

NEWS RELEASE

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Skirball Cultural Center to present

**POP FOR THE PEOPLE
Roy Lichtenstein in L.A.
October 7, 2016–March 12, 2017**

**New retrospective of vanguard American artist Roy Lichtenstein
explores social impact of Pop Art**

**Display of rarely seen works and photographs underscores
the artist at work in Los Angeles for more than twenty-five years**

LOS ANGELES—Renowned for his representations of everyday objects and his inventive interplay of line, dot, and color, Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) shaped the Pop Art movement. Organized by the Skirball Cultural Center, *Pop for the People: Roy Lichtenstein in L.A.* explores how the artist and the movement—buoyed by a renaissance in printmaking in Los Angeles—made fine art accessible to the American public in ways that had not been achieved before. By exploring the historical and cultural context of Lichtenstein's life and work, the exhibition sheds light on the social impact of Pop Art, especially as it developed in Los Angeles.

On view at the Skirball October 7, 2016, through March 12, 2017, *Pop for the People* will display more than seventy Lichtenstein works spanning four decades. On view will be the seminal and rarely exhibited *Ten Dollar Bill* (1956), one of Lichtenstein's very first Pop Art pieces; as well as the iconic *Sunrise* (1965) and *Shipboard Girl* (1965), which he made when he was first gaining renown. A number of Lichtenstein's famed comic book works, such as *Whaam!* (1963) and *As I Opened Fire* (1964), will be mounted alongside the actual comic books from which he appropriated and whose popular imagery he elevated to the realm of high art. By drawing inspiration from comic books as well as from advertising and children's books, Lichtenstein invited viewers to recognize the world around them in his art.

In the early 1960s, fine art printmaking was on the verge of a technical and popular renaissance, and the locus of print experimentation shifted from France to America. The initial focus of this print revival was on lithography, and many master printers received training at the Tamarind Lithography Workshop in Los Angeles, effectively making the city the epicenter of the movement. The prominent Los Angeles printing house Gemini G.E.L., which celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year, was born out of this printmaking community. Over more than twenty-five years, Lichtenstein had a long and fruitful collaboration with the printing house, and *Pop for the People* features more than twenty Lichtenstein prints that resulted from it. These include examples from Lichtenstein's *Haystack* (1969), *Bull Profile* (1973), and *Surrealist* (1977) series—in which he reconsiders the work of Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, and Salvador Dalí, respectively—as well as from his

Interior (1991) series. Through these works, the exhibition highlights Lichtenstein's longtime working relationship with Gemini cofounders Stanley Grinstein and Sidney Felsen, illustrating how they developed a new aesthetic, printed in new mediums, and began to produce and sell the works at a range of price points. This invited patronage by established collectors as well as everyday Americans, and helped to break down the aesthetic and economic barriers between the fine art world and the general public. In addition to the Gemini prints on view, several rarely or never-before-seen photographs show Lichtenstein at work in the Gemini studios and around Los Angeles with family, fellow artists, and his New York gallerist, Leo Castelli.

Pop for the People includes work, on loan from the National Portrait Gallery, in which Lichtenstein responded to major national news—namely the portrait *Bobby Kennedy* (1968) and the provocative *Gun in America* (1968). The former was commissioned by *Time* magazine while Kennedy was on the presidential campaign trail, and the latter after the candidate was gunned down in Los Angeles. Both graced the cover of *Time*, publicizing Lichtenstein's signature graphic style to a very wide readership and sparking a conversation about gun control that continues to this day.

Additional works demonstrate the depth and breadth of Lichtenstein's oeuvre, from rare prints to paper plates, clothing, and even turkey shopping bags. The exhibition shows how Lichtenstein's aesthetic persists even today—in advertising, fashion, and merchandising.

Finally, visitors will be able to walk through a three-dimensional reimagination of Lichtenstein's 1992 painting *Bedroom at Arles*, based on a series by the same name by Vincent van Gogh. The installation urges visitors to not just look at the art, but to inhabit it, reinforcing the “what's mine is yours” ethos of the Pop Art movement.

Exhibition Overview

Pop for the People examines key periods in the artist's life and career, introducing visitors to Lichtenstein as a New York boy descended from German Jewish immigrants, then as an art student at Parsons School of Design and Ohio State University. During his three years in the United States Army during World War II, Lichtenstein served alongside fellow American Jewish soldiers, among them several comic book illustrators, who introduced Lichtenstein to the art form. The work of one such comic book artist, Irv Novick, would later serve as direct inspiration for Lichtenstein's *Whaam!*

Pop for the People follows Lichtenstein through a period of discovery when he began to paint in the intellectual, nonfigurative style of Abstract Expressionism, represented in the exhibition by the 1957 work *Two Indians*. Works like *Ten Dollar Bill* reveal his transition into the nascent niche of Pop Art, which transformed conceptions of fine art by appropriating images from daily life. Here Lichtenstein found his artistic voice. He took his new body of work to the famed New York gallerist Leo Castelli, who agreed to represent him in 1961. During the 1960s, Lichtenstein continued to draw inspiration from commonplace objects, consumer culture, and children's books. Such popular imagery struck a chord: a larger swath of the general public could relate to Lichtenstein's depictions of the world around them and could see their daily lives reflected in what was considered fine art.

This democratization of art was supported by Lichtenstein's relationship with Gemini G.E.L. In addition to Lichtenstein, Gemini collaborated with Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, among many others, making Gemini a formative player in shaping the Los Angeles art scene and establishing it as a global center for graphic experimentation. Lichtenstein issued his first serial prints with Gemini in 1969. During their twenty-seven-year collaboration, Lichtenstein and Gemini produced 124 editions, offering a myriad of edition sizes at various prices. This availability and affordability represented a dramatic shift in the economy of fine art.

The exhibition concludes with Lichtenstein's venture into political terrain in the 1960s through the 1980s, as seen in works such as *Bobby Kennedy*, *Gun in America*, and *Mao* (1971); and an examination of his

unspecified prints, posters, and ephemera, such as *Turkey Shopping Bag* (1964), *Paper Plates* (1969), and *Untitled Shirt* (1979). These works shed light on the various modes and methods employed by Lichtenstein and the community of artists, gallerists, printers, and patrons who molded the Pop Art movement as a brand new fine art form—one that permeated American popular culture and aimed to give art to the people.

About Roy Lichtenstein

Roy Lichtenstein (1923–1997) was one of the most influential artists of the twentieth century. He was born in Manhattan and raised on the Upper West Side. His father, Milton, was a real estate broker; his mother, Beatrice (Werner), was a homemaker. His grandparents were Jewish immigrants from Germany. Lichtenstein attended public school and by age fourteen was taking art classes at the Parsons School of Design. He attended Ohio State University where his major influence was Hoyt Sherman, whose figure-ground relationships inspired Lichtenstein's treatment of cliché subjects.

In 1943, Lichtenstein was drafted into the United States Army and served in Europe. After the war, he returned to Ohio State, completing his BFA and MFA and then teaching there. From Ohio, he made frequent trips to New York and started to exhibit there in 1949. In the 1950s, he used various techniques of Abstract Expressionism, did figurative work, and, like many of his generation, began employing Pop Art images. In 1957, he left Ohio to teach at the State University of New York in Oswego, New York. In 1961, he began teaching at Rutgers University, where one of his colleagues, Allan Kaprow, used cartoon figures. Through Kaprow, he met many renegade New York artists, including Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine.

From his studio in New York City, Lichtenstein created cartoon-inspired paintings that helped launch the Pop Art movement. He was unique in that he developed a new visual language in an avant-garde style that was disruptive to viewers and yet accessible and popular with them. He also produced innovative work that incorporated many late twentieth-century movements and addressed a number of social issues.

POP FOR THE PEOPLE: ROY LICHTENSTEIN IN L.A. AND ITS RELATED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AT THE SKIRBALL CULTURAL CENTER ARE MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH SUPPORT FROM THE FOLLOWING DONORS:

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About the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball

The Skirball Cultural Center is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–

Friday 12:00–5:00 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. Admission to exhibitions beginning March 1, 2016: \$12 General; \$9 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$7 Children 2–12. Exhibitions are always FREE to Skirball Members and Children under 2. Exhibitions are FREE to all visitors on Thursdays. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.