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April 8, 2009

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Monumental Roy Lichtenstein Sculpture Acquired by the Smithsonian American Art Museum

The monumental sculpture “Modern Head” by Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997), a major figure in the pop art movement, now is part of the Smithsonian American Art Museum’s permanent collection.

In 1996, “Modern Head” was installed by the Public Art Fund of New York City in Battery Park City, one block from the World Trade Center. The sculpture survived the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack with only surface scratches and temporarily was used by the FBI as a message board during its investigation. The sculpture was removed from the site on Nov. 9, 2001, and was subsequently on view at the Nassau County Museum of Art in Roslyn Harbor, N.Y., and at the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden in Coral Gables, Fla. It has been on view outside the museum in Washington, D.C., since Aug. 27, 2008.

“I am thrilled that the Smithsonian American Art Museum, through the generosity of Jeffrey Loria, will be able to display permanently this exceptional work of public sculpture,” said Elizabeth Broun, The Margaret and Terry Stent Director at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. “‘Modern Head’ is not only a marvelous example of Lichtenstein’s best work, but also has a dramatic place in the 21st-century history of the United States.”

The sculpture is installed on the grounds of the museum’s main building at the corner of Ninth and F streets N.W. It is a gift from Jeffrey H. Loria in memory of his sister, Harriet Loria Popowitz.

“Modern Head” (conceived 1974, fabricated 1989-1990) stands 31 feet tall and is made of stainless steel painted blue. In the piece, Lichtenstein referenced the flat planes, precision and abstract geometric forms associated with 1930s’ art deco architecture and design. The sculpture is part of a series Lichtenstein began in the late 1960s that explored the idea of creating images of human figures that look like machines. This concept pervaded the artist’s work throughout his career.

Lichtenstein created the first “Modern Head” in 1974 out of wood that was painted blue. In 1989, he produced an edition of four in brushed steel. In 1990, the artist painted one a vibrant blue making it a unique work.

The Smithsonian American Art Museum is located at Eighth and F streets N.W. Museum hours are 11:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. daily, except Dec. 25. Admission is free. Metrorail station: Gallery Place/Chinatown. Smithsonian Information: (202) 633-1000; (202) 633-5285 (TTY). Web site: americanart.si.edu.

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