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SFMOMA PRESENTS MAJOR ROY LICHTENSTEIN EXHIBITION

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present *Roy Lichtenstein: All About Art*, on view October 23, 2004, through February 22, 2005. This is the first major exhibition of Lichtenstein's work at a Bay Area museum, and SFMOMA is its only U.S. venue. *Roy Lichtenstein: All About Art* is organized by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark. The San Francisco presentation is sponsored by Bank of America and Visa USA, Inc. Media sponsors are KQED Public Broadcasting and SFSTATION.COM.

This major exhibition features approximately eighty paintings and drawings by Lichtenstein (1923–1997) and traces the artist's fascination with the painted image and the act of art-making over his nearly forty-year career. Best known as a pop artist of the 1960s, Lichtenstein paraphrased a wide range of visual sources in his work, including comic books, master works by artists such as Monet and Picasso, and the accoutrements of art-making itself: stretchers, mirrors, brushstrokes, and studios. His interrogation of both the iconography and mechanics of painting reveals a knowledge of and affection for art that resulted in an unmistakably original body of work. Organized by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebaek, Denmark, the exhibition travels to the Hayward Gallery, London, and the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid, in advance of its arrival at SFMOMA.

The San Francisco presentation of *Roy Lichtenstein: All About Art* is organized by Madeleine Grynshztejn, Elise S. Haas Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture. Grynshztejn explains, "SFMOMA has long had a special affinity for the work of Roy Lichtenstein and other pop artists. We are proud to offer our community its first in-depth look at this well-known artist."

Lichtenstein was born into a middle-class family in New York City in 1923. After serving in active military duty in Europe from 1943 to 1945, Lichtenstein pursued his interest in art at Ohio State University, first as an art student and later as an instructor. He made art in a variety of idioms throughout most of the 1950s, including Cubism and Abstract Expressionism. Having only modest success in his art career, Lichtenstein supported himself with a variety of jobs until he began teaching in 1958, first in New York and then at Rutgers University in New



Roy Lichtenstein, *Forget It, Forget Me*, 1962; oil and Magna on canvas; 80 x 68 in.; Collection of the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University; Gevirtz-Mnuchin Purchase Fund; © The Estate of Roy Lichtenstein

Jersey. It was there that Lichtenstein came in contact with a new generation of artists and teachers, including Allan Kaprow, Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and others, who offered a liberating approach to art centered in everyday life (as expressed in staged ‘happenings,’ forerunners of Performance art).

In the summer of 1961, at the age of thirty-seven, Lichtenstein made a complete break from his previous paintings and drawings, beginning the work that would become widely recognized as his signature style; Lichtenstein’s painting *Look Mickey*, 1961, signaled this transition. Though a few years earlier Lichtenstein had made some ink drawings of Disney characters, they were rendered in a sketchy, expressionist manner. This new picture seemed to be a faithful reproduction of a cartoon image—with its banal humor and speech bubble—rendered in the inexpressive lines and flat colors of commercial printing. The art world of the early sixties was poised for a dramatic change, yet even in this atmosphere Lichtenstein’s use of the lowly, “artless” cartoon was a challenge to the traditions of fine art. He swiftly found unprecedented success with this new work, however. Within months, Leo Castelli, an influential New York art dealer, took on Lichtenstein and gave him a show in early 1962, which earned the artist almost instant notoriety. In 1964 *Life* magazine ran a profile of the artist under the headline “Is He the Worst Artist in the U.S.?” Lichtenstein had found his niche in the world of post-abstract expressionist Pop art.

Lichtenstein’s interest in comic-book and advertising images was primarily formal, translating their simple graphic style, black outlines, and flat colors into his paintings. He was particularly drawn to the way cartoons could express “violent emotion and passion in a completely mechanical and removed style.” By incorporating clichéd character types in his paintings—the tough man of action or the swooning, tearful woman—Lichtenstein ironically removed them from their original context and placed them in the realm of fine art. Despite the apparently direct relationship between his art and the cartoon sources, Lichtenstein described his process of selecting and transforming images as one of “seeing, composing, and unifying.” His drawings reflect how deftly and freely he could adjust the balance of forms, color, line, and detail; these measured studies for paintings were scaled up and projected onto canvas to be enlarged and redrawn. This process led him to adopt the use of benday dots, which quickly became his signature mark. Just as in the comics, Lichtenstein used these dots in his paintings to convey surface, tone, shading, and form; yet unlike the mechanically printed originals, Lichtenstein’s dots were painted by hand on canvas with brush or stencil.

Roy Lichtenstein: All About Art includes a thorough selection of these groundbreaking works, including some of the artist’s earliest experiments with cartoon imagery (*Look Mickey*, 1961; *Popeye*, 1961), a group of early monochrome paintings of domestic scenes (*Washing Machine*, 1961; *Tire*, 1962; *Golf Ball*, 1962), and the classic war and romance images (*Kiss V*, 1962; *Forget It! Forget Me!*, 1962; *Whaam!*, 1963). But the exhibition’s chronological presentation places these early works in the context of Lichtenstein’s lifelong interest in the process of art-making, focusing particularly on the way imagery is conventionalized in the mass media. Later works in the exhibition show the artist’s engagements with traditional artistic genres such as landscape (*Sussex*, 1964) and still life (*Still Life with Glass and Peeled Lemon*, 1972), as well as his revisions of Impressionism and Abstract Expressionism (*Rouen Cathedral*, 1969; *Yellow Brushstroke I*, 1965). Still other works refer to the artist’s interest in the mechanics of art-making (*Compositions II*, 1964; *Stretcher Frame with Cross Bars III*, 1968), while his work of the seventies and early eighties returns again to the vocabulary of art history—particularly Surrealism (*Portrait*,

1977; *Figures in Landscape*, 1977)—and, for the first time, to his own oeuvre (*Artist's Studio No. 1 [Look Mickey]*, 1973). The show concludes with Lichtenstein's final two bodies of work: a group of interior scenes that make sophisticated visual puns on reality versus representation (*Interior with Exterior*, 1991) and the large-scale landscapes, executed shortly before his death, that derive from the tradition of landscape painting in China (*Vista with Bridge*, 1996).

SFMOMA's Education Department will present a variety of programs and public lectures to further enhance visitors' experience of the exhibition. On the exhibition's opening day, Saturday, October 23, at 2 p.m., Irving Blum, the legendary art dealer whose Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles was one of the first galleries to show Pop art, will be a guest speaker. The talk will be held in the Museum's Phyllis Wattis Theater. *Roy Lichtenstein: All About Art*, a special audio tour, will be available in the galleries. Narrated by the artist's son, Mitchell Lichtenstein, this self-guided audio tour offers a lively look at Lichtenstein's art and ideas. Visitors will hear archival interviews with the artist discussing his interest in comic imagery, plus commentary from art dealer Ivan Karp, who first displayed Lichtenstein's groundbreaking art in the 1960s. There is additional commentary by art historian Michael Lobel and SFMOMA curatorial associate Joshua Shirkey. Additional program information is available on the Museum's Web site at www.sfmoma.org.

A fully illustrated catalogue, published by the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, with minor revisions for the American presentation at SFMOMA, accompanies the exhibition. It includes essays by the exhibition's curator, Paul Erik Tøjner, and Michael Lobel, Avis Berman, and Jack Cowart, together with transcripts of David Sylvester's 1997 interview with the artist and a chronology of the artist's life. The catalogue is available in hardcover at the SFMOMA MuseumStore for \$39.95.

Timed Tickets/Hours during *Roy Lichtenstein: All About Art*

Admission to the exhibition *Roy Lichtenstein: All About Art* will require a special ticket designating a specific entrance time. General Museum admission is included in the price of the Lichtenstein ticket: Tickets are \$15 for adults; \$12 for seniors; and \$11 for students. SFMOMA members and children twelve and under are admitted free. Advance reservations are recommended. Tickets go on sale to the public Monday, September 20, and will be available at the Museum box office, by phone at 866.573.6662 (866.5SF.MOMA), and online at www.sfmoma.org.

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Museum hours: Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day.

Koret Visitor Education Center: Open daily (except Wednesdays) 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

Admission prices: Adults \$10; seniors \$7; students \$6. SFMOMA members and children twelve and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings, 6 to 8:45 p.m., admission is half price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

Visit our Web site at www.sfmoma.org or call 415.357.4000 for more information.

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a private, not-for-profit institution supported by its members; individual contributors to Donor Circle; corporate and foundation support; foreign, federal, and state government grants; and admission

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