

Pop-Art – The Bright Side of Life

It was around 1960 that pop art began to supplant abstract painting. In terms of worldview, pop art embodied a reaction to the post-World War Two economic boom, the commercialization of all areas of life, and the rise of consumer and leisure culture as well as the celebrity cult fueled by film, television, and illustrated magazines.

From an art-historical perspective, pop art represents a backlash against abstraction as the supposed endpoint of painting's developmental history. With Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, Mel Ramos, and Alex Katz, representation made a powerful return to art—not as “mimesis” (the imitation of nature), but as the “appropriation” of pre-existing images. Whether it was photographs or other pictorial matter from newspapers, comics, illustrated magazines, or advertisements: every person and every thing became a product, a fetish, a celebrity, a consumer object.

Austrian pop art grew out of similar circumstances but set out on a path all its own that was independent of the original US version and characterized by abundant wit and playful (self-)irony.

The garish and lurid chromatic qualities of pop art's pictorial cosmos reflect not the eruption of the proverbial volcano, but the dance thereupon: this movement's 1960s and '70s heyday was marked by deep political and societal crises, with the assassinations of political figures from John F. Kennedy to Martin Luther King, the Cold War and Vietnam War, the Oil Crisis, galloping inflation, and the German Autumn leading to this era becoming known as the “troubled decades” both in Europe and in the United States.

Press Images

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Alex Katz
Beach Stop, 2001
Oil on canvas
250 x 500 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection



Andy Warhol

Daimler Motor Coach (1886) and Benz Patent Motor Car (1886), 1987

Acrylic and silkscreen on canvas

240 × 640 cm

The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Loan of the MIURA Hotel

Art Collection



Andy Warhol

Mercedes Benz W125 Grand Prix Car, 1987

Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas

240 × 640 cm

The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Private Collection, COLOMOBIL Limited, Israel

ALBERTINA klosterneuburg



Jannis Varelas
Untitled, 2022
 Oil, pastel, gesso on canvas
 250 × 250 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Donation of Galerie Krinzinger



Kiki Kogelnik
Untitled, 1962
 Oil and acrylic on canvas
 120 × 180 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The Haselsteiner Family Collection



Mel Ramos
Elephant Seal, 1970
 Oil on canvas
 165 × 200 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – Loan of Andreas Brinkmann



Fang Lijun
2004.9.30, 2004
 Acrylic on canvas
 250 × 180 cm
 The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna – The ESSL Collection



Robert Klemmer
Running Klemmer, 1969
Oil-and-egg-tempera mixed technique on canvas
150 × 80 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna