A Dialogue

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Essay by Miguel de Baca

CASTELLI

"Inscribed with all Forms of the Beautiful": Roy Lichtenstein's Entablatures in a Post-Painterly-Pop-Minimal Dialogue

by Miguel de Baca

> Plato has gifts in their most splendid variety… and the structure of his mind resembles some master-piece of classic architecture, in which the marble columns rise from their deep foundation exquisitely fashioned and proportioned, surmounted with elaborate and ornamented capitals, and supporting an entablature inscribed with all forms of the beautiful.[1]
>
> Henry Rogers, as quoted by George Gilfillan in *Galleries of Literary Portraits, Complete in Two Volumes, Vol. II* (1857)

Figs.1&2
Photos of architectural details/entablatures on New York City buildings taken by Roy Lichtenstein
ca. 1972–1974
Black and white photos
3½ x 5 inches each

In 1857, the Scottish critic George Gilfillan wrote an enthusiastic, if not curious, review of his contemporary, Henry Rogers. His lengthy quotation of Rogers's writing about Plato's literary depiction of his mentor, Socrates, could be mistaken for praise of classicism's noble restraints. Gilfillan, however, was a proponent of a brief movement in British literature that favored epic digression and the expression of human desire.[2] Thus what he found most bracing in the text is not Plato's sobriety, but rather the uninhibited display of imagination in ventriloquizing the elder Greek. In this poetic spirit, Gilfillan excerpts Rogers's use of lofty architectural metaphors

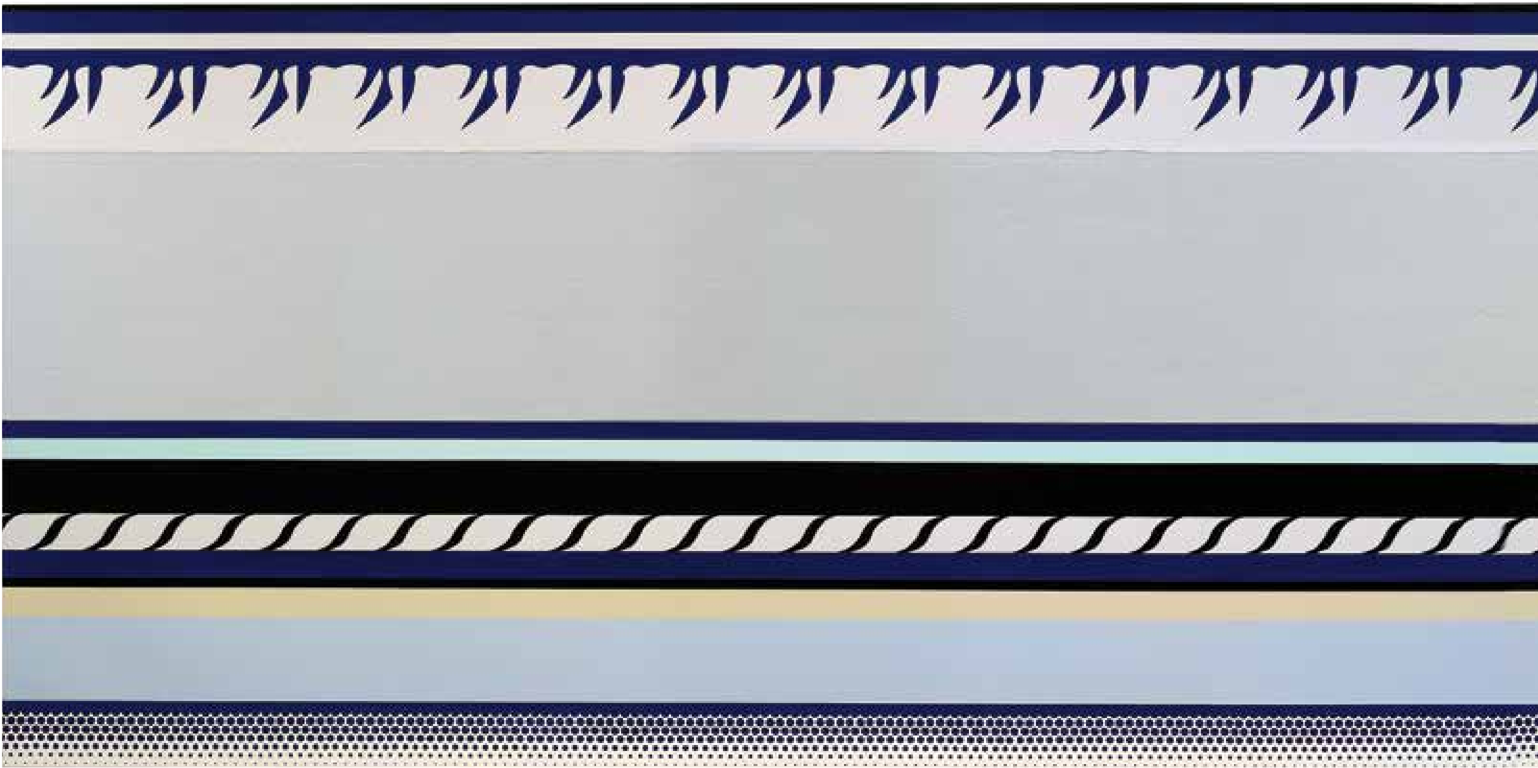


Fig.3
Roy Lichtenstein
Entablature, 1975
Oil, Magna and sand with aluminum powder and Magna medium on canvas
54 x 216 inches

for Plato's intellect: columns are logical in their proportions, balanced by the flamboyance of the capitals. But the entablature is the key image; it is the compendium of aesthetic knowledge, accommodating all forms of beauty.

Let us keep the capaciousness of classicism as a reference in mind as we proceed with the present subject: the renowned pop artist Roy Lichtenstein's *Entablatures*, a series of paintings completed between 1971 and 1976. The paintings are based, at least in part, on photographs the artist took of architectural details of buildings in Lower Manhattan in the area around Wall Street (Figs.1&2).[3] Lichtenstein trained his lens on the classical motifs of these buildings' entablatures, capturing them at high noon when the shadows between decorative elements appeared the crispest. Accordingly, the initial group of *Entablatures*, made in 1971 and 1972, are black and white, and some are rendered with graduated Ben Day dots to convey shadows (Fig.4). The second group, from 1974 to 1976, introduced a surprising range of formal additions to Lichtenstein's practice, including non-primary colors, metallic paint, and textured surfaces achieved through the application of paint enriched with

sand (Fig.3). The artist's investment in these classical designs was not strictly about classicism itself, but rather about classicism's intellectual flexibility, just as so many of Lichtenstein's paintings exceed the meaning of their individual subjects.

Lichtenstein regularly incorporated art history into his pop argot, and the excerpting of classical embellishments facilitated his unique reflection upon the art of the recent past. According to the artist, the *Entablatures* have a threefold reference. One was to the "establishment," that is, to the Greco-Roman origin of the Western tradition and its neoclassical vernacular. To this, Lichtenstein added:

> The *Entablatures* represent my response to Minimalism and the art of Donald Judd and Kenneth Noland. It's my way of saying that the Greeks did repeated motifs very early on, and I am showing in a humorous way that Minimalism has a long history… It was essentially a humorous way of making a Minimalist painting that has a classical reference.[4]

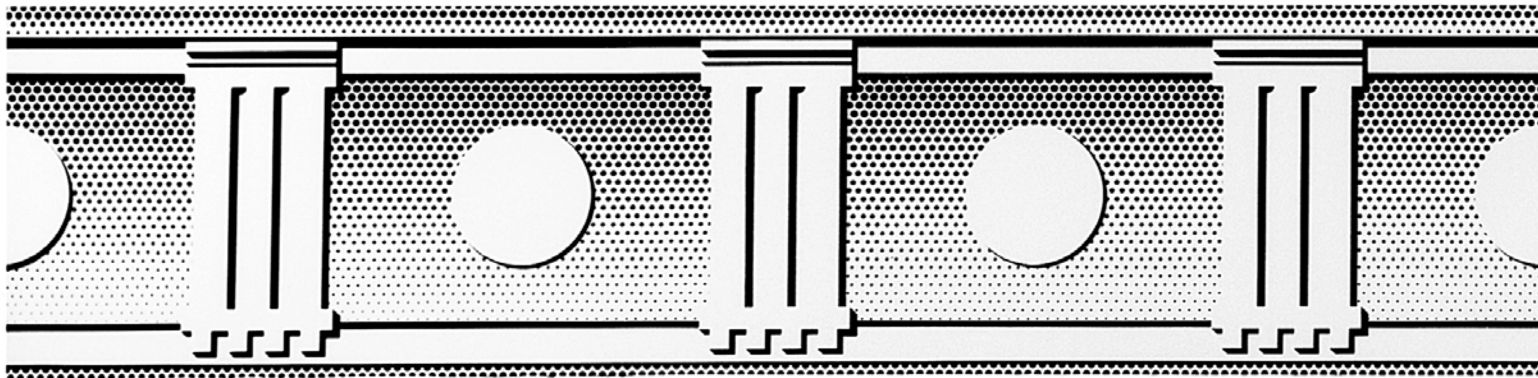
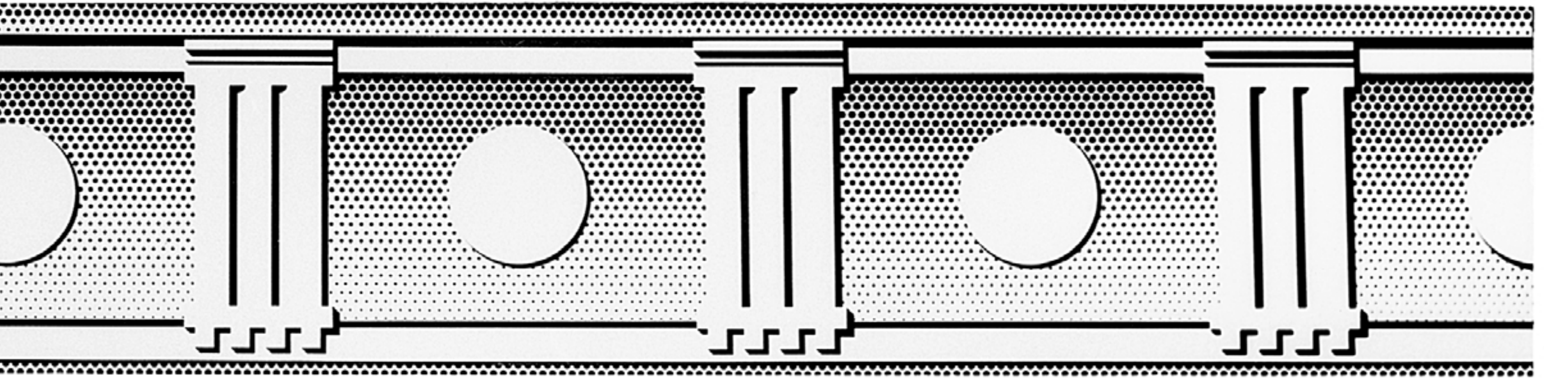


Fig.4
Roy Lichtenstein
Entablature #4, 1971
Oil and Magna on canvas
26 x 216 inches

Minimalism was understood to exist in isolation from historical references, so Lichtenstein's alignment of it with classicism made light of the style's infatuation with its own novelty. The third reference is more hermetic, by which Lichtenstein intended the *Entablature* paintings to refer to themselves as whole objects because the motif stretched from edge to edge. As he explained to Robert Rosenblum, "it's not a picture of something, it *is* the thing," taking to heart Donald Judd's pat proclamation, "the whole's it."[5] Likewise, the means by which an artwork existed as a whole perceptual entity was under special scrutiny in the late 1960s, an effect of minimalism's digestion into art criticism.

This essay will address the *Entablatures* in the following interrelated contexts. The first is Lichtenstein's unorthodox grouping of Kenneth Noland with Donald Judd purposefully to conflate post-painterly abstraction with minimalism, in order to capture the tentativeness of labels in the 1960s and to critique the decade's insular art critical consternations. Secondly, although minimalism was largely a sculptural movement, there are minimalist paintings with which the *Entablatures* have a lot in common, demonstrating that while his works might have been "humorous" in their apparent intent, they are not a mere parody. Indeed, his study of entablatures emboldened the artist to make strategic formal changes to which he turned throughout his career. Lastly, the *Entablatures*, which imply the



"establishment" as we have seen, also equipped Lichtenstein with a design vocabulary that succinctly signified the economic and political establishment at a time of societal flux. The close of his experimentation with the *Entablatures* coincides with the 1976 American Bicentennial, prompting a moment of cultural review.

To begin: the tumultuous 1960s acquainted the art world with the strange bedfellows of pop art and minimalism. Each style came about at the beginning of the decade as a departure from late modernism, and both styles were forging connections to a range of unwieldy practices and processes emerging as a postmodern episteme. But let us account for their obvious differences upfront in broad terms. To begin, pop looks commercial, and minimalism theoretical; while pop embraced the diverse visuals of an unprecedented consumer culture, minimalism seemed to sidestep consumerism, preferring instead to grow with and respond to an art critical apparatus oftentimes written and defended by its own practitioners. Pop is often whimsical; minimalism, often serious. Drawing sharper distinctions between pop and minimalism, or between those and hard-edged and soak-stained modernist painting, might lead us to ignore the fact that this work was exhibited side-by-side throughout much of the 1960s. As the artist Larry Poons said of the era, "For a few moments, everything existed on the same walls, and it was fine."[6] Criticism gesturing toward inclusivity flagged, however, because what might have seemed "fine" to Poons had changed

Fig.5
Kenneth Noland
Earthen Bound, 1960
Acrylic on canvas
$103^1/_2$ x $103^1/_2$ inches

over course as galleries, artists, and critics squared off. According to the art historian James Meyer, the apparent categorizations derived from an art market newly saturated with younger practitioners and gallerists eager to represent them.[7] As a matter of generational difference, many of these emerging figures were at a remove from the anxieties of the immediate postwar moment that accounted for the cohesiveness of abstract expressionism in the 1940s and '50s. Swaggering brushwork yielded to regularized patterns and shapes, stripes, dots, and repetition by rote.

During this apparent changing of the guard, there existed a need to explain how the new practices worked within or against the powerful critical apparatus that had supported the previous generation. Clement Greenberg, whose association with gestural abstraction was robust in the 1940s and '50s, welcomed a fresh turn toward hard-edged, soak-stained, and geometric painting in the 1960s. To that end, in 1964, Greenberg curated the exhibition *Post-Painterly Abstraction* at the Los Angeles

Fig.6
Kenneth Noland
Half Way, 1964
Acrylic on canvas
102 x 102 inches

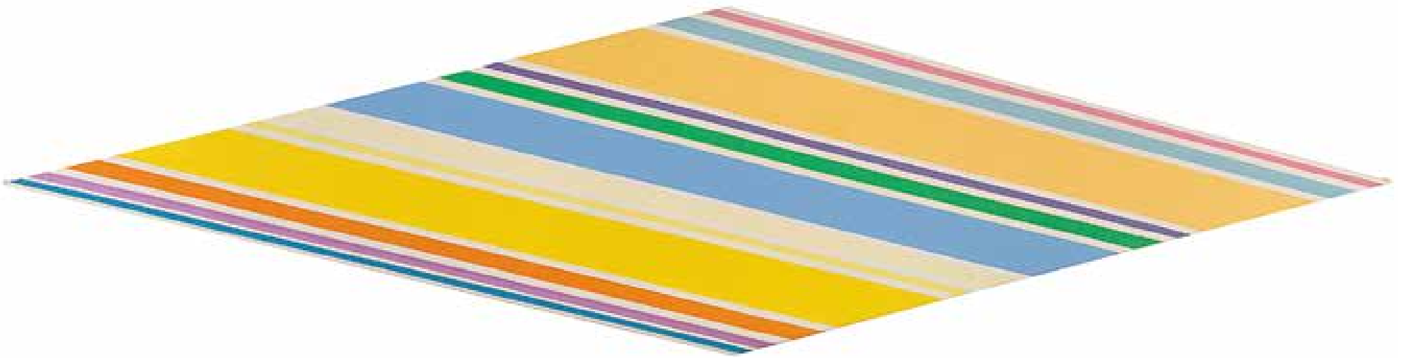


Fig.7
Kenneth Noland
Galore, 1966
Acrylic on canvas
$23\frac{3}{4}$ x $94\frac{1}{2}$ inches

County Museum of Art, the title of which eventually came to define the color field style of Barnett Newman (one of the earliest to have worked in such a pared down aesthetic), Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis, Jules Olitski, Sam Francis, and others. While these artists are not homogenous, they were generally characterized by their linkage to the compositional unity of abstract expressionism, but without the density of its surfaces. Greenberg wrote about the "clarity" possessed by these paintings, articulated through flat, sometimes translucent, fields of color and exposed canvas. These works were not only clear, so to speak, of the heavy-handedness of abstract expressionism, but also of contamination by popular culture and its allusions to mass manufacturing of which the critic despaired in the emergence of pop.[8]

Post-painterly abstraction is a threshold. For the most part, the critical debates that ensued between it and minimalism were separated from pop, although the critic Robert Rosenblum found worthy resemblances in their shared geometric patterning.[9] But the natural connections that developed between post-painterly abstraction and minimalism, since both were nonobjective, made stylistic labels timid. For example, Michael Fried, whose formalism in the 1960s extended certain aspects of Greenberg's criticism, notably praised the painter Frank Stella for

Fig.8
Kenneth Noland
Mysteries: Moonlit, 2001
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 inches

recuperating modernism by invigorating the formal quality of shape. However, at the very same moment, Frank Stella seemed to depart from modernism, and his infamously banal statement, “What you see is what you see,” still epitomizes the objectivized aesthetics of minimalism.[10] Artists proceeded with their work without much regard for the categories applied by critics.

Kenneth Noland cuts across this dialogue intriguingly because his paintings from the late 1950s and early 1960s satisfied what Greenberg and Fried at

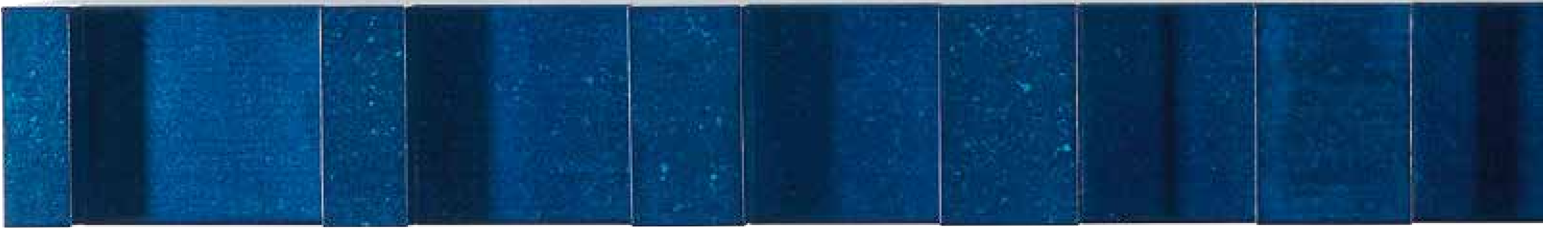
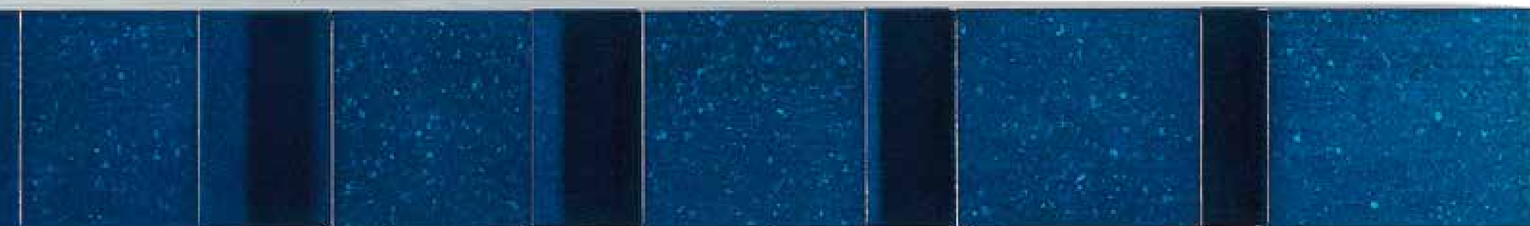


Fig.9
Donald Judd
Untitled, 1967
Blue lacquer on galvanized iron
5 x 69 x 8 inches

the time thought was exemplary of advanced modernist painting, but his works also inspired Donald Judd to depart from modernist conceptualizations of space altogether. In 1960, Greenberg was compelled to write about Noland's paintings as happily "upsetting," at once leaving behind the cluttered tendencies of expressionism and forging a path to a clearer, more porous whole.[11] Noland's targets (Fig.5) and lozenges of the period seemed impressive, as they "create a revolving movement that spins out over unpainted surfaces and beyond the four sides of the picture to evoke, once again, limitless space, weightlessness air… reaffirming in the end… the limitedness of pictorial space as such."[12] These paintings tantalize the eye. Noland refined this aesthetic strategy throughout his career; in the more recent *Mysteries: Moonlit* (2001; Fig.8), for instance, the circumference of each ring provides a visual texture measured against the circumferences of the other radiating rings, imaginatively extending beyond the surface of the canvas yet at the same time gravitating back into the boundary of the frame. This push-pull dynamic was principally "convincing" to Greenberg.[13]

Fried's defense of Noland has also to do with this notion that the artist's colors somehow extend beyond the support into the space outside the canvas. In 1965, Fried's essay "Three American Painters: Kenneth Noland, Jules Olitski, Frank Stella" was published for an exhibition of the same title at the Fogg Art Museum at



Harvard. In it, Fried marks out the logical evolution of Noland's work with respect to shape: the target paintings' concentricity yields to the lozenge paintings' centeredness and symmetry; the chevron paintings, both symmetrical and asymmetrical (Fig.6), eventuate in the diamond paintings in which Noland manipulates the structure of the canvas support (Fig.7).[14] The sharp, attenuated shapes of Noland's diamond canvases seemed to him to "vibrate and shimmer" in tension with the stimulating interactions of colors in their interior bands. Fried reaffirms that the "physical limits of [their] support are overrun, indeed all but dissolved."[15]

Donald Judd acknowledged Noland for his advancements in painting, but as a sculptor, ultimately defined his project against him. In 1965, Judd published the seminal essay "Specific Objects," a manifesto calling for a new art freed from traditional boundaries and definitions. There, Judd wrote enthusiastically about the rectangularity of Noland's work, understanding the emphasis on shape both in terms of the whole shape of the painting as well as its relationship to the shapes defining the interior composition. Looking again at *Earthen Bound*, the internal maroon disk and radiating white and yellow bands seem to be so utterly flat that they are fused together with the canvas itself. Even so, Judd noticed that as one looks at these ultra-flat shapes, they rather uncannily start to "advance and recede."[16] Judd claimed that the full impact of Noland's intentions

would have a "better future outside of painting," and concluded that an investigation of real space rightly occurs in three dimensions.[17] Like Noland, he rejected overelaboration, allowing that each of his "specific objects" conveys abundant information about the assertion of form. A sculpture such as *Untitled* (1967; Fig.9), for example, contains complex spaces made visible by multiple cast shadows, not only by the object's overall projection from the wall, but also within the recessed notches along its length.

Significantly, Lichtenstein's response to contemporary criticism had been in formation before the *Entablatures* literalized it. Although it seems unusual, even Lichtenstein's iconic cartoon and comic book paintings have a Greenberg-like inflection. The critic's well-known and popularly read essay, "The Case for Abstract Art," which appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1959, argued for an appreciation of abstract painting despite its occasional inscrutability. To make the point, Greenberg wrote that the best modernist painting consummated in a moment of profound realization like a "mouth repeating a single word."[18] Words are notably a key feature of Lichtenstein's early work. For instance, Greenberg's "single word" might come sharply to mind when we see *Cold Shoulder* (1963; Fig.10), depicting a glamorous young blonde turned away from the viewer, faced toward an

Fig.10
Roy Lichtenstein
Cold Shoulder, 1963
Oil and Magna on canvas
68 x 48 inches
Collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art
Gift of Robert H. Halff through
the Modern Contemporary Art Council

uninflected red background, as she pronounces the word "Hello…." The drama of Greenberg's encounter with abstraction is rendered ironic in the nervous response of the woman as she countenances what we assume is a yet-unseen intruder. The empty red ground hews closely, and humorously, to the style of color field painting that Greenberg so prized, readily apparent in Barnett Newman's paintings (Fig.11) and the atmospheric early works by Louis and Noland.

Fig.11
Barnett Newman
Covenant, 1949
Oil on canvas
47 3/4 x 59 5/8 inches
Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden
Smithsonian Institution
Gift of Joseph H. Hirshhorn, 1972

The radiant expanse and optical tremors claimed for the pinnacle of modernism have a place in Lichtenstein's work as well. As early as 1963, the artist had begun to think about a picture expanding from the center of the

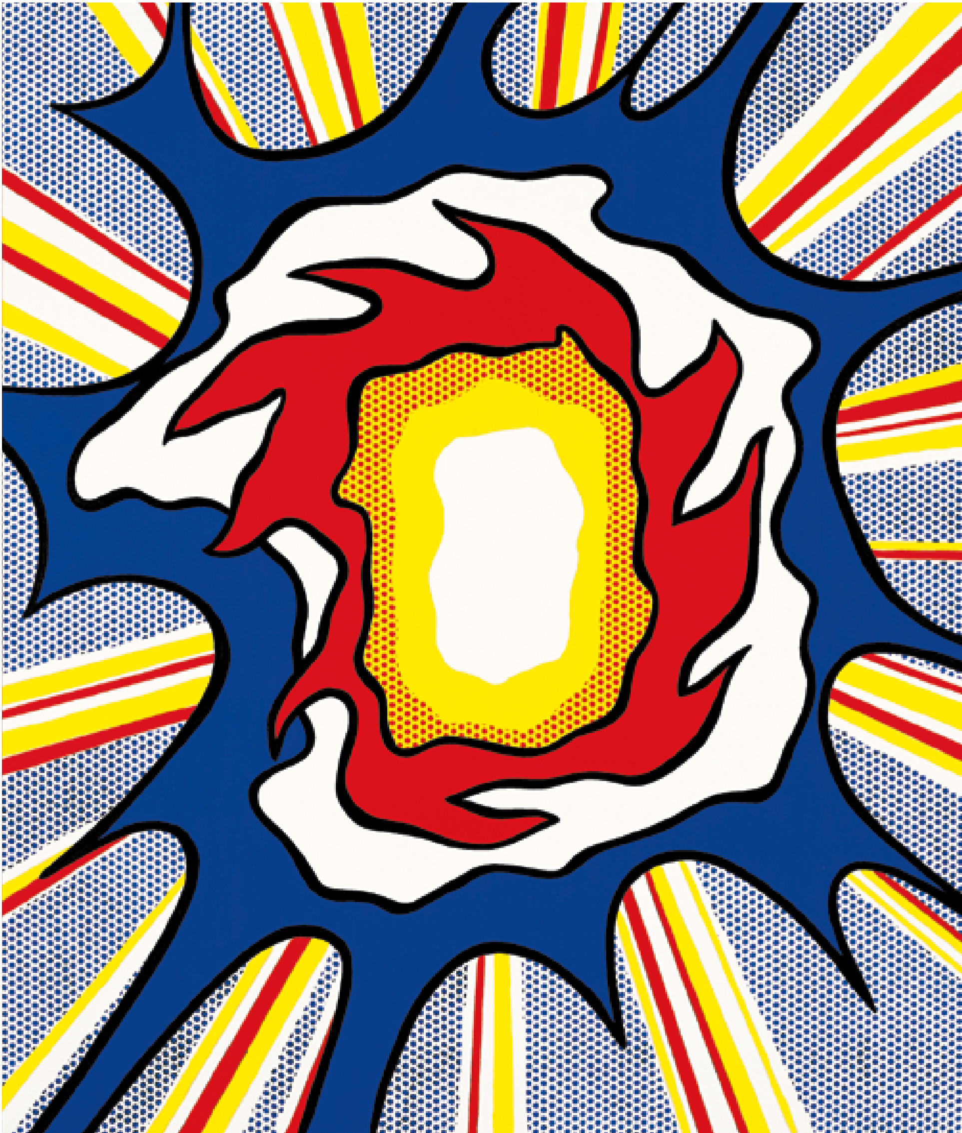


Fig.12
Roy Lichtenstein
Explosion, 1965
Oil and Magna on canvas
56 x 48 inches

canvas in the *Explosions*, which include paintings and porcelain-enameled steel sculptures. *Explosion* (1965; Fig.12), with its concentric bands of effluvia and red-and-yellow rays shooting at the margins of the painting, address the issue matter-of-factly. Noland's *Heat* (1958) (Fig.13) is plainly compatible, not only in

terms of composition, but also the apparent subject of a blast with its concomitant rapid release of energy. Likewise, Lichtenstein's eccentric *Seascapes*, made with sheets of lenticular plastic Rowlux (Fig.14), maintain a vibrant connection to the swelling and puckering surfaces of Op Art, a movement popularized by the Museum of Modern Art's *Responsive Eye* exhibition in 1965 (disparaged, however, by Greenberg for what seemed to him to be pure novelty).[19] In the broader context, it is imperative to connect Lichtenstein's *Explosions* and *Seascapes* to these other contemporary manipulations of visual effects.

Fig.13
Kenneth Noland
Heat, 1958
Acrylic on canvas
65 x 63 inches

Lichtenstein's surprising choice of Rowlux circles back to a contradiction lodged at the core of Judd's art, which oscillates between the predictability of its geometry and the radical way in which the viewer moves around the sculptures to examine its various parts. On the one hand, the flatness of Noland's work led Judd to defeat illusionism at last, which he did at first through austere forms. On the other hand, as the critic William Agee has noted, Judd's embrace of real space and "dynamic openness" was also fundamentally sensuous. By obtruding into such space, Judd appealed to an effulgence of the beholder's senses: visual, bodily, and haptic. In fact, the artist had abandoned the plainness of painted wooden structures by 1963 (Fig.15) to embrace the versatility of enamel on metal, with its lustrous surfaces (Fig.16) and ebullient, colorful range (Fig.18).[20] Lichtenstein's Rowlux *Seascapes* are similarly enticing. The severe edge between sheets of Rowlux

Fig.14
Roy Lichtenstein
Golden Sand, 1966
Rowlux and cut-and-pasted metallic paper on board
21 3/4 x 26 1/2 inches

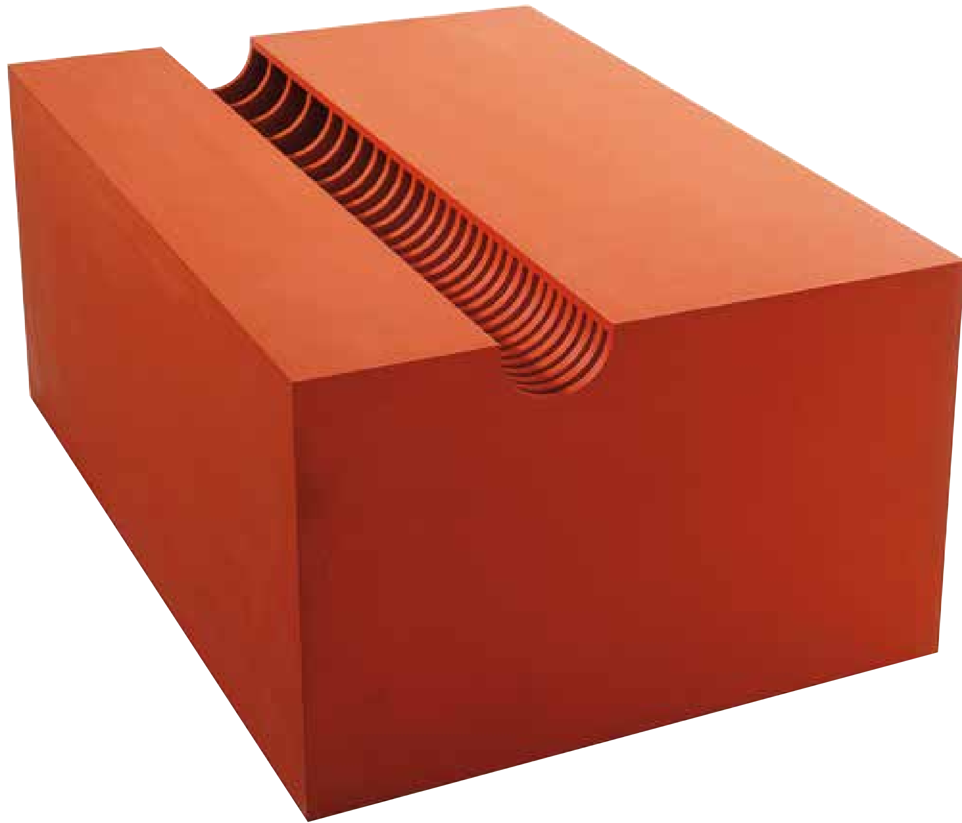


Fig.15
Donald Judd
Untitled, 1963/69
Light cadmium red oil and wood
$19^1/_2$ x 45 x $30^1/_2$ inches

simplifies relationships of proportion and shape, and at the same time, the groovy moiré pattern shifts based on the beholder's perspective. Analogously, the shadows implied by crisp black-and-white ornamental moldings on some of the *Entablatures* position the viewer virtually beneath and to the right or left of the depicted architecture. These shadows convey perception in ordinary, diurnal time, since the architectural details appear the sharpest at noon. Moreover, *Entablature* (1975; Fig.17) conveys the decorative bead-and-reel pattern at a slant, an adaptation (indeed, a violation) of the classical design, suggesting movement.[21] Lichtenstein had become newly intent on the coextensive relation between the beholder's body and the art object, and minimalism was his example.

We must also contend with Lichtenstein's claim that with the *Entablatures,* he was making "minimalist paintings." Despite that minimalism is largely sculptural, there were also painters who identified closely with it, including Agnes Martin, Robert Ryman, Jo Baer, and others, and they sharply understood how their work was held in ideological crosshairs. Baer was concerned with the reception of her work relative to late modernism, as we see now that Lichtenstein might also have been. She purposefully complicated her stance toward modernism and equally toward minimalism in letters she wrote to Fried and the sculptor Robert Morris, published in summary in *Artforum* in September 1967.[22] The crux of the matter for Baer was that Greenberg and Fried's defenses of opticality had ignored the integration of eyesight with bodily experience, and that Morris (and Judd) discounted the ways in which painting could be called upon to transgress modernism and expand the beholder's perception of reality.

To explore Lichtenstein's evolving understanding of what constituted minimalist painting, consider Baer's article "Art and Vision: Mach Bands," written for the art journal *Aspen* in 1970. Here, Baer claimed the optical theories of the Austrian physicist Ernst Mach to explain how colors in juxtaposition

Fig.16
Donald Judd
Untitled, 1965
Red lacquer on galvanized iron
5 x 69 x 8½ inches

could affect the viewer's perception of saturation. In particular, Baer explained, "Most sensation is at the edge of things. Visual systems schematize; they look to physical boundaries, edges and contours to select from the immense detail in the retinal-image data which are most significant to the organism."[23] In *Primary Light Group: Red, Green, Blue* (1964-74; Fig.20), Baer achieves this quality by pushing color to the edges, thereby forcing the viewer's retinal perception of the brightness of the colored bands to be determined by the black bands or the white expanses on either side. Crucially, the amount of ambient light reflected or absorbed by black and white changes the intensity of the color in between. Thus, luminosity does not strictly inhere in painting as such, as modernist critics would have it, but rather derives from the environment of the viewer, as freshly articulated by minimalism.

Certainly Lichtenstein comprehended the radicalization of modernist painting in not just optical, but also physiological, terms. Baer's marshaling of science to the cause of contemporary art invites a comparison with Lichtenstein's earlier awareness and experience of Hoyt Sherman's Visual Demonstration Center, a "flash laboratory," at Ohio State University between 1946 and 1949, which the artist marked

Fig.17
Roy Lichtenstein
Entablature, 1975
Magna and sand with aluminum powder
and Magna medium on canvas
36 x 48 inches

as his "earliest important influence."[24] Subjects in the darkened lab were asked to draw images that flashed on the screen for a fraction of a second, causing an optical afterimage. The flash lab integrated the hand and eye as the students traced on paper the images imprinted on their retinas. As the art historian Michael Lobel demonstrates, Sherman's influence on Lichtenstein unfolded in artworks that contemplate embodied vision.[25] The hand-eye connection is conveyed also in the *Entablatures*' subtly textured surfaces. By 1974, Lichtenstein was working full time at his coastal Southampton studio, and began thickening Magna with sand and aluminum powder. In *Entablature*, the wide, silvery stripe at center is granular, dense, and uneven, as though the pigment were troweled over the painting like stucco over a real, tangible wall (see Fig. 3). In other *Entablatures*, Lichtenstein incorporated stripes with a wood grain pattern, conveying the sense of a bare surface awaiting a scratch coat (see

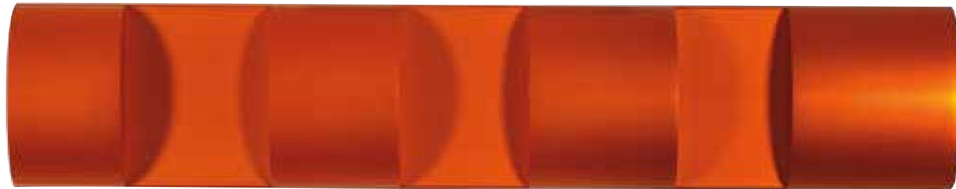


Fig.18
Donald Judd
Untitled, 1987
Anodized aluminum
5 x 25 1/2 x 8 1/2 inches

Fig.17). The implication of a tactility comports with minimalism's whole integration of optical and haptic sensation in pursuit of anti-illusionism.

Lichtenstein's *Mirrors*, the production of which partially coincides with the *Entablatures*, also evoke optical illusion at once with the viewer's sense of where their body should appear in front of the art object. Lichtenstein himself said that the *Mirrors* were about "making a painting that is also an object [that] bridges, somewhat, the gap between painting and sculpture," calling to mind the period-specific critical dialogues between modernism and minimalism.[26] These paintings are lean, conveying a mirror's shadow and reflection through sharp areas of Ben Day dots and flat planes of color. Lichtenstein analogized some of the paintings to real mirrors by shaping the canvas into circles and ovals (Fig.22), perhaps as a reference to Noland's shaped canvases of the same period (see Fig.7). However, I would like to point in a different direction to mirroring and its application within minimal art. The reflectivity of some of Judd's materials, especially polished brass, suggests mirroring (Fig.21), and his contemporary Robert Morris made notable use of actual mirrors applied to boxes and later in room-sized installations. The reflective surfaces in these works premise that art could serve as a reflection of its viewers' social interactions, from the banal to the chaotic and all points in between.

This was not exactly new to Lichtenstein, since his body of work, and pop art more generally, borrows from everyday life. Notwithstanding, it is worthwhile to consider the *Entablatures* as fundamentally social, borrowing from minimalism not only as it was in the 1960s, but also its intent open-endedness over the course of

the early 1970s. Granted, none of Lichtenstein's source photographs picture people or their interactions with the buildings, nor even point to identifiable structures from New York's storied past, but the photographs he made of these seemingly omnipresent flourishes are rendered poignant by the fact that these pictures excerpt such rote details from structures with supposedly monumental importance. If something is ubiquitous, does it automatically mean that it is meaningless?

Yve-Alain Bois ascribes the "establishment" in the *Entablatures* in one way to classicism and in another to minimalism, which by the 1970s was accepted by the art world to be sure. Even so, those who had first forayed into minimalism in the 1960s had extended their work beyond its initial parameters. Robert Morris's post-1968 "anti-form" installations can be seen as a way of extricating himself from the expected austerity of minimalism. Hans Haacke applied minimalist principles to conceptual pieces with increasingly political intent. Judy Chicago, among other women artists, reacted to the exigencies of second-wave feminism by leaving behind minimal aesthetics in pursuit of more overtly activist art. And, as James Meyer notes, minimalism was not wholly embraced abroad, largely in part because

Fig.19
Joseph Beuys
I like America and America likes me, 1974
René Block Gallery

Fig.20
Jo Baer
Primary Light Group: Red, Green, Blue, 1964–1965
Oil and synthetic polymer paint on canvas, three panels
Each panel 60 x 60 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Philip Johnson Fund

of Judd's public claims of the anti-Europeanness of his aesthetic, which was taken by critics to be, in essence, a grand championing of the continuing ascent of American contemporary art.[27] In an even more radical direction, the German artist Joseph Beuys, whose work in the '60s was consistent with the conceptual edge of minimal art, staged his bitingly critical *I Like America and America Likes Me* in 1974 (Fig.19), a performance involving the artist inhabiting closed quarters with a live, American coyote, at René Block Gallery, just a few doors down from Castelli Gallery on West Broadway where Lichtenstein was represented. Large, industrially-fabricated sculptures seemed to fetishize the monolithic nature of American corporate capitalism, although Judd in particular—whose political advocacy for public self-determination is well documented—never intended such interpretations.[28]

Returning to Lichtenstein's photographic survey of financial institutions, what might we now gain? Among Lichtenstein's final *Entablatures* are the prints *Entablature X* and *Entablature XA* (1976) (Fig.23), which include the serif text "JVSTITIA" (the Roman goddess of justice) in the frieze—Lichtenstein's first use of text in the *Entablatures* series. One of the sources for these prints is the frieze of Eighty Maiden Lane (Fig.24), a building located just a minute's walk from Wall Street, and another is the frieze of Franklin National Bank (Fig.25), a Long Island financial institution established in 1926, which crashed spectacularly in 1974. The fall of Franklin National was the most newsworthy collapse in American

financial history since the Great Depression, but even so, Lichtenstein would have known of it acutely since he had relocated to his Southampton studio in the same year. At the time, headlines concentrated on the controlling interest of Michele Sindona, a Sicilian banker with links not only to the Mafia, but also to United States politics by way of his affiliation with David Kennedy, the bank chairman of Continental Bank in Chicago and President Richard Nixon's Secretary of the Treasury.[29] Thus it would seem that risky fiduciary practices were separated only in small degrees from deep channels of political power. With this in mind, Lichtenstein's invocation of Justitia seems to yearn for a special measure of moral guidance and reason.

From this evidence, the *Entablatures* evolved in their meaning from the initial moment in 1971—a funny documentation of vernacular classicism—to

Fig.21
Donald Judd
Untitled, 1968
Brass
22 x 48¼ x 36 inches
The Museum of Modern Art, New York,
Gift of Philip Johnson

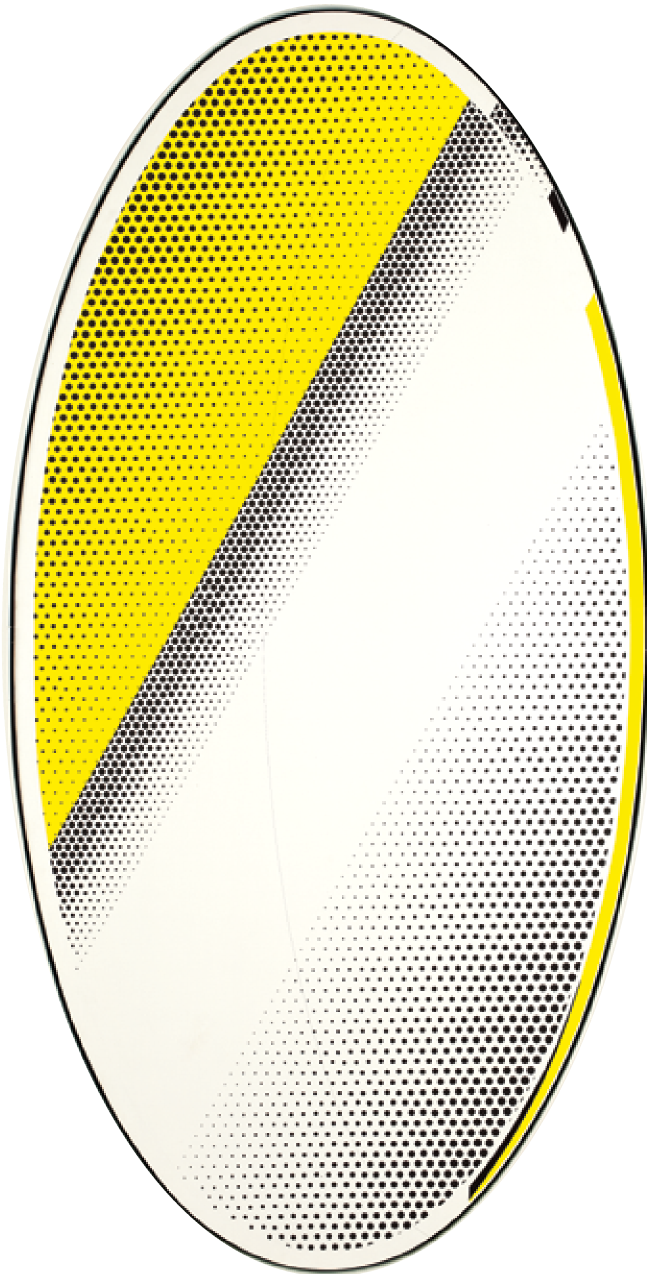


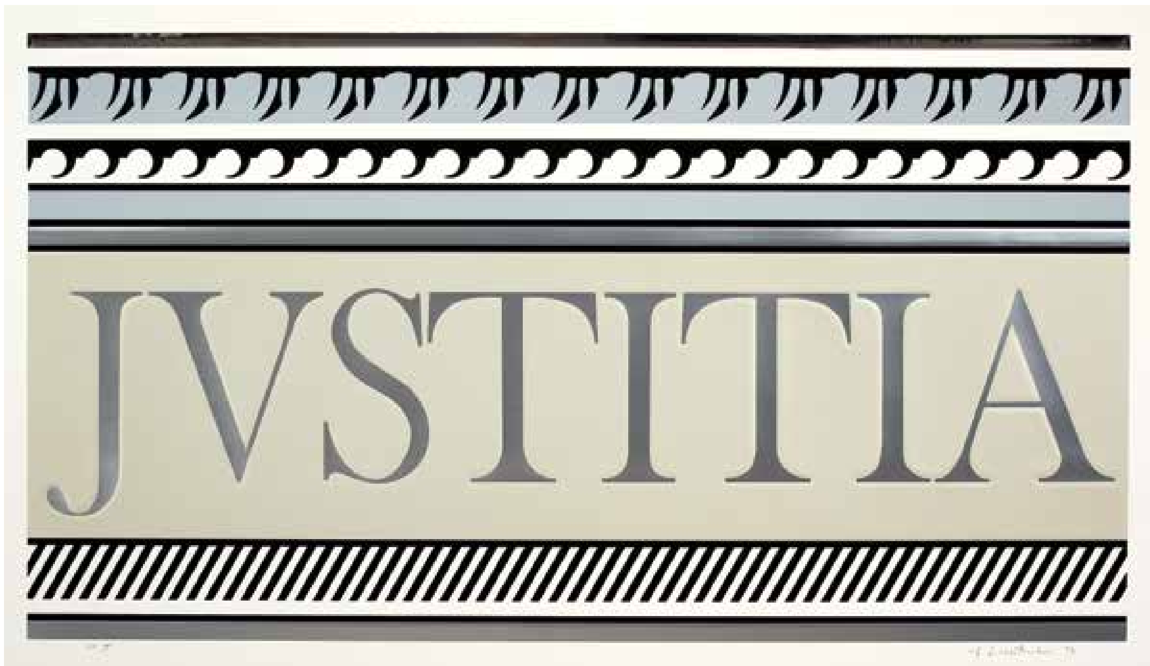
Fig.22
Roy Lichtenstein
Mirror #3 (oval 6' x 3'), 1971
Oil and Magna on canvas
72 x 36 inches

the close of the series in 1976, where weightier issues were brought to bear. Lichtenstein's mastery of the classical entablature through idiosyncratic design proceed into the artist's excerpting of the series' motifs in separate projects starting in 1975, such as the bead-and-reel pattern forming the background for a Picasso still-life in *Still Life with Crystal Bowl* (1976) and the flourishes included in his contribution to *America: The Third Century*, a multi-artist benefit print portfolio commissioned by Mobil Oil Corporation and produced by APC Editions (1976; Fig.26). This latter work is particularly interesting since Mobil was an established New York institution that had been headquartered in the city since 1885. In those days, it was known as the titanic Standard Oil, incorporated by John D. Rockefeller. The Socony-Mobil Building at 150 East Forty-Second Street, which Mobil occupied since the mid-1950s, is a Midtown landmark of sleek, late Art Deco style. Located near the Chrysler Building, with which it shares several architectural similarities, the skyscraper contains seven thousand panels of stainless steel with pressed and raised-relief patterns. In its day, the building was controversial, drawing well-known attention by critics like Lewis Mumford for the *New Yorker*.[30]

The difference between Lichtenstein's interests in Art Deco and neoclassical details illustrate the artist's need for obvious seriousness

in the *Bicentennial Poster*. Lichtenstein had begun working on Art Deco architectural motifs in 1966 with the *Lincoln Center Poster* and the *Modern* series (Fig.27). These works were an homage to New York's storied Deco masterpieces, such as Rockefeller Center, with its stepped, streamlined fronts and aluminum spandrels, and Radio City Music Hall's ornate geometrical decorations.[31] As Lichtenstein's studio assistant Carlene Meeker recalls, the artist embraced Deco because it was the quintessence of New York, representing the aspirations of a bygone golden age.[32] It might have made sense to paraphrase Art Deco when turning his hand to the design of the *Bicentennial Poster*, given the direct connection to Mobil's sponsorship and the corporation's glistening Forty-Second Street headquarters.[33] Instead, Lichtenstein imported other details nostalgic for pre-Depression era industrialism—a gear wheel, pulley, steamship, the suspender cables and hangers of a bridge—where the iconography was overtly suggestive of American aspiration. Whereas the *Lincoln Center Poster* was meant to bask in the jazzy mood of Manhattan in the 1920s and '30s, the *Bicentennial Poster* needed gravitas. Thus, Lichtenstein turned to the *Entablatures*, incorporating

Fig.23
Roy Lichtenstein
Entablature XA, 1976
Screenprint, lithograph, collage on Rives BFK paper
29 3/16 x 44 5/16 inches
Edition of 18; plus 9 AP, 1 RTP, 1 PPI, 1 A, 2 CTP



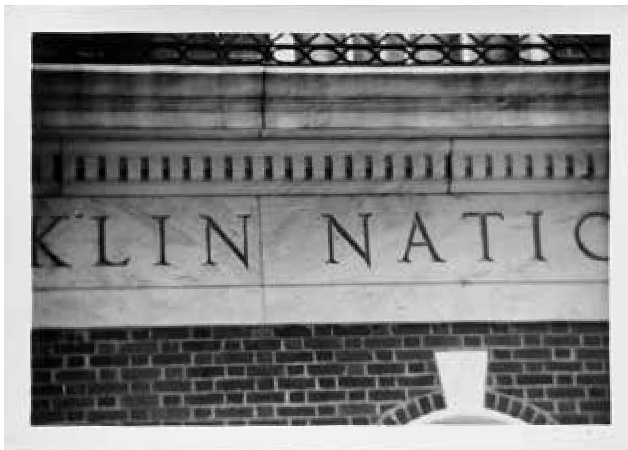
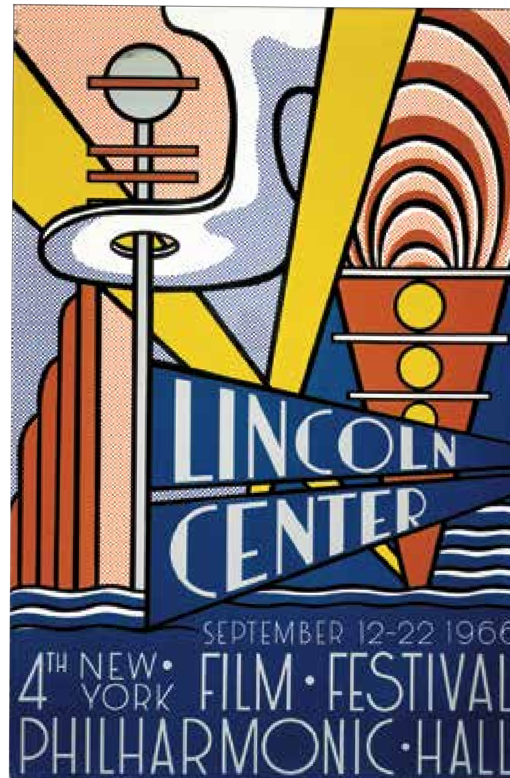


Fig.24 & 25
Photos of architectural details/entablatures on New York City buildings taken by Roy Lichtenstein ca. 1972–1974
black and white photos
3 1/2 x 5 inches each

the dentil pattern molding at the top right and the modified dart-and-egg pattern at the bottom center. Clearer than before, the classical designs from the *Entablatures* signify an "establishment" shaken by the Franklin National collapse, Nixon's reelection, and the unseemly national politics exposed thereafter.

In sum, the economic fabric of America and its acquiescence to capital was scrutinized intensely by the national bicentennial in 1976. Lichtenstein supported a liberal America, as his studio assistant, James DePasquale, recalls.[34] For instance, the proceeds from the sale of Lichtenstein's *Bicentennial Print* went to Change, Inc., which provided emergency grants for working artists, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the New York Civil Liberties Union, demonstrating the artist's pointed philanthropy. As the artist remarked years later, by way of a humorous critique, the Greco-Roman origin of the *Entablature* motifs conferred "fake importance" on those that appropriated it—humorous, of course, because he was appropriating it, too.[35] But the *Bicentennial Poster* reminds us that consolidated regimes do not so often adhere to their high-minded founding principles. America itself—its economy, law, and politics—endures, necessarily changed.

To return to where we began, classicism is fundamentally intellectually flexible, open enough to accommodate "all forms of the beautiful."



Over 150 years ago, it served George Gilfillan's praise of creativity and vibrancy in literature in ways that may have had little to do with Plato's ancient "gifts." The ubiquitous reproduction of classical architecture in the Western tradition ultimately reveals more about how each generation comprehends its relationship to the past, and therefore, its own modernity. The references made in the *Entablatures* to Kenneth Noland and Donald Judd are genuine, and demonstrate Lichtenstein's grappling with cataclysms in contemporary art to which he was not immune. To be sure, there is no shortage of sly wit involved in representing classicism's generic formulations and applying them to art critical debates. A visual stereotype, however, is not the end of the discussion. Given the contentious atmosphere of the 1970s, an upsetting and imperfect return to order after the freewheeling 1960s, Lichtenstein's concentrated and deliberate emulation of the classical entablature in contemporary paintings and prints was meant to do more than restate—it was meant to provoke. ■

Fig.26
Roy Lichtenstein
Bicentennial Poster
(America: The Third Century), 1976
Screenprint
34 15/16 x 23 5/8 inches

Fig.27
Roy Lichtenstein
Lincoln Center Poster, 1966
Screenprint on silver foil
45 13/16 x 30 inches
Publisher: Lincoln Center/List Art Poster and Print Program

(Endnotes)

1 Henry Rogers, as quoted in *George Gilfillan, Galleries of Literary Portraits, Complete in Two Volumes*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: James Hogg, 1857), 365.
2 Kirstie Blair, "Swinburne's Spasms: 'Poems and Ballads' and the 'Spasmodic School,'" in "Victorian Literature," special issue, *The Yearbook of English Studies* 36, no. 2 (2006): 181.
3 I say "at least in part" because Lichtenstein must also have had the general form of the entablature already running through his mind as evidenced by paintings of classical ruins such as *Temple of Apollo* (1964), in addition to other paintings, drawings, and prints he made representing these motifs. Lichtenstein also consulted architectural catalogues to experiment with various neoclassical designs.
4 Roy Lichtenstein, "Commemorative Lecture: A Review of My Work Since 1961." This lecture was delivered by Lichtenstein on November 11, 1995, on the occasion of being awarded the Kyoto Prize that year. The Roy Lichtenstein Foundation Archives.
5 Roy Lichtenstein, in interview with Robert Rosenblum, National Gallery of Art, The Honorable and Mrs. Edward E. Elson Lecture, October 26, 1994, transcript. The Roy Lichtenstein Foundation Archives; Donald Judd as quoted in Meyer, *Minimalism: Art and Polemics in the Sixties* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2001), 88.
6 Larry Poons as quoted in James Meyer, *Minimalism*, 45.
7 Meyer, *Minimalism*, 46.
8 Clement Greenberg, "Post-Painterly Abstraction," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4: *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957-1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 197.
9 "The Boundary between Pop and abstract art is an illusory one… The most inventive Pop artists share with their abstract contemporaries a sensibility to bold magnifications of simple regularized forms… to taut, brushless surfaces that often reject traditional oil techniques… to expansive areas of flat, unmodulated color." See Robert Rosenblum, "Pop Art and Non-Pop Art," *Art and Literature* 5 (Summer 1965): 80-93.
10 Bruce Glaser, "New Nihilism or New Art," interview with Dan Flavin, Don Judd, and Frank Stella, New York, NY, February 15, 1964, broadcast on WBAI, New York, NY, March 24, 1964.
11 Greenberg, "Louis and Noland," in *Modernism with a Vengeance*, 99-100.
12 Ibid., 98.
13 Ibid.
14 Michael Fried, "Three American Painters," in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 213-265.
15 Fried, "Shape as Form," in *Art and Objecthood*, 83.
16 Donald Judd, "Specific Objects," in *Donald Judd: 1955-1968*, ed. Thomas Kellein (New York: Distributed Art Publishers), 89.
17 Ibid., 88.
18 Greenberg, "The Case for Abstract Art," in *Modernism with a Vengeance*, 81.
19 Greenberg, "Recentness of Sculpture," in *Modernism with a Vengeance*, 254.
20 William C. Agee, "Donald Judd and the Endless Possibilities of Color," in *Donald Judd: Colorist*, ed. Dietmar Elger (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 68.
21 Yve-Alain Bois, "Two Birds with One Stone," in *Roy Lichtenstein: A Retrospective*, eds. James Rondeau and Sheena Wagstaff (London: Tate Publishing, 2012), 63.
22 Patricia Kelly, "Jo Baer, Modernism, and Painting on the Edge," *Art Journal* 68, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 54.
23 Jo Baer as quoted in Kelly, "Painting on the Edge," 59.
24 Gene Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from Eight Painters, Part I," *Art News* 62, no. 7 (November 1963): 25, 62.
25 Michael Lobel, *Image Duplicator: Roy Lichtenstein and the Emergence of Pop Art* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002), 77.
26 Lichtenstein, "Commemorative Lecture."
27 Meyer, *Minimalism*, 264.
28 Donald Judd, "General Statement," reproduced online as a part of Judd Foundation's "From the Vault" initiative: http://www.juddfoundation.org/FromTheVault.htm.
29 David C. Jordan, *Drug Politics: Dirty Money and Democracies* (Norman, OK: Oklahoma UP, 1999), 108.
30 Matthew A. Postal, "Socony-Mobil Building," New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, http://www.nyc.gov/html/lpc/downloads/pdf/reports/soconymobil.pdf.
31 Diane Waldman, *Roy Lichtenstein* (New York: Guggenheim Museum), 167.
32 Carlene Meeker, interview by Avis Berman, August 13-15, 2003, transcript. The Roy Lichtenstein Foundation Archives.
33 Lichtenstein's momentous handling of decorative details in works on paper is so incredibly precise from a practical standpoint that something more is at work, perhaps an integration of the minimalist aesthetics in the *Entablature* paintings and the ornamentation of Art Deco style. In April 1976, Lichtenstein produced *Entablatures* as a series of highly varied prints. Here, the task at hand is made extremely challenging by the construction of the matrix which, by its very definition, requires adroit mental translation between positive and negative spaces. Moreover, the prints encompassed techniques new to the artist, such as serigraphy and lithography combined with matte and gloss embossed and debossed foil cut-outs as collage. By the final series of *Entablatures*, the technical principles at work in Lichtenstein's studio were the most diverse of his career to-date.
34 James DePasquale, interview by Avis Berman, August 30, 2011, transcript. The Roy Lichtenstein Foundation Archives.
35 Lichtenstein, Elson Lecture.

Checklist of Exhibition

Donald Judd
Untitled, 1965
Red lacquer on galvanized iron
5 x 69 x $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches
Stenn Family Collection

Donald Judd
Untitled, 1967
Blue lacquer on galvanized iron
5 x 69 x 8 inches
Private collection

Donald Judd
Untitled, 1987
Anodized aluminum
5 x $25\frac{1}{2}$ x $8\frac{1}{2}$ inches
Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco

Roy Lichtenstein
Entablature, 1975
Magna and sand with aluminum powder and Magna medium on canvas
36 x 48 inches
Private collection

Roy Lichtenstein
Entablature, 1975
Oil, Magna and sand with aluminum powder and Magna medium on canvas
54 x 216 inches
Private collection

Kenneth Noland
Half Way, 1964
Acrylic on canvas
102 x 102 inches
Private collection

Kenneth Noland
Mysteries: Moonlit, 2001
Acrylic on canvas
60 x 60 inches
Private collection, Los Angeles

Photo courtesies

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