

## The Newspaper That Was

The origin of the use of newspaper in art takes us back to an exciting era of change. In the mid-nineteenth century, newspapers had been around for about two hundred years. Once afforded only by the wealthy, literate minority, new advances in printing and papermaking technology brought about a surge in newspaper development. The "Penny Press" in America made it possible to produce a newspaper that sold for just a cent a copy, providing the availability of cheap, interesting reading material, a luxury now afforded by all classes.<sup>1</sup> At around the same time, the Parisian daily, *La Presse* cut prices by half, striving to achieve financial support primarily through the sale of space for advertising<sup>2</sup>.

The industrial revolution transformed all aspects of life and society in the western world and had a dramatic affect on the newspaper. Massive powerful presses appeared in the 1850s, which were able to print ten thousand complete newspapers per hour, and with the emergence of the telegraph, far-away stories were brought to the fingertips of newspaper readers<sup>3</sup>. The demand for timely, accurate news reporting changed journalism into a dynamic influential force in western society. In America, in 1791, the ratification of the Bill of Rights guaranteed freedom of the press and all shades of political opinion were represented<sup>4</sup>. In France this occurred in 1881, when the Third Republic passed a law eradicating government censorship, and permitting it the general right to publish<sup>5</sup>. This change encouraged sensationalist writing in order to boost sales and led to fierce competition between newspapers. This new form of mass journalism was interested in enticing and directing mass opinion. The unforgettable front-page headline of "J'accuse", which Emile Zola wrote in regard to the Dreyfus affair, remains scorched in journalism history as a reminder of the power of manipulated opinion in the press<sup>6</sup>. Yet, at the same time, other changes were taking place.

The advertising sections of the newspapers grew and the newspaper expanded in order to accommodate additional ads. Soon the four-page format was replaced with a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.historicpages.com>, 02/02/09.

<sup>2</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk, & Gopnik, Adam, **High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture**, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1990, p.25.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.newspaper-industry.org/history.html>, 02/02/09.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.historicpages.com>, 02/02/09.

<sup>5</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk; Gopnik, Adam, **High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture**, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1990, p.26.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p.28.

six-page one, and then to an eight-page format. Advertisements appeared on the same page as news bulletins and a variety of typefaces became popular. Sketches made from woodcut engravings or from photographs were featured in the newspaper, using new photomechanical illustration and halftones technology. Bold "banner" headlines, extended use of illustrations, coverage of organized sporting events, full-page advertisements, "funny pages" and political caricatures were apparent in newspapers by 1910, making them the recognizably modern newspaper which we are familiar with today<sup>7</sup>.

A stroll along a boulevard in pre-World War I Paris, would have exhibited a vivid scene of the change in place, with vast colorful advertising posters displayed in shop windows, on billboards, poster columns, and of course in newspapers, and it is in this backdrop where modern art met popular culture, thus intersecting between the high tradition of art and the low culture of the modern city<sup>8</sup>. In the autumn of 1911, Georges Braque incorporated a word onto his canvas by using a stencil. The style of the topography of the word was unmistakably one found on packaging crates and in advertising. Following this, in the spring of 1912, his friend, partner and competitor, Pablo Picasso glued a piece of chair-caning patterned cloth onto his canvas, and later used colored paper and clippings from newspapers. At the same time, Juan Gris was also working with pieces of mirror and printed text in his works, and a few years later Hannah Hoch, Raoul Hausmann, and Kurt Schwitters were incorporating newspaper clippings into their photomontages as well. These artists chose their letters, phrases, words and images primarily from the newspaper, as they were intrigued by mass-produced design apparent in typography and advertising. Using this main element in their works invoked not only the experience of the new and changing urban life, but it also incorporated a material from modern popular culture into high art that changed the idea of the art process, its content and how it would be viewed<sup>9</sup>.

The artists who came after them would forever be in their debt for opening the gates to an innovative way of approaching art and connecting "high art" with "low art". After World War II, a new mass culture based on consumerism was establishing itself, with new technology and communication networks that broke cultural

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.historicpages.com>, 02/02/09

<sup>8</sup> Varnedoe, Kirk, & Gopnik, Adam, **High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture**, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1990, p.17.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 23.

barriers<sup>10</sup>. It was coined by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer as the "culture industry" and it was apparent in all aspects of life<sup>11</sup>. These cultural developments had a huge impact on society and art. In the early works of Robert Rauschenberg, his White and Black Paintings incorporated pieces of newspaper into the thickly applied pigments, which were sometimes revealed and sometimes hidden with layers of paint. Rauschenberg's Red Painting series, which were the forerunner of his Combine works, were created with different kinds of red paint applications included newsprint and other materials. The Combine series are filled with massive accumulations of visual information, altered from their original context; the spectator's gaze is instantaneous and not focused, making him more aware of himself and his environment<sup>12</sup>. Rauschenberg had a unique perception of his surroundings and believed he needed to work in the "gap between art and life", in which he saw his activity as a kind of reporting<sup>13</sup>. Andy Warhol recognized the power of mass-circulated media images in American culture and he used these as a source in his artwork<sup>14</sup>. These newspaper images are apparent in his *Death and Disasters* series; *129 Die in Jet*, 1962 (plane crash), *Suicide (Fallen Body)*, 1963 (the suicide girl who jumped from the Empire Building in 1947), *Tunafish Disaster*, 1963 (the two women who died of botulism from eating tuna from contaminated cans), *Red Race Riot*, 1963 (civil rights protest in Alabama), *Saturday Disaster*, 1964 (a car crash occurring on a weekend holiday), *Atomic Bomb*, 1965, and other works. Warhol used commercial photo-silkscreen technique in order to create mass-produced images, having been enticed with the idea of the artist as a "machine" which mass-produces art in an easy and casual way<sup>15</sup>. Roy Lichtenstein's art is an issue of organized perception as his Benday dots are meticulously reproduced on his canvases, similar to the process in cheap color printing<sup>16</sup>. Lichtenstein uses imagery from comic strips, in which trivial aspects are enlarged and stupendous depicting social roles established in our surroundings<sup>17</sup>. Sophie Calle's *Address Book*, 1983, set new precedents in the art

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<sup>10</sup> Lucie-Smith, Edward, **Art Today**, Phaidon Press Limited, New York, 2002, p.9.

<sup>11</sup> Adorno, Theodor W., "Culture Industry Reconsidered", *New German Critique*, 6, Fall 1975, p12-19.

<sup>12</sup> Lucie-Smith, Edward, **Movements in Art Since 1945: Issues and Concepts**, Thames and Hudson Ltd., London, 1995, p.119.

<sup>13</sup> Hunter, Sam, **Robert Rauschenberg**, Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona, 1999, p.7.

<sup>14</sup> Copplestone, Trewin, **The Life and Works of Andy Warhol**, Parragon Book Service Limited, Bristol, 1995.

<sup>15</sup> Osterwold, Tilman, **Pop Art**, Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, Cologne, 1991, p.44.

<sup>16</sup> Hendrickson, Janis, **Roy Lichtenstein**, Benedikt Taschen Verlag GmbH, Cologne, 1993, p.41.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.50.

world when a series of twenty-eight articles published on half of a page in a French daily newspaper, during the course of a month, created a portrait of an unknown man by way of his acquaintances<sup>18</sup>. David Wojnarowicz overlapped text from news and comics, paint, photography and collaged elements in his works, rebelling against conformity, materialism and mechanization. In his *The Death of American Spirituality*, 1987, Wojnarowicz uses newspaper articles referring to gangsters, Oliver North, AIDS and advertisements, symbols of the American dream become condemnations of American capitalism and violence<sup>19</sup>. Masaaki Sato symbolizes diversity in his *Newsstand* series, in which he paints newsstands in New York City with reversed or changed order, representing the difficulty in communication between East and West<sup>20</sup>. The list of artists goes on, as the boundaries between the worlds of "high art" and "low culture" is becoming increasingly interlaced, as artists continue to incorporate elements of contemporary popular culture (including political and world issues) and intertwine them with modern art.

The newspaper survived the slump in the 1950s, after television was introduced<sup>21</sup>, but today it faces an even bigger giant, threatening to replace the ink-on-paper production with on-line news and digital distribution. Could it be a fleeting memory of a past-time leisure activity as seen in Marie Cassatt's *Portrait of a Lady*, 1878 and *Woman Reading in a Garden*, 1880, or in Edouard Manet's *Woman Reading*, 1878-79, or Tina Barney's *The Sunday Times*, 1982? It would be a shame if future generations would never know the touch of its material, the smell of its print, the pleasures of reading it along with a cup of coffee in the morning, and the endless possibilities it holds for creative minds. The factors which have sustained the newspaper's role in society are falling apart. Its days may be numbered (hopefully maybe not), and the only remnants being those newspaper clippings, words or styles in modern and contemporary art which will preserve the newspaper that was, forever.

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<sup>18</sup> <http://www.findarticles.com>, 16/02/09.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.queer-arts.org>, 16/02/09.

<sup>20</sup> Lucie-Smith, Edward, *Art Today*, Phaidon Press Limited, New York, 2002, p.409.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.historicpages.com>, 02/02/09.