

# Analysis of Pop Art Expressions in Contemporary Design

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## Abstract:

Probing into the connections between Pop Art and design, and analyzing how Pop Art is manifested in contemporary design practices, contributes to a deeper comprehension of modern art and design—furnishing theoretical references and practical insights for contemporary design endeavors. Through dissecting the artistic expressions embedded in Pop Art's creative styles, methodologies, and emotional articulations, this paper explores the creative forms of Pop Art and accentuates its specific applications in contemporary design. It points out that contemporary design products are gradually shifting towards online and symbolic design, with Pop Art's expressive style entering an insubstantial, virtualized design phase. The paper summarizes Pop Art's impact on contemporary socio-cultural contexts, clarifies its reflection of consumer culture and integration with design forms in contemporary design, and explores its value manifestation in contemporary design. The expressive forms of Pop Art, accompanied by technological progress and the evolution of mass consumer consciousness, manifest as real or virtual artistic expressions in contemporary design. These specific forms of expression, intertwined with mass culture and consumerist ideologies, influence contemporary societal values and aesthetic perceptions.

## Keywords:

Pop Art, Contemporary Design, Artistic Expression, Virtual Pop

## 1. The Creative Manifestations of Pop Art

Pop Art employs painting, printing, imagery, design, installation, and graffiti as creative mediums [1]. After integrating diverse art forms from various modern and contemporary art disciplines [2], it incorporates cultural symbols of commerce and consumption. Utilizing specific material media, artistic language, and expressive techniques, it creates tangible artistic images and appreciable artworks. Its specific artistic expressions and content often feature avant-garde, novel, fashionable, popular, and colorful characteristics. Against this backdrop, Pop Design represents a disdain for and subversion of orthodox formal design, presenting qualities of realism,

repetition, mass production, fabrication, mundanity, and bricolage—like a colossal flame freely erupting from the structure of modernized production [3].

### ***1.1. Artistic Expression of Creative Style***

The artistic style exhibited by Pop Art possesses its own representative and unique characteristics. Its expressive forms authentically present art within people's lives. Pop creators enhance the sense of rhythm and layering in design through variations in the size of patterns and symbols, the thickness of graphic elements' lines, and changes in tonal intensity. Simultaneously, they make designs more distinctly layered, content-rich, and engaging, showcasing powerful visual impact. Contemporary Pop Art patterns have broken free from the constraints of traditional pictorial space and design direction, no longer seeking theoretically rigorous perspective. Instead, they employ flattened artistic techniques to compress space, displaying simple geometric elements—such as polka dots, curves, grids—within limited two-dimensional space, combined with various simple or complex patterns to form popular, modern design elements. The artworks of contemporary Pop artist Yayoi Kusama fully exhibit the polka dot element. Through the simple, mechanical repetition of polka dots, Kusama endows her works with a strong pixellated visual effect. The endlessly repeated polka dots appear chaotic yet unified as a whole, ultimately forming a complete, systematic composition. Illustration artist Roy Lichtenstein frequently used imagery as basic painting material in his illustrations or comics. This technique, known as Ben-Day dots [4], involves the regular repetition of small dots, lines, or woodgrain patterns in different colors and shades, densely arranged or overlapped to form large blocks of color and patterns, achieving distinct styles across different works.

For fine art, Pop artists organize the rhythmic relationships of density between graphic color blocks, points, lines, and planes through principles like “balance” and “symmetry,” achieving a measured tension in the composition. Japanese Neo-Pop artist Takashi Murakami's works integrate Eastern traditional culture with Western civilization, high art with popular art, while retaining entertainment and appreciation value. His work *Sunflowers* consists of over a dozen sunflowers of varying colors and sizes. The rich colors do not render the visual effect chaotic; instead, the overall color composition appears harmonious and comfortable. Murakami meticulously plans the composition, adhering to principles of balance and symmetry: larger, dominant shapes occupy the central position to attract focus, while smaller, subordinate shapes in peripheral areas require less detailing. This compositional approach ensures hierarchical order among elements and achieves visual balance and rhythmic arrangement.

### ***1.2. Artistic Expression of Creative Methods***

“Collage,” a common artistic expression method in Pop Art creation, can be traced back to the Cubist paintings of Spanish modernist master Pablo Picasso. In his work *Bottle, Glass, and Violin*, these objects are rendered using cut-and-pasted newspaper. Picasso used collage like dividing lines to create dynamism, breaking through the two-dimensional world with a sense of realism and visual effect. The fragmented forms and textures produced by modern collage are considered one of the characteristic techniques of Pop Art. In Pop Art, any popular element can participate in design, becoming excellent collage material. Collage integrates informational elements from different sources completely within the picture. In Richard Hamilton's designs, elements like an athlete holding a “POP” sign or interiors plastered with consumerist posters are collages promoting popular commercialism through image

symbols. Pop Design's use of the "collage" technique breaks free from formal rationality and emotional coldness. Creators, through poetic combinations, transform the picture into a semantic medium with independent value and meaning, fully expressing their independent character. The pictorial expression becomes a material carrier for personal emotion and ideas, no longer constrained by "formalism."

"Repetition" means imitating something to produce identical copies, increasing its quantity. When repetition serves as a creative method in Pop Art, it represents an artistic compositional form where similar or identical elements are copied multiple times and systematically arranged within the work, creating a sense of order and leaving a profound impression on the viewer [5]. In Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans, the recurring can pattern is formed by infinitely repeating identical cans arranged on a white canvas. Though each can's shape, orientation, and texture are identical, the overall effect combines rhythm and spatial extension. Combining with contemporary printing techniques, variations in ink pressure gave each identical can pattern unique characteristics. Pop artists used mechanical repetition to clarify underlying themes and emphasize them through repetition, forming direct and deep impressions in the viewer's mind. Through these serial reproductions, the artists truly sought to express the artistic reflection behind "repetition and copying": the shift from industrial mass production to the disposable consumerism of modern society.

"Appropriation" is another artistic expression method in Pop creation, referring to the borrowing of pre-existing images from another context with little or no transformation. These readymades come from all aspects of daily life, either directly appropriated objects or representations of people, objects, or events in image form, re-endowed with new forms of expression and artistic language. French artist Marcel Duchamp's Fountain is a representative work of readymade art. Duchamp advocated subverting original definitions, using the "taking" of readymades to break art's symbolic tendencies. His readymade artworks fully embody the challenge to traditional art and aesthetics. When artists reprocess and redesign everyday items into their own artworks, the original attributes of these objects are effaced by the artist's personal emotions. This philosophy of readymade art is one root of Pop Art. Hamilton's 1958 work *She* is also a classic example of appropriation. The title directly uses the dollar sign to convey the theme. The main materials came from advertisements for the large American appliance manufacturer Whirlpool from the last century, including a refrigerator, toaster, and vacuum cleaner. Primarily using collage and painting techniques, though directly appropriating readymades, some technical means were employed. For instance, the female figure is subtly suggested by a small exposed shoulder and a solitary eye; a white collage along the lower edge represents her hip contour; the open refrigerator interior is collaged using photos showing only a few drawers holding Coca-Cola. The toaster is painted, with Hamilton using countless fine dots to succinctly depict the trajectory of popping toast. These layered symbols also hint at modern people's thirst for information. Through his work, Hamilton interprets the true meaning of Pop Art as the symbolic and semiotic dissection of original works. The technique of appropriating readymades not only broadens artists' horizons and expands Pop Art's thematic scope but also helps avoid narrow, arrogant aesthetic tastes and rigid, closed aesthetic standards, fulfilling art's dual function of spiritual solace and redemption for humanity.

### ***1.3. Artistic Expression of Creative Emotion***

In the emotional expression of Pop Art, color symbols are bold, avant-garde, lively, and possess strong contrasting recognizability. Pop creators pursue daring color

combinations, creating unique decorative and artistic emotional effects. Roy Lichtenstein's illustration design features a strong personal style in color application. His compositions often appear in flattened comic strip forms, amplifying characters' expressions and using high-purity complementary colors to showcase his unique painting style. "Works like *Flowers and Whaam!*", similar to early advertising posters, employ large areas of highly saturated colors like red, blue, yellow, and green applied flatly, incorporating large onomatopoeic titles and simplified, solid outlines to highly generalize the depicted subjects. The 1950s and 1960s, when Pop Art emerged and flourished, were a period of rapidly increasing material living standards. Material abundance brought diversified color development, aligning with mass aesthetic tastes in an affluent society. Lichtenstein used ultra-saturated colors to express post-war prosperity and people's expectations for the future, also containing a hint of self-affirmation bordering on defiance towards traditional American culture. Pop Art consistently rejected and scorned traditional artistic themes, focusing instead on popular culture elements to bridge the gap between art and life—a process inevitably influenced by social reality. In the modern world of abundant information, vivid and generalized colors remain key to attracting public attention in contemporary design.

Pop Art works can convey warm emotional expression. Romero Britto, a renowned Brazilian Pop artist, centers his creation on unrestrained optimism and passion. Britto conveys love and hope worldwide through a unique visual language—using lively, playful tones and striking, infinitely combinable three-dimensional imagery. The New York Times once praised Britto's style as "exuding warmth, optimism, and love." Passionate about philanthropy and drawing on rich knowledge of theory and popular aesthetics, he skillfully blends Pop Art and Cubism, forming a uniquely meaningful and delightfully entertaining new modern art style.

## **2. The Application of Pop Art in Contemporary Design**

Pop Art's profound and lasting impact on contemporary design lies primarily in two aspects: First, both conceptually and thematically, Pop Art overlaps significantly with contemporary design; Second, the public influence and added commercial value brought by Pop Art are precisely what contemporary design pursues [6]. Modern and contemporary art design is a new cultural phenomenon born alongside industrial production and market commodities. It is a mass-consumed form transmitted via urban mass media and driven by technological innovation, bearing strong commercial overtones and transforming societal aesthetic trends. Main forms of modern and contemporary art design culture include film, fashion, packaging, etc. These cultural forms often exhibit Pop Art styles. As Pop Art continuously evolves, the commercial value of these forms also increases. Pop Art originates from modern design culture and is borrowed by contemporary design, while the widespread dissemination of contemporary art design further propels Pop Art's rapid development. Moreover, Pop artists take popular commercial images and ubiquitous urban objects as subjects, filling their art forms with industrial and commercial characteristics imbued with profound social reflection. Their design style breaks with the traditional "orthodox" aesthetics and elite culture. Today, Pop Art's unique expressive methods make it ubiquitous in modern design fields like fashion and furniture. In the process of continually expanding the boundaries of "Pop," its artistic charm has exerted a lasting, profound influence on the development of modern art design, forming unique aesthetic symbols [7].

In contemporary design, Pop design language has developed diverse artistic forms across different levels and channels. For instance, new technologies with novel design concepts have found new carriers; products enhanced with added consumer value create new market demands; and virtual Pop, guided by innovation, has gained future channels of expression. In the post-information society, digital technology flourishes, and the virtualization of Pop is a new design direction born alongside its development. It shifts design products towards online and symbolic design, ultimately entering an insubstantial, virtualized design phase. Against this backdrop, Pop Art no longer remains merely an art form but evolves into an artistic concept. In the digital album cover ARTPOP designed by contemporary American artist Jeff Koons for Lady Gaga [8], the image of Lady Gaga's nude sculpture and the "Gazing Ball" before her employs the "collage" technique commonly used in Pop Art creation. Due to advancements in technology and information, this technique is no longer confined to easel art. Using digital processing methods, various materials and elements are decomposed, combined, piled, and packaged to complete the album cover design. Japanese artist Takashi Murakami once designed doodles for Google. He created exclusive small animations based on solar terms or historical events, such as the Summer and Winter Solstices. This design pioneered cross-disciplinary Pop Art design. Facebook's information assistant introduced Murakami's works into its camera effects [9]. Rapidly developing information technology and mobile social media have placed artworks in everyone's phones. Users simply need to activate the camera or video function to access adorable sunflowers as decorative elements. Without visiting exhibitions or shopping offline, one can co-create their own artwork with Murakami's "Sunflowers" by simply opening a mobile app [10]. This design inherits the popular spirit of Pop Art while transcending concrete physical commodity economies, expanding into online communication software and integrating with the vast demands of the internet era.

Guided by the times, Pop design continuously presents itself in "cross-boundary" forms. Virtual Reality (VR) technology presents complex, abstract data to users in non-quantitative, intuitive forms. When Nintendo launched the AR game Pokémon GO [11], its game settings overlaid reality and virtuality, offering players an authentic, three-dimensional, real-time interactive experience. Mixed Reality (MR) and Augmented Reality (AR) will integrate the virtual world into the real world in the most natural way, combining digital art media with informatization and networking, enabling users to interact with others intuitively. The virtualization of Pop design aligns with the demands of the new era's mass trends. It will also genuinely integrate with contemporary technology as society develops.

### **3. The Impact of Pop Art on Contemporary Socio-Cultural Contexts**

Contemporary Pop Art and Pop design incorporate numerous concepts along their path of rebellion against formalism, blending into various cultural phenomena of contemporary society. It is difficult to strictly define their boundaries, but fundamentally, they must be full of interest and possess some popular, individualistic traits to awaken the intrinsic essence of design. Specifically, they attract the younger generation by borrowing mass culture, fusing consumerism and commercial design, ultimately redefining art and design. This breaks the formal monotony, emotional coldness, and dullness of Modernist design, transforming timely, free design into a mass "trend"—an artistic expression no longer exclusive to the upper echelons.

### ***3.1. Reflection of Consumer Culture***

Pop design is inherently compatible with consumerism and commercial design. As consumer society upgrades and evolves, Pop design will integrate with consumerism and commercial design—a profound understanding of human societal essence and a response to the times. The development of Pop design requires a mature consumer culture. From Hollywood stars to household products and food packaging, the thematic content and production techniques of Pop design originate from all aspects of daily life, with the primary purpose being how design is consumed by the masses [12]. Many Pop creators actively engage in commercial design, possessing a thorough understanding of corporate operations and advertising practices. From product manufacturing to window displays and advertising design, designers integrate artistic elements into the initial design stages to cater to the market, create profits, and meet mass demand and commercial design considerations, constantly striving to achieve effective value [13]. Starting with Andy Warhol, Pop designers' creative concepts have been directly linked to commercial design. Pop design, consumerism, and commercial design are deeply intertwined. The ethical values of consumerism and the ideology of commercial design have become the conceptual foundation of Pop design creation. The rise of Pop design is also a choice by creators to break free from pure formalism and return to reality [14]. Nurtured by consumerism and mass culture, the new generation in Europe and America sought to assert their individuality and distinguish themselves from their parents' stance. Swept by this trend, the emotional appeals and life philosophies of the younger generation clashed with those of their elders. Pop design gradually made young people the target of commercial design catering. Their rebellious personalities and "entertainment to death" mentality formed a new life philosophy. To appeal to young audiences' aesthetic tastes, their slogans were commercialized in Pop design to provide daily products aligning with their ideals. For instance, typical "Flower Power" patterns appeared in fashion design, while furniture and other product designs expressed similar concepts. In fact, changes in lifestyle needed expression through daily items or clothing, and the emergence of Pop design catered precisely to this shift in people's lifestyles—especially those of the youth—during their rebellion against traditional morals and mainstream values and pursuit of hedonism. Pop design undoubtedly served as the best prop for expression.

### ***3.2. Integration with Contemporary Design***

From the perspective of Pop Art's evolving characteristics, the application of its formal artistic elements has moved closer to real life, enabling design to flexibly and cleverly develop towards popularity and mass appeal. In selecting design themes, Pop artists or designers use their unique artistic means to create a witty and humorous atmosphere. This alternative art form exhibits a proactive artistic attitude, challenging and critiquing so-called "orthodox" aesthetics, making art design more universal. Simultaneously, Pop creators habitually employ vulgar and satirical design forms to reflect the living conditions of society's lowest strata. Furthermore, the charm of Pop Art lies in its ability to awaken those lost in a vulgar world through strong, contrasting visual impact, enabling them to truly recognize themselves, seek authenticity, and shaping its unique aesthetic symbols and intrinsic value.

With the transition from the era of large-scale machinery and the information age to the post-information society, and the rise of various ideological trends from Modernism to Postmodernism, mass ideology has also moved towards pluralism and inclusivity. Projected onto artistic expression, Pop Art has gradually absorbed more

emotional factors. Unlike its past overemphasis on individualism, designers now pay greater attention to emotional resonance and shared feelings with the audience, beginning to interact and communicate with mass emotions. Emotional expression is the inner spirit conveyed by Pop creators during the design process, the concentrated embodiment of their design thinking. Regardless of the creative method adopted, it essentially communicates the unique creative concepts of Pop Art to the masses. Relying on its distinctive strong personal tension, Pop Art observes contemporary life forms, enabling the public to better understand and accept the designer's intent. In contemporary design, besides retaining characteristics like popularity and commercialism, Pop Art works exhibit greater affinity and a trend towards blurred boundaries and mass aesthetics [7].

In the process of integrated development with modern design, human-centeredness has gradually become the core of Pop Art creation, balanced with pragmatic functionality. For instance, in fashion design, its popularity and commercialism align precisely with modern people's fast-paced lifestyles; in architectural design, the application of Pop Art is typically reflected in strong artistic expression and low cost, offering modern people a new low-cost lifestyle; in other fields, Pop Art is also applied in graphic design, ceramics, textiles, and other product designs. Its humanistic design dissolves the seriousness and monotony of industrial products. Additionally, Pop Art's design philosophy incorporates ecological and sustainable development concepts, reflecting human-centered subjective consciousness and humanistic care.

#### 4. Conclusions

Pop Art and the subsequent Pop design philosophy constitute a new style under modern and contemporary art. It is both a historical evolutionary stage from Modernist design to Postmodern design and the cradle of Modernist design's brief rupture and the rise of Postmodern design [15]. The manifestations of Pop Art in contemporary design are no longer confined to specific forms of expression. Pop creators, through unique and diverse methods, express innovation and truth-seeking in design, ultimately conveying their distinctive conceptual consciousness across various life domains through tangible or intangible artistic expressions. As a unique art form, the characteristics possessed by Pop Art are owned by and cater to the masses—precisely the traits contemporary design should embody. The artistic charm it conveys has also exerted a lasting, profound influence on the development of contemporary art design, forming unique aesthetic symbols.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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