

# Hard Edge Pop

## American Art from the Permanent Collection



In the late 1950's two distinct styles of art emerged in the United States, Pop Art and Hard-Edge Abstraction. This exhibit showcases works from the Albany Museum of Art's Permanent Collection that reflect these styles, their predecessors, successors and the points at which the two styles intersect and merge.

Pop Art is probably the better known of the two styles. Developing in the United States and Britain in the 1950's, Pop reflected the new age of consumerism that followed World War II. Pop artists used images from mass media and mass marketing including advertisements, movie stars, and comic books to explore the mundane and ordinary. Pop art was characterized by a detached and "cool" treatment of its subjects, never condemning or fully celebrating popular culture. Artists like

Andy Warhol used commercial art techniques like serigraphy or silk screen to create iconic images of ordinary objects like his Campbell Soup Cans as well as portraits of political leaders and celebrities like his portrait of Lillian Carter, the mother of Former-President Jimmy Carter, featured in this exhibit.

In 1959, art critic Jules Langster coined the term "Hard-Edge" to describe the work of artists who used crisply defined areas of un-interrupted color to create totally abstract compositions. These works focused on geometry and mathematical precision. Like Pop, they were also detached, eschewing any emotional or narrative content. Hard-Edge artists explored formal themes like color interaction and proportion. Ellsworth Kelly, an artist associated with Hard-Edge art, famously said, "My form is my content", meaning that the colors, shapes, and proportions in his work served as its subject matter.



Other artists of this period developed distinctive personal styles that mixed aspects of Pop and Hard-Edge art. Naoto Nakagawa's *Red Nails* is a mixture of the many currents flowing through the art world in the 1960's and 1970's. This painting mixes the precision and geometry of Hard-Edge Abstraction with a focus on ordinary and mundane subjects found in Pop Art. The playful abstraction and references to nature seen in the works of Jack Youngerman and Nicholas Krushenick, can be found in contemporary works by artists like Dale Chihuly. While these artists may not be direct influences on Chihuly, they reflect similar stylistic concerns that trace their way back through contemporary art to the Post War period.