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Wake Forest University Fine Arts Gallery



MULTIPLES



Curated by
Victor Faccinto and David Lubin

October 6 - November 12, 2000

Replete with dozens of mass-produced visual artifacts salvaged from almost every decade of the twentieth century, the present exhibition is bright, bold, and splashy, like the artifacts themselves. And in keeping with the light-hearted spirit of many of these objects, the exhibition's title, *Multiples*, is a play on words, for multiple artifacts gathered here from multiple decades were manufactured in multiples of thousands or millions.

Everything displayed in *Multiples* was itself either mass-produced or slated for mass-reproduction. Hence, according to traditional definitions, the material before you is not art. Conventional notions of art place utmost importance on the uniqueness (and therefore scarcity) of the object under consideration. It has to be an original, a one of a kind, or at the very least part of a limited edition. If what you are gazing upon is a handmade copy of someone else's original or, worse, a machine-produced imitation, then, by traditional standards, it isn't art.

A more modern objection to mass-produced art is that it makes few if any intellectual demands on the viewer and goes down too easily, like junk food for the mind. According to this criticism, mass art panders to base instincts. Most of the items displayed in this exhibition, it's true, once beckoned brazenly from the newsstand shelf or drugstore rack, winking at browsers to snap them up and carry them home. What you see here, taken collectively, is colorful, lively, lurid, sleazy, sentimental, cynical, utopian, brash, and bizarre. It taps into sexual desire, fantasies of wealth, nationalistic fervor, fear of aliens (and other strangers), and obsession with or dread of futuristic technology.

These are the standard complaints about mass art: that it's unoriginal and formulaic and that it's mentally and morally degrading. But critics with a strong democratic agenda have disparaged such objections and instead celebrated cultural artifacts produced by and for the masses. To them, "mass art" is not a contradiction in terms but an accurate indication of the true purpose of art, which is to reach broadly across social and economic barriers to touch the lives of the many, not the few.

Indeed, looking at the objects on display, you might well be touched by potent reminders of your own childhood, youth, or adulthood during the twentieth century. *Katzenjammer Kids* and children's handkerchiefs dating from the early decades, *Amazing Stories* and *Fortune* magazine covers of the Depression years, *Peanuts*, *EC* horror comics, and *Mad* magazines of the fifties, psychedelic Fillmore Ballroom poster cards and *Zap* comics of the sixties and seventies, political cartoons of the nineties. Do these amount to anything more than cheap, disposable baubles of consumer culture or are they genuine insignias of popular democracy?

Either way, the show is a grab bag of arresting visual images. Let them ignite your fantasies. Then go a step further. Question the extent to which these mass-produced images—or ones like them—have filled your head with notions about yourself, your nation, and your world. But don't expect to arrive at a single conclusion. *Multiples* will do.

David Lubin
Weber Professor of Art
Wake Forest University

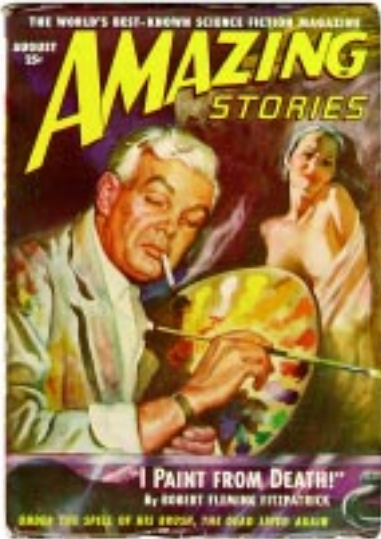


Fortune, June 1936
cover by A. Petruccelli
Collection of Dr. Stephen R. Turner

Fillmore Ballroom poster card, 1968
Collection of Victor Faccinto



ZAP # 0, 1967
cover: Robert Crumb
Collection of Jay Rogers



Amazing Stories, August 1949
cover by Arnold Kohn
Collection of Dr. Stephen R. Turner



Warrington Colescott
"The Scream"
editorial cartoon from
The Progressive, April 1996



MAD magazine, July 1959
cover by Kelly Freas
MAD #48 ©1959 E.C. Publications, Inc.
Collection of Dr. Stephen R. Turner

A special thank you
to Dr. Stephen R. Turner
whose enthusiasm and
support made this exhibition
possible.

from "Katzenjammer Kids" comic strip
 drawn by Doc Winner, 1953
 Collection of Dr. Stephen R. Turner



Mickey Mouse and Clara Cluck
 child's handkerchief, ca. 1934
 Collection of J.J. Murphy and Nancy Mladenoff

from "The Orphan"
 drawn by Jack Kamen, 1953
 for EC comic book,
Shock Suspense
 Collection of Dr. Stephen R. Turner



Front Cover Reproductions:

ZAP #2
 1968

Fillmore Ballroom
 poster card, 1968

**Horace Horsecollar and
 Clarabelle Cow**, 1934
 handkerchief

Amazing Stories
 Sept. 1952

Dionne Quintuplets, 1936
 handkerchief box

Fortune magazine
 cover by Diego Rivero
 March 1932

Brenda Starr
 comic book
 Sept. 1948

Space Girl, 1950
 handkerchief

detail from
Pussy Cat magazine
 ca. 1950s

MAD #48
 July 1959

Little Orphan Annie, ca. 1920s
 handkerchief in box

Hairy Who comic book, 1969
 cover by Jim Nutt