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PRESS RELEASE
GAGOSIAN GALLERY
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LICHTENSTEIN: Expressionism
Monday, 1 July–Saturday, 12 October 2013

I'm not sure exactly why I do this, but I think that it's to establish the hardest kind of archetype that I can.
—Roy Lichtenstein

Gagosian Paris is delighted to announce “Lichtenstein: Expressionism.”

Lichtenstein’s early appropriation of the aesthetics of American popular culture made him integral to the development of Pop art. Studying the work of Pablo Picasso, Joan Miró, and Paul Klee, he incorporated elements of contemporary art theory and popular print media into his painting. In 1961 he began to replicate the Benday dot system used in comics, newspapers, and billboards; this would become a signature element of his work. By mimicking this industrial method and appropriating images from high and low culture, Lichtenstein realized a broad accessibility that had not yet been achieved in contemporary art. Some of his most recognizable series evolved from pop-cultural imagery: advertisements, war comics, and pin-ups, as well as traditional genres such as landscape and still-life painting. Turning his attention to art history, he began exploring classical architectural motifs. Beginning in the late 1960s, defining elements of Futurism—followed by Cubism, Surrealism, and Expressionism—featured regularly in his work.

Among the styles and movements appropriated by Lichtenstein, his borrowing of Expressionist motifs—from Alexei Jawlensky’s close-up, pensive faces to Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s jagged, feline figures—strikes the clearest irony. Including key paintings, sculpture, drawings, and woodcuts, this exhibition demonstrates the bold paradox that Lichtenstein posed by translating Expressionist subjects into the primary colors and pop flatness of his signature style. Sometimes he traded the Benday dots for striping, shading, and grisaille patterns in paintings that evoke Expressionist woodcuts, going as far as to create his own woodcuts incorporating Expressionist tropes. This exploration was realized in three dimensions with the impossibly tilted painted bronze caricature Expressionist Head (1980).

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During a trip to Los Angeles in 1978, Lichtenstein was fascinated by lawyer Robert Rifkind’s collection of German Expressionist prints and illustrated books. He began to produce works that borrowed stylistic elements found in Expressionist paintings. *The White Tree* (1980) evokes lyric *Der Blaue Reiter* landscapes, while *Dr. Waldmann* (1980) recalls Otto Dix’s *Dr. Mayer-Hermann* (1926). Small colored-pencil drawings were used as templates for woodcuts, a medium favored by Emil Nolde and Max Pechstein, as well as Dix and Kirchner. *Head* (1980), a woodcut printed in both black and seven-color states, was made from a birch woodblock that Lichtenstein cut across the grain to emulate the smooth surface and even coloration of his paintings. Plucking stylistic strings while leaving the raw emotional tone of the movement behind, Lichtenstein’s use of Expressionism and other pivotal moments in art history called all remaining boundaries into question.

“Lichtenstein: Expressionism” is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue that includes an essay by Brenda Schmahmann, and conversations between Hans Ulrich Obrist and Mayen Beckmann, and Ruth Fine and Sidney B. Felsen.

This exhibition was prepared in close collaboration with the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation and the Estate of Roy Lichtenstein, and coincides with the touring retrospective at Centre Georges Pompidou, on view from July 3 through November 4.


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