



What's Time  
the Rush?

Convenience

Topics on Con



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What's The Rush?

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**What's The Rush?**

# Director's Foreword

In British artist Richard Hamilton's famous little collage—about 10 by 10 inches small—**Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?** the word "POP" is boldly printed in yellow letters on the extra-large Tootsie Pop strategically placed over the naughty parts of the otherwise nude bodybuilder featured near center image. When Hamilton submitted the work for the thin, spiral-bound 1956 **This is Tomorrow** exhibition catalog, I'm sure he had no idea what Pop would come to mean, or that more than fifty years later a crop of young artists would be still mining Pop as a relevant vehicle for social critique.

One commonality between the artists in **What's the Rush? Topics on Convenience** and the '50s Brits who exhibited in *This is Tomorrow* is a fixation with American culture. The images in **Just what is it . . .** were mostly clipped from American magazines. Hamilton and his colleagues, who are credited with the invention of Pop, saw America with its obsession and optimism about the future as a fertile source of images and ideas about what tomorrow could become. Of course, Pop changed when it came to America. Critics and historians have placed a gamut of ideas and aesthetic approaches under the Pop umbrella. But the most predominant and outrageous ideas come from Warhol. Andy was Pop and Andy was all about the banal and the absurd. He famously declared himself a "mirror"—a dispassionate conduit that simply reflected culture without judgment, malice, or prejudice.

Although many of the artists in **What's the Rush?** feature banal aspects of culture, their work reads as opinionated commentary on the way we live today. But there are no pat answers offered here, just questions and a more than subtle suggestion that everything isn't rosy in the today that has emerged from the promise of yesterday's tomorrow. In many ways, the artists in this exhibition are asking the same question that Hamilton asked with his **Just what is it . . .** But unlike Hamilton's pondering about tomorrow, they wonder why our frantic lifestyle today is "so appealing" and so inescapable.

These are ostensibly simple questions, but to truly find answers we need to dig deep into our collective psyches. We need to ask ourselves: Who are we? and Where are we going? These are profound questions. It is absurd, and very telling of our culture, that a path to these questions could be found via queries implied in this exhibition: Why do we find the logos on paper coffee cups so attractive? Why do we spend so much time on those congested freeways? And why do we crave eating the stuff in those shiny little chip bags?

Perhaps equally absurd is that the above queries are found in artworks that are . . . beautiful. This is the first thing you notice when you look at

the art in this exhibition; it is seductive: it pulls you in with colors, textures, gleaming surfaces, familiar imagery, and soothing formal structure. Indeed, the visuals here contradict the conceptual concerns, but they also reflect the push-pull relationship we have with our pace of life and products that facilitate such a pace.

Much to their credit, **What's the Rush?** curators Krystal Glasman and Elizabeth Tallman, and the designers who worked with them on this project, have designed a catalog and an exhibition environment that complements and enhances the seductive qualities of the art. Glasman and Tallman have also articulately outlined the conceptual aspects of the artists' work in their essay for this publication. I applaud them for their development of this exhibition and all the hard work they have done to make this project successful.

Ryan Oliver, Luis Pedraza, Rodney Sao, and Johan Vilchez, the designers for this catalog, are graphic design professor Theron Moore's students. The gallery program has been collaborating with Moore and his students for several years. This collaboration has resulted in many—and now one more—remarkable print projects and several design awards.

Matt Jarvis' essay provides an insightful and colorful read of the artists in this exhibition and engaging observations about Pop art. Marty Lorigan and Marilyn Moore, their assistants, and the exhibition design museum studies program students all made notable contributions. Lastly, and most significantly, I want to thank the artists who participated in the exhibition.

[\\_Mike McGee](#)

# I Do Not Trust This Box

Something emerges with Pop Art that is quite different from any experience I have had with art, whether contemporary or classical. Somewhere entrapped within Pop Art's banal nature lurks a perverse longing and a reminder of where we are headed and how inescapable our path seems to be. Consumption is at the heart of Pop. It is art that eats at everything; however, this is not quite fair to say. It is we who eat at everything, locked in cycles of bigger/better, newer/shinier, more/still more. Pop Art, then, is at once a reflection of, a critique of, and a warning about our compulsive consumerism. The critic and the historian must love Pop Art or, at least, secretly love it. We can ascribe any level of theoretical discourse to it: Pop is Freudian, Baudrillardian, existential, fetishistic (the non-Freudian kind)—the list can go on throughout the canon of Western and non-Western theory.

Instead of ascribing some other person's name to an idea of what Pop Art is or clumsily trying to force the square shaped idea into a round hole, let us try to come to an idea of why Pop Art must endure and why it will prevail. Pop Art will never face the tedious rhetoric of Manet's **Olympia**; the epithet "the last" will never be ascribed to an art whose sole purpose is an end unto itself. What would the end of Pop Art mean anyway? Pop is taken directly from culture and the everyday; the end of Pop would be the end of us....

Susan Jane Belton's portraits of disposable coffee cups stare back at the viewer, seeming to implicate us for consuming and for not recycling, yet reminding us of how we are perversely sucking energy from these paper bodies first thing in the morning or late in the afternoon or on a first date. They are silent witnesses to a logo-obsessed world in which judgment lies in every gesture we articulate.

Chris Jordan displays something more perverse in his photographic depictions of cell phones. His enormous photograph of 426,000 discarded phones brings to mind a battlefield strewn with amputated parts—the now-useless limbs that allowed for a three-way connection between hand, mouth, and ear. More and more we become aware that the machine is what is indeed in control. Jordan's work brings to mind scenes from David Cronenberg's 1983 film **Videodrome**. Moreover, think about the deep irony present in the cell phone, a device of communication that has led to more misunderstandings and miscommunications than previous generations could have ever conceived. The cell phone births us as cyborg and renders our ability to communicate impotent to its will.

Our portrait of life gets no more cheery with Kevin Landers. **Lottery Shelf**, 2005, stands as a place of worship for the American dream. It

is an altar to greed and the false promise of easy money, its electric yellow border glowing and attracting us to the maze of red-encircled bubbles that give rise to hope for wealth and an end to problems. Easier times are not to be had, however. Indeed, I look to the pencil for the answer, the sad blue pencil that appears to have committed suicide by hanging.

Chris Wright offers Chinese food to us. Well, not exactly. He presents the containers that hold Chinese food or, as the title tells us, **Delicious Chinese Food**, 2005. There is something deeply amusing about the title and date being side by side here, a trope of art history and exhibition design. I can just imagine the food having sat in the box since 2005, like the to-go box at the back of the refrigerator that has been there too long to be touched and that will remain there for the next tenants. Indeed, Wright's takeout box, which is set on a backdrop of black, forebodes more than Belton's coffee cups. This box wants to hurt us; it lurks up to us. I do not trust this box. The possibility of what this container holds troubles me the most. The forced jovial exterior unsettles instead of comforts. Moreover, what is active here if not decay? But it is not a decay that is natural, as the material that decays is itself not natural; it is made by us. This box will not disappear into the black, no. Instead, it will rot into something much different, much more sinister and threatening.

Whenever I look at contemporary Pop I worry. I realize that we are taking more from the planet than we can ever hope to replenish. There doesn't seem to be a way to break from this cycle. Turning off the lights or not watering your lawn will only go so far. We eat and we eat and we take and we dispose. Convenience, or the attempt at convenience, has altered our perception like some fast-acting drug. We no longer have will over our senses—we know what we need and we take it, use it. The things control us, though. We don't realize it yet. We will. As the art and the things pile around us, will we, in the end, be able to tell the two apart? Or, more distressingly, will we know which came first? Of Pop we must say that what it seeks to represent, what it makes its commentary on, what it appropriates from are also works of art or design: logos, portraits, constructed identities, architecture. And we, we eat them all. We eat the art and the apparatus with our eyes and body. We are lost in a world of things. I cannot offer any answers. Nor do I think Pop Art can. However, it is a clear reflection of what is and what is going on. When did we become so blinded by the "stuff" that we needed to look at art to begin to realize the banality that binds us with a firm nod to our insatiable consumerism?

[\\_Matthew Jarvis, 2009](#)



# Glimpses of 2009

What were once household activities can now be done at 65 miles per hour; phone calls, full meals, and hot beverages are accessible from cars. In the past fifty years, the habits of individuals have adapted to accommodate a fast-paced lifestyle. These changes are chronicled in every product designed to aid consumers throughout their hectic day. While designers and engineers make this lifestyle possible, it is artists who realize the potential of a particular object. Through various media, artists reinterpret objects in ways that transcend their original purpose and thereby transform the mundane into something meaningful.

In an early example highlighting the influence of common objects, images of pretzels, chairs, street signs, and coffee once served as ambassadors for the United States. Assembled by midcentury designers and cultural touchstones Charles and Ray Eames, images of these seemingly insignificant objects were among 2,200 other images presented in a multiscreen, large-scale film sent to represent the U.S.A. at the 1959 American National Exhibition in Moscow. **Glimpses of the U.S.A.** was an ambitious project that successfully illustrated postwar America.<sup>1</sup> The effectiveness of this project resulted from seeing objects as icons; similarities among cultures were captured by the familiarity of a mundane item. More importantly, this show's success marked a turning point between an industrial past driven by war and a growing consumerist population investing in brands. As the nation and the world established a lifestyle increasingly dependent on consumer goods, objects emerged as a universal language by which individuals and society could be identified.

Shortly after the debut of **Glimpses of the U.S.A.**, the common object evolved from a cultural artifact to an iconic muse. Specifically, Pop artists began embracing objects as a source of inspiration. Soup cans, pastries, and American currency were removed from their original contexts, isolated within a composition, and emphasized in new art works. However, the artists' interests in these objects went beyond formal characteristics. Unlike previous artists, who valued objects for aesthetic qualities, Pop artists presented objects that carried moral judgments.<sup>2</sup> In addition to isolating their subject matter, Pop artists worked in series and used commercial art techniques to comment on identity, consumption, and excess. This growing interest in commercial appeal and popular culture led to Southern California, where Ferus Gallery co-founder Walter Hopps brought New York's biggest Pop stars to the West Coast. In 1962, Hopps organized what some regard as the first museum survey of American Pop Art, at the Pasadena Art Museum.<sup>3</sup> **New Painting of Common Objects** featured eight future superstars including Andy Warhol, Ed Ruscha, and Roy Lichtenstein. This exhibition propelled Pop

Art toward critical acceptance and cast an even greater focus on these now common icons.<sup>4</sup>

The artists invited to exhibit as a part of **What's the Rush? Topics on Convenience** demonstrate some Pop aesthetics in their work and share similar ways of storytelling with objects. Through isolation of objects, larger-than-life focus, repetition, and series, these artists comment on contemporary issues such as environmental concerns, anxiety, and branding, while reintroducing objects as cultural icons. It is these new concerns that separate the Pop-inspired work of today from emerging Pop Art of the 1960s. As cultural icons, these objects reflect not only these concerns but also the contemporary culture that encourages this lifestyle.

Within the paintings, photographs, and sculpture in **What's the Rush?** are glimpses of a hectic, product-dependent, often wasteful lifestyle. In Chris Jordan's large-scale photographs, discarded plastic bottles accumulate into a visual statistic depicting five minutes worth of consumption. Painter Susan Jane Belton presents consumption as a ritual, emphasized by an incessant repetition of paper coffee cups, which she collects on a daily basis. The baroque painting technique Chris Wright uses to render contemporary products reevaluates context, asking viewers to forget the object's purpose and focus on its formal qualities. Individuals are objectively represented by the items they carry in Maya Sutter's series of photographs. Familiar convenience store goods lose their identity in the oversimplified presentation and industrial materials Kevin Landers uses to fabricate them. Henriette Sonne's household items are parodied by fabricating a useless cord, and the anxieties of constant development overwhelm the viewer in Derek Buckner's goliath depiction of dense urban sprawl. The significance of these objects and the stories they tell is not in their revelation but in their timeliness. This exhibition focuses on current trends; its relevance will increase in hindsight. Fifty years from now, **What's the Rush?** will disclose a global generation invested in a fast, convenient, and nearly disposable lifestyle.

Despite the absence of human figures, **What's the Rush?** is a show about people: the coffee drinker, the commuter, the consumer, the multitasker. It is a show for people who frequently replace their cell phone, who do not drink tap water, who eat out more than they cook, who eat in the car, who give into impulse buying, who never carry cash, who only carry cash, who respond to a text while driving, who know when to take side streets, who have lucky numbers, who drink milk after the expiration date, and anyone else reflected in the art work of Susan Jane Belton, Derek Buckner, Chris Jordan, Kevin Landers, Maya Sutter, Henriette Sonne, and Chris Wright.

[\\_Krystal Glasman, 2009](#)

Eames Office Resources, <http://www.eamesoffice.com/index2.php?mod=culture> (Apr. 19, 2009).

John Coplans, "The New Paintings of Common Objects," *Artforum*, November 1962.

WARHOLSTARS, <http://www.warholstars.org/articles/walterhopps.html> (Apr. 19, 2009).

Coplans, "The New Paintings of Common Objects."

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Chris  
Wright



Associated Bag\_2005\_oil on linen\_22" x 30"

\_all work courtesy of George Billis\_New York

# Bodegónes

There are certain objects, moments, and conditions that inspire a painting experience. I paint through direct observation of everyday, commonplace objects that have a peculiar purpose or a purpose that is telling of an aspect of our culture. I consider the materials, textures, colors, and graphic qualities of the objects and the light and space in which they exist, building the surface with alla prima layers. I gradually clarify the image over several months of concentrated effort in an attempt to capture the qualities of the initial fascination.

\_Chris Wright

Delicious Chinese Food\_2005\_oil on linen mounted on panel\_14" x 15"







The Flute Player\_2007\_oil on linen mounted on panel\_14" x 11"

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

## Thanks To

### Exhibition Design Students

Alyssa Cordova, Alexandra Duron, Jennifer Frias, Loriann Hernandez, Lilia Lamas, Liz Little, Jillian Nakornthap, Heather Rose, Lynn Strommick, Sarah Strozza, Jeffery Rau

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Special Thanks To

### Artists

Susan Jane Belton  
Derek Buckner  
Chris Jordan  
Kevin Landers  
Henriette Sonne  
Maya Sutter  
Chris Wright

### Galleries

Hilary Metz at George Billis, L.A.  
Jenny Moore and Tim Saltarelli at Elizabeth Dee Gallery, N.Y.  
Krystal McKay of Chris Jordan Studios  
Paul Kopeikin of Paul Kopeikin Gallery, L.A.

### Collector

Kevin Landers, Lottery Shelf courtesy of the Mugaribi Colloection

### Supporters

Chris Wright's work is supported, in part, by the Faculty Development Fund at the Pratt Institute, N.Y.

Henriette Sonne is supported, in part, by



Printer: Permanent Printing Limited, Hong Kong, China

This book was published in conjunction with the exhibition **What's the Rush? Topics on Convenience**, held from November 7 to December 16, 2009, at CSU Fullerton, Main Art Gallery.

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