Appropriation (art)

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Appropriation in art is the use of pre-existing objects or images with little or no transformation applied to them.[1] The use of appropriation has played a significant role in the history of the arts (literary, visual, musical and performing arts). In the visual arts, to appropriate means to properly adopt, borrow, recycle or sample aspects (or the entire form) of human-made visual culture. Notable in this respect are the Readymades of Marcel Duchamp.

Inherent in our understanding of appropriation is the concept that the new work **recontextualizes** whatever it borrows to create the new work. In most cases the original 'thing' remains accessible as the original, without change.

Contents

Composition with Fruit, Guitar and Glass. 1912. Pablo Picasso.

Definition

Appropriation has been defined as "the taking over, into a work of art, of a real object or even an existing work of art."[2] The Tate Gallery traces the practise back to Cubism and Dadaism, but continuing into 1940s Surrealism and 1950s Pop art. It returned to prominence in the 1980s with the Neo-Geo artists.[2]

History

In the early twentieth century Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque appropriated objects from a non-art context into their work. In 1912, Picasso pasted a piece of oil cloth onto the canvas. Subsequent compositions, such as *Guitar, Newspaper, Glass and Bottle* (1913) in which Picasso used newspaper clippings to create forms, became categorized as *synthetic cubism*. The two artists incorporated aspects of the "real world" into their canvases, opening up discussion of signification and artistic representation.

Marcel Duchamp is credited with introducing the concept of the **ready-made**, in which "industrially produced utilitarian objects...achieve the status of art merely through the process of selection and presentation."[3] Duchamp explored this notion as early as 1913 when he mounted a stool with a bicycle wheel and again in 1915 when he purchased a snow shovel and humorously inscribed it "in advance of the broken arm, Marcel Duchamp."[4][5] In 1917, Duchamp formally submitted a readymade into the Society of Independent Artists exhibition under the pseudonym, R. Mutt.[6] Entitled *Fountain*, it consisted of a porcelain urinal that was propped atop a pedestal and signed "R. Mutt 1917". The work posed a direct challenge to traditional perceptions of fine art, ownership, originality and plagiarism, and was subsequently rejected by the exhibition committee.[7] Duchamp publicly defended *Fountain*, claiming "whether Mr.Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—and created a new thought for that object."[7]

The Dada movement (including Duchamp as an associate) continued with the appropriation of everyday objects. Dada works featured deliberate irrationality and the rejection of the prevailing standards of art. Kurt Schwitters, who produced art at the same time as the Dadaists, shows a similar sense of the bizarre in his "merz" works. He constructed these from found objects, and they took the form of large constructions that later generations would call installations.

The Surrealists, coming after the Dada movement, also incorporated the use of 'found objects' such as Méret Oppenheim's *Object (Luncheon in Fur)* (1936). These objects took on new meaning when combined with other unlikely and unsettling objects.

In 1938 Joseph Cornell produced what might be considered the first work of film appropriation in his randomly cut and reconstructed film 'Rose Hobart'.

In the 1950s Robert Rauschenberg used what he dubbed "combines", literally combining readymade objects such as tires or beds, painting, silk-screens, collage, and photography. Similarly, Jasper Johns, working at the same time as Rauschenberg, incorporated found objects into his work.

The Fluxus art movement also utilised appropriation: its members blended different artistic disciplines including visual art, music, and literature. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s they staged "action" events and produced sculptural works featuring unconventional materials.

Along with artists such as Claes Oldenburg and Andy Warhol appropriated images from commercial art and popular culture as well as the techniques of these industries. Often called "pop artists", they saw mass popular culture as the main vernacular culture, shared by all irrespective of education. These artists fully engaged with the ephemera produced from this mass-produced culture, embracing expendability and distancing themselves from the evidence of an artist's hand.

In 1958 Bruce Conner produced the influential 'A Movie' in which he recombined existing film clips. In 1958 Raphael Montanez Ortiz produced "Cowboy and Indian Film', a seminal appropriation film work.

In the late 1970s Dara Birnbaum was working with appropriation to produce feminist works of art.[8] In 1978-79 she produced one of the first video appropriations. *Technology/Transformation: Wonder Woman* utilised video clips from the *Wonder Woman* television series.[9]

The term ***appropriation art*** was in common use in the 1980s with artists such as Sherrie Levine, who addressed the act of appropriating itself as a theme in art. Levine often quotes entire works in her own work, for example photographing photographs of Walker Evans. Challenging ideas of originality, drawing attention to relations between power, gender and creativity, consumerism and commodity value, the social sources and uses of art, Levine plays with the theme of "almost same". Elaine Sturtevant (also known simply as Sturtevant), on the other hand, painted and exhibited perfect replicas of famous works. She replicated Andy Warhol's *Flowers* in 1965 at the Bianchini Gallery in New York. She trained to reproduce the artist's own technique —to the extent that when Warhol was repeatedly questioned on his technique, he once answered "I don't know. Ask Elaine."[10]

During the 1970s and 1980s Richard Prince re-photographed advertisements such as for Marlboro cigarettes or photo-journalism shots. His work takes anonymous and ubiquitous cigarette billboard advertising campaigns, elevates the status and focusses our gaze on the images.

Appropriation artists comment on all aspects of culture and society. Joseph Kosuth appropriated images to engage with philosophy and epistemological theory. Other artists working with appropriation during this time with included Jeff Koons, Barbara Kruger, Greg Colson, and Malcolm Morley.

In the 1990s artists continued to produce appropriation art, using it as a medium to address theories and social issues, rather than focussing on the works themselves. Damian Loeb used film and cinema to comment on themes of simulacrum and reality. Other high-profile artists working at this time included Christian Marclay, Deborah Kass, Damien Hirst and Genco Gulan.[11]

In the digital age

Since the 1990s, the exploitation of historical precursors is as multifarious as the concept of appropriation is unclear. A hitherto unparalleled quantity of approriations pervade not only the field of the visual arts, but of all cultural areas. The new generation of appropriators consider themselves for example as "archeolog[es] of the present time".[12] Some speak of "postproduction" which is based on preexisting works to re-edit "the screenplay of culture".[13] The annexation of works made by others or of available cultural products mostly follows the concept of use. So called "prosumer"[14] browse – consuming and producing at the same time—through the ubiquitous archive of the digital world (more seldom through the analog one), in order to sample the ever accessible images, words, and sounds via 'copy-paste' or 'drag-drop' to 'bootleg', 'mashup' or 'remix' them just as one likes.

Appropriations have become an everyday phenomenon. The new "generation remix"[15] who has taken the stages not only of the visual arts, but also of music, literature, dance and film causes of course highly controversy debates. On the one hand are the celebrators who foresee a new age of innovative, useful, and entertaining ways for art of the digitized and globalised 21st century. The new appropriationists will not only realise Joseph Beuys' dictum that everyone is an artist but also "build free societies".[16] By liberating art finally form traditional concepts such as aura, originality and genius, they will lead to new terms of understanding and defining art. More critic observers see just here the starting point of a huge problem. If creation is based on nothing than on carefree processes of finding, copying, recombining and manipulating pre-existing media, concepts, forms, names, etc. of any source, the understanding of art will shift in their sight to a trivialized, low-demanding, and regressive activity. In view of the limitation of art to references to preexisting concepts and forms, they diagnose endless recompiled and repurposed products. Sceptics call this a culture of recycling with an addiction to the past[17] Some say that only lazy people who have nothing to say let themselves be inspired by the past in this way.[18] Other fear, that this new trend

of appropriation is caused by nothing than the wish of embellishing oneselve with an attractive genealogy.[19] The term **appropriationism**[20] reflects the overproduction of reproductions, remakings, reenactments, recreations, revisionings, reconstructings, etc. by copying, imitating, repeating, quota ting, plagiarising, simulating, and adapting pre-existing names, concepts and forms. Appropriationism is discussed—in comparison of appropriation forms and concepts of the 20th century which offer new representations of established knowledge[21]—as a kind of "racing standstill",[22] referring to the acceleration of random, uncontrollable operations in highly mobilised, fluid Western societies that are governed more and more by abstract forms of control. Unlimited access to the digital archive of creations and easily feasible digital technologies, as well as the priority of fresh ideas and creative processes over a perfect masterpiece leads to a hyperactive hustle and bustle around the past instead of launching new expeditions into unexplored territory that could give visibility to the forgotten ghosts and ignored phantoms of our common myths and ideologies.

Appropriation art and copyright

Appropriation art has resulted in contentious copyright issues regarding its validity under copyright law. The U.S. has been particularly litigious in this respect. A number of case-law examples have emerged that investigate the division between transformative works and derivative works.

Andy Warhol faced a series of lawsuits from photographers whose work he appropriated and silk-screened. Patricia Caulfield, one such photographer, had taken a picture of flowers for a photography demonstration for a photography magazine. Warhol had covered the walls of Leo Castelli's New York gallery in 1964 with the silk-screened reproductions of Caulfield's photograph. After seeing a poster of their work in a bookstore, Caulfield claimed ownership of the image and while Warhol was the author of the successful silk screens, he made a cash settlement out of court.[23]

On the other hand, Warhol's famous Campbell's Soup Cans are generally held to be non-infringing, despite being clearly appropriated, because "the public was unlikely to see the painting as sponsored by the soup company or representing a competing product. Paintings and soup cans are not in themselves competing products", according to expert trademark lawyer Jerome Gilson.[24]

Jeff Koons has also confronted issues of copyright due to his appropriation work (see *Rogers v. Koons*). Photographer Art Rogers brought suit against Koons for copyright infringement in 1989. Koons' work, *String of Puppies* sculpturally reproduced Rogers' black and white photograph that had appeared on an airport greeting card that Koons had bought. Though he claimed fair use and parody in his defense, Koons lost the case, partially due to the tremendous success he had as an artist and the manner in which he was portrayed in the media. The parody argument also failed, as the appeals court drew a distinction between creating a parody of modern society in general and a parody directed at a specific work, finding parody of a specific work, especially of a very obscure one, too weak to justify the fair use of the original.

In October 2006, Koons successfully defended his work by claiming "fair use". For a seven-painting commission for the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin, Koons drew on part of a photograph taken by Andrea Blanch titled *Silk Sandals by Gucci* and published in the August 2000 issue of *Allure* magazine to illustrate an article on metallic makeup. Koons took the image of the legs and diamond sandals from that photo (omitting other background details) and used it in his painting *Niagara*, which also includes three other pairs of women's legs dangling surreally over a landscape of pies and cakes.

In his decision, Judge Louis L. Stanton of U.S. District Court found that *Niagara* was indeed a "transformative use" of Blanch's photograph. "The painting's use does not 'supersede' or duplicate the objective of the original", the judge wrote, "but uses it as raw material in a novel way to create new information, new aesthetics and new insights. Such use, whether successful or not artistically, is transformative."

The detail of Blanch's photograph used by Koons is only marginally copyrightable. Blanch has no rights to the Gucci sandals, "perhaps the most striking element of the photograph", the judge wrote. And without the sandals, only a representation of a woman's legs remains—and this was seen as "not sufficiently original to deserve much copyright protection."

In 2000, Damien Hirst's sculpture *Hymn* (which Charles Saatchi had bought for a reported £1m) was exhibited in *Ant Noises* in the Saatchi Gallery. Hirst was sued for breach of copyright over this sculpture. The subject was a 'Young Scientist Anatomy Set' belonging to his son Connor, 10,000 of which are sold a year by Hull (Emms) Toy Manufacturer. Hirst created a 20-foot, six ton enlargement of the Science Set figure, radically changing the perception of the object. Hirst paid an undisclosed sum to two charities, Children Nationwide and the Toy Trust in an out-of-court settlement. The charitable donation was less than Emms had hoped for. Hirst sold three more copies of his sculpture for similar amounts to the first.

Appropriating a familiar object to make an art work can prevent the artist claiming copyright ownership. Jeff Koons threatened to sue a gallery under copyright, claiming that the gallery infringed his proprietary rights by selling bookends in the shape of balloon dogs.[25] Koons abandoned that claim after the gallery filed a complaint for declaratory relief stating, "As virtually any clown can attest, no one owns the idea of making a balloon dog, and the shape created by twisting a balloon into a dog-like form is part of the public domain."[26]

In 2008, photojournalist Patrick Cariou sued artist Richard Prince, Gagosian Gallery and Rizzoli books for copyright infringement. Prince had appropriated 40 of Cariou's photos of Rastafarians from a book, creating a series of paintings known as "Canal Zone". Prince variously altered the photos, painting objects, oversized hands, naked women and male torsos over the photographs, subsequently selling over $10 million worth of the works. In March 2011, a judge ruled in favor of Cariou, but Prince and Gargosian appealed on a number of points. Three judges for the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld the right to an appeal.[27] Prince's attorney argued that "Appropriation art is a well-recognized modern and postmodern art form that has challenged the way people think about art, challenged the way people think about objects, images, sounds, culture"[28] On April 24, 2013, the appeals court largely overturned the original decision, deciding that many of the paintings had sufficiently transformed the original images and were therefore a permitted use.[29] *See **Cariou v. Prince**.*[30]

In September 2014, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit questioned the Second Circuit's interpretation of the fair use doctrine in the *Cariou* case. Of particular note, the Seventh Circuit noted that "transformative use" is not one of the four enumerated fair use factors but is, rather, simply part of the first fair use factor which looks to the "purpose and character" of the use. The Seventh Circuit's critique lends credence to the argument that there is a split among U.S. courts as to what role "tranformativeness" is to play in any fair use inquiry.[30]

In 2013, Andrew Gilden and Timothy Greene published a law review article in The University of Chicago Law Review dissecting the factual similarities and legal differences between the *Cariou* case and the *Salinger v. Colting (http://www.ipinbrief.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/08/salinger-o pinion.pdf)* case, articulating concerns that judges may be creating a fair use "privilege largely reserved for the rich and famous."[31]

Artists using appropriation

The following are notable artists known for their use of pre-existing objects or images with little or no transformation applied to them:

- ABOVE
- Vikky Alexander
- System D-128
- Ghada Amer
- J. Tobias Anderson
- Cory Arcangel
- Martin Arnold
- John Baldessari
- Craig Baldwin
- Banksy
- Gordon Bennett
- Mike Bidlo
- Pierre Bismuth
- Georges Braque
- Glenn Brown
- Reginald Case
- James Cauty
- Jake and Dinos Chapman
- Greg Colson
- Felipe Jesus Consalvos
- Joseph Cornell
- PJ Crook
- Brian Dettmer
- Mark Divo
- Eric Doeringer
- Burhan Dogancay
- Marcel Duchamp
- Marlene Dumas
- Benjamin Edwards
- Max Ernst
- Shepard Fairey
- Hans-Peter Feldman
- Joy Garnett
- General Idea

- Vincent van Gogh
- Kenneth Goldsmith
- Leon Golub
- Douglas Gordon
- Genco Gulan
- Hans Haacke
- Marcus Harvey
- Damien Hirst
- Pierre Huyghe
- Jodi
- Jasper Johns
- Bill Jones
- Deborah Kass
- Mike Kelley
- Ai Kijima
- Karen Kilimnik
- Jeff Koons
- Joseph Kosuth
- Graig Kreindler
- Barbara Kruger
- Michael Landy
- Matthieu Laurette
- Louise Lawler
- Lennie Lee
- Nikki S. Lee
- Sherrie Levine
- Damian Loeb
- Robert Longo
- Norm Magnusson
- Miltos Manetas
- Christian Marclay
- John McHale
- Aleksandra Mir
- Joan Miró

- Yasumasa Morimura
- Malcolm Morley
- Dominique Mulhem
- Vik Muniz
- Ted Noten
- Claes Oldenburg
- Meret Oppenheim
- People Like Us
- Tom Phillips
- Pablo Picasso
- Bern Porter
- Rick Prelinger
- Richard Prince
- Robert Rauschenberg
- Graham Rawle
- Gerhard Richter
- Thomas Ruff
- David Salle
- Peter Saville
- Rob Scholte
- Kurt Schwitters
- Cindy Sherman
- Cornelia Sollfrank
- Nancy Spero
- John Stezaker
- Elaine Sturtevant
- Luke Sullivan
- Philip Taaffe
- Fatimah Tuggar
- Luc Tuymans
- Kelley Walker
- Andy Warhol
- Vivienne Westwood

See also

- Appropriation (music)
- Art intervention
- Assemblage

- Classificatory disputes about art
- Collage
- Conceptual art

- Copies by Vincent van Gogh
- Cultural appropriation
- Decollage

- Fair use
- Found object
- Postmodern art
- Scratch video

Footnotes

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Further reading

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- Margot Lovejoy, *Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age* Routledge 2004

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External links

- Michalis Pichler : *Statements on Appropriation* (http://www.ubu.com/papers/pichler_appropriation.html)
- Appropriation Art Coalition-Canada (http://www.appropriationart.ca)
- Blanche v. Koons Decision (August 2005) (https://web.archive.org/web/20071202093258/http://www.geocities.com/williampatry875/copyright1.pdf)
- Koons Wins Landmark Copyright Lawsuit (http://newsgrist.typepad.com/underbelly/2006/01/koons_wins_land.html) 1/2006
- Koons wins appeal (2006) (http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-2nd-circuit/1374144.html)
- Fair Use Network (http://fairusenetwork.org/)
- Creative Commons (http://creativecommons.org/)
- Free Culture (http://freeculture.org/) an international student movement
- The New York Institute for the Humanities Comedies of Fair U$e conference (Archive.org) (https://archive.org/details/NYIH_Comedies_of_Fair_Use/)
- Open Source Culture: Intellectual Property, Technology, and the Arts, Columbia Digital Media Center lecture series (https://web.archive.org/web/20060814000631/http://arts.columbia.edu:80/dmc/docs/lectureseries.html)
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- Warhol (https://web.archive.org/web/20041206075456/http://www.imageexchange.com:80/featured/warhol/posters.shtml)
- transordinator/edition (http://www.transordinator.com/edition) Remixing conceptual artworks

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