

= Whaam ! =

Whaam ! is a 1963 diptych painting by the American artist Roy Lichtenstein . It is one of the best @-@ known works of pop art , and among Lichtenstein 's most important paintings . Whaam ! was first exhibited at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York City in 1963 , and purchased by the Tate Gallery , London , in 1966 . It has been on permanent display at Tate Modern since 2006 .

The left @-@ hand panel shows a fighter plane firing a rocket that , in the right @-@ hand panel , hits a second plane which explodes in flames . Lichtenstein conceived the image from several comic @-@ book panels . He transformed his primary source , a panel from a 1962 war comic book , by presenting it as a diptych while altering the relationship of the graphical and narrative elements . Whaam ! is regarded for the temporal , spatial and psychological integration of its two panels . The painting 's title is integral to the action and impact of the painting , and displayed in large onomatopoeia in the right panel .

Lichtenstein studied as an artist before and after serving in the United States Army during World War II . He practiced anti @-@ aircraft drills during basic training , and he was sent for pilot training but the program was canceled before it started . Among the topics he tackled after the war were romance and war . He depicted aerial combat in several works . Whaam ! is part of a series on war that he worked on between 1962 and 1964 , and along with As I Opened Fire (1964) is one of his two large war @-@ themed paintings .

= = Background = =

In 1943 Lichtenstein left his study of painting and drawing at The Ohio State University to serve in the U.S. Army , where he remained until January 1946 . After entering training programs for languages , engineering , and piloting , all of which were canceled , he served as an orderly , draftsman and artist in noncombat roles . One of his duties at Camp Shelby was enlarging Bill Mauldin 's Stars and Stripes cartoons . He was sent to Europe with an engineer battalion , but did not see active combat . As a painter , he eventually settled on an abstract @-@ expressionist style with parodist elements . Around 1958 he began to incorporate hidden images of cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse and Bugs Bunny into his abstract works .

By the late 1950s and early 1960s , the American art world had grown accustomed to and tired of the subjective angst and " hot " look of abstract expressionism . A new generation of artists emerged with a more objective , " cool " approach characterized by the art movements known today as minimalism , hard @-@ edge painting , color field painting , the neo @-@ Dada movement , Fluxus , and pop art , all of which re @-@ defined the avant @-@ garde contemporary art of the time . Pop art and neo @-@ Dada re @-@ introduced and changed the use of imagery by appropriating subject matter from commercial art , consumer goods , art history and mainstream culture . Lichtenstein achieved international recognition during the 1960s as one of the initiators of the pop art movement in America . Regarding his use of imagery MoMA curator Bernice Rose observed that Lichtenstein was interested in " challenging the notion of originality as it prevailed at that time . "

Lichtenstein 's early comics @-@ based works such as Look Mickey focused on popular animated characters . By 1963 he had progressed to more serious , dramatic subject matter , typically focusing on romantic situations or war scenes . Comic books as a genre were held in low esteem at the time . Public antipathy led in 1954 to examination of alleged connections between comic books and youth crime during Senate investigations into juvenile delinquency ; by the end of that decade , comic books were regarded as material of " the lowest commercial and intellectual kind " , according to Mark Thistlethwaite of the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth . Lichtenstein was not a comic @-@ book enthusiast as a youth , but was enticed as an artist by the challenge of creating art based on a subject remote from the typical " artistic image " . Lichtenstein admitted he was " very excited about , and very interested in , the highly emotional content yet detached impersonal handling of love , hate , war , etc . , in these cartoon images . "

Lichtenstein 's romance and war comic @-@ based works took heroic subjects from small source panels and monumentalized them . Whaam ! is comparable in size to the generally large canvases

painted at that time by the abstract expressionists . It is one of Lichtenstein 's many works with an aeronautical theme . He said that " the heroes depicted in comic books are fascist types , but I don 't take them seriously in these paintings ? maybe there is a point in not taking them seriously , a political point . I use them for purely formal reasons . "

= = History = =

Whaam ! adapts a panel by Irv Novick from the " Star Jockey " story from issue No. 89 of DC Comics ' All @-@ American Men of War (Feb. 1962) . The original forms part of a dream sequence in which fictional World War II P @-@ 51 Mustang pilot Johnny Flying Cloud , " the Navajo ace " , foresees himself flying a jet fighter while shooting down other jet planes . In Lichtenstein 's painting , both the attacking and target planes are replaced by different types of aircraft . Paul Gravett suggests that Lichtenstein substituted the attacking plane with an aircraft from " Wingmate of Doom " illustrated by Jerry Grandenetti in the subsequent issue (# 90 , April 1962) , and that the target plane was borrowed from a Russ Heath drawing in the third panel of page 3 of the " Aces Wild " story in the same issue No. 89 . The painting also omits the speech bubble from the source in which the pilot exclaims " The enemy has become a flaming star ! "

A smaller , single @-@ panel oil painting by Lichtenstein around the same time , Tex ! , has a similar composition , with a plane at the lower left shooting an air @-@ to @-@ air missile at a second plane that is exploding in the upper right , with a word bubble . The same issue of All @-@ American Men of War was the inspiration for at least three other Lichtenstein paintings , Okay Hot @-@ Shot , Okay ! , Brattata and Blam , in addition to Whaam ! and Tex ! The graphite pencil sketch , Jet Pilot was also from that issue . Several of Lichtenstein 's other comics @-@ based works are inspired by stories about Johnny Flying Cloud written by Robert Kanigher and illustrated by Novick , including Okay Hot @-@ Shot , Okay ! , Jet Pilot and Von Karp .

Lichtenstein repeatedly depicted aerial combat between the United States and the Soviet Union . In the early and mid @-@ 1960s , he produced " explosion " sculptures , taking subjects such as the " catastrophic release of energy " from paintings such as Whaam ! and depicting them in freestanding and relief forms . In 1963 , he was parodying a variety of artworks , from advertising and comics and to " high art " modern masterpieces by Cézanne , Mondrian , Picasso and others . At the time , Lichtenstein noted that " the things that I have apparently parodied I actually admire . "

Lichtenstein 's first solo exhibition was held at the Leo Castelli Gallery in New York City , from 10 February to 3 March 1962 . It sold out before its opening . The exhibition included Look Mickey , Engagement Ring , Blam and The Refrigerator . According to the Lichtenstein Foundation website , Whaam ! was part of Lichtenstein 's second solo exhibition at the Leo Castelli Gallery from 28 September to 24 October 1963 , that also included Drowning Girl , Baseball Manager , In the Car , Conversation , and Torpedo ... Los ! Marketing materials for the show included the lithograph artwork , Crak !

The Lichtenstein Foundation website says that Lichtenstein began using his opaque projector technique in 1962 @-@ in 1967 he described his process for producing comics @-@ based art as follows :

I do them as directly as possible . If I am working from a cartoon , photograph or whatever , I draw a small picture ? the size that will fit into my opaque projector ... I don 't draw a picture in order to reproduce it ? I do it in order to recompose it ... I go all the way from having my drawing almost like the original to making it up altogether .

Whaam ! was purchased by the Tate Gallery in 1966 . In 1969 , Lichtenstein donated his initial graphite @-@ on @-@ paper drawing Drawing for ' Whaam ! ' , describing it as a " pencil scribble " . According to the Tate , Lichtenstein claimed that this drawing represented his " first visualization of Whaam ! and that it was executed just before he started the painting . " Although he had conceived of a unified work of art on a single canvas , he made the sketch on two sheets of paper of equal size ? measuring 14 @-@ 9 cm x 30 @-@ 5 cm (5 @-@ 9 in x 12 @-@ 0 in) . The painting has been displayed at Tate Modern since 2006 . In 2012 ? 13 , both works were included in the largest Lichtenstein retrospective that visited the Art Institute of Chicago , the National Gallery of Art in

Washington , D.C. , the Tate Modern in London and the Centre Pompidou .

= = Description = =

WHAAM ! depicts a fighter aircraft in the left panel firing a rocket into an enemy plane in the right panel , which disintegrates in a vivid red @-@ and @-@ yellow explosion . The cartoon style is emphasized by the use of the onomatopoeic lettering " WHAAM ! " in the right panel , and a yellow @-@ boxed caption with black lettering at the top of the left panel . The textual exclamation " WHAAM ! " can be considered the graphic equivalent of a sound effect . This was to become a characteristic of his work ? like others of his onomatopoeic paintings that contain exclamations such as Bratatat ! and Varoom !

WHAAM ! is one of Lichtenstein 's series of war images , typically combining vibrant colors with an expressive narrative . WHAAM ! is very large , measuring 1 @. @ 7 m x 4 @. @ 0 m (5 ft 7 in x 13 ft 4 in) . It is less abstract than As I Opened Fire , another of his war scenes . Lichtenstein employs his usual comic @-@ book style : stereotyped imagery in bright primary colors with black outlines , coupled with imitations of mechanical printer 's Ben @-@ Day dots . The use of these dots , which were invented by Benjamin Day to simulate color variations and shading , are considered Lichtenstein 's " signature method " . WHAAM ! departs from Lichtenstein 's earlier diptychs such as Step @-@ on @-@ Can with Leg and Like New , in that the panels are not two variations of the same image .

Although Lichtenstein strove to remain faithful to the source images , he constructed his paintings in a traditional manner , starting with a sketch which he adjusted to improve the composition and then projected on to a canvas to make the finished painting . In the case of WHAAM ! , the sketch is on two pieces of paper , and the finished work is painted with Magna acrylic and oil paint on canvas . Although the transformation from a single @-@ panel conception into a diptych painting occurred during the initial sketch , the final work varies from the sketch in several ways . The sketch suggests that the " WHAAM ! " motif would be colored white , although it is yellow in the finished work . Lichtenstein enlarged the main graphical subject of each panel (the plane on the left and the flames on the right) , bringing them closer together as a result .

Lichtenstein built up the image with multiple layers of paint . The paint was applied using a scrub brush and handmade metal screen to produce Ben @-@ Day dots via a process that left physical evidence behind . The Ben @-@ Day dots technique enabled Lichtenstein to give his works a mechanically reproduced feel . Lichtenstein said that the work is " supposed to look like a fake , and it achieves that , I think " .

Lichtenstein split the composition into two panels to separate the action from its consequence . The left panel features the attacking plane ? placed at a diagonal to create a sense of depth ? below the text balloon , which Lichtenstein has relegated to the margin above the plane . In the right panel , the exploding plane ? depicted head @-@ on ? is outlined by the flames , accompanied by the bold exclamation " WHAAM ! " . Although separate , with one panel containing the missile launch and the other its explosion , representing two distinct events , the two panels are clearly linked spatially and temporally , not least by the horizontal smoke trail of the missile . Lichtenstein commented on this piece in a 10 July 1967 , letter : " I remember being concerned with the idea of doing two almost separate paintings having little hint of compositional connection , and each having slightly separate stylistic character . Of course there is the humorous connection of one panel shooting the other . "

Lichtenstein altered the composition to make the image more compelling , by making the exploding plane more prominent compared to the attacking plane than in the original . The smoke trail of the missile becomes a horizontal line . The flames of the explosion dominate the right panel , but the pilot and the airplane in the left panel are the narrative focus . They exemplify Lichtenstein 's painstaking detailing of physical features such as the aircraft 's cockpit . The other element of the narrative content is a text balloon that contains the following text : " I pressed the fire control ... and ahead of me rockets blazed through the sky ... " This is among the text believed to have been written by All @-@ American Men of War editor Robert Kanigher . The yellow word " WHAAM ! " , altered from the red in the original comic @-@ book panel and white in the pencil sketch , links the

yellow of the explosion below it with the textbox to the left and the flames of the missile below the attacking plane .

Lichtenstein 's borrowings from comics mimicked their style while adapting their subject matter . He explained that " Signs and comic strips are interesting as subject matter . There are certain things that are usable , forceful and vital about commercial art . " Rebecca Bengal at PBS wrote that Whaam ! ' s graphic clarity exemplifies the *ligne claire* style associated with Hergé , a cartoonist whose influence Lichtenstein acknowledged . Lichtenstein was attracted to using a cool , formal style to depict emotive subjects , leaving the viewer to interpret the artist 's intention . He adopted a simplified color scheme and commercial printing @-@ like techniques . The borrowed technique was " representing tonal variations with patterns of colored circles that imitated the half @-@ tone screens of Ben Day dots used in newspaper printing , and surrounding these with black outlines similar to those used to conceal imperfections in cheap newsprint . " Lichtenstein once said of his technique : " I take a cliché and try to organize its forms to make it monumental . "

= = Reception = =

The painting was , for the most part , well received by art critics when first exhibited . A November 1963 Art Magazine review by Donald Judd described Whaam ! as one of the " broad and powerful paintings " of the 1963 exhibition at Castelli 's Gallery . In his review of the exhibition , The New York Times art critic Brian O 'Doherty described Lichtenstein 's technique as " typewriter pointillism ... that laboriously hammers out such moments as a jet shooting down another jet with a big BLAM " . According to O 'Doherty , the result was " certainly not art , [but] time may make it so " , depending on whether it could be " rationalized ... and placed in line for the future to assimilate as history , which it shows every sign of doing . " The Tate Gallery in London acquired the work in 1966 , leading to heated argument amongst their trustees and some vocal members of the public . The purchase was made from art dealer Ileana Sonnabend , whose asking price of £ 4 @,@ 665 (£ 78 @,@ 369 in 2016 currency) was reduced by negotiation to £ 3 @,@ 940 (£ 66 @,@ 189 in 2016 currency) . Some Tate trustees opposed the acquisition , among them sculptor Barbara Hepworth , painter Andrew Forge and the poet and critic Herbert Read . Defending the acquisition , art historian Richard Morphet , then an assistant keeper at the Tate , suggested that the painting addresses several issues and painterly styles at the same time : " history painting , Baroque extravagance , and the quotidian phenomenon of mass @-@ circulation comic strips . " The Times in 1967 described the acquisition as a " very large and spectacular painting " . The Tate 's director , Norman Reid , later said that the work aroused more public interest than any of its acquisitions since World War II .

In 1968 , Whaam ! was included in the Tate 's first solo exhibition of Lichtenstein 's work . The showing attracted 52 @,@ 000 visitors , and was organized with the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam , which later hosted the exhibition from 4 November to 17 December 1967 , before it traveled to three other museums .

= = Analysis and interpretation = =

For José Pierre , Whaam ! represents Lichtenstein 's 1963 expansion " into the ' epic ' vein " . Keith Roberts , in a 1968 Burlington Magazine article , described the explosion as combining " art nouveau elegance with a nervous energy reminiscent of Abstract Expressionism " . Wendy Steiner believes the work is Lichtenstein 's most successful and harmonious comic @-@ based composition . She sees the narrative and graphic elements as complementary : the action and spatial alignment lead the viewer 's eye from left to right so as to emphasize the relationship between the action and its explosive consequence . The ellipses of the text balloon present a progression which culminates with a " WHAAM ! " . The " coincidence of pictorial and verbal order " are clear for the Western viewer with the explanatory text beginning in the upper left and action vector moving from the left foreground to the right background , culminating in a graphical explosion in tandem with a narrative exclamation . Steiner says the striking incongruity of the two panels ? the left panel appearing to be

" truncated " , while the right depicts a centralized explosion ? enhances the work 's narrative power

Lichtenstein 's technique has been characterized by Ernst A. Busche as " the enlargement and unification of his source material ... on the basis of strict artistic principles " . Extracted from a larger narrative , the resulting stylized image became in some cases a " virtual abstraction " . By recreating their minimalistic graphic techniques , Lichtenstein reinforced the artificial nature of comic strips and advertisements . Lichtenstein 's magnification of his source material made his impersonally drawn motifs seem all the more empty . Busche also says that although a critique of modern industrial America may be read into these images , Lichtenstein " would appear to accept the environment as revealed by his reference material as part of American capitalist industrial culture " .

David McCarthy contrasted Lichtenstein 's " dispassionate , detached and oddly disembodied " presentation of aerial combat with the work of H.C. Westermann , for whom the experience of military service in World War II instilled a need to horrify and shock . In contrast , Lichtenstein registers his " comment on American civilization " by scaling up inches @-@ high comic book images to the oversized dimensions of history painting . Laura Brandon saw an attempt to convey " the trivialization of culture endemic in contemporary American life " by depicting a shocking scene of combat as a banal Cold War act .

Carol Strickland and John Boswell say that by magnifying the comic book panels to an enormous size with dots , " Lichtenstein slapped the viewer in the face with their triviality . " H. H. Arnason noted that Whaam ! presents " limited , flat colors and hard , precise drawing , " which produce " a hard @-@ edge subject painting that documents while it gently parodies the familiar hero images of modern America . " The flat and highly finished style of planned brushstrokes can be seen as pop art 's reaction against the looseness of abstract expressionism . Alastair Sooke says that the work can be interpreted as a symbolic self @-@ portrait in which the pilot in the left panel represents Lichtenstein " vanquishing his competitors in a dramatic art @-@ world dogfight " by firing a missile at the colorful " parody of abstract painting " in the right panel .

According to Ernesto Priego , while the work adapts a comic @-@ book source , the painting is neither a comic nor a comics panel , and " its meaning is solely referential and post hoc . " It directs the attention of its audience to features such as genre and printing methods . Visually and narratively , the original panel was the climactic element of a dynamic page composition . Lichtenstein emphasizes the onomatopoeia while playing down articulated speech by removing the speech balloon . According to Priego , " by stripping the comics panel from its narrative context , Whaam ! is representative in the realm of fine art of the preference of the image @-@ icon over image @-@ narrative " .

Whaam ! is sometimes said to belong to the same anti @-@ war genre as Picasso 's Guernica , a suggestion dismissed by Bradford R. Collins . Instead , Collins views the painting as a revenge fantasy against Lichtenstein 's first wife Isabel , conceived as it was during their bitter divorce battle (the couple separated in 1961 and divorced in 1965) .

= = Legacy = =

Marla F. Prather observed that Whaam ! ' s grand scale and dramatic depiction contributed to its position as a historic work of pop art . With As I Opened Fire , Lichtenstein 's other monumental war painting , Whaam ! is regarded as the culmination of Lichtenstein 's dramatic war @-@ comics works , according to Diane Waldman . It is widely described as either Lichtenstein 's most famous work , or , along with Drowning Girl , as one of his two most famous works . Andrew Edgar and Peter Sedgwick describe it , along with Warhol 's Marilyn Monroe prints , as one of the most famous works of pop art . Gianni Versace once linked the two iconic pop art images via his gown designs . According to Douglas Coupland , the World Book Encyclopedia used pictures of Warhol 's Monroes and Whaam ! to illustrate its Pop art entry .

Comic books were in turn affected by the cultural impact of pop art . By the mid @-@ 1960s , some comic books were displaying a new emphasis on garish colors , emphatic sound effects and stilted dialogue ? the elements of comic book style that had come to be regarded as camp ? in an attempt

to appeal to older , college @-@ age readers who appreciated pop art . Gravett observed that the " simplicity and outdatedness [of comic books] were ripe for being mocked " .

Whaam ! was one of the key works exhibited in a major Lichtenstein retrospective in 2012 ? 2013 that was designed , according to Li @-@ mei Hoang , to demonstrate " the importance of Lichtenstein 's influence , his engagement with art history and his enduring legacy as an artist " . In his review of the Lichtenstein Retrospective at the Tate Modern , Adrian Searle of The Guardian ? who was generally unenthusiastic about Lichtenstein 's work ? credited the work 's title with accurately describing its graphic content : " Whaam ! goes the painting , as the rocket hits , and the enemy fighter explodes in a livid , comic @-@ book roar . " Daily Telegraph critic Alastair Smart wrote a disparaging review in which he acknowledged Lichtenstein 's reputation as a leading figure in " Pop Art 's cheeky assault on the swaggering , self @-@ important Abstract Expressionists " , whose works Smart said Whaam ! mimicked by its huge scale . Smart said the work was neither a positive commentary on the fighting American spirit nor a critique , but was notable for marking " Lichtenstein 's incendiary impact on the US art scene " .

Detractors have raised concerns over Lichtenstein 's appropriation , in that he directly references imagery from other sources in Whaam ! and other works of the period . Some have denigrated it as mere copying , to which others have countered that Lichtenstein altered his sources in significant , creative ways . In response to claims of plagiarism , the Roy Lichtenstein Foundation has noted that publishers have never sued for copyright infringement , and that they never raised the issue when Lichtenstein 's comics @-@ derived work first gained attention in the 1960s . Other criticism centers on Lichtenstein 's failure to credit the original artists of his sources ; Ernesto Priego implicates National Periodicals in the case of Whaam ! , as the artists were never credited in the original comic books .

In Alastair Sooke 's 2013 BBC Four documentary that took place in front of Whaam ! at the Tate Modern , British comic book artist Dave Gibbons disputed Sooke 's assertion that Lichtenstein 's painting improved upon Novick 's panel , saying : " This to me looks flat and abstracted , to the point of view that to my eyes it 's confusing . Whereas the original has got a three @-@ dimensional quality to it , it 's got a spontaneity to it , it 's got an excitement to it , and a way of involving the viewer that this one lacks . " Gibbons has parodied Lichtenstein 's derivation of the Novick work .