



Susan Inglett Gallery is pleased to present *THE BOYS CLUB*, an exhibition curated by Cortney Connolly. The exhibition will run from 5 December 2024 through 25 January 2025, and will be closed for the holiday break 21 December 2024 reopening 2 January 2025. Please join us for a reception held in conjunction with the launch of *On The Rag's* second edition on 12 December 2024 from 6 to 8 PM.

Nearly seventy years ago, Whitechapel Gallery staged *This is Tomorrow*, a seminal exhibition featuring practitioners of Lawrence Alloway's "fine art/popular culture continuum," better known as the Independent Group. Grappling with post-war industrialism, this continuum reflected a new standardization of culture one that was disseminated through mass media and realized through commerce.

When soldiers returned home and the baby boom commenced, a culture of consumption was ignited. Driven by post-war optimism, traditionally upper-class products and appliances were marketed as essential commodities. The right home, car, and dishwasher could make identity and personal satisfaction easy to secure. Such commodification of the consumer, as noted by William Leach, established a new measure of individual value:

"The cardinal features of this culture were acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire; and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society."¹

Shifting towards accessibility and direct engagement, Culture transitioned from the life of the mind as practiced in the salons of the elite and privileged to a mass-produced array of films, print media (specifically comics), radio, and music. These mediums, bolstered by the rise of in-home radios and televisions, became industries—creating a clear contrast to the consumer model of high art. In response, Alloway argued that art should depart from pre-war elitist ideals of high thought and art, promoting a more accessible and directly engaged commentary on culture.

"... Mass production techniques, applied to accurately repeatable words, pictures, and music, have resulted in an expendable multitude of signs and symbols. To approach this exploding field with Renaissance based ideas of the uniqueness of art is crippling. Acceptance of mass media entails a shift in our notion of what culture is. Instead of reserving the word for the highest artifacts and the noblest of thoughts of history's top ten, it needs to be used more widely as the description of what society does."²

Thus, the Independent Group constructed the framework of Pop Art as we know it. As a methodology, Pop Art communicates, reflects, and subverts cultural values through its preexisting signs and symbols driven by mass media. In the words of Richard Hamilton, a founding member of the British boys club, Pop Art is "Popular (designed for a mass audience), Transient (short-term solution), Expendable (easily forgotten), Low cost, Mass-produced, Young (aimed at youth), Witty, Sexy, Gimmicky, Glamorous, Big business."

¹ Leach, William R. *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1993

² Alloway, Lawrence. "The Long Front of Culture," 1959, p 1.

Since the baby boom, advertisers have sought opportunities to address the needs and desires of individuals. Traditionally, post-war capital-driven machines have titillated and exploited the masses by promoting archetypal representations of sex, drugs, fame, and wealth. Their reach has evolved far beyond the home TV and radio, advancing exponentially into surveilled mobile devices, making the propelled archetypes hyper stimulating and inescapable.

As we sink deeper into the Information Age, the noise of headlines, bold print, and imagery has led to an exhaustion of mass media. Generation Z has become a catalyst for a mass withdrawal from the mainstream, co-opting strategies from fiercely gatekept subcultures and niche networks. Nostalgia-obsessed, Generation Z increasingly appropriates punk, indie-sleaze, and Y2K aesthetics (among others), resulting in a surface-level performance of identity. In an attempt to withdraw from consumerist goods and validation, Generation Z's shift toward socialization and identity has created a new playground for mass marketing.

Social media is used by nearly 70% of the population. Platforms like TikTok and Instagram collect user interactions to organize a personalized experience and successfully deploy niche marketing. In this era of data mining, Generation Z interests have organized the direction of mass media's expansion.

Technology and commerce have evolved into nanny-cam-esque marketing machines. Yet, such transplantation requires great tact. Forbes noted in a recent guide to effective marketing to Gen Z,

"Gen-Z is well-known for holding deep convictions and high ethical standards, and gaining their trust is essential. If Gen-Zers pick up on the fact that a business has developed messaging, branding and creative specifically tailored to reach their demographic, the strategy may backfire."³

Carefully adapting their campaigns to mimic the younger generation's attitude, mass media performs as one of *them*. Think Brat Summer to Kamala Harris, Gossip Girl's reboot, and Nutter Butter's TikTok, to name a few.

The allure of being an "individual" has become a consumable product, organizing and progressing the consumerist positive feedback loop. To disrupt this cycle, one must first recognize how body and individual expression are sold back to its performer.

As an inquiry of intervention and act of reclamation, *THE BOYS CLUB* brings together artists of various generations and disciplines who use the methodologies of Pop Art to interrogate the power systems bolstered by mass communication. Featuring the works by demographics not originally included in the Independent Group (queer and femme) the exhibition showcases objects of extortion; body, sexuality, and identity through the perspectives of Nina Hartmann, Troy Montes Michie, Marilyn Minter, Natalie Ochoa, Erica Rutherford, Beverly Semmes, and Susan Weil.

- Cortney Connolly

The exhibition will be on view at the gallery located at 522 West 24 Street, Tuesday to Saturday 10 AM to 6 PM. For additional information please contact Susan Inglett Gallery at 212 647 9111 or info@inglettgallery.com.

Join the conversation on Instagram (@SusanInglettGallery) Facebook (Susan Inglett Gallery) and Twitter (@inglettgallery), and via the hashtags #SusanInglettGallery and #THEBOYSCLUB

³ Expert Panel. "Council Post: How to Appeal to Gen-Z without Obviously "Marketing to Gen-Z."" *Forbes*, 12 Aug. 2024, www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2022/08/24/how-to-appeal-to-gen-z-without-obviously-marketing-to-gen-z/.