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Art pops off the walls at Lyman Allyn

[Kristina Dorsey](#)

The Lyman Allyn Art Museum's latest, "Pop Goes the Easel: Pop Art and its Progeny," dives into various aspects of pop art, from portraiture to road culture. Naturally, the exhibition boasts works by that granddaddy of the genre, Andy Warhol; both Warhol pieces on display - screenprints of a cow and the iconic Campbell's soup can - are from Lyman Allyn's collection.

The show, though, traces the vast influence of those early pop artists. It exposes, too, the breadth of pop-art imagery.

Idelle Weber's cut-paper pieces from the 1960s, for instance, have a "Mad Men" vibe - businessmen in sharp suits, their faces anonymous in shadow.

The Luo Brothers, who live in China, created a kitschy 2008 portrait of a doll-like Mao Zedong surrounded by cherubs holding Coca-Cola bottles, with a painting of Tiananmen Square stripped across the bottom of the canvas. It works as a statement on American popular culture's impact in China. It also, guest curator Barbara Zabel notes, suggests that Mao's image is almost like an advertisement in China.

"It's what you saw instead of the Marlboro Man. It was Mao," she says.

In her wall text, Zabel writes, "By exploding traditional modes of easel painting, Pop artists of the 1960s radically expanded the possibilities of how art is made and how it is viewed; thus they opened up multiple pathways for artists coming to maturity in later decades of the twentieth century."

Pop artists toy with mundane subjects. They use commercial techniques and borrow the look of advertising and comic strips.

Pop art grew in post-WWII America when the commercial world began influencing Americans more than ever before. The art work elevated the world of commerce and critiqued American culture.

During a tour of the exhibition, Zabel spoke of how pop art was interested in "the blurring of the boundaries between high art and popular culture but also between art and life, breaking down those boundaries."

"Pop Goes the Easel" shows how pop art flourished on the global stage, too.

"British pop really took off before American pop did," Zabel says. "After World War II, the Brits were fascinated with America - American culture, American TV."

A color screenprint with collage by Scottish artist Eduardo Paolozzi displays that eloquently, bringing together an array of images - JFK, an astronaut on a TV screen, Marilyn Monroe, and the scrawled name of Shirley Temple among them.

That piece and others in the exhibition explore the notion of pop portraiture, which, Zabel writes, is "more about the power of the media to package an image for distribution and consumption

IF YOU GO

What: "Pop Goes the Easel: Pop Art and its Progeny"

Where: Lyman Allyn Art Museum,
625 Williams St., New London

When: Through Aug. 10; hours
10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues.-Sat. and 1-5 p.m. Sun.

Admission: \$10 adults; \$7 seniors, students over 18, active duty military with ID; \$5 students under 18; free for kids under 12 and for members and New London residents with ID

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than about the individual represented."

Comics, of course, play a huge part in pop art history, and the Lyman Allyn show features, among other works, Roy Lichtenstein's 1967 "Brushstrokes." The artist appropriated the brushstrokes of abstract expressionism - which are supposed to be full of personal meaning - and reduced them to a comic strip.

"It's a parody of abstract expressionism. For him, that brushstroke had become cliché, sort of like a comic," Zabel says. "But it's also a tribute in using it. He talks about how he likes the things he parodies."

While artists like Lichtenstein and Warhol became well-known, female pop artists emerging at the same time didn't reach the same level of fame. The Lyman Allyn exhibition shines a light on some of those women who were marginalized in the 1960s, with work by Marjorie Strider and Niki de Saint Phalle. While pop art was often about how men see women, the aforementioned Idelle Weber turned things around. Zabel writes that Weber "looks into that male domain from the outside, subtly critiquing the anonymity of that masculine milieu."

A half-century after pop art bloomed in America, it remains hugely influential.

Zabel writes, "The legacy of Pop art has been more powerful than even Warhol could have imagined. To paraphrase him, after artists 'got' Pop, their perception and their thinking about America and its commercial environment were irrevocably transformed."
