

# RICHARD HAMILTON

introspective

Press release

Exhibition: 7 March - 1 June 2003



# RICHARD HAMILTON

## introspective

**Presentation to the media: Wednesday, 5 March, 2003 - 11:30 a.m.**

**Opening: Thursday, 6 March 2003 - 7:30 p.m.**

**Exhibition dates: from 7 March to 1 June 2003**

**Curator: Vicent Todolí**

**Co-Production: Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona - Ludwig Museum of Cologne**

**In collaboratin with:**



Although Richard Hamilton (London, 1922) is best known as the father of *Pop Art*, his work within this movement is just one small stage in an artistic career spanning over fifty years and in which he has worked in the most varied fields, styles and techniques, from engraving to painting, drawing and installations, objects and industrial design, and during which he has explored the boundaries between art and advertising, design and mass production.

Hamilton's work began to reach maturity in the mid-1950s, coinciding on the art scene with the consolidation of such movements as Abstract Expressionism, which he felt embodied the paralysis of the avant-garde. His reaction was to use his own everyday experience in his work, enriching his visual culture, working with the cinema, magazines such as *Playboy*, *Esquire*, *Look*, *Design* and *The Architectural Review* and photography in his attempt to bring content —non-existent, he said, in avant-garde painting— back into art.

It was in the 1950s, too, that Hamilton began to manifest his interest in mass culture products, forming the Independent Group with the likes of Laurence Alloway, Peter and Allison Smithson and Eduardo Paolozzi and organising exhibitions such as *This is Tomorrow* (London, 1956). Other artists, such as Marcel Duchamp, Jean Tinguely and Joseph Beuys, also exercised a powerful influence on his artistic production, particularly Dieter Roth, whom he worked with in the 1970s in Cadaquès.

This exhibition, organised in collaboration with the Ludwig Museum of Cologne, features drawings, paintings, objects and recreations of large installations, such as *Fun House*, 1956; *Treatment Room*, 1983-84; and *Lobby*, 1985-87. The exhibition is structured into classical categories, just as Hamilton himself classifies his work: still lifes, portraits, interiors, exteriors, nature, religious works, etc., and includes key pieces from 1938 to 2002, such as the series *Solomon R. Guggenheim*, 1965-66, or *Lux 50-Functioning Prototype*, 1979, the combination of an amplifier designed by Hamilton himself with an object-painting.

**In the context of:**  **ANY DEL DISSENY 2003  
BARCELONA**

**In collaboration with:**  **BRITISH  
COUNCIL**

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## **introspective**

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**MUSEU D'ART CONTEMPORANI DE BARCELONA (MACBA)**

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**In collaboration with:**



**Dates of the exhibition at the Ludwig Museum in Cologne (Germany):**

**From 12 July to 9 November, 2003**

**Pop art is:**

**Popular (designed for a mass audience), Transient (short-term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low cost, Mass produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big business.**

**Richard Hamilton, 1957**

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This exhibition covers the heterogeneous trajectory of Richard Hamilton (London, 1922) from 1938 up until today, with approximately a hundred and eighty works on display. Hamilton himself has been deeply involved in the organisation of this exhibition.

Richard Hamilton, one of the key artists in the second half of the 20th century, has created a body of work that spans sixty-five years and covers various fields – from painting to industrial design – including elements from popular culture, politics, cinema and the scatological. At the same time, he has participated tirelessly in other cultural activities, as a writer, art and design teacher and organiser of exhibitions such as the retrospective shows of Picabia (1964) and Marcel Duchamp (1968). Hamilton's work was the precursor of the use of figuration and photography as a basis for painting and he has had a profound influence on many generations of artists, from Gilbert & George to the Young British Artists of the early nineties.

Hamilton has tackled many of the main themes in the history of painting and his work displays a common interest on the issues of perspective and structure as defined from Cézanne onwards and the influence of Vermeer and Velázquez. He subjects traditional pictorial genres to a process of reinterpretation. For this reason, the exhibition has been divided into thematic genres: portraits, interiors, landscapes, flower pieces and history paintings. Other sources of influence in

his work are those of James Joyce, whose *Ulysses* he began to illustrate in 1947, and Marcel Duchamp, with whom he collaborated on an English version of *Green box*. These influences are echoed in the constant polarity between representation and abstraction and in the complex relationship between image and idea, sign and signification, and form and message, all summed up by Duchamp's question: "What is it, precisely, that makes an object a work of art?"

Hamilton reached his artistic maturity in the mid-fifties. At a time when Abstract Expressionism ruled the art world, he formed the Independent Group with Lawrence Alloway, Peter and Allison Smithson and Eduardo Paolozzi, who together developed an early form of Pop art iconography. The MACBA exhibition begins with a reconstruction of *Fun house*, a contribution by Hamilton, sculptor John McHale and architect John Voelcker for the exhibition *This is tomorrow* (1956), which explored the collaborative possibilities of artists working in different fields. Hamilton's small collage *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* (1956) was used for the exhibition's poster and catalogue, and is considered a landmark in the birth of Pop art containing all the icons of consumer society. He designed it from a list of categories: "man, woman, humanity, history, food, newspapers, cinema, television, telephone, comics (picture information), words (textual information), cars, domestic appliances, space", and these became the main ingredients of his work.

Hamilton's work often investigates what the world is comprised of, what processes structure it and with what means we perceive and understand it. This can be seen in the exhibitions *Growth and form* (1951) and *an Exhibit* (1954). His fascination for machines as mediators between technology, nature and human beings began with the series *Reaper* (1950), and it appears in the exhibition *Man, Machine & Motion* (1953) and in *Hommage à Chrysler Corp.* (1957).

Hamilton has been using photography in his work from the late fifties onwards, exploring its possibilities of manipulation through other techniques and combining it with collage and relief, as can be seen in the series *Towards a definitive statement on the coming trends in men's wear and accessories (a-d)* (1962-1963), *The Solomon R. Guggenheim* and *Bathers*, and in the majority of his work based on celebrities, highlights of which include *My Marilyn* (1965) and *Swinging London*, a study of inner and outer spaces expressing a clear sense of socio-political concern, based on a press photo showing Mick Jagger and Hamilton's art dealer, Robert Fraser, handcuffed in a police van.

The creation of "products" based on Duchamp's concept of ready-made began with *Epiphany* (1964), a circular panel containing the text "Slip it to me", taken from an existing button. In *Still-Life* (1965) the photo and the panel remain almost untouched except for the substitution of the word "Braun" for "Brown". In 1968 Hamilton produced *The critic laughs*, a giant set of edible teeth applied to his electric toothbrush, which later was the basis for a limited edition series and a BBC advertisement. Other product-works in which he subtly plays with our perceptions of famous icons are *Sign* (1975), *Carafe* (1978) and *Ashtray* (1979). He has also presented his designs for industrial prototypes, such as the *Lux 50 – Functioning prototype amplifier* (1950) or the *OI-IIO mini-computer* (1985-89), as artistic objects.

In the seventies, Hamilton re-examined landscape and still-life genres and added a sense of perversity and irony to them. His out-of-focus, idyllic landscapes like *Soft blue landscape* (1976-1980), or his flower pieces and sunsets, which feature rolls of toilet paper and, later, as can be seen in *Flower piece II* (1973), with the introduction of excrement as a form of memento mori. Another of his main subjects is interiors, from *Interior II* (1964) – in which a still from a film is manipulated – to *Langan's* (1976) – a view of a restaurant hung on the actual space it represents – or his painting *Lobby* (1985-1987), which

was later transformed into an installation which delves into the illusion of a painting within a painting.

Between 1982 and 1993, Hamilton created a series of historical paintings based on the Northern Ireland conflict. *The citizen* (1982-1983) transforms an IRA prisoner into an image with a mystic aspect, and his excrement stained cell – a result of the “dirty protest” – into an abstract painting. The work’s companion piece is *The subject* (1988-1990), the image of a marching Orangeman. *The state* (1993) shows a soldier in a misty landscape. By the way it is set and by manipulating photographs, Hamilton questions observed images from the media as well as historical and artistic iconography. For the last ten years, he has continued to work on self-portraits, such as those he began in 1968 using Polaroids. These are photos of Hamilton taken by other artists and acquaintances and then later manipulated and enlarged. The exhibition also presents Hamilton’s work in collaboration with Dieter Roth in 1976 and his series on deceased friends, such as Derek Jarman and Dieter Roth.

**IN COLLABORATION WITH:**



**elPeriódico**

**IN THE CONTEXT OF:**

