

Pop art and comics—imitation, confrontation, collaboration

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The relationship between pop artist Roy Lichtenstein and the creators of comics was famously fraught, with accusations of imitation and idea-stealing from the 'strip men'. However, new research published in the journal *Art History* reveals a more complex and collaborative dynamic of mutual admiration.

Researchers at the University of Chichester and the University of Leuven have discovered Roy Lichtenstein's forgotten admiration for comic books. Over the years Lichtenstein's famous blow ups have attracted significant hostility from the world of [comic books](#).

However Professor Hugo Frey (Chichester) and Professor Jan Baetens (Leuven), working with the Roy Lichtenstein Archive, have discovered that for a period the artist and the comic book men shared a mutual admiration. Published this spring in the journal *Art History* they explain that pop art significantly shaped comics publications and, most importantly, cartoonists and pop artists were briefly meeting with each other and discussing each other's work in flattering terms.

In 1965 the National Cartoon Society commissioned work from Lichtenstein and hosted him at their [annual event](#), with Lichtenstein telling the strip men: "I am honoured and very much amazed that you are feeding me and not stringing me up." A year later Lichtenstein engaged again—this time with the Paris comics world and an interview in its fanzine Giff-Wiff.

In the same *Art History* article Frey and Baetens speculate on a long forgotten source of Lichtenstein's fascination with the comics. While a student at Ohio State University the young artist's fraternity house wall included a 'blow up' of the Milton Caniff femme fatale—Burma—from Terry and the Pirates.

Professor Hugo Frey from the University of Chichester commented: "Pop art changed everything for a while, including the comics themselves. Of course over the years it has been common to bash Lichtenstein but the relationship was much more of a two-way process: Lichtenstein's work was exhibited alongside [comic](#) panels in a famous Paris show at the time. We hope our research shows once and for all that fine art and comics need not be rivals."

Professor Jan Baetens from the University of Leuven added: "In fact, we believe our research indicates all parties were in fact collaborating for greater creativity in both disciplines."

More information: Hugo Frey et al, Comics Culture and Roy Lichtenstein Revisited: Analysing a Forgotten 'Feedback Loop', *Art History* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/1467-8365.12416](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8365.12416)

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