

Brushstrokes

The sculpture *Brushstrokes* has been on public exhibition at Brown University since 2003. It is made in 1996 and it is one of the several Roy Lichtenstein's three-dimensional artworks, representing brushstrokes. The 30-foot work is made from painted and fabricated aluminum and has comics style, typical for the artist's paintings. The sculpture is remarkable and unusual with its shape and idea of turning something two-dimensional into a huge three-dimensional artwork.



The most impressive thing about the sculpture is its form. It is obvious that the artist was more interested in issues of form than in allusions to stories. But the question: “What do brushstrokes signify?” is still of interest in the field of semiotics. The only signifier in this piece of art is the brushstrokes and the signified is open to interpretations: it can be artistic spirit, creativity, freedom, flight of mind, boldness.

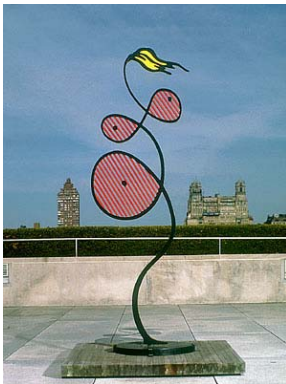
The suggestion of freedom and spirit is achieved mainly by the aesthetic composition of regular and irregular forms which imply incompleteness and openness to the space. The shapes are dynamic and suggest development and movement of the hand. Different components of the sculpture are almost parallel to each other which make the work look symmetric and aesthetic. On the other hand contrast is achieved by the opposition of elements and by the bright colors, which give the comics look of the sculpture. The choice of colors isn't casual: the lower oval stroke is green, which evokes associations of the connection with earth and nature, and the upper yellow stroke resembling a bird, suggests freedom and heaven. The perfect shape of the components is emphasized by the skillful use of negative space. The proximity symbolizes nature harmony and perfection.

From a particular point of view the sculpture looks completely two-dimensional like a spot of paint on a white canvas. In general we perceive three-dimensional objects thanks to our stereo vision and because our eye-brain system is so powerful. This allows an artist to create a 3D brushstroke. What give us a feeling of depth of the view, are the shadows, projection and texture gradient, as well as the vertical composition of the work. Another thing that prevents us from seeing the sculpture as 2D are the round colored specks, used also in commercial

photo-engraving to create the illusion of volume on a two-dimensional surface.

The well-defined forms and the graphic overall look of the sculpture give the work a modern look and a suggestion of computer art. The brushstrokes seem computer generated on some raster or vector software, rather than made by a human hand. The work can be easily modeled on a 3D graphics program as first decomposed on separate primitive shapes. It is an example of the increasing use of computers in modern art, not only in painting and graphics design, but also in the process of creating three-dimensional artwork.

Roy Lichtenstein introduces a brushstroke as an image, reducing it to cartoon which functions both as technique and subject matter. He uses this approach in many of his paintings and sculptures. Other unique three-dimensional artworks of this kind that the artist creates are: Galatea, Brushstroke Nude, Endless Drip, House, etc.



Galatea



Brushstroke Nude



Endless Drip



House