

Making the Ordinary Extraordinary

Transforming Everyday Objects into Whimsical Artworks!

TASK: Read the information provided below. There are some areas that require **ACTION** on your part, so do not skip ahead.

The History of POP ART

The Pop Art movement was cultivated in England during the 1950's and spread to America in the 1960's. Following the optimism and prosperity that defined the 1950s in America, Pop artists sought an edgier approach to the concerns and issues that were inherent in 1960s America, which was quickly becoming a landscape of social and political unrest.

Pop Art was a movement intended to both represent and appeal to the masses rather than the elite. The movement took the ordinary (like Campbell's Soup cans and images of Marilyn Monroe) and made it extraordinary by redefining it as art. Artist Roy Lichtenstein appropriated scenes from comic strips and made them larger than life, while Andy Warhol refashioned photographs as huge paintings and silkscreens.



Pop Art was instantly recognizable and widely Popular. Many Pop Art works were

great in size and made of unusual materials. For example, Claes Oldenburg created a "Soft Toilet" using unexpected materials. This type of art is reminiscent of the Dada Movement of the early twentieth century. Roy Lichtenstein elevated comic book frames to high art when he enlarged cells to enormous sizes. George Segal created plaster casts of people and set them up in everyday scenes, essentially frozen in place and time.



ARTIST STUDY: Claes Oldenburg

"I make my work out of my everyday experiences, which I find as perplexing and extraordinary as can be." --Claes Oldenburg

Throughout his career Claes Oldenburg has demonstrated the power of the imagination to transform the everyday environment. Drawing inspiration from the ubiquitous and the mundane, he has created artworks of varying scale and media that astonish with their wit, humor, and metaphoric associations.

About the Artist: Born in Sweden in 1929, Claes Oldenburg was brought to America as an infant and raised in Chicago. After graduating from Yale and working as a newspaper reporter, he studied at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1956, he moved to New York City where he became acquainted with a group of artists who were involved in staging improvised theatrical performances known as "happenings." These performances anticipated Oldenburg's later sculpture in their references to everyday life and emphasis on visual and spatial relationships.

Oldenburg came of age artistically in the early 1960s with the Pop Art generation. Because of his use of imagery from American consumer culture, Oldenburg has often been associated with the Pop Art movement. To this day, Oldenburg continues to use familiar objects to delve beneath surface appearances in search of what he has called "parallel realities," or the multiple identities a form can take on through changes of material, scale, or physical setting.

Metamorphosis

Metamorphosis, or the transformation from one thing into another, is a key element in Oldenburg's work. He delights in taking something hard-edged and geometric and making it into something pliable and organic--or vice versa. His first soft sculpture of everyday objects, which included toilets, fans, and other household fixtures, was fashioned out of canvas and stuffed with the silky fiber kapok. The unexpected effects of gravity caused many of these creations to sag, giving them vulnerable and lifelike overtones.

In 1965, he began making drawings for colossal monuments; they were proposals for sculpture representing everyday objects enlarged to gargantuan proportions. Oldenburg employed the term "monument" ironically, since his non-heroic subjects deliberately subvert traditional notions of public sculpture.



Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen, *Shuttlecocks*, 1992. Photo by jpellgen, via Flickr.



ACTION REQUIRED: Watch the following videos about Claes Oldenburg and his art (headphones required in class)

<https://youtu.be/BRkNntry7tl>

<https://youtu.be/DhEyoDCTSDQ>

<https://youtu.be/wASBs16U4g0>

<https://youtu.be/eB91flTprsl>

<https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-claes-oldenburgs-supersize-d-pop-sculptures-made-public-art-fun>



VIEW: Take a look at some of the visuals included below for more inspiration! Note how the photographs are cited. You will need to apply this later in your analysis work.



Claes Oldenburg, *Clothespin*, 1976. Photo by John Vosburgh, via Flickr.



Claes Oldenburg, *Spoonbridge and Cherry*, TK. Photo by m01229, via Flickr.



Claes Oldenburg, *Cupid's Span*, 2003. Photo by dewet, via Flickr.