



James Rosenquist - Clip 2

Bombarded by advertisements: “I painted birds, beer, shirts, airplanes...”

The thing that happened during the big booming period in the 50s is we had the coloured toilets and we had rose coloured refrigerators and there was all this stuff, and short skirts and everybody was very peppy and happy and people clung to the idea of having their own personal airplane and all that stuff and it was utopia, and also...this Pop Art thing carries up to my work today, up to the *The Swimmer* in the *Econo-mist* it carries forward. The reason is with me, as we all were in a Capitalist economy, were we're bombarded by advertisements, makes the world go-round, allegedly. And so I could paint and I started painting pictorial signs for General Outdoor Advertising in Minneapolis when I was a teenager. I was good, I could do it, I was making a lot of money. I painted beer, birds, shirts, airplanes, everything you could imagine, good enough to sell. You know, the imagery had to be good enough to sell for a product. Pretty soon I just got tired of these things that I was kind of in a dream world of fragments of imagery, so my thinking developed into wondering if I could make a new kind of abstract picture with fragments well-painted of realistic imagery and the largest painting would be so close, painted so well that it would be identified last. So I could set these pieces of imagery in the picture plane in scale, almost like Cubism, but

they would be large, so that the one closest to you, smack in your face, you wouldn't get until last, you'd say 'oh, that's spaghetti, or that's a shirt, or that's something like that.' I just wanted to make a mysterious picture. I was not concerned with logos or brand names, like Andy Warhol, for instance.

When I painted signs in Times Square, I was interviewed by the United Press. The guy came by and said, 'what are you doing here?' At the moment, I happened to be painting the Astor Victoria Theatre, the Castro convertible sign and the Mayfair all at the same time. I had started three big jobs billboards, and then have other guys fill them in. So I said, 'man, these are snake oil advertisements'. And I've got this review and so the guy wrote a story called, "Billboard Michelangelo spills paint on tourists far below."

