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# Rose revels in treasures of the '60s

Exhibit ranges from Pop  
artists to Neo-Dadaists

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WALTHAM – Brandeis University opened its doors in 1961, a moment of transition in the history of art. The Abstract Expressionists had

## **Art Review**

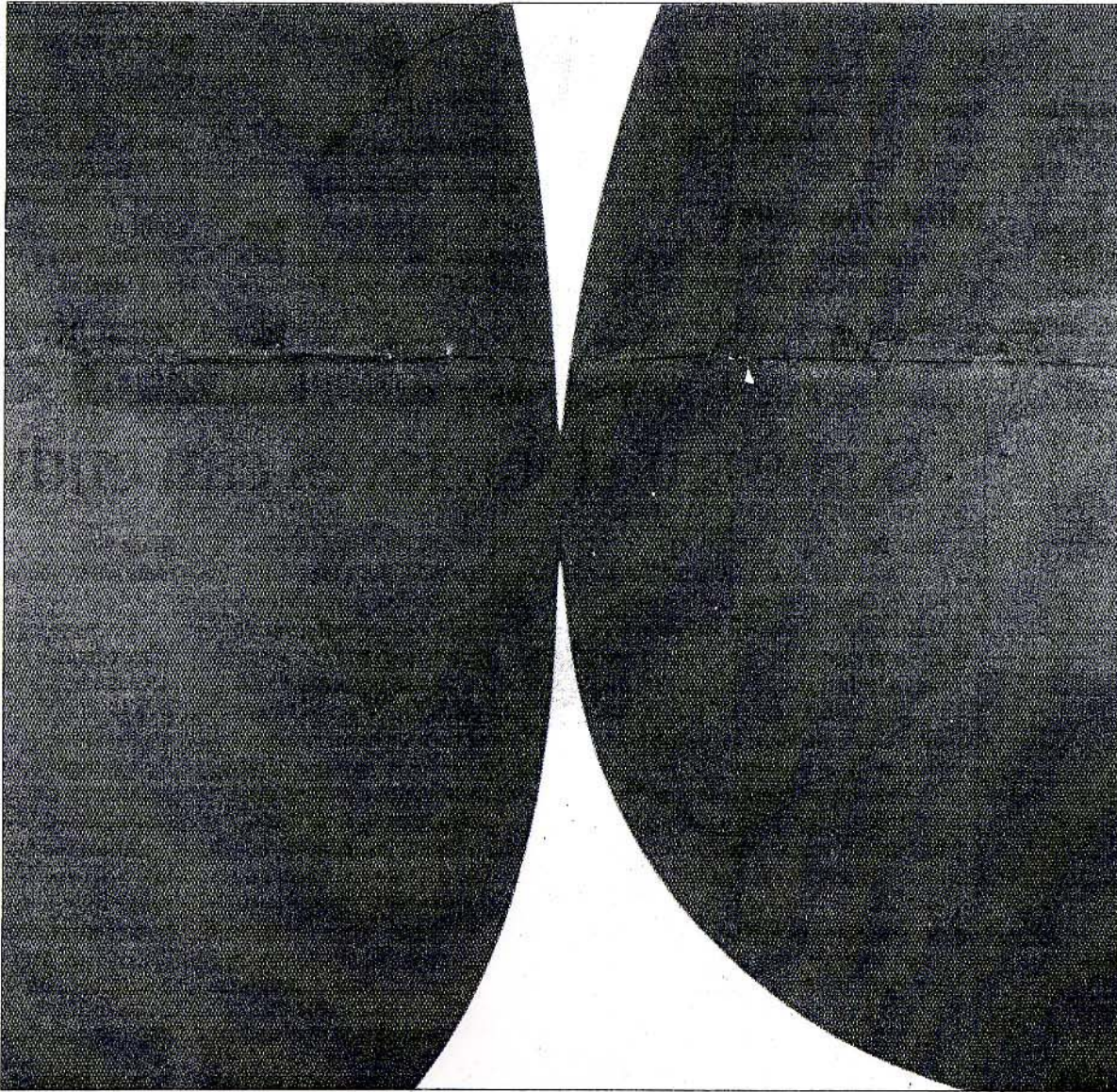
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had their say over the previous 15 years, splattering and emoting their magnificent talent (and their magnificent egos) over canvases that changed the way we defined art.

What next? In 1962, Sam Hunter took the helm of the Rose Art Museum and with \$50,000 began to build a collection. Hunter didn't look back. His purchases were pinned to the moment, both courageous and prescient. "The Alchemies of the Sixties," co-curated by current Rose director Joseph Ketner and Nancy Tienken, formerly of the Denver Art Museum, uses

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**Ellsworth Kelly's Minimalist painting "Blue White" (1962) is curvaceous and alluring.**



the work Hunter acquired to explore the '60s gestalt in the art world. The show strives to answer the question: After Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, what followed?

The answer seems to be a fascination with the everyday and a return to form. From Pop artists such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein to Neo-Dadaists like Jim Dine, Robert Rauschenberg, and Jasper Johns, the '60s demonstrated a trend away from the mythic soul of the artist played out by Abstract Expressionists toward the power of ordinary life. Those who didn't retreat into the banal settled into a more stringent formalism, which Pollock and de Kooning would have shrugged off.

The handsomely assembled show groups pieces from the Rose's collection according to such themes, and encourages conversation among the varied works of art. Gene Davis's "Moondog" (1965), a vast Color Field painting pulsating in vivid vertical stripes, grabs attention on the main floor. If you stand on the stairway, you can see the painting beneath it on the floor below: Ellsworth Kelly's Minimalist "Blue White" (1962). Both are made of clean, pure color and shape, but Kelly's is curvaceous and alluring while Davis's more linear painting asserts itself on the viewer like a hard rainstorm.

The curators create other pleasing segues from one movement to the next. Around the corner from Color Field, you'll find Pop artists, such as Lichtenstein, utilizing garish colors similar to Davis. Pop, of course, doesn't only revere the ordinary and the kitschy but capitalizes on it. Warhol's "Saturday Disaster" (1964), a painted silkscreen of a car wreck, presages the media culture, graphically transforming the horrific into the glamorous.

Across the gallery, the Neo-Dadaists show a different take on ordinary life. Jasper Johns's 1957 "Drawer," an encaustic assemblage, is simply a construction of a closed gray bureau drawer, flat and spackled roughly with waxen paint. Rauschenberg's "Second Time Painting" (1961) is gestural and drippy with shrouds of colored paint, chopping the picture plane into sections. It also features torn swatches from a pair of work pants, a T-shirt, and an athletic bag. An upside-down clock projects from the top of the canvas. Both Johns and Rauschenberg elevate the shreds and details of life into high art.

Downstairs, the Minimalists like Kelly break up and cool off a confrontation between conceptual artists and figurists. Yayoi Kusama's "Blue Coat" (1967), however, is a conceptual figure. She hangs a dress

THE ALCHEMIES OF THE SIXTIES  
BRUCE PEARSON: A NEW VISUAL  
LANGUAGE

At: Rose Art Museum, Brandeis  
University, 415 South St., Waltham,  
through Oct. 17

with soft, blue fabric protuberances. "Blue Coat" braces the posturing a good wardrobe allows against the mute assertion of desire.

Philip Guston's untitled 1969 painting of two pink, bald heads, presented from the rear, has a typically rough, comedic quality to it while romancing with form. Emilio Cruz's 1968 "Beethoven Machine," a reference to the novel "A Clockwork Orange," shows a Cubist joker in a bowler hat with broad pink swells that hint at particular body parts arcing away from him. The painting is full of slyness and foreboding amid the crazy geometric carnival of shapes.

"Alchemies of the Sixties" is a strong show, a testament to the directions art took after the explosion of Abstract Expressionism died down. Its strength is in no small thanks to the visionary collecting of Sam Hunter.

Also at the Rose, in a neat companion exhibition, contemporary art-

ist Bruce Pearson shows work that harkens back to the '60s in its psychedelic colors and patterns, and artificial materials, but very much addresses issues of the '90s.

Pearson carves wild patterns from styrofoam. He bases the patterns on text, which he carves into the positive space and shapes into the negative space of his picture plane. Then he applies color. The result is visually ravishing; it isn't until closer examination that you discover you're taking in words and images along with the eye-popping colors or patterns.

"Violence, Profanity, Supernatural Strangeness and Graphically Rendered Sexual Situations" was a warning published in a film review. Pearson melds those words into wormy, squiggling shapes that lose their readability yet somehow render their meaning in a painting with that title. "Step 1" and "Step 2" look like magnetic resonance images of the human brain; the text embedded in these mandalas was taken from preachy affirmations Pearson heard on the "Oprah" show.

Ultimately, these are seductive works of art that subtly critique popular culture. They slow you down with their enigmatic beauty, then grab you with their ironic sensibility.

