

QUICK VIEW:

Synopsis

Jasper Johns, a major post-war, American artist still creating new, inventive work, was a key force shaping the artistic movements following **Abstract Expressionism**. Best known for his paintings and lithographs of flags, maps and numbers, Johns also integrated sculptural elements, displaying everyday objects in new artistic light. This aesthetic of utilizing, but subverting, recognizable images laid the foundation for later movements such as Pop Art.

Key Ideas / Information

- Jasper Johns' early work drew on Abstract Expressionism's ideas and techniques, but he took the art world in a new direction by endowing everyday objects with artistic importance, paving the way for Pop Art and Minimalism.
- His integration of collage, sculptural elements and thickly applied wax and paint in his works created an important challenge to traditional definitions of both paintings and objects.

DETAILED VIEW:

Childhood

Born in 1930 in Augusta, Georgia, Johns grew up throughout rural South Carolina, living with various relatives after his parents divorced before he was three years old. While living with his grandfather until the age of nine, the paintings of his grandmother, who had died before he was born, provided his only knowledge of art. Still, Johns began drawing at a very young age, with a vague intention of wanting to become an artist. Yet, he has said, "I don't think I knew what it meant.. I knew I couldn't be an artist where I

was, so it meant I would get to be somewhere else." For much of his early childhood, which was marked by isolation and frequent moves, his aunt taught him and two other students in a one-room schoolhouse; he had no formal art training until later in life.



Early Training

After several brief stints studying art - first at the University of South Carolina in 1947, and then at the Parsons School of Design in New York in 1948 -- Johns was drafted into the Army; he spent 1951-1953 in service in both South Carolina and Japan. Upon returning to New York, he met **Robert Rauschenberg**, with whom he had an intense relationship, both personal and artistic, from 1954 to 1961. Johns has noted that he "learned what an artist was from watching [Rauschenberg]." Living in the same building, and "the main audience for each other's work," the two deeply influenced each other's artwork, exchanging ideas and techniques that broke from Abstract Expressionism. The pair's close friendships with composer John Cage and choreographer Merce Cunningham, and their subsequent collaborations for Cunningham's modern dance company, also shaped Johns' painting during this period. Additionally, the Abstract Expressionists' work heavily influenced Johns, as did that of other artists such as Picasso and Cézanne, but Johns synthesized these ideas into a new artistic aesthetic that favored concrete images over abstractions, a significant change within the art world.

Mature Period

Johns' relationship with Rauschenberg led him to his first art show in 1958 at just 28 years old after Rauschenberg introduced Johns to gallery owner Leo Castelli. The show featured Johns' first major painting *Flag*, as well as other variations on the American flag theme - an idea that first came to him in a dream. This series of works, along with his paintings of targets, letters and numbers, catapulted Johns into the public eye and established him as a contradiction to the non-figurative Abstract Expressionism. Marking his instant recognition within the New York art scene, the Museum of Modern Art bought three pieces from that first show, a purchase highly uncommon for work by a young, unknown artist.

While certainly drawing on the abstract brushstrokes and textures of the Abstract Expressionists, Johns' work also marked a new artistic direction by depicting ordinary

and recognizable objects, or "things the mind already knows," as he has said. Yet, at the same time, he portrayed these everyday objects in a very non-representational manner, endowing them with new, often ambiguous meanings; in this sense, his work simultaneously expanded and rejected Abstract Expressionism. His efforts at transforming paintings into objects, and objects into paintings, would ultimately help lead the way to Pop Art.

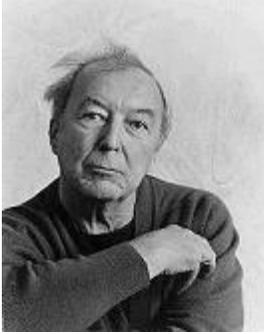
With the Pop Art movement growing around him in the 60s, Johns left behind the colorful abstractions he had created after the Castelli show (including the images of maps) and turned to a darker palette. He also started creating prints, some of which echoed his previous subjects. Sculpture, particularly using found objects, as inspired by Duchamp's "readymades," had always been an important part of Johns' work, and he began to further integrate physical, sculptural elements into his paintings.

Late Period



In the 1970s, Johns started utilizing the style of crosshatching, or line clusters, to fill his canvases; this style appeared in many of his well-known images of paintbrushes in a Savarin coffee can, which were based on his earlier sculpture of the same object. Johns' focus changed once again in the 80s and 90s, and his paintings illustrated a more autobiographical, introspective edge, although, Johns has pointed out, "There is a period in which I began to use images from my life, but everything you use is from your life." Some of Johns' more recent paintings employ the idea of the catenary (or curve), created with hanging pieces of string attached to the canvas at two points. He has also been working again with the flagstone imagery he had used earlier in his career. Johns continues to create new work at his homes in Connecticut and St. Martin, and is currently represented by Matthew Marks Gallery in New York.

Legacy



Often considered part of a Neo-Dadaist movement, Johns bridged the gap between Abstract Expressionism and Pop Art during his early career, but is still expanding his subjects, materials and styles through his current work. He remains a major figure in contemporary American Art; his 1959 work *False Start* sold for \$17 million at auction in 1988 (then the highest price paid for a living artist's work), and was sold privately for \$80 million in 2006, making it the most expensive painting by a living artist. Johns' paintings, sculptures, lithographs and etchings can be found in nearly every major American art museum, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, the Art Institute of Chicago and the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, as well as in numerous other collections worldwide.

ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

Below are Jasper Johns' major influences, and the people and ideas that he influenced in turn.

ARTISTS	CRITICS/FRIENDS	MOVEMENTS
 Marcel Duchamp  Pablo Picasso  Paul Cézanne  Willem De Kooning	 Robert Rauschenberg  John Cage  Merce Cunningham	 Abstract Expressionism  Dada



Arshile Gorky

**INFLUENCES
ON ARTIST**



Jasper Johns

Years Worked: 1954 - present

**INFLUENCED
BY ARTIST**

ARTISTS



Robert Rauschenberg



Andy Warhol



Claes Oldenburg

CRITICS/FRIENDS



John Cage



Merce Cunningham

MOVEMENTS



Pop Art



Minimalism



Conceptual Art



Frank Stella



Roy Lichtenstein

Quotes

"I tend to like things that already exist."

"Do something, do something to that, and then do something to that."

"I feel that works of art are an opportunity for people to construct meaning, so I don't usually tell what they mean. It conveys to people that they have to participate."

"Early on I was very involved with the notion of the painting as an object and tended to attack that idea from different directions."



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