



# Roy Lichtenstein: American Indian Encounters

*Gail Stavitsky*

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## **Roy Lichtenstein: American Indian Encounters** Gail Stavitsky

One of America's leading Pop artists, Roy Lichtenstein was master of stereotype. Bringing sophisticated analyses to artistic conventions, he had a distinct flair for using irony to exploit existing styles. Today, his name is typically associated with whimsical renderings of comic strips and paintings marked by their bold colors, prominent black lines and patterns of Ben Day dots. Beyond his fascination for icons of popular culture, however, Lichtenstein had a little-known but deep appreciation for the objects and images of American Indian culture. This book explores in depth and fully illustrates a virtually unknown collection of his paintings and works on paper that were influenced by his encounters with Native American subjects. Lichtenstein's cubist abstractions from the early 1950s reflect his interest in European art specifically the work of artists such as Pablo Picasso, Joan Miro, and Paul Klee. The Native American subjects of these works also suggest the artist's interest in nineteenth-century sources such as Catlin, the Swiss painter Karl Bodmer, the German artist Charles Wimar, and the American John Vanderlyn. Lichtenstein himself characterized the paintings from this period as "born of those artists concerned with the opening of the West...with the subject matter of American Indians, treaty signings - a sort of Western official art in a style broadly influenced by modern Europe painting." The themes and compositions of these often-ignored early works are revisited in his 1979 "Amerindian" paintings and related drawings and prints. His paintings from this period were primarily inspired by his extensive collection of catalogs of Native American design motifs. He also attended powwows at the nearby Shinnecock Indian reservation in Southhampton, Long Island. For Lichtenstein, Native American art provided a historical base for American art, mirroring African art's relationship to early European modernism. This catalog, including forty color plates, is the first to examine the compelling details of this foundation.

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