

# Jasper Johns– Modern Art

## “the Flag”

Jasper Johns (born 1930), American painter and sculptor, helped break the hold of abstract expressionism on modern American art and cleared the way for pop art. Versatile in several different artistic fields, he has given the world sculptures, lithographs, and prints, as well as paintings.



“One night I dreamed that I painted a large American flag,” Johns has said of this work, “and the next morning I got up and I went out and bought the materials to begin it.” Those materials included three canvases that he mounted on plywood, strips of newspaper, and encaustic paint—a mixture of pigment and molten wax that has formed a surface of lumps and smears. The newspaper scraps visible beneath the stripes and forty-eight stars lend this icon historical specificity. The American flag is something “the mind already knows,” Johns has said, but its execution complicates the representation and invites close inspection. A critic of the time encapsulated this painting’s ambivalence, asking, “Is this a flag or a painting?”



Johns is best known for his painting [Flag](#) (1954–55), which he painted after having a dream of the [American flag](#). His work is often described as a [Neo-Dadaist](#), as opposed to [pop art](#), even though his subject matter often includes images and objects from popular culture. Still, many compilations on pop art include Jasper Johns as a pop artist because of his artistic use of classical iconography.

**Jasper Johns** was an artist that came onto the scene in the 1950s. Much of the work that he created led the American public away from the expressionism form, and towards an art movement or form known as the concrete. He would

depict many flags and maps, and this created a more distinct style with the work that was being done during this period in American art history. He was also one of the leading forces to the pop form known as [minimalism](#); even to this day, many of



Early works were composed using simple schema such as [flags](#), [maps](#), [targets](#), [letters](#) and [numbers](#). Johns' treatment of the surface is often lush and painterly; he is famous for incorporating such media as [encaustic](#) and plaster relief in his paintings. Johns played with and presented opposites, contradictions, and ironies.

**Neo-Dada** is exemplified by its use of modern materials, popular imagery, and absurdist contrast. It also patently denies traditional concepts of aesthetics.

**Encaustic**—Is a wax based paint (composed of beeswax, resin, and pigment) It is applied on a heated palette. It is applied to an absorbent surface and reheated to adhere to paint

**Pop Art**— A change from fine art where it included images of pop culture, news, media, and advertisement. Also popular in the 1950's.