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Abstract Self-Portrait Research Notes

My abstract self-portrait was inspired by the Pop Art era, specifically the work by Roy Lichtenstein. The research problem statement was to accurately create my own piece that matches the art style of Lichtenstein. The communication objective was to portray myself in digital art form without using my face but using other means to display my personality.

To begin, the Pop Art period started in the mid-1950s and ended in the late 1970s. Pop Art originated in Great Britain by the Independent Group in 1952. This group of artists met to discuss the fascination of popular culture including science fiction, comic books, and Western movies (“Pop Art History and Concepts”). Famous artists from this era are Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Claes Oldenburg, and Eduardo Paolozzi. Pop Artists were inspired by and drew ordinary objects and people, unlike in previous art eras. This was a new form of modernism being introduced and is now one of the most familiar styles of modern art (“Pop Art”).

Lichtenstein started making pieces for Pop Art in 1961, but he faced criticism because his artwork looked too similar to comic strip art. Repeatedly, he was accused of copying that art style in his work and was labelled as unoriginal. Yet, he made many modifications from his source material in his final product (“Roy Lichtenstein”). Lichtenstein’s pieces were inspired by popular culture and common objects. Several of his pieces included people, but a frequent subject in his work was a white, blonde woman in pieces such as “The Crying Girl” (“Roy Lichtenstein, The Crying Girl”). Lichtenstein’s contribution to Pop Art was a key change that

moved away from Abstract Expressionism, which focused heavily on the artist's emotions while Pop Art mostly lacked in that area and focused on the subject itself ("Roy Lichtenstein"). He defined a gray area between what was considered fine art and mass reproduction ("Pop Art History and Concepts").

Common qualities of Pop Art include thick line strokes and bold colors. A special quality in Pop Art are the dots in the foreground, which has a technical name called "Ben-Day Dots." Ben-Day Dots are defined as "small colored dots (typically cyan, magenta, yellow, and black) that are variously spaced and combined to create shading and colors in images," which was created in the late 19th century ("Ben-Day Dots"). These dots were over large parts of the art piece or over the entire piece, but in a subtle way that was not distracting. Lichtenstein reproduced these Ben-Day Dots by hand-painting them for his pieces, as well as the comic-book scenes he remade ("Pop Art History and Concepts").

I appreciate Pop Art pieces and Lichtenstein's work because of the excitement they bring to the mundane world with the use of regular people or items like in the piece "Spray Can (1 cent life)" in 1964 ("Roy Lichtenstein, Spray Can (1 cent life)") Pop Artists use bright, bold colors to get the audience's attention like in "The Crying Girl" in 1963 ("Roy Lichtenstein, The Crying Girl"). Also, they bring the art piece to life with a quality of spontaneity flowing through it, such as in "Composition 1" which Lichtenstein screen-printed in 1996 ("Roy Lichtenstein, Composition 1"). Furthermore, I love the appearance of Ben-Day Dots because of my love for polka dotted designs, as well as my enjoyment of reading visual novels such as the "Captain Underpants" and "Scott Pilgrim" series in my childhood. In addition, they give artwork that "comic strip" quality, which I enjoy looking at. It inspires me to believe that there is more to the world than just what I see. I can see something that is stationary and make it exciting and alive.

For the visual solution, I focused on my appreciation of music to drive the piece using a piano and several musical staves with music notes. I have not learned how to play an instrument, but I've always enjoyed listening and singing to music whether alone, at church, or with friends. To produce it, I made small sketches of my various interests before I decided to focus on music. Once I made the decision on my topic, I made a larger final sketch of how I wanted the final to look like. I scanned the final sketch using my phone to upload to my computer. Then, I placed the image as a template in my Adobe Illustrator project file to draw over and continue to use as reference. Most of the work was done using my pen tool to trace the line work, then I filled in the color using the four colors chosen and various patterns, including polka-dots to replicate the "Ben-Day Dots". Finally, I used a clipping mask to make the piece fit into a perfect square. Looking at my visual solution, it accomplished my goal of creating a self-portrait using the theme of music, which brings joy into my life.



“Spray Can (1 cent life)” – Roy Lichtenstein



“Composition 1” – Roy Lichtenstein



“The Crying Girl” – Roy Lichtenstein

Works Cited

“Ben-Day Dots.” *Museum of Modern Art*, 2021, <https://www.moma.org/collection/terms/145>

“Pop Art.” *The Art Story*, 2021, <https://www.theartstory.org/movement/pop-art/>

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“Roy Lichtenstein, Composition 1.” *Artsy*, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/roy-lichtenstein-composition-1-1>

“Roy Lichtenstein, Spray Can (1 cent life).” *Artsy*, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/roy-lichtenstein-spray-can-1-cent-life-1964>

“Roy Lichtenstein, The Crying Girl.” *Artsy*, 2021, <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/roy-lichtenstein-crying-girl-1991>