



## Still Life with Goldfish

1974

Oil and Manga on canvas

80 × 60 inches (203.2 × 152.4 cm)

## Roy Lichtenstein

American, 1923–1997

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with the Edith H. Bell Fund, 1974-110-1  
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## Let's Look

- What's going on in this painting?
- What colors do you see? Why might the artist have chosen those colors?
- How would you describe the shapes and lines of this picture? Can you find patterns or connections between them?
- What parts of this painting seem flat and what parts seem three-dimensional? How did the artist create those effects?
- How does your eye move through the painting?

## Let's Look Again

- Compare this painting to works by Henri Matisse. How did Lichtenstein transform those earlier paintings?
- Based on what you see in the artwork, what do you think was important to the artist?

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## About the Artist

Roy Lichtenstein is best known for paintings of comic-strip-style subjects blown up to monumental size and styled to evoke the commercial printing process of the time. The stenciled circles that create color and shading in his paintings were exaggerated forms of the colored dots of ink used in printing, known as Ben-Day dots.

Lichtenstein was born in 1923 and grew up in New York City. He studied studio art as a teenager, and later learned about art history at Ohio State University, where he earned a master of fine arts. Those studies were interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. He was drafted into the army and spent three years in Europe putting his training to use drawing maps.

Lichtenstein experimented with a variety of painting styles, including Abstract Expressionism and Cubism, before he honed his signature style in the early 1960s. He found inspiration in other Pop artists he met, including Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine. The real breakthrough came from his five-year-old son David, who pointed at a picture of Mickey Mouse and told his father, "I bet you can't paint as good as that." That challenge set the course for the rest of Lichtenstein's career.

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## About the Artwork

Lichtenstein's *Still Life with Goldfish* isn't simply a painting of a goldfish bowl. It's a painting of a painting of a goldfish bowl. The starting point is the work of French painter Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Matisse had returned again and again to the theme of the goldfish bowl. Lichtenstein used elements from several of Matisse's images, combining them into a single interior scene. Matisse's 1914 [Interior with a Goldfish Bowl](#) shows a cityscape through a window. Lichtenstein probably encountered this painting in his collection of art books, but others he could have visited in person. The close-up view of the bowl, sitting on a rickety table with a piece of fruit, comes from [Goldfish and Palette](#), painted in the same room and in the same year, which now hangs in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Some of Matisse's figure drawings are also included in Lichtenstein's composition, as if decorating the walls of the room.

When asked why he created images based on another artist's work, Lichtenstein answered that it wasn't intended as a parody, clarifying that "I'm making a painting of my particular image of Matisse." Lichtenstein's painting is about his impression of Matisse's paintings, their bold colors, strong forms, and simple geometries. While the hand of the artist is clear in Matisse's work, it is concealed in Lichtenstein's. Taking his cues from new commercial techniques, Lichtenstein hardened his contour lines and applied his paint evenly to remove any evidence of his brushstrokes. He further reduced Matisse's palette to the primary colors plus black and white as though translating the picture into a rudimentary printed reproduction. The forms are processed to flat areas of color, and regular diagonal lines that signify form and shading. The view from the window, of Paris in Matisse's original, is filled in Lichtenstein's work with the blocky skyscrapers of New York City. Lichtenstein transformed Matisse's source material, adapting it to his own time and place, an American world of shiny advertising photography and industrial techniques. He framed the question, "What would a Matisse look like if created by a machine?"

## Compare and Connect

- Take a close look at these two paintings side by side. What do they have in common? How are they different?
- Goodes painted *Fishbowl Fantasy* in 1867 and Lichtenstein painted *Still Life with Goldfish* in 1974, over one hundred years later. Connect each work to a timeline of American history. What was happening around the time each artist was working? How are the events, innovations, or spirit of each era reflected in the artwork? What can comparing these artworks teach us about American history and culture?
- How would you compose a still life with a fishbowl? What would your choices say about you or the time you live in?

This teaching resource is based on the Museum's *Audubon to Warhol: The Art of American Still Life* teaching poster.

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