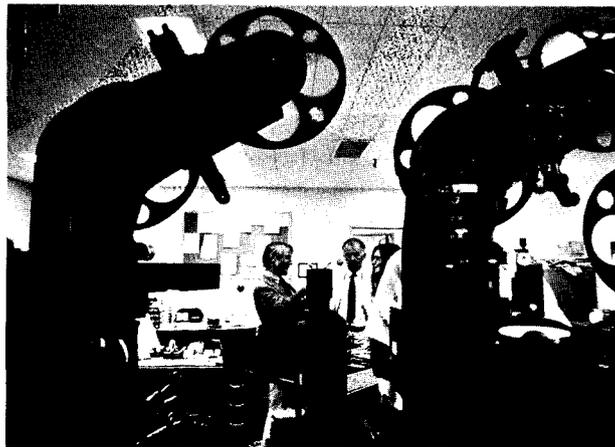




From the earliest staff meeting in the Spring of 1968, Roy Lichtenstein was considered by us in connection with Universal Film Studios. MT saw Lichtenstein in June in New York, described A & T, mentioned some available companies and suggested that the artist tour Universal. Roy was interested, and although he was unable to travel West until the Fall, we were so confident of his collaboration that we postponed consideration of any other artist for Universal until after his visit.

Lichtenstein toured the studio on September 12, 1968. In two days he visited most of Universal's key facilities on their vast grounds in the San Fernando Valley. Several department heads explained the capacities of the film laboratories, including optics, cutting, editing and special effects. There was a visit to the set of *Topaz*, then being filmed; and a behind-the-scenes look at the mechanical set-ups for the public tour of the studio. Lichtenstein was enthusiastic about Universal's facilities and was introduced to Alexander Golitzen, Supervising Art Director, who was established as our primary contact man. The artist also met several top executives, two of whom had Lichtenstein lithographs hanging in their offices. There was no problem in obtaining Universal's agreement to work with Lichtenstein as artist-in-residence, even though he had made no indication as to the nature of the work he might do there.

Before Roy returned home, he said he would probably work with film. This was a surprise to us, and, we later learned, to Universal. Comic strips, basic to Lichtenstein's past work, possess, at least for him, a distinct cinematic quality—he mentioned how narrative is developed in comics with abrupt compositional transitions from close-up to aerial to interior views, etc. One proposal which he outlined would be a sequence of shots of a woman's face with contrasting lighting (for example, green light on the left, red on the right), or tattooed with dots, or with varieties of makeup. He rejected this plan because it was too "zippy," or slick; also it would have been too expensive and elaborate an enterprise to



justify the idea. He was also intrigued with making a literally "moving picture." On the basis of this pun, he proposed a series of landscape moving pictures. The films, displayed as a group, would be sequences of landscape fragments—water, clouds, sky—in combination with synthetic images such as textured aluminum for sunrays or a Ben Day dot grid for sky. He wanted it to look "fairly phoney."

Lichtenstein affirms a direct relationship between the films and his 1964-65 series of landscape collages made from heterogeneous materials—shiny, textured plastics and metals resembling rays of sunlight or expanses of undulating water. [1] Some of these collages were kinetic, incorporating motor-driven parts to simulate moving water or daylight to night-light changes. The idea for showing the films simultaneously on different screens derived from the installation of kinetic landscapes at the Pasadena Art Museum's Lichtenstein exhibition in 1967. They were displayed side by side and their different rates of motion fascinated the artist.

Our initial impression of Roy's idea was that it was too simple; we were later disabused of this opinion. We

encouraged him to develop his idea for films and exploit Universal's technology and expertise. Lichtenstein felt his best work in the past had always evolved from a basically simple concept and that he might attempt something more complex after his primary project was accomplished.

Lichtenstein returned on February 3, 1969 and was given as a studio Jack Benny's old dressing rooms. He had decided to do the landscape, or as they turned out, seascape films. Each sequence would be divided by a heavy black "horizon" line. Above it would be a "sky" image, either clouds of a blue expanse, or a grid pattern of Ben Day dots; below would be a rippling water surface, or an underwater scene with tropical fish, or, again, the dot pattern. Some of the image combinations would rock slowly back and forth as if the camera were in a boat. Roy stressed two requirements for the film: that it be projected in such a way that the viewer would not see or interfere with the light source or mechanics of the system, so that the film would appear to exist autonomously, as a painting; and that the images be exceptionally clear and precise.

1



Although his ideas were intelligible, if not yet completely defined, and his demands were by no means beyond the capability of the Universal facilities and experts, it seemed difficult for them to comprehend why he wished to use film in this way or combine images of this sort. Despite their uncertainty as to the esthetic intentions of the artist, they were eager to evolve a method for projecting the films as Lichtenstein wished. The only rear screen projection system developed to date required forty feet of throw between screen and projector, which



would be an impractical use of exhibition space. Customarily, a series of mirrors is used to reduce the distance between projector and screen but this results in a loss of clarity. Universal technicians agreed to investigate ways to shorten the projection throw without sacrificing quality.

By this time the logistics of the project became a primary concern. Because of other commitments Roy could only stay in California for about two weeks, but it was necessary that he be closely involved in every stage of the operation, particularly in the initial steps of selecting certain types of images to be filmed. It was agreed that on his return to New York he would consult with his friend Joel Freedman of Cinnamon Productions and propose the idea of working with Freedman on some experimental filming.

In his New York studio, Roy made a series of sketches showing fifteen variations of combined images. [2] With these drawings and a precise idea of the imagery and effect he sought, Roy approached Freedman. After studying the problems and searching for suitable locations, Freedman, Roy and two technical assistants began filming near the artist's summer house at Southampton, Long Island. For the first attempt the assistants stood on the ocean shore and held a four by six foot wooden board, painted with blue dots on a white field, suspended over the water. The camera was rocked back and forth to simulate the motion of a boat. When this film

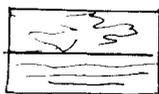
was processed the results were unsatisfactory for several reasons: the color could not be controlled, as the dots and ocean required different exposures; the foreground of dots and background of ocean could not be held in focus simultaneously; and by tilting the camera, they could not simulate the water's movement successfully because of the "depth of field" phenomenon. After this unsuccessful attempt, they decided to film the natural landscape fragments and the dots separately, combine the images on film, add horizon line and rocking motion, and synchronize the whole in an optical laboratory.

They filmed clouds, various bodies of water in both color and black and white, and tropical fish in a tank. Roy particularly wanted a series of sunrise, daylight, sunset and starlight sequences in which the sun would rise and set in a vertical course directly in the center of the picture, not in an arc as is apparent in nature. To film a sunrise over the Atlantic and keep the sun in the center of the scene required an elaborate time exposure procedure. The sequence was made frame by frame in intervals of two minutes. The camera was shifted after each shot to keep the sun in the center. But this effort resulted in failure. In the print the sun wiggled back and forth. Another unsatisfactory trial was made, using a telescope calibrated to the camera.

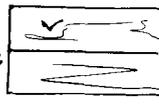


Roy returned to Los Angeles in July with the sample footage. Golitzen arranged a screening of this film for us and several Universal technicians including William Wade, head of Camera Department, James Phillips of Projection Department, and Wes Thompson, head of Process and Projection. The moving water shots (some of which Roy had filmed himself) were especially impressive. In the next few days Lichtenstein selected footage from Universal's film library of sequences which he and Freedman had been unable to shoot—an airplane passing horizontally through the sky and going through a cloud bank, as well as certain sunlight and artificial starlight shots. He asked to have these sent to him in New York. Again, Lichtenstein opted to return to his New York studio and his summer house in Southampton, where he

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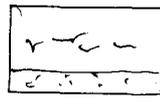
1  ← blue sky w/ clouds 2 fps C
 ← water in motion C

2  ← blue dots on white ground C
 ← water in motion C

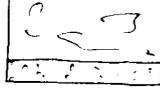
3  ← stationary bird in sky w/ cloud - no motion C
 ← water in motion C

4  ← blue sky w/ clouds 2 fps C
 ← water in motion B+W.

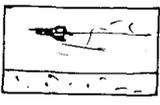
5  ← blue sky w/ clouds 2 fps B+W C
 ← water in motion C

10  ← morning heron C
 ← black dot on yellow C

11  ← B+W dots C
 ← colorful water C

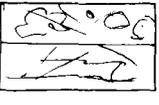
12  ← time lapse sky C
 ← black dot on yellow C

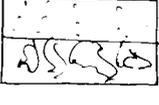
13  ← time lapse sunrise; day up C
 ← cloud; sunset; night up C
 ← moon on water C

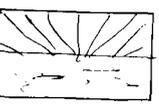
15  ← aurora borealis C
 ← black dot on yellow C

6  ← sky w/ clouds 2 fps C
 ← tropical fish C

7  ← pan of sky w/ clouds REL C
 ← side moving water REL C

8  ← plane moving toward clouds C
 ← boat moving toward horizon C

9  ← blue dots on white C
 ← tropical fish C

17  ← stadium construction C
 ← slow motion water C
 B+W

and Freedman would continue filming and editing. Roy commented later,

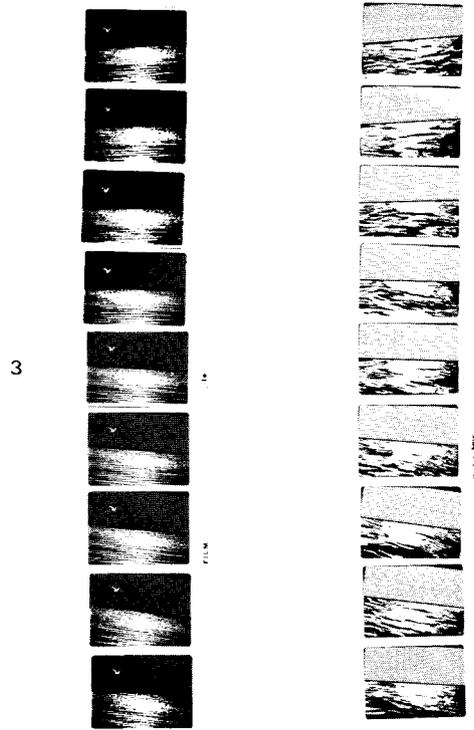
I think . . . that had I been in California and lived there, I could have really worked with them closely but as it turned out, most of this was done with Joel Freedman in Cinnamon Productions. He's a freelance, independent film maker who lives in New York and it was easy for me to work with him and get the film made. It was a question of proximity and of course our friendship more than anything else. Universal was perfectly willing to give me all the help I needed, but I wasn't there. And some of these things have to be filmed and looked at and color-corrected, and you can't really—although they would be willing—fly things back and forth. So most of the work took place between Joel Freedman and me, even though Universal footed the bill. I learned a lot about how to proceed from them.

The disturbing thing I feel about any idea that people present to me (and I think there is a tendency to present artists with things to do—everybody's doing that—they have projects they want done and they want certain artists to do it. It's the same ten artists all the time, but that's something else) is that you're getting led by other people's ideas. Sometimes it's interesting and sometimes you get into things that are useful and lead you to interesting things; but other times it's like filling orders. I didn't really get that feeling in this project, I must say, but there are so

many things that people want you to do. I think you could fill orders and never go in your own direction. I prefer not to be led . . . I like to work in my studio and let one painting lead to the other.

We were seriously considering Lichtenstein's project for the Expo show and asked Alexander Golitzen to advise us about a projection system for displaying the films. In discussing this with Lichtenstein, we described the special conditions of a World's Fair exhibition—particularly the massive crowds expected to pour through the U.S. Pavilion—and explained that there would be room to have only two screens, rather than the optimum arrangement of ten to twelve. Lichtenstein then selected two seascape sequences he felt were suitable. One was a sequence of gently moving blue-white-black water below with blue dots on a white field above; the other used footage of rippling sunset-lit water below and blue sky above, with a white seagull poised in flight but stationary. [3] The water in each rocked back and forth, but at different rates. He had eliminated the scenes with tropical fish, and those with the passing clouds-passing water combination, because those images were *too* exotic or interesting.

To satisfy Lichtenstein's standards of quality, the job of editing and composing each film loop became a complex task, involving much consultation with optics and animation experts. First it was necessary to determine the exact composition of the images. After filming many shots of seagulls—both flocks and single birds—Roy selected a bird image that he liked, but it appeared in the wrong section of frame on the original film. It was cut out from the frame, blown up and remounted on a field of blue sky in the correct location. The exact specifications for the dot pattern—how many, of what size, and in what grid configuration—were calculated through a series of graphs and charts. Lichtenstein was especially concerned about the quality of color; he attempted to control the color of the film as precisely as he would in mixing paint, and therefore demanded numerous correction prints. Roy's decisions about composition and motion were made intuitively, on the basis of each film's internal consistency, as well as its relationship to the group and the type of installation. In the two films for Expo, the motion of the internal elements was minimal and thus called for rocking motion. In the Museum exhibition, on the other hand, there will be ample time for spectators to view the film, and it will be possible for Lichtenstein to select sequences with more engaging internal activity, as well as a rocking motion. But for all sequences that rock, the key factor is that they be set out of synchronization with the others in the group. After processing the film, the final step was to match exactly the beginning and ending frames to form a continuous loop, without skips. At the completion of this tedious editing process, which took about nine



months, Joel Freedman commented in a letter to us, "It was quite a difficult project, I've now got to say—behind the quiet tranquility of a suspended seagull over sunset water there is a maze of graphs, charts, photography, animation, Neanderthal lab technicians driving me nuts and—a bit of money."

Throughout his association with A & T, Roy maintained a certain skepticism regarding the possibilities for technological collaboration which he later explained in an interview:

The thing that's advanced scientifically is the theory, and artists don't get anywhere near the theory; they're usually using the equivalent of a refrigerator or a light bulb or some by-product of the theory, it seems to me. In being avant garde, they're really using old-fashioned products. There's nothing to understand in a laser, even if you understand the principle. I'm not putting down the laser as useful in art; I'm just saying that you can immediately comprehend the laser—what it does, what it looks like and how it's done. It can be explained to you in five minutes and you get it. There's nothing mysterious about the medium. I'm not sure it should be mysterious; that's not the point, either. Very few artists are really using anything that can be considered advanced technology. It's not putting it down, it's saying that it isn't advanced, and one tends to believe it's advanced. There's something disturbing connected with both the artist using technology and the scientist wishing he were an artist, and I think that both of them get into a kind of romantic fantasy—it's a longing for

