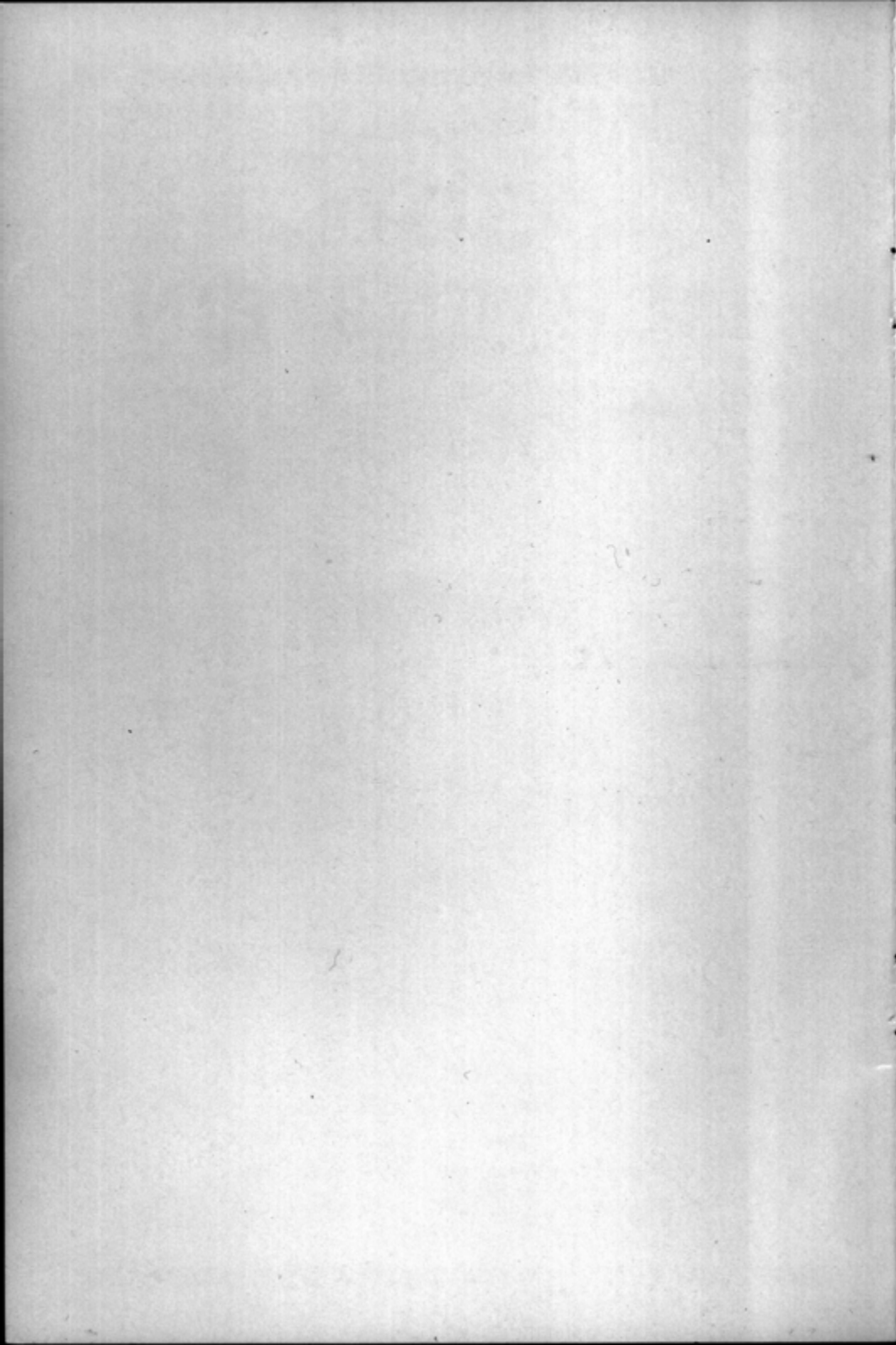

**ROY
LICHTENSTEIN**

**Mirrors
and
Entablatures**

**Art Gallery
Fine Arts Center
State University of New York at Stony Brook**



Mirrors and Entablatures

Art Gallery
Fine Arts Center
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Long Island, New York 11794

October 25—December 14, 1979

This exhibition is a contribution of the Art Department to the inauguration of the Fine Arts Center at Stony Brook. This first opportunity to see Roy Lichtenstein's mirrors and entablatures in depth has been made possible by the generosity of the artist: all the works are from his own collection. Thanks are due to Leo Castelli for his cooperation.

L.A.



Mirror #2, 1970
24" diameter

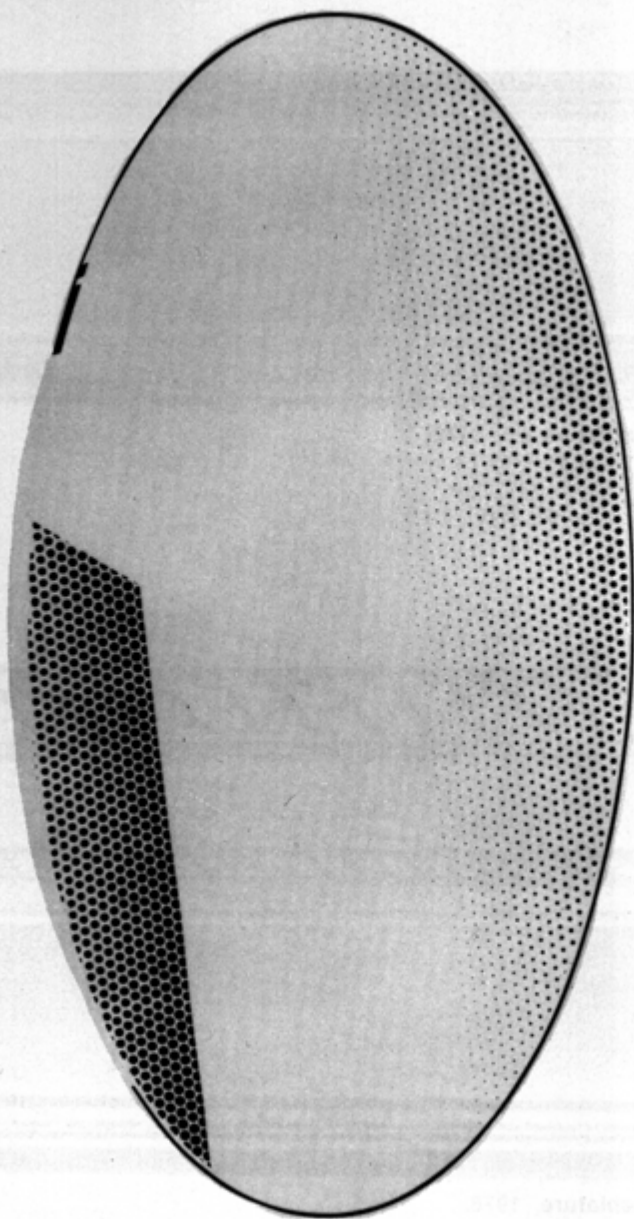
INTRODUCTION

Roy Lichtenstein's art alternates between poles of intricacy and austerity, between subdivided and holistic form. The images of mirrors and entablatures painted between 1970 and 1976 are of the second type. Prior to these works he had taken his modern paintings, so-called because of their base in Art Deco ornament, to a high point of geometric elaboration. The mirrors and entablatures share with the modern paintings a basic reference to architecture, but are formally very different, with a unified rather than a compartmented imagery.

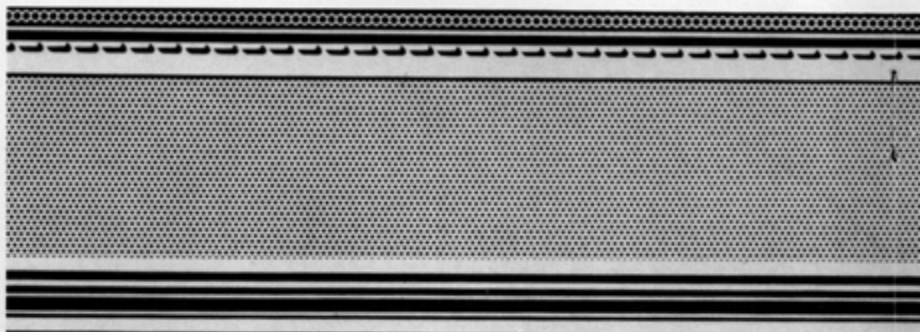
The holistic mode appears first in his studies of artifacts in isolation, ranging from an *Electric Cord*, 1961, to a razor blade, *Duridium*, 1964, all centrally placed, enlarged, and defined by imperturbable black outlines. This is less a form of still life painting, taking the term to refer to relationships among a plurality of objects, than of object painting. Incidentally the simplified objects were paralleled and then succeeded by the diversified, contrasting, and hierarchic forms of the comic strip paintings, another example of Lichtenstein's fluctuating sense of form.

George Maciunas coined the word monomorphic for single event art and it is appropriate here. Other examples of the study of enlarged daily objects, enigmatic in their presence but not dreamlike, are Richard Artschwager's closed monolithic furniture of 1962 and later, and Claes Oldenburg's giant neatly-crafted wall switches and electric plugs of 1963-64, as well as Joe Goode's staircases of 1970. Lichtenstein's early single image paintings therefore can be related both to the contemporaneous interest of other artists in the environment of artifacts as well as to the later period of his work that is the subject of this exhibition.

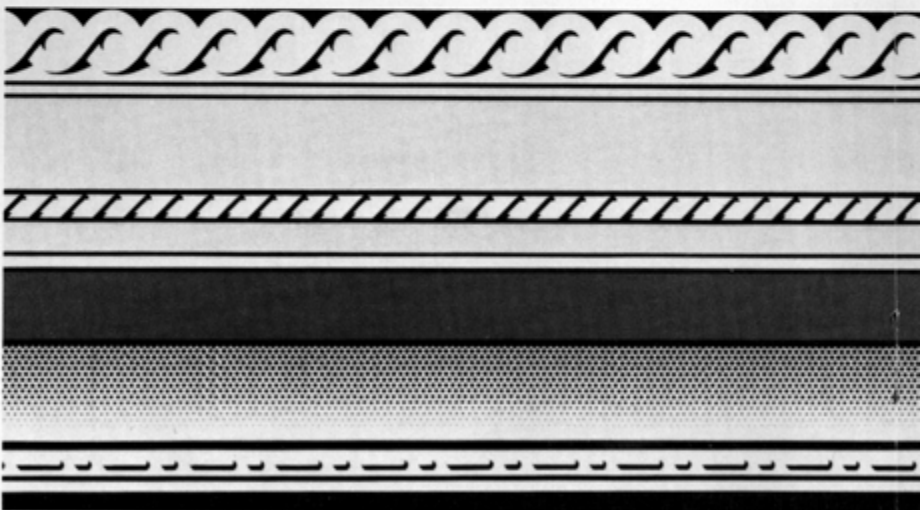
Mirrors have an iconographical history in art; they have been used moralistically to symbolize vanity and, extended into landscape, as the pool into which Narcissus gazed. They were used as a device to aid painting in its rivalry with sculpture, showing aspects of the head or body not visible directly from the artist's viewpoint. Lichtenstein dismisses these iconographical options by identifying the whole surface of the canvas, oval or round, single or multi-paneled, with the forms of mirrors. Thus his subject is the unpaintable aspect of mirrors, the play of reflections. The perceptual variations of light in mirrors are arrested at a single state.



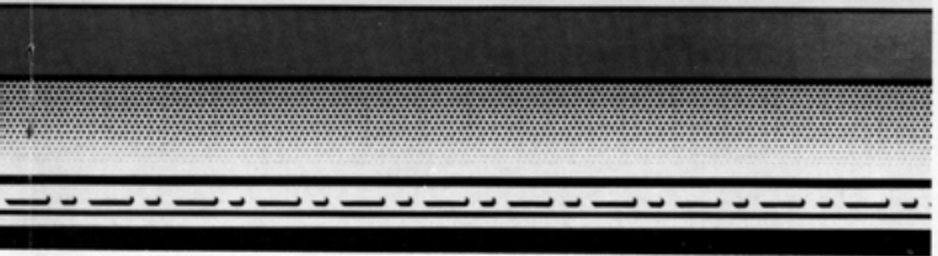
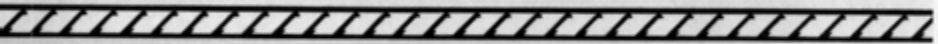
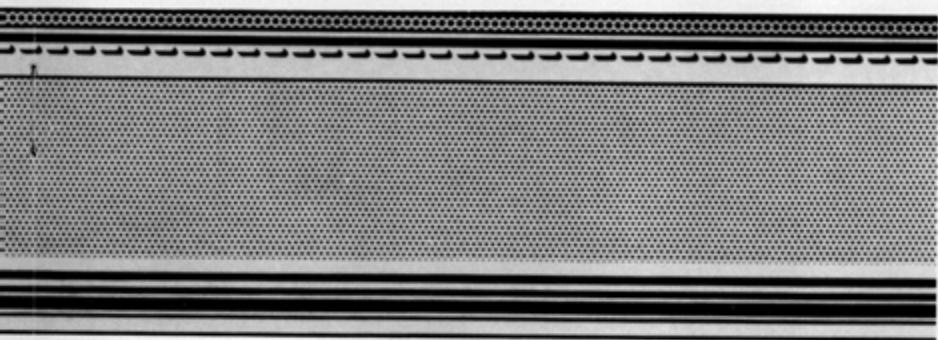
Mirror (Oval) #1, 1970
70" x 36"



Entablature #9, 1972
30" x 144"



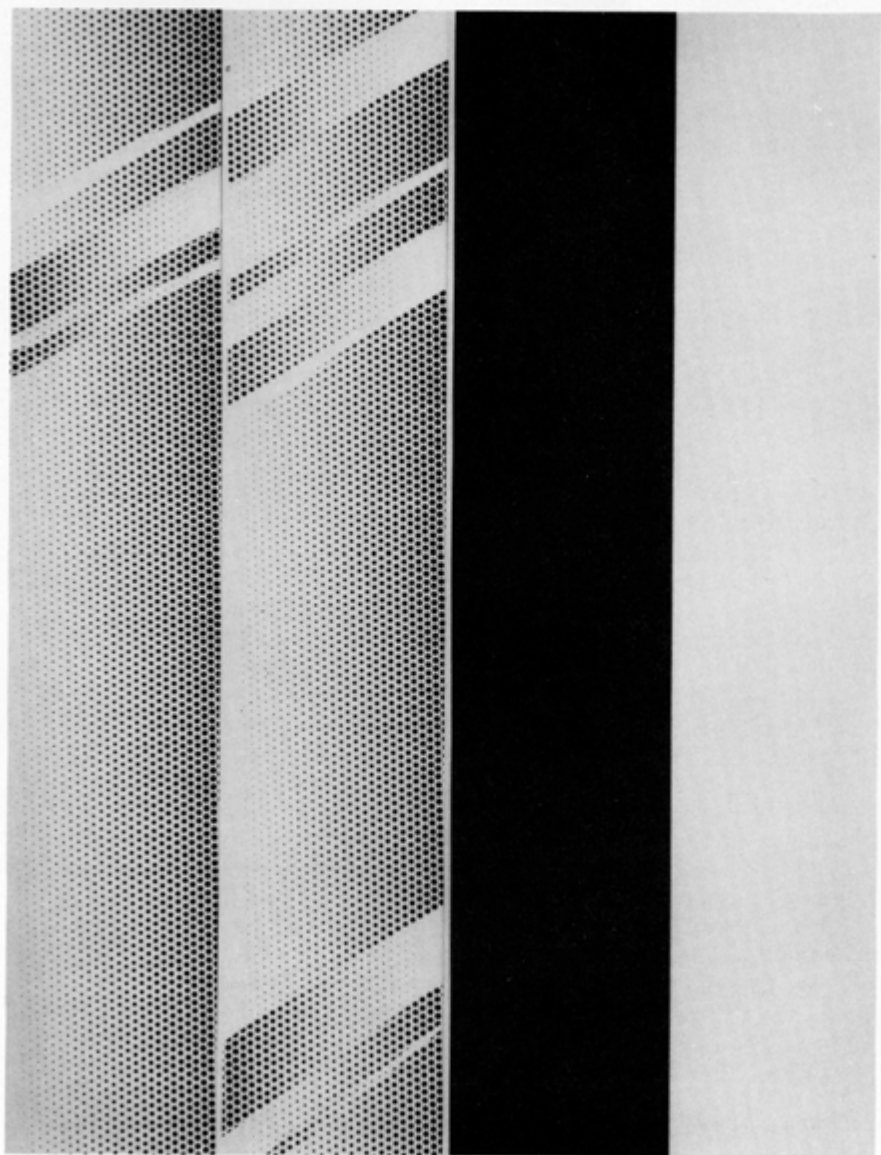
Entablature, 1976
54" x 192"



The conventions of comic strip and newspaper advertisement representation for mirrors are employed by Lichtenstein as much for their artificiality as for their likenesses to visual phenomena. There are screens of dots to indicate the smoothness of glass, parallel hatching to imply reflections, and little jumps at the outer edges to denote beveled edges. Lichtenstein has expanded these conventions into a brilliant game of references. These studies of highlights on a matt surface, sheer tonal gradients and blips of color, immobilize the fleeting as decisively as his earlier paintings of explosions. The mirrors are presented frontally, head-on, so that we are aware of the absence of our reflections from them even as we recognize conceptually the objects that confront us.

Of all our artifacts the Greek Temple is the most commonly accepted symbol of order, taking the word to mean the harmonious relationship of the rational body and the receptive environment. Lichtenstein first painted classical architecture in *The Temple of Apollo*, 1964; incidentally, with an encyclopaedic tourist impulse, he has also painted Egyptian and Gothic monuments, in *The Greek Pyramids*, 1969, and *Rouen Cathedral*, 1969-70. In the entablatures Lichtenstein takes an unprecedented subject, the section of a classical temple above the columns, that consists of, from upper to lower, cornice, frieze, and architrave. The cornice is the projecting top section, the frieze is the middle zone, and the architrave is the line of blocks immediately supported by the columns. Many of Lichtenstein's paintings are long and thin, which is a physical analogue of the original architecture; there is a wry scenic aspect as the painted canvases stretch out horizontally.

There is an intervening stage between Lichtenstein's paintings and their classical origin: elements of the entablature have of course provided decorative motifs for centuries of European and American architecture, including mixed and perfunctory derivations. For instance, Roger Fry, in a railroad waiting room, noted on the wall "a moulding but an inch wide, and yet creeping throughout its whole width a degenerate descendent of a Graeco-Roman carved guilloche pattern: this has evidently been cut out of the wood by machine..." There is no guilloche, an ornamental band of interlaced curves, among Lichtenstein's entablatures, but it is close enough to the dentils and key patterns that he does depict. Fry's sense is



Mirror #1, 1971
4 panels, 96" x 72"

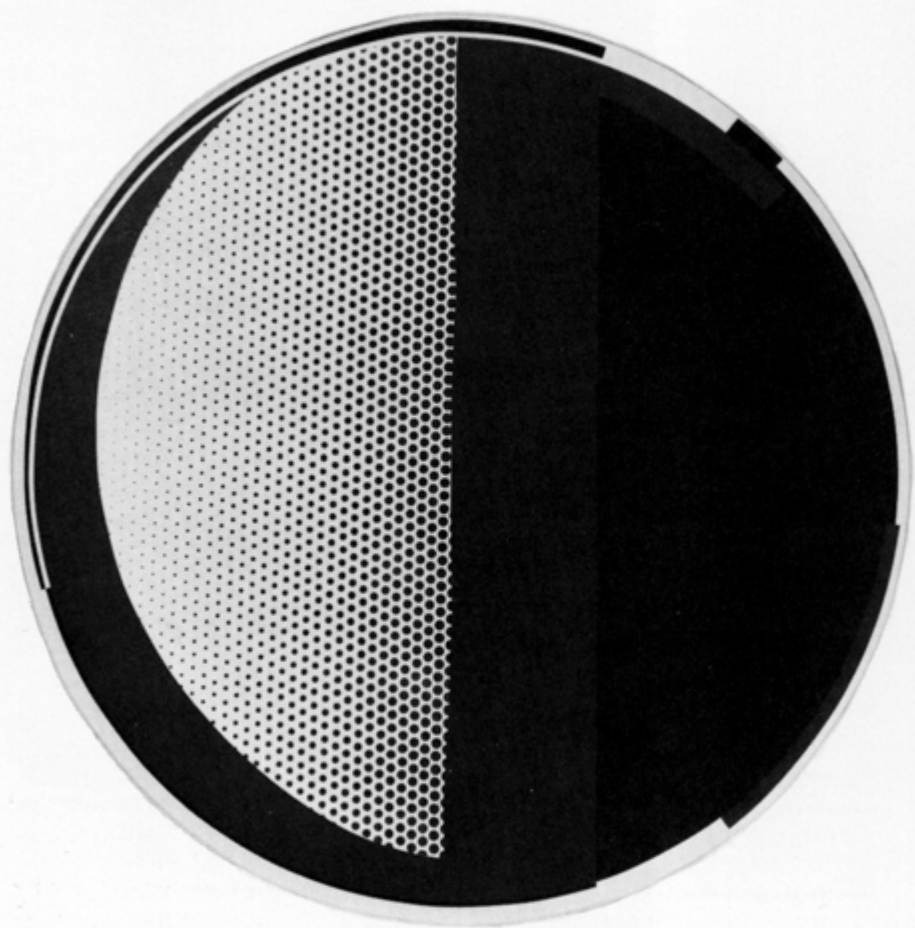
that great ornament is degraded by repetition and machine production; Lichtenstein to the contrary starts with these as facts and builds his art to include them. Thus his entablatures, like the preceding modern paintings, rest on an awareness of decoration as a cultural fact, not merely on the quotation of specific models.

Lichtenstein's classicism is diagrammatic, as he simulates mechanical repetition, which is anti-classical. If classicism is taken, as it usually is in art, as an optimum point of fullness and balance, schemata are antithetical to it. A diagram represents the condensation of information, the paraphrasability of something, not its unique embodiment. Lichtenstein's entablatures are ironically whole but schematic, *complete* paintings of *partial* subjects. The first entablatures were black on white, the later ones painted and colored in earthy terra-cotta colors and sometimes stacked one above the other, but the sense of diagram persists through the pictorial allusions of color.

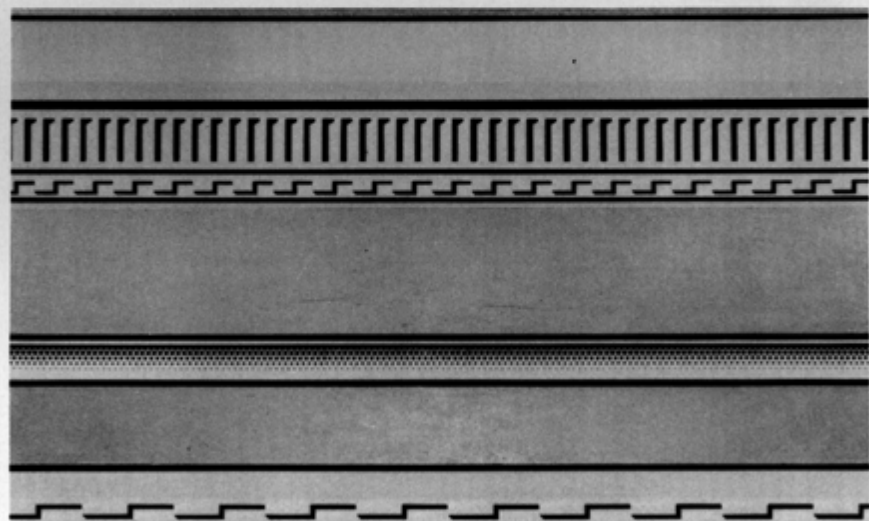
Lichtenstein has said that "once I have established what the subject matter is going to be I'm not interested in it anymore," but this does not mean that he is really an abstract painter. It has been suggested that, particularly in his monomorphic paintings, Lichtenstein is basically a Hard-Edge artist, but to look at his work like this is to simplify the dialectic between likeness to the object (iconicity) and formal autonomy that is central to his art.

Mirrors that withhold reflections of their spectators and diagrams of classical architecture that subvert the idea of order are images that for all their factuality are denials as much as they are exemplifications. The objects are presented legibly, indeed with high polish and impact, but they are qualified by the paradoxes of a matt mirror and a flat architecture. By taking, as Lichtenstein always does, pre-existing signs as his subject matter, he demonstrates not that art feeds off art, but that art partakes of the provisional and arbitrary nature of our knowledge of the world. The false iconicity of his objects, simultaneously given and withheld, is at the core of the view of the world in Lichtenstein's paintings.

LAWRENCE ALLOWAY



Mirror #4, 1972
48" diameter



Entablature, 1974
60" x 100"

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Photo on bottom of pages 6-7 by Bevan Davies. All other photos by Eric Pollitzer.

CATALOGUE

1. Mirror #1	1970	36" diameter
2. Mirror (Oval) #1	1970	48" x 32"
3. Mirror (Oval) #1	1970	70" x 36"
4. Mirror #2	1970	24" diameter
5. Mirror #5	1971	36" diameter
6. Mirror #14	1970	24" diameter
7. Mirror #1	1971	4 panels, each 96" x 18", 96" x 72"
8. Mirror #6	1971	36" diameter
9. Mirror #4	1972	48" diameter
10. Entablature #9	1971	30" x 144"
11. Entablature	1974	60" x 100"
12. Entablature	1974	60" x 100"
13. Entablature	1974	60" x 90"
14. Entablature	1975	60" x 90"
15. Entablature	1975	54" x 192"
16. Entablature	1976	54 x 192"
17. Entablature	1976	54¼" x 144"

All works are from the collection of the artist.

All works are painted in oil and magna on canvas.

Dimensions are in inches, vertical measurements first.