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## Pop art to brighten your day at Acquavella

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“The Pop Object: The Still Life Tradition in Pop Art,” the current exhibition at Acquavella Galleries in New York City, does much to brighten the dreariest day. Curated by John Wilmerding, a noted scholar of American art and Professor Emeritus at Princeton University, the show comprises 75 works by leading pop artists, including Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, George Segal, Wayne Thiebaud, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselmann. All in all the show is bright and lively, and, most of all, it is fun.

The exhibition focuses not only on the development of Pop Art in the United States but on the role still life played in the context of Pop. Wilmerding says because most people think the subject matter of Pop is concentrated in the kitchen, the highway, and the supermarket, landscape and still life have largely been ignored. “Still life also has long been treated as a minor preoccupation for artists, yet has turned out to be the occasion for some of Pop’s most innovative and witty expressions,” wrote Wilmerding in the show’s splendid catalog.

Wilmerding has organized the exhibition by four major themes: food and drink, the garden, body parts, and clothing and housewares. Grouping the artists together into categories makes it interesting to see how each one approaches the particular subject in a different light.

Take the ubiquitous Coke bottle, which might be considered the icon of the Pop Movement. Andy Warhol does what we have seen him do countless times with images of the bottle itself and its logo. One image is painted on cotton and the other silk-screened on linen. Robert Rauschenberg’s sculpture consists of three actual bottles placed above a battered newel cap in a wooden box-like structure embellished with metal wings on either side. Marisol, on the other hand, has depicted a figure in silhouette holding the bottle as if it were a trumpet.

Food and drink also includes several still lifes by Tom Wesselmann, a ceramic Oreo by Robert Arneson, and three different rendering of the word “eat” by Robert Indiana. The garden is represented by paintings of flowers as well as of a tropical plant made of steel by Larry Rivers and a flower drawing on a mirror by Jeff Koons. Among various articles of clothing is a sculpted metal shoe by Jasper Johns.

The individual artists are, of course, also interesting in their own right. When one thinks of George Segal, his portraits in white plaster of patrons such as Robert and Ethel Scull are what first come to mind. At Acquavella one realizes he also worked in color and explored a variety of styles. A table draped with a white plaster tablecloth on which are scattered red plaster apples resembles a Cezanne painting. A still life of a guitar in plaster, graphite and wood recalls Georges Bracque. Segal has created a wooden shelf with tins of paint in bright primary colors set against the peeling boards of wainscoting.

For me two of the highlights of the show are the works by Claes Oldenburg and Wayne Thiebaud.

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The most dour visitor cannot help but smile at Oldenburg’s pieces. Four brightly colored “popsicles” are made of fake fur in animal prints. A typewriter eraser stands on end, the balloon gone flat and the bristles limp. A stainless-steel martini glass, perched at a precarious angle on a black stand, is empty save for a large, green olive stuffed with a pimento.

Wayne Thiebaud, whose works are included in each of the categories, never fails to delight. His cheerful paintings include slices of layer cake, a vase of plastic flowers, a tray of brightly colored neckties, a gumball machine filled with candies, a tree of lollipops, a row of lipsticks, and, finally, a hot dog.

You may not like Pop Art. You may even be one of those who still doesn’t consider it art. But you cannot help but take pleasure in such bright, humorous and joyful works.

**Caption: From Left: Claes Oldenburg, Typewriter Eraser, 1970, collection Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen art © 1070 Claes Oldenburg;Robert Rauschenberg Coca Cola Plan 1958 – Pencil on paper, oil on three Coca-Cola bottles, wood newel cap, and cast metal wings on wood structure – Art © Robert Rauschenberg Foundation / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY, Wayne Thiebaud, Tie Tray, 1969 Oil on canvas © Wayne Thiebaud / Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY**

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