



Mr. Bellamy

**Roy Lichtenstein, American, born 1923
1961, Oil on canvas, 56 x 42 1/2 inches**

Collection of Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Museum Purchase, The Benjamin J. Tillar Memorial Trust, Acquired from the Collection of Vernon Nikkel, Clovis, New Mexico, 1982

About the Artist

Roy Lichtenstein was born October 27, 1923, in New York City. He describes his childhood as quiet and uneventful. His father was a realtor, and his mother was a housewife. Art was not taught at the school he attended, but when he was 14, he began taking Saturday-morning classes at the Parsons' School of Design. After he graduated from high school in 1940, he attended the School of Fine Arts at Ohio State University. His education was interrupted, however, by World War II when he was drafted in 1943. While in the military, he served in Great Britain and in Europe. When he returned in 1946, he completed his studies for his Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree at Ohio State University and graduated in June of 1949. His earliest work in a Pop Art style was a picture of a dollar bill, painted in 1956, but no more works of this type followed right away. From 1957 until 1960, his work was classified as Abstract Expressionist.

In 1960, Lichtenstein moved to New Jersey where he was appointed Assistant Professor at Rutgers University. This move placed him very near to New York City where he came into contact with many of the prominent artists of that time. His interest in Pop images was revived, and in 1961, he made paintings of Mickey Mouse for one of his young sons who had pointed to a comic book and said, "I bet you can't paint as good as that."

About the Art

In *Mr. Bellamy*, Lichtenstein presents a scene in which a man in a military uniform moves toward the viewer in what appears to be a passageway with large windows. Through these windows, we see the walls of other parts of the building, an airplane, an automobile that might be a taxi, and a second partially hidden figure. Even though the subject is presented in a familiar style, one used in impersonal printed materials, the artist indicates to us the uneasiness of this man as he anticipates meeting Mr. Bellamy who we

assume will be someone important, perhaps a higher ranking officer.

Additional Information

During the early 1960s, Pop artists were reacting to Abstract Expressionism. They wished to produce art that expressed the popular culture of America. They often chose the least arty objects that represented the life of Americans: soup cans, Coke bottles, comic strip heroes, and the common cartoon subjects of war and young women. During this period Lichtenstein first used speech balloons with lettering showing us the words or thoughts of the figures. He also used Ben-day dots, those dots of varying size used in bubblegum comics and comic books to indicate tonal values. He sometimes used single panels from war comic books, romance comics, or printed advertisements to present popular style in a work of fine art.

Most of the Pop art images are based on mass-production, consumer goods, and advertising. Common objects, mass media, and popular culture were the underlying themes. The style is mechanical and two-dimensional, with the objects and figures often enlarged many times the size of the real subject. Pop art works were in some cases more easily accepted by the general public than the art world that was less willing to accept commercial art as an appropriate form for higher art.

About the Time and Place

The 1960s in the United States was a time of turbulence and confusion. The decade had begun on a note of hope with the launching at Cape Canaveral, Florida of the rocket that carried Alan B. Shepard, Jr., the first American to travel in space. Less than a month earlier, the Soviet Union had sent Yuri Gregarin to orbit the earth in a space capsule, so Americans were pleased that their manned space program could compete with the Soviets. Seven astronauts were chosen to be the first U.S. space travelers. They and the space program represented for Americans optimism about their future and faith in an ability to be first in the world in technology.

In January of 1961, John F. Kennedy, the first U.S. president to have been born in the 20th century, was inaugurated. He was the youngest man to have been elected to the presidency, and he symbolized a new generation of hopes and optimism. Kennedy was popular during his brief time in office partly because of his personality. He was charming and witty. His attractive wife, Jacqueline, and their children fascinated the American public. After serving less than three years as president, on November 22, 1963, while riding in an open car through downtown Dallas, Texas, he was shot. He died a short time later at a nearby hospital.

Discontent characterized the 60s. The War on Poverty, begun under Kennedy and continued under Lyndon Johnson, attempted to eliminate poverty from the lives of Americans who could not understand how a society that had such unprecedented prosperity could have 20 percent of its citizens, 35 million people, living in poverty. During this period African-Americans began a major revolt against racial oppression. The

feminist movement gained momentum, and rebellious youths alongside intellectuals criticized the nation for its impersonal and alienating quality of life. Many of these issues became the center of major social conflict.

In July of 1965, President Lyndon Johnson announced that American troops would be involved in fighting in Vietnam. The U.S. had gradually assumed the major responsibility for fighting a war that had technically begun many years earlier. Americans doubted the wisdom of such a commitment, and soon the doubts grew into an enormous antiwar movement.