The Americanization of modern art through Pop and Abstract Expressionism

- At first glance Pop might look like a movement of lifting up everyday objects into the realm of fine art and museums. Although this is true, it was also full of irony and humor that noted the absurdities of American Mass culture.
- For example, Warhol’s images of Marylyn Monroe were full of irony. “Gold Marylyn Monroe” 1962 with its gold background and central image evokes religious icon paintings. It comments on how she was worshiped by her fans like a Madonna who were obsessed with the celebrity – however paintings like this were shown alongside images of mass produced products such as Brillo pads who were similarly ‘worshiped’ by mass consumers.
- Links back to Duchamp’s idea that any common object can be art, as long as the artist intended for it to be. “Urinal” 1917.

Why was the cultural climate right for an American art to emerge?

- Norman Podhoretz “American culture has no real status in the eyes of anyone in the 1940’s” – in the post war year’s attitude towards American art changed.
- There was a common idea that American art (American regionalism) was unoriginal and provincial.
- At a time of political and economic leadership, newfound pride in the American way of life – American culture flourished.
- The subject matter for new artists was well-known American icons, and the representation of common American experience. (Jasper Johns Flag 1955, and Edward Hopper’s Nighthawks 1942)
- Art also represented post war affluence, consumerism, technological advances, mass media etc. (Andy Warhol Marylyn Diptych 1962).
- Why was this art American? It took inspiration from the American systems of mass production and mass communication; but unlike precisionist whose art derived from American technology presented in pure terms, this mid age art was exaggerated “steeped in irony, absurdity and paradox” – Made in the USA Sidra Stich.
- Social Realist art was American as it took the approach of social commentary of American life; Regionalist art was American as it was rooted in nationalism and patriotism to America.