and located anything that looks Biedermeier in a bourgeois milieu.

The traditional view has recently come under damaging scrutiny. Dr Haidrun Zinnkann in a study of furniture produced in Mainz – an important centre of manufacture – has looked at cabinet-makers' order books, finding that it was the aristocracy who first commissioned pieces in Biedermeier style. Only around 1830 did the local Mainz middle classes, copying their 'social betters', approach manufacturers for such furniture.[2]

What of Biedermeier in Munich? Here, the Stadtmuseum collection is important because so many of its 300-odd Biedermeier pieces can be dated, and their history documented. To be more precise, the museum has fallen heir to a good deal of furniture from the residences of the former ruling house of Wittelsbach. Between 1806 and 1815 the Wittelsbachs commissioned large numbers of pieces in a style that can only be described as Biedermeier (Fig.76). This furniture was for everyday use, while grander rooms were decorated in *Empire* style. Thus in Munich Biedermeier appears a full decade before 'it should'. It was introduced by a court that also had a taste for French furnishings, and the work was not executed by craftsmen in the town but by the royal cabinet-maker, Daniel, and his sub-contractor. (The evidence presented to support this is so overwhelming as to be incontestable.) Moreover, enough is known about Munich in this period to be able to say how Biedermeier spilled over from the ruling house into the homes of a surrounding circle of high public officials and the upper-middle classes, to acquire later a still wider following.

The Mainz-Munich pattern in the spread of the Biedermeier style – courts and aristocracy setting the trend – would seem generally to have been the case. In Vienna, the court had Biedermeier furniture as early as 1800. It may also be said that the great centres of Biedermeier were not the free cities ruled by the *Bürgertum* but those with a royal residence, such as Vienna, Berlin and Munich. All of which makes admirable sense when viewed in a more general context. The Bavarian capital, like the Prussian and Austrian, belonged to a conservative kingdom, ruled by a stern bureaucracy that gave the middle classes and, even more, the craftsmen – including the cabinet-makers – a very hard time of it.[3] That these layers of society were living in quiet confidence and giving free expression to their own taste, is a fiction invented by those who wished to see in Biedermeier a German national style.

In truth, Biedermeier can no longer be regarded as peculiarly German. The Wittelsbach court which brought the style to Bavaria, for instance, was deeply influenced by the 'modesty' of the Enlightenment, and in the throes of anglomania. Its preference for simple furniture – although by no means an exclusive preference – was part and parcel of all this. And, in European terms, Munich was provincial. Prints showing Hepplewhite and Sheraton – and French furniture in the English manner – as well as reports of diplomats and travellers reached Munich, but they took time to do so. Of course, styles were adapted to meet local requirements, although less on aesthetic grounds than for reasons of cost and the difficulty of importing exotic woods. The extensive use of deal and cherrywood, as well as the types of veneer, are best explained in terms of what local cabinet-makers had to hand.

76. Biedermeier chair, c.1806-15. Height 92/46 cm, breadth 46.5/44.5 cm. (Exh. Stadtmuseum, Munich).

Besides showing Biedermeier furniture in reconstructed period rooms, the exhibition seeks to bring two general themes before the public. Firstly, 1815-48 was not an idyllic or even especially contented period in the history of the city. Secondly, Biedermeier was far from being the only style in favour; in these years Munich also saw *Empire*, neo-classical, mock-gothic, neo-baroque and various hybrids thereof, including after c.1835 baroque-influenced Biedermeier. There was a similar variety in schools of art.

The term Biedermeier has become a synonym for conventionality. Amongst the portraits on show – some of which do indeed depict early-Victorian domestic harmony – there is one by Kaulbach of Lola Montez that points up the paradoxes involved. Her name and protestations of respectability notwithstanding, Lola was Irish and won great notoriety as King Ludwig I's mistress. Not all the many strands of the Biedermeier period in the Bavarian capital were expressions of bourgeois piety.

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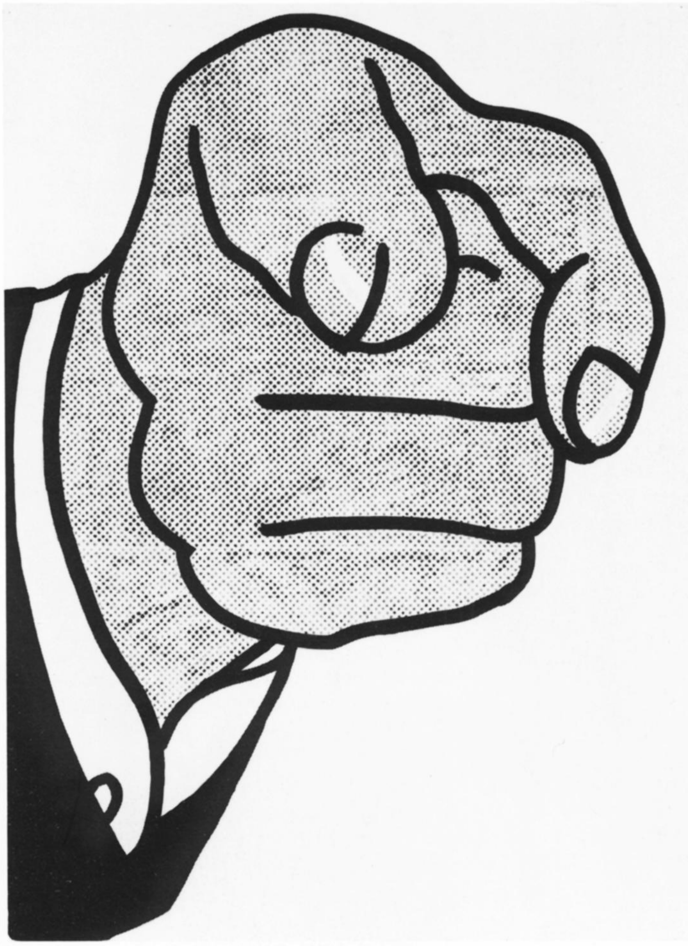
[1] *Biedermeiers Glück und Ende . . . die gestörte Idylle 1815-1848* (Munich, 1987), edited by Hans Ottomeyer.

[2] H. ZINNKANN: *Mainzer Möbelschreiner der ersten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985). See also OTTOMEYER: 'Von Stilen und Ständen der Biedermeierzeit', in *Biedermeiers Glück und Ende*, cited above. The present writer was shown this volume when it was still in proof, and is, therefore, unable to provide page references.

[3] C. MOLL: 'Zwischen Handwerk und Unternehmertum – Das Leben Johann Georg Hiltl (1771-1845) Tapazierer, Möbelhändler und Möbelfabrikant,' in *Biedermeiers Glück und Ende*, cited above.

New York, Museum of Modern Art
Roy Lichtenstein's drawings

For the first time in its history, the **Museum of Modern Art** has mounted an exhibition of drawings by a living artist (15th March to 2nd June). Only Picasso and Matisse have had their works in this medium featured before, and then posthumously. Therefore, Roy Lichtenstein's drawings must be extraordinary, or so we are led to expect. And yet in her initial paragraph-long analysis of the artist's 1961 drawing of an airplane – a pivotal work created when he was thirty-eight years old and had been exhibiting in galleries for a decade – curator Bernice Rose uses the adjective 'awkward' four times to describe Lichtenstein's lines and the word 'dumb' twice about the composition.[1] These are certainly not adjectives one might apply to the drawings of Picasso or Matisse, masters of the art of making beautiful lines, as Ingres, according to Degas, defined drawing.



77. *Finger pointing*, by Roy Lichtenstein. 1961. Ink on paper, 76.2 by 57.2 cm. (Kiki Kogelnik collection; exh. Museum of Modern Art, New York).

Rose describes Lichtenstein's drawing style as crude, amateurish and unsophisticated – words that indeed spring to the mind again and again as one studies over 300 images included in this exhibition. A number of the smaller, earlier drawings are exhibited on canted viewing tables covered with beige fabric in the way old master drawings are displayed in the Fitzwilliam Museum. But Lichtenstein's works are completely unconcerned with the properties and aesthetic satisfactions of drawing as it has always been. What then is their value? Why is he being honoured with this major exhibition? The curator is quick to tell us. It is because of the artist's rejection of the 'principles of composition and technique' and, in fact, of 'the whole tradition and culture of 'fine' drawing'. Thus she makes the trite assumption that an artist's rejection of tradition automatically guarantees his or her greatness. But in this case, does it? I think not.

Lichtenstein learned this anti-traditional manner of drawing after service in the army during World War II when he studied with Hoyt Sherman at Ohio State University. Sherman's method was to flash various images onto a screen which the student was then trained to draw from memory. Starting with simple shapes and working up to complex forms, the student was manually trained to convert visual elements into visualised concepts. Apparently it was a very effective system since it eliminated associations, emotions, and any old-fashioned ideas about modulation, nuance or grace, thereby providing a perfect grounding for Lichtenstein's cold, depersonalised mature style. Sherman was an engineering draughtsman and encouraged Lichtenstein to study that technique as well, which the younger man did, making his living at mechanical drawing until 1957 while continuing to paint on the side.

Originally Lichtenstein's 'fine' art was painted in a loosely representational cubist style, but during the fifties he gradually adopted the prevailing expressionist mode of paint handling. Given the evident difficulties he has with subjective, personal expression – as can be seen in the rare instances of 'doodle' drawing in the exhibition and in the flaccid clumsiness of his recent, loosely-painted *Brushstroke* pictures – it is clear that he made the right decision in 1961 to 'appropriate' other artists' imagery through which to express himself. His reactions to the violence and horror of war were expressed in cartoon stereotypes derived from action comics, and, apparently, his intimate emotions concerning the break up of his marriage and family were formalised into frozen-frame images based on love comics (Fig.77). That his feelings, and by extension, all human feeling are trivialised by such hackneyed, low-art presentation does not seem to be of much concern to him. When he reverses himself in the later sixties to debase high art by depicting it with the techniques of low art, the result is the same. One can only try to decide which is diminished more, art or humanism.

Throughout the exhibition, one is aware of the hard and the mechanical. Each drawing serves a purpose; it will be mechanically enlarged into a painting. Then too, a large number of his images are concerned with design – interior decoration from curtains to mirrors and dishes, architectural moldings and railings, and Art Deco patterns and posters. In fact, the conjunction of his temperament and technique finds its perfect subject in the *Entablatures*, the most mechanical images of all. Here the 'dumb' lifeless lines are appropriate to the inert, *beaux-arts* content.

Interestingly, Fernand Léger (with whom Lichtenstein obviously feels some kinship since the independent cubist is the most frequent source of his borrowings), manages to evoke the marvels of the mechanical age and yet maintain, in his drawings, the full range of the medium's aesthetic for giving pleasure. Léger's drawn structures are firm to the point of toughness, yet his pencil leaves a silver screen of dust on the paper as though it were blown there. Léger's finely-tuned compositions are rife with subtleties, and so are the ways in which he individualises the separate units that comprise his precisely-fitted structures.

By comparison Lichtenstein is merely a competent post-cubist composer whose work would seem quite dull if it were not for the jazzy images he has appropriated from a wide range of twentieth-century sources in both high and low art. His facture is non-existent, his colour boringly predictable, the transformation of his means into aesthetically satisfying substances nil. De Kooning's pencil leaves a residue of quicksilver; Johns's the velvety nap of graphite, but Lichtenstein's pencil simply deposits lead on the paper. Although the catalogue reproductions hype-up the colour (as such reproductions are wont to do), one remains aware of its overall sameness. Even in the complicated multiple-source pictures of the late seventies and the eighties where swiss-cheese biomorphism converts figure and wall, landscape and door into perforated planes, the pictures don't really come to life. They are neither frighteningly surreal nor patently humorous. In fact genuine humour is as lacking in his work as passion. Perhaps both are too revealing. As Bernice Rose points out, his style of drawing is concerned with containment, not gesture, and a mechanical or depicted gesture is not a genuine gesture but a parody of one. Parody, of course, is the insincerest form of flattery. If you can't speak in your own voice, however, it provides a useful, and at least mildly amusing substitute. From his imitation comics, through all the years of coyly 'duplicating' his twentieth-century superiors in the fine and applied arts, to his recent collaged re-caps of these re-presentations, Lichtenstein consistently accomplished one thing – he has kept himself out of the picture. You can see him only in the negative.

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[1] *The Drawings of Roy Lichtenstein.* Text by Bernice Rose. 200 pp. + 86 col. pls. + 79 b. & w. ills. (Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1987), $37.50 HB; $17.95 PB. ISBN 0-8019-0849-2.