

POPTICAL: Imagery

Since the 1950s, when consumer culture and mass media began their furious growth, artists have been fascinated with their products and images. Pop Art, which first appeared in Britain and the United States during the late 1950s and early 1960s, is the most well known artistic movement of its time. Fresh, lively, and brash, Pop proposed that the everyday world is a fine and fascinating subject for art, and practitioners such as Andy Warhol and Peter Blake lifted their imagery directly from the vast world of consumer goods, advertisements, and the popular press. Today, globalization and mass media allow goods and images to move freely across national boundaries. Pop culture has spread to almost every part of the globe, and “neo-Pop” has become a worldwide artistic language.

POPTICAL: Style

While adapting imagery from pop culture and the mass media has characterized Pop art, its signal styles have distinguished it as well. Interest in the lowbrow culture of comic strips and cartoons fueled early Pop artists such as Roy Lichtenstein and Peter Saul, and such imagery continues to delight neo-Pop artists, particularly those working in parts of Asia today. Younger artists are less concerned with the imagery of consumer capitalism than with its underlying issues, such as the politics of abundance, the corruption of social values, and the utter seductiveness of surface. In its earlier incarnations and now, Pop's message remains ambiguous: It is sometimes a celebration and sometimes a critique.

PASSAGES

The uprooting and displacement of millions of people since World War II have defined recent history. In the three “Passages” sections of “Until Now,” artists respond to the loss of home, the erosion of cultures and values, and the meaning of displacement, which have become core elements of the modern condition. As nomadic and diasporic modes of existence increase, concepts of home, nationality, individuality, and exile are radically reconsidered. In this gallery, artists contemplate the loss of identity, the erosion of culture, the meaning of exile, and the inevitability of mortality—on personal, poetic, and universal terms.

PASSAGES: Migrations

In our increasingly diverse world, both national and individual identities are rapidly shifting, as borders fluctuate, people move about or are displaced, and digital technology enables speedy communication. Artists in this gallery explore some of the reasons our world has changed so drastically during the past fifty years: massive social upheaval and migrations necessitated by ecological change, wars, and cultural conflicts. The ravages of these radical changes are apparent in the paintings, sculpture, textiles, photographs, and video installation in this gallery, which includes works by American, Brazilian, Canadian, Hmong, and Iraqi artists.

PASSAGES: Identity

Issues of identity are a particular focus in this gallery. Here artists examine shifting notions about race in a “post-racial” world, colonialism and its legacy, nascent feminism, and a homogenized society in which it is increasingly difficult to define oneself. Many of these works were made during the past two decades but have their roots in the often-angry debates of the 1960s and 1970s, when women, African Americans, Native Americans, and homosexuals were fighting for their rights and colonized peoples were struggling for freedom. Much has changed since then: corrupt political systems have collapsed, new voices are being heard, and tolerance has increased. As these works suggest, many artists continue to confront cultural stereotypes as they seek to transcend over-simplified portrayals of national and individual identity.