koon's experience as commodities broker before turning to art and his blatant self-promotion have led to accusations that his art is market driven



*If Koons doesn't actually paint the image,  
can he call it his own?*

## Jeff Koons

### *Hook*

2003

Oil on canvas

102x 138 inches

### About the Artist

Jeff Koons employs a large number of professional artists who treat his work as a “factory”, much like the factory that Andy Warhol developed in the 1960s. Since Jeff Koons has neither the time nor the expertise to create these monumental images on his own, he has a team of skilled painters work closely with him to complete the work.

In his studio, he usually has about eight paintings being worked on at a time, each one being incredibly large like the image you see to the left. The paintings are first collaged together digitally in his graphic design studio, where he has up to 20 designers working with him to create the images that will be painted. Once he is satisfied with a digital image, it is projected, carefully traced onto the canvas, and painted very meticulously by a team of highly skilled painters.

Every detail of the project is micro managed by Koons himself. He hires skilled paint mixers to mix and tube specific colors for each painting, and makes sure that each artist is using the exact same technique when applying the paint to the canvas.





## Jeff Koons

### *Hook*

2003

Oil on canvas

102x 138 inches

### About the Artist

The studio of Jeff Koons is more of an artist's community than it is a traditional artist's studio. Skilled artists from around the world are eager to become a part of Koons's team, as the networking and learning that happens inside his studio are tremendous. There, artists have a chance to share their expertise with one another, and can develop a network of artists with whom to collaborate on their own work outside of Koons's studio. In a way, his studio has become a highly effective art educational system for emerging painters, sculptors, and designers.

When you consider the economic times we are in, artists like Jeff Koons play a tremendous role in providing employment opportunities for aspiring professional artists. His community of artisans is celebrated throughout the world, and Koons's genius branding campaign has made his work some of the most famous in the world.

Some art critics have argued that Koons and his work instructs viewers because both artist and work serve as the most visible symbols of everything wrong with contemporary American society.