

Roy Lichtenstein once stated, “Art doesn’t transform, it just forms.” Lichtenstein’s paintings, which were based on the images and processes used in comic books, garnered him as one of the most influential figures in Pop Art. Following the ideals of Pop, Lichtenstein strove to create pieces that were machine-like replicas of consumer images, rather than works of art that were meant to show the autobiography of the artist or invoke thought. He did this by appropriating from comic strips in subject matter and style (Busche 1). Lichtenstein achieved this to an extent in *Forget it! Forget Me!* by making a copy of a comic strip image by erasing the hand of the artist and doing away with depth and perspective. Lichtenstein wanted the viewer to ask himself if these replicas should be considered works of art. The artist’s answer was negative; his pieces were copies, not art. *Forget it! Forget me!* is based on an image pulled from an actual comic book; its style is copied down to the Ben-day dots, which are visible in Lichtenstein’s pieces. He was interested in the way comic book images could portray intense emotions with such a mechanic quality of creation. Despite his desire to create an exact copy of this comic book image, Lichtenstein did alter the composition and colors of the original to make it more aesthetically pleasing and dramatic. In *Forget it! Forget me!*, Roy Lichtenstein used process, material, and formal qualities to make a replica of a comic book image while still maintaining its intense emotions and a good Modernist aesthetic.

Forget It! Forget Me! conveys a conventionally handsome man expressing his frustrations to a beautiful woman, who is worried by his words. A speech bubble stemming from the right side of the man’s head reads: “FORGET IT! FORGET ME! I’M FED UP WITH YOUR KIND!” The man wears a blue jacket and white shirt, his eyes are closed, and his expression is straight. Blonde and heavily made up with red lipstick, the viewer can see that the female is visibly confused and hurt by the man’s words through her open-mouth expression and furrowed

eye-brows. Although the speech bubble in *Forget it! Forget me!* explains the sentiments of the man and woman in the scene, his disdain and her confusion are clearly visible through their facial expressions, which are created with very few thick black outlines and strokes. The characters are pushed to the very front of the composition and the only other aspect of the piece besides the two characters is the field of red that fills in the gaps between the characters and the edges of the canvas.

Lichtenstein utilized color, brushwork, surface quality, forms, and space to create a comic-book replica that is flat, bright, and intense. The artist used extremely saturated, bright colors to reinforce the comic-book/cartoon-like aesthetic he was copying and the stereotypical look of men and women in America's popular culture during this time. His materials of magna and oil on canvas created the thickness and saturation of the colors. Magna was a relatively new material at the time; it is a turpentine soluble acrylic paint that has a bright effect (Benezit Dictionary of Artists). Lichtenstein used only the primary colors and non-colors in this work. These most basic of colors create an effect that is symbolic and simplified rather than naturalistic. For example, he used yellow for the woman's blonde hair and black for the man's dark hair and features. He also used one color to create the skin tone of both figures. The colors in this work mirror the brightness and simplicity of comic book aesthetics. The original comic book image he replicated in this work used color symbolically, but Lichtenstein chose to simplify the colors even more. In its original form, the comic uses color a bit more naturalistically; for example, it used brown for the man's hair rather than black, and used green and beige for the couple's clothing (see attached image). Lichtenstein chose to drift from exact replication of the comic image in his use of color to further reflect the idealized man and woman in consumer culture. Popular culture during this time glorified this sort of stereotypical beauty-

the tall, dark, and handsome man, and the blonde, red-lipped woman. The bright, saturated, primary colors used in this piece further intensify the image and make it look even more machine-like.

Lichtenstein's smooth and imperceptible brushwork lends a mechanical quality to the piece and leaves no sign of the artist's hand. The surface quality is completely flat; there is no sign of texture at all. The saturated nature of the colors makes them look completely whole rather than divided by strokes and slashes of a paintbrush. For example, the red background looks like a pure field of color. From close-up the viewer can see the Ben-day dots Lichtenstein created to mirror the style of comic books. The Ben-day dots exist only in the faces and necks of the characters, or where their skin shows. Each tiny dot is visible, and although from close up we can see some places where two or three dots got too close to each other and formed one larger unit, from a photograph or from farther away, no imperfections are visible. Even though the viewer can see these Ben-day dots on the canvas's surface, their texture is not visible. The original comic Lichtenstein was copying also utilized Ben-day dots in the skin areas of the characters faces. The use of smooth, invisible brushstrokes and Ben-day dots proves the precision of Lichtenstein's replication of this comic book image. The clean, smooth nature of the brushstrokes allows the simplicity of the forms to portray intense emotions.

The forms in *Forget It! Forget Me!* are very clearly defined by thick black outlines. The saturation of the colors, invisible brushstrokes, and lack of texture in this piece, make the outlines extremely bold and important in the creation of the forms and portrayal of emotions. The outlines create a sort of coloring-book aesthetic in the piece. The outlines are also able to convey a sense of volume. The repeated curved black lines in the woman's hair create a sense of height and volume. The outlines accentuate the shapes of the figures and the bright colors, as they are

the creators of the forms. For example, just a few thick black lines create the woman's face, clothing, hair, and facial features. Her eyes and eyebrows are made of less than ten black outlines, but they very clearly signify facial features. The lines, although small in quantity, are able to portray her intense emotions. The bends of the lines on her face and the shape of her eyes allow the viewer to see that she is upset and confused by the man's statement.

Lichtenstein denies a sense of space in this piece and creates a composition that is completely flat. He does this by pushing the figures all the way up to the edge of the composition. Although there is a sense of volume and depth in some areas like the woman's hair, and the repetition of the shape of her face in black as a shadow, the viewer still reads the piece as totally flat. There is no use of light and shadow in this work; the black works as an outline and creator of space against the brightness of the primary colors. In this way, there is no depth or perspective. The piece also lacks a source of light, which further intensifies the replication effect and flatness of the piece. Other methods Lichtenstein uses to deny a sense of space are the overlapping and diminution of forms. The woman looks like she is behind the man because her face and body are smaller than that of the man. Lichtenstein placed the woman behind the man, but her blouse and his blue jacket share a black outline. In this overlapping of the woman and the man's bodies, the forms are flattened because although she is clearly behind him, this denies any sense of realistic space.

Although Lichtenstein succeeded in creating a flat copy of a comic strip image through the use of color, brushwork, and outlines, he changed the organization of the forms in the composition to make them look better in terms of a "good modernist aesthetic." The artist's process in doing this was to sketch his own version of the comic, then project it onto a canvas, trace it, and then paint it in. He used the machine to project his sketch to the scale he chose.

Lichtenstein was influenced by Hoyt Sherman's ideas about transposing perceptions by drawing. He believed that by copying real images, they could be re-invited to gain new artistic and intellectual meaning. Lichtenstein was able to imitate the comic's Ben-day dots through the use of a perforated screen with the projected image (Benezit Dictionary of Artists). These steps combine aspects of exact replication and also granted the artist space to make his own alterations and choices. He imitated industrial printing techniques and used them as stylistic elements in his work. Lichtenstein said of his work in 1967, "I don't draw a picture in order to reproduce it. I do it in order to recompose it. Nor am I trying to change it as much as possible. I try to make the minimum amount of change" (Coplans). In terms of composition, Lichtenstein moved the figures farther from each other and closer to the front of the canvas. He also created a greater sense of unity in making the skin tones of the couple the same and using a simple color scheme. This unity denies an emphasis in the piece or an obvious path for the viewer's eye to follow. The woman's face is slightly farther from the man's face in Lichtenstein's version, which makes the composition more dramatic because it looks like she is actually looking at him. He also chose to strengthen the formal aspects of the piece by cleaning up the outlines, making them clearer, simpler, and more exact, which also adds to the mechanic quality of the work. This makes the piece look more engaging and more precise and intensifies the existing emotions of their facial expressions by eliminating distractions. By simply enlarging the piece to a grand scale, its compositional organization is enhanced and the story is more dramatic and easily read. Lichtenstein "emphasized the banality and emptiness of his motifs as an equivalent to the impersonal, mechanized style of drawing" by enlarging his source material (Busche 3).

In *Forget It! Forget Me!*, Roy Lichtenstein created a replica of a comic book image that he altered and enlarged to increase the drama and the overall quality of the piece. He used a

mechanical process along with bright, primary colors and thick black outlines to accurately represent the comic-book aesthetic popular in American consumer culture of the 1960s. However, Lichtenstein veered away from his “exact copy” by enlarging, unifying, and strengthening the formal qualities of the work. In this way he was able to stylize the comic book motif and freeze the emotion and action of the scene. *Forget It! Forget Me!* proves Roy Lichtenstein’s ability to compose a piece in a way that is compelling and pleasing to the eye while maintaining the machine-like aesthetic he strove to copy.



Original comic. Source:
<http://www.roseartmobiletour.com/origin/roy-lichtensteinsources.html>