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Art History
2025'

Exhibition- Mass Media and Consumerism

The theme of my exhibition is on artworks that express reflections and critiques on mass media and consumerism. Since mass media and consumerism is closely related to everyday life, so the art works are typical objects from daily life as well. The art pieces I chose are representations of the material culture. The normal objects from the aesthetic of advertising put in the context of art can be seen as a celebration of consumer culture, or a critique of the 21st century commodity culture under the power of mass media.

I chose art works of different medium such as video and television because of them being transmission tools for mass media. These works not only appeal visually, but also engage with the audience in other senses such as hearing and touch as well.

Walking through the gallery, we come to the well-known piece of Andy Warhol's *Campbell's Soup Cans*. His mundane, detailed transcriptions of everyday subjects such as the soup cans, to pop icon of the time Marilyn Monroe, all can reflect the consumer culture in that era of American life. I wonder whether the random, consumer products are meant to denounce the materialistic culture in the American society and the art market, or his note of the numb society in its reaction to creation and deaths through his numb repetition of the photographic composition of the Marilyn series. What he wanted to convey in his work seem easily accessible because of its directness and verity, but also complicated in the widely accessible subjects.

The exhibition ended with a video that is broadcasted on television. Video as an art medium begins with artistic engagement and interventions with the material of film, TV, and video. The video becomes the mass media, which efficiently spreads messages to the public and sets up a social construct. The invention of panoramas give ground to cinema and film making, and the projected light sources of magic lantern made creations of illusion of movement possible. Video technology continue to develop in reversing time so artists can manipulate with reality. Since video can show an alternated reality, people's minds are easily influenced by what video creators want them to see.

Pop art is dependent on the culture outside, as it reflects directly of the societal paradigms. But culture and big issues alternate rapidly. Pop art only reflect on phases of the fleeting culture, but its mass production and unceasing development can represent the culture wholly.



Jasper Johns *Ale Cans* 1975 Lithograph

At first glance, the painting seems difficult to examine the subject matter because of the use of different layers of black paint. A black rectangular shape in the center of the Washi paper creates a second frame for the subject, the two Ballantine ale cans. Johns's creation of the ale cans changes every-day object a subject matter in art. But he places the ale cans on a pedestal gives them a different meaning. Now, they seem like monumental object with more significance than empty ale cans, which should be thrown away. The pedestal that the ale cans stood on made them as monumental objects, but its repetition and mass production washes away their significance.



Jasper Johns *Flag* 1954 Encaustic, oil, and collage on fabric

“One night I dreamed that I painted a large American flag, and the next morning I got up and went out and bought the materials to begin it,” Johns once said. An American flag, a representation of an American flag, what is the difference? There are only forty-eight stars instead of fifty, because when Johns made this work Hawaii and Alaska were not part of the United States yet. The mere repetition of the lines and stars on the American flag normalizes and removes the value if one sees them only shapes and forms in repetition.



Andy Warhol *Campbell's Soup Cans* 1962-1987 Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans could not be disregarded when it comes around the subject of consumer culture and mass media. The 32 soup canvases each represent Campbell's 32 soup varieties. Just like the mass production of printed advertisements, Warhol used photo-silkscreen technique that became his signature medium for art production, which commodifies his work as he starts mass producing them as well. Rich people do not eat Campbell's soup but they are the ones buying the painting; art is only for the selected few, but it should be the mass of the people.



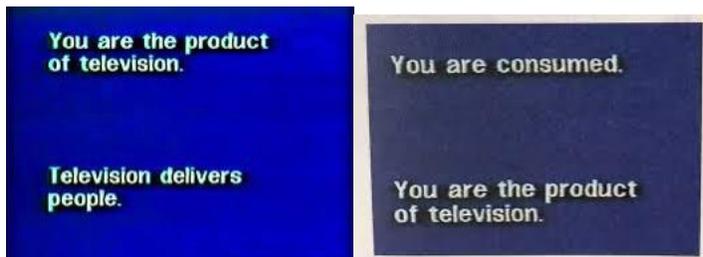
Allan Kaprow *Yard* 1961 Tires

The hundreds of used tires not only create a visual scene for the audience, but also interacts with them physically. This work opens all senses of the audience as they engage with the tires: the touch on the rough surface, the smell of the rubber, the sight of the disorderly setting, and the sound that it screeches when stepped on. *Yard* is on display in different cities under different context, so each time the tires are arranged differently. The audience becomes part of the art as they engage with the tires, which they should not be unfamiliar with to encounter in everyday life.



Nam June Paik, *Exposition of Music – Electronic Television* 1963

This is an exhibition that ran in a private residence. The title indicates the transition from music to electronic images. At the entrance is a freshly slaughtered ox welcoming the guests. In the room, there are prepared pianos, prepared TVs, mechanical sound objects, and several record and tape installations. Audience can manipulate with the TVs and there will be disruption of picture and sound. It is more than just the information that is broadcasted to viewers by normal televisions.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvZYwaQJJsg>

Richard Serra and Carlota Schoolman *Television Delivers People* 1973 Video

This 7-minute video is a single channel video art piece that is broadcasted to the public in 1973. With just words running on a blue screen, it critiques how mass media and pop culture are controlling the social construct and manipulating consumers. The conventional soundtrack and electronically generated text scrolls in blue background stands out in the TV environment where everything else is entertaining. The line “You are the product of TV/you are delivered to the advertiser who is the customer. He consumes you” asserts that the people behind television broadcasting can easily manipulate people, normally without their notice. Using the television as the medium against itself, Serra tears apart the veil of commercial television and reveals the manipulation of consumers under mass screening.