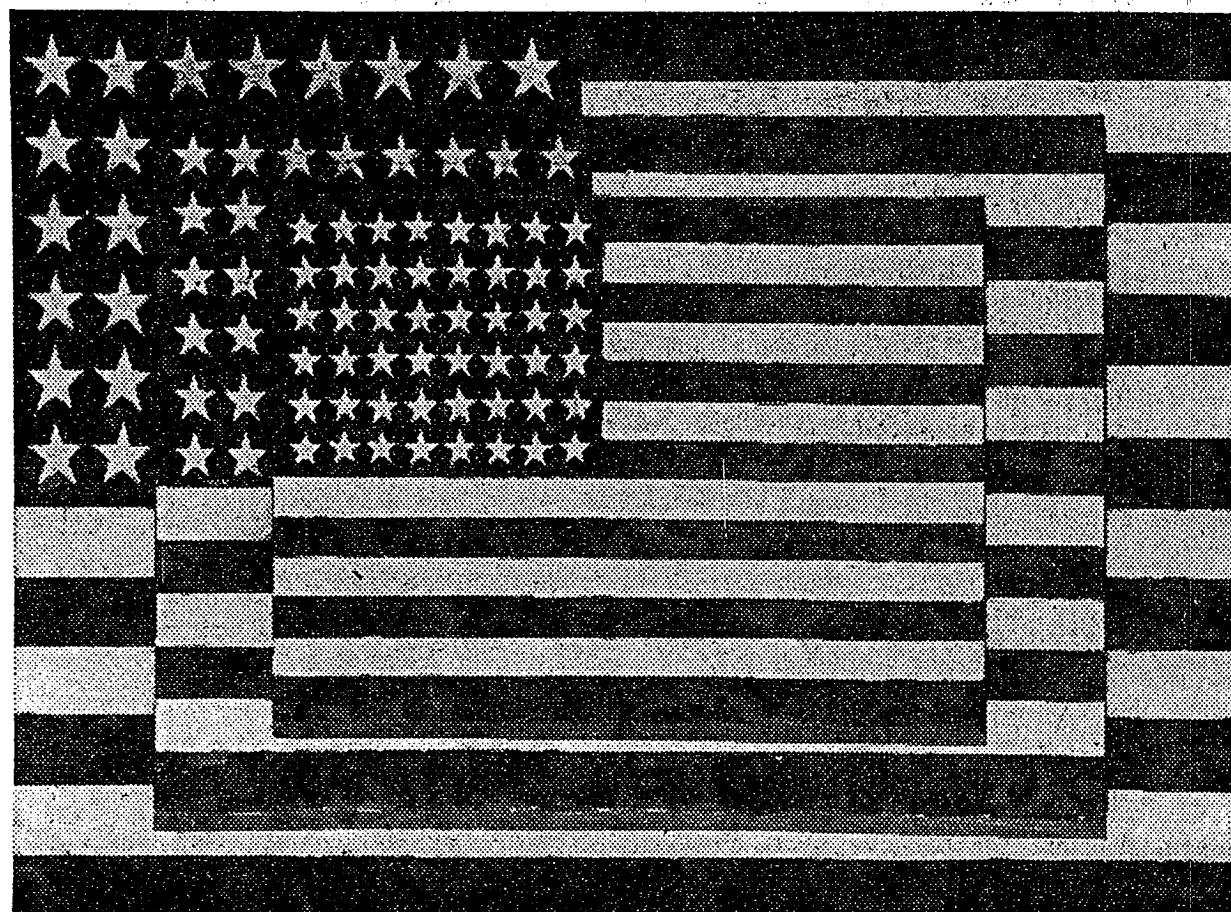


On Display: All-Out Series of Pop Art



"Three Flags," 1958 by Jasper Johns, part of a Pop art exhibition at Guggenheim Museum

'Six Painters and the Object' Exhibited at Guggenheim

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Despite the vagueness of its title, the Guggenheim Museum's new exhibition, "Six Painters and the Object," is an all-out display of Pop art. It includes work by leading young American artists of this persuasion: Jim Dine, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenberg, James Rosenquist and Andy Warhol. If asked Tolstoy's famous question, "What is art?" they would undoubtedly and correctly answer, "What isn't?"

If we define art as an imaginative reconstruction of reality, a process whereby what we sense and see is transformed so as to give it deeper meaning, we would have a definition that applies to everything from Michelangelo's exalted interpretations of religious subjects to a Pop artist's appropri-

tion of the weaponry of mass media, the propaganda of the faith of the good life in mid-twentieth century America. For Pop art is an art of comment on contemporary objects of worship, something both rueful and satirical, jolting us into recognizing the hidden impact of signs and symbols we see everywhere about us, to which we all too passively submit.

Pop art draws its material from comic strips; film magazines; posters, and from objects such as flags, so familiar to us that we hardly ever look at them any more. Its strength lies in this social relevancy, in its dealing with the immediate and its weakness — preventing it from being truly popular — lies in the fact that its most gifted practitioners are of necessity sophisticated. It is a said irony that its public will also be a sophisticated one, comprising just the very persons searching for an amusing novelty who not so long ago were delighted by such esthetic absurdities such as white-on-white non-objective paintings.

But for all its extravagance; its often silly search for ways in which to be daring, and for

It Has the Merit of Showing Variety Included in Work

all that its anarchistic, anti-art attitude more devastatingly taken 50 years ago by Marcel Duchamp and later by Dada, Pop art represents a healthy reaction against the increasingly sterile esotericism of non-objective art. Pop mediates between life and art. It "connects."

If variety be the spice of a living art, the Guggenheim exhibition has the merit of showing that Pop art can be of many different kinds. We can choose here between the complex ambiguities of work by Rauschenberg and the straight-in-the-eye impact of that by Warhol and Lichtenstein. To each his own. Any culture benefits by having fun poked at its often monstrous solemnities. We can only be grateful for these genial jesters and for their pointfulness in deflating balloons. The deep, dark secret of Pop art is that it is anti-popular with a vengeance.