

Richard Hamilton (artist)

Richard Hamilton	
Born	24 February 1922Pimlico, London, England
Nationality	English
Field	Collage, Painting, Graphics
Training	Royal Academy Slade School of Art University College, London
Movement	Pop Art
Works	<i>Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?</i>

Richard Hamilton, CH (born 24 February 1922) is an English painter and collage artist. His 1956 collage titled *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*, produced for the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition of the Independent Group in London, is considered by critics and historians to be one of the early works of Pop Art.^[1]

Early life

Richard Hamilton grew up in the Pimlico area of London. Having left school with no formal qualifications Hamilton got work as an apprentice working at an electrical components firm. Here he discovered an ability for draughtsmanship and began to do painting at evening classes at St Martin's School of Art which eventually led to his entry into the Royal Academy Schools. After spending the war working as a technical draftsman he re-enrolled at the Royal Academy Schools but was later expelled on grounds of "not profiting from the instruction", loss of his student status forcing Hamilton to carry out National Service.

After two years at the Slade School of Art, University College, London, Richard Hamilton began exhibiting at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) where he also produced posters and leaflets and teaching at the Central School of Art and Design.

1950s and 1960s

Hamilton's early work was much influenced by D'Arcy Wentworth Thompson's 1913 text *On Growth and Form*. In 1952, at the first Independent Group meeting, held at the ICA, Hamilton was introduced to Eduardo Paolozzi's seminal presentation of collages produced in the late 1940s and early 1950s that are now considered to be the first standard bearers of Pop Art.^{[1] [2]} Also in 1952, he was introduced to the *Green Box* notes of Marcel Duchamp through Roland Penrose, whom Hamilton had met at the ICA. At the ICA Hamilton was responsible for the design and installation of a number of exhibitions including one on James Joyce and *The Wonder and the Horror of the Human Head* that was curated by Penrose. It was also through Penrose that Hamilton met Victor Pasmore who gave him a teaching post based in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne which lasted until 1966. Among the students Hamilton tutored at Newcastle in this period were Rita Donagh, Mark Lancaster, Tim Head, Roxy Music founder Bryan Ferry and Ferry's visual collaborator Nicholas De Ville. Hamilton's influence can be found in the visual styling and approach of Roxy Music.



Hamilton's 1956 collage titled *Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?*

The post also afforded Hamilton the time to further his research on Duchamp, which resulted in the 1960 publication of a typographic version of Duchamp's *Green Box*, which comprised Duchamp's original notes for the design and construction of his famous work *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, also known as *The Large Glass*. Hamilton's 1955 exhibition of paintings at the Hanover Gallery were all in some form a homage to Duchamp. In the same year Hamilton organised the exhibition *Man Machine Motion* at the Hatton Gallery in Newcastle. Designed to look more like an advertising display than a conventional art exhibit the show prefigured Hamilton's contribution to the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition in London, at the Whitechapel Gallery the following year. *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* was created in 1956 for the catalogue of *This Is Tomorrow* where it was reproduced in black and white and also used in posters for the exhibit.^[3]

The success of *This Is Tomorrow* secured Hamilton further teaching assignments in particular at the Royal College of Art from 1957-61 where he promoted David Hockney and Peter Blake. During this period Hamilton was also very active in the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament and produced a work parodying the then leader of the Labour Party Hugh Gaitskell for rejecting a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament. In the early 1960s he received a grant from the Arts Council to investigate the condition of the Kurt Schwitters 'Merzbau' in Cumbria. The research eventually resulted in Hamilton organising the preservation of the work by relocating it to the Hatton Gallery in the Newcastle University. In 1962 his first wife Terry was killed in a car crash and in part to recover from this he travelled for the first time to the United States, where, as well as meeting other leading Pop Artists, he was befriended by Marcel Duchamp. Arising from this Hamilton curated the first and to date only British retrospective of Duchamp's work, and his familiarity with *The Green Box* enabled Hamilton to make copies of *The Large Glass* and other glass works too fragile to travel. The exhibition was shown at the Tate Gallery in 1966.

From the mid-1960s, Hamilton was represented by Robert Fraser and even produced a series of prints *Swinging London* based on Fraser's arrest, along with Mick Jagger, for possession of drugs. This association with the 1960s Pop Music scene continued as Hamilton became friends with Paul McCartney resulting in him producing the cover

design and poster collage for the Beatles' *White Album*.

1970s to present

During the 1970s, Richard Hamilton enjoyed international acclaim with a number of major exhibitions being organised of his work. Hamilton had found a new companion in the painter Rita Donagh and together they set about converting North End, a farm in the Oxfordshire countryside, into a home and studios. Hamilton realised a series of projects that blurred the boundaries between artwork and product design including a painting that incorporated a state-of-the-art radio receiver and the casing of a Diab Computer. In 1977-8 Hamilton undertook a series of collaborations with the artist Dieter Roth that also blurred the definitions of the artist as sole author of their work. Since the late 1940s Richard Hamilton has been engaged with a project to produce a suite of illustrations for James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Associated with this, in 1981 Hamilton began work on a trilogy of paintings based on the conflicts in Northern Ireland after watching a television documentary about the protest organised by IRA prisoners in Long Kesh Prison, unofficially known as *The Maze*. *The citizen* (1981-3) shows IRA prisoner Bobby Sands from Belfast's Short Strand republican enclave. He is portrayed as Jesus, with long flowing hair and a beard. Republican prisoners had refused to wear prison uniforms, claiming that they were political prisoners. Prison officers refused to let "the blanket protesters" use the toilets unless they wore prison uniforms. The republican prisoners refused, and instead smeared the excrement on the wall of their cells.

Hamilton explained (in the catalogue to his Tate Gallery exhibition, 1992), that he saw the image of "the blanket man as a public relations contrivance of enormous efficacy. It had the moral conviction of a religious icon and the persuasiveness of the advertising man's dream soap commercial - yet it was a present reality". *The subject* (1988-9) shows an Orangeman, a member of an order dedicated to preserve Unionism in Northern Ireland. *The state* (1993) shows a British soldier undertaking solitary patrol on a street. Critical responses to the works have been divided with those both on the political left and right accusing Hamilton of naïveté. *The citizen* was first exhibited alongside an installation of Rita Donnagh's drawings about the Maze.

During the 1980s Hamilton also voyaged into industrial design and designed two computer exteriors: OHIO computer prototype (for a Swedish firm named *Isotron*, 1984) and DIAB DS-101 (for Dataindustrier AB, 1986). As part of a television project Hamilton was introduced to the Quantel Paintbox and has since used this or similar devices to produce and modify his work.

In 1992 the Tate Gallery in London organised a major retrospective of Hamilton's career with an accompanying catalogue which provides the most comprehensive review of his career. In 1993 Hamilton represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale and was awarded the Golden Lion.

His definition of Pop Art from a letter to the Smithsons dated 16 January 1957 was - "Pop Art is: popular, transient, expendable, low-cost, mass-produced, young, witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous, and Big Business" - stressing its everyday, commonplace values.

Hamilton is also known as a prolific and groundbreaking printmaker. Since making his first print in 1939, his graphic work has consistently pushed the boundaries of how prints and multiples are made. These works are shown by the Alan Cristea Gallery in London.

In February 2002, the British Museum staged an exhibition of Hamilton's illustrations of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, entitled *Imaging Ulysses*. A book of Hamilton's illustrations was published simultaneously, with text by Stephen Coppel. In the book, Hamilton explained that the idea of illustrating this complex, experimental novel occurred to him when he was doing his National Service in 1947. His first preliminary sketches were made while at the Slade School of Art, and he continued to refine and re-work the images over the next 50 years. Hamilton felt his re-working of the illustrations in many different media had produced a visual effect analogous to Joyce's verbal techniques. The *Ulysses* illustrations were subsequently exhibited at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, and

the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam. The British Museum exhibition coincided with both the 80th anniversary of the publication of Joyce's novel, and Richard Hamilton's 80th birthday.

The Tate Gallery now has a comprehensive collection of Hamilton's work from across his career.

Notes

- [1] Livingstone, M., (1990), *Pop Art: A Continuing History*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.
- [2] Tate Gallery Collection Reference (<http://www.tate.org.uk/imap/imap2/pages/paolozzi.html>)
- [3] "This is tomorrow" (http://www.thisistomorrow2.com/images/cat_1956/cat_web/FrameSet.htm), thisistomorrow2.com (scroll to "image 027TT-1956.jpg"). Retrieved 27 August 2008.

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- Lucy R. Lippard, *Pop Art*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1985
- Richard Hamilton, *Collected Words 1953-1982*, New York, Thames and Hudson, 1983
- David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty*, MIT Press, 1990
- *Richard Hamilton* (exhibition catalogue), London, Tate Gallery, 1992
- Etienne Lullin, Richard Hamilton, Stephen Coppel (eds.), *Richard Hamilton: Prints and Multiples 1939-2002*, Richter, 2004
- John Richardson, Richard Cork, Richard Hamilton, *Hamilton*, Dickinson, 2006
- Hal Foster and Alex Bacon (eds.), *Richard Hamilton*, London, The MIT Press, 2010

External links

- Richard Hamilton: Pop Daddy, from an interview by Hans-Ulrich Obrist, Tate Magazine (<http://www.tate.org.uk/magazine/issue4/popdaddy.htm>)
- Hal Foster, On the First Pop Age, New Left Review (<http://newleftreview.net/A2434>)
- Richard Hamilton, Catalogue (<http://www.infoloop.org>)
- exhibitions with Richard Hamilton (<http://www.artfacts.net/index.php/pageType/artistInfo/artist/2296>)
- Hamilton New York 2006 (<http://www.simondickinson.com/index.php?id=5&year=&work=50>)
- Richard Hamilton works in the Tate Collection (<http://www.tate.org.uk/servlet/ArtistWorks?cgroupid=999999961&artistid=1244&page=1>)
- Richard Hamilton's illustrations of Ulysses (<http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts-art-drawings-prints-and-multiples-imaging-ulysses.htm>)
- John-Paul Stonard (2007), "Pop in the Age of Boom: Richard Hamilton's 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?'" (http://www.johnpaulstonard.com/John-Paul_Stonard/JOHN-PAUL_STONARD_files/Stonard_Hamilton.pdf)PDF, *The Burlington Magazine*, September 2007

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Richard William Hamilton CH (24 February 1922 – 13 September 2011) was an English painter and collage artist. His 1955 exhibition *Man, Machine and Motion* (Hatton Gallery) – Perhaps best-known for his 1956 collage 'Just What Is It that Makes Today's Homes So Different, So Appealing?', often referred to as the first example of Pop art. Hamilton also acted as curator of a major retrospective of Marcel Duchamp's work at the Tate Gallery in 1966, and edited a typographic version of that artist's "Green Box." Here Richard Hamilton discovered an ability to draw professional paintings. This pop art artist had begun evening classes at Saint Martin art school. And along with this institution, he also joined another art school- Westminster School of Art. After these two art schools, Richard Hamilton enrolled in another art school. Richard Hamilton was the founder of Pop art and a visionary who outlined its aims and ideals. A lollipop from one of his early collages furnished the movement with its title. Hamilton introduced the idea of the artist as an active consumer and contributor to mass culture. Up until then (especially in Abstract Expressionist circles) the prevailing view was that art should be separate from commerce. Hamilton gave other artists permission to consider all visual sources, especially those generated by the commercial sector.