POP ART
Parodies

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When I first started teaching twenty years ago, I learned that, in order to engage students in art history, I had to sneak it into my lessons and make it as tantalizing as possible for my students. Even now it seems to be a continual challenge to pique the interest of the everyday art student when it comes to art history.

Much to my relief, however, I have discovered that teenagers seem to have a keen interest in the pop art movement of the 1960s. Pop art was an art form that the general public could relate to because the images were recognizable from everyday life.

The Lure of Pop Art
Students know that the 1960s was a time of social upheaval and rebellion so it is interesting to show them that the art world was in rebellion as well. When I think back on those years, I realize that as a teenager then I was not "in tune" with the contemporary artists of my day—much like students I teach now.

As an artist I am continually in awe of the technical skills of the old masters. I equate their abilities to the fact that they had no television, movies, or iPods with which to distract themselves, and that they were highly-trained in their respective crafts.

Benday dots were used in the 1950s and 60s in comic books and advertising as part of the four-color process. Dots of different colors were placed close together, creating a third color, much like in pointillism. Roy Lichtenstein became known for using Benday dots in his paintings and sculptures, which often looked like giant comic book panels.

A Portrait Assignment
We studied the pop art movement in depth, paying particular attention

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to the art of Roy Lichtenstein. The philosophy of the movement and its parody of commercialism and mass production was explored.

Students were challenged to create their own pop art parody of a master artwork. Using a wealth of visual information at my disposal—books that had been donated to me containing full-color 8 x 10" (20 x 25 cm) images of some of the most famous paintings of the last 500 years, students chose from an array of black-and-white copies of famous portraits by a variety of artists. Employing the grid system, the chosen portrait was enlarged to a 16 x 20" (40 x 50 cm) format. The contour lines of the portrait were transferred and space was left for a "text balloon." The grid lines were then erased.

A Painting Lesson

As this was a painting lesson, students were instructed in the intricacies of the color wheel and asked to apply a complementary and/or analogous color scheme to their art. Tinting and shading were explored through mixing of these colors and the acrylic paint was applied flatly. All areas, including the text balloon were to be painted.

As students painted they were asked to consider what they would write in their text balloon. After the paint was dry, black fine-point permanent markers were used to add design work, including Benday dots over the paint. The text balloon was completed and the work signed.

When the art was exhibited, the copy of the old master print was placed beside the pop art parody. In addition, students completed a traditional art history report with in-depth research of their chosen artist.

This was truly an educational exhibit for the everyday viewer and a wonderful way to bridge the gap between the old masters and the "not-so-old" masters of the 1960s. ✌

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