

A Self-Guided Tour
for
The ANDY WARHOL Exhibition
at The Chrysler Museum *of* Art
(October 23, 1998 through January 10, 1999)

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Andy Warhol entered the world as Andrew Warhola, the youngest of three brothers born to immigrant parents and raised in Pittsburgh in a working class neighborhood called Soho. (Ironically, years later he was to become “the king of Soho” in the center of the Art world in New York.) His father was a carpenter who died early in Andy’s life, and he and his brothers were raised by their loving and hard-working mother, Julia Warhola. She saw to it that Andy received a proper education that included college, and she was to remain a significant and positive influence throughout Andy’s life. (Later in the tour we will see a delightful gallery dedicated to Julia Warhola and her own art work, and we will see that she too was an artist.)

After public school, Warhol pursued formal training at Pittsburgh’s Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University), where he studied both the fine arts and what was termed “industrial design,” that which today we know as “commercial art.” (It is important to note and to keep in mind as we go through the galleries that Andy Warhol did have a formal educational background in art, and he was especially knowledgeable about Art History.)

Always quite sensitive, young Andrew Warhola was forever trying to figure out the world as he experienced it, and his early years were said to be both trying and challenging. Pittsburgh at the time was a very stratified society. The rich lived “up on the hill,” with the poor and the working class living below. Like “the Little Match Girl,” hungry and with her face pressed against the window, Andy must have realized early on that he would always be a kid from the Polish working class in Soho as long as he remained in Pittsburgh. He knew that in order to accomplish his dreams he had to leave. New York had always held wonder and appeal for him; with its allure and excitement it became in his imaginings a fabled place like “The Emerald City.”

In 1949 the war was over and New York City with all of its fast-pace and newness was the place where he could create a persona completely different from the one of his experience in Pittsburgh. In New York, Andy became the consummate embodiment and practitioner of the American Dream; it could be said that he evolved *himself* into the most innovative and influential cultural figure of the 20th Century.

As soon as he made the move to Manhattan, the great transformation began. Although he ultimately became the definitive “Artist rebel,” early in Warhol’s career he made every attempt to fit into this new world: He thought his name was too ethnic so he took the “a” off the end and became Andy Warhol. Always self-conscious about his nose, he got a nose job. Andy created for himself a completely new personality, and the creation of that personality became a major part in the creation of his Art, and the “Warhol Industry” that was to follow.

He became a master of transformation - especially self-transformation, as we can see here. Through Andy Warhol the whole notion of “Performance Art” was born. What made him “Andy Warhol” was that he did so many different creative things so well - and with such verve.

Here we see a photograph of Andy still new to the city, striding cheerfully and confidently along its streets in his very traditional Madison Avenue poplin suit and bow tie. This was the new world that he would master rather quickly, one that today still follows his lead. The Andrew Warhola from working class Pittsburgh, PA was now Andy Warhol – the Artist.

He was his own creation, here the very successful ad man, who might not have invented the concepts of advertising agencies and marketing, but he took their ideas and made them his own. He learned that the world was run by "spin doctors." He learned it was the media that determines new trends and decides "what's hot," and that ultimately it is marketing that defines the things to which we pay attention and homage. It is the way the American culture works. Always trying to figure out what constitutes the world, Andy paid close attention and learned these lessons well, later applying them so effectively to his own distinctive vision.

As well as the Artist, he became a documentarian, musicologist, anthropologist, and the ultimate social critic. Here we have some of the early images that frame and remind us of that fact that - as well as being the premiere Pop Artist, Impresario, Entrepreneur, Film Maker, Publisher, Commentator, Celebrity, and Visionary - Andy Warhol was, after all, a traditionalist.



Thanks to Curator Jeff Harrison, this marvelous exhibition is presented in a logical and wonderful chronology. This gallery provides clear evidence that young Andrew Warhola began his legendary career as very possibly the most influential American Artist of the 20th Century simply as that one child in the class who we all knew as "the good drawer."

The works on display in this gallery are all from the 1950s. They include formative images from his youth and young-adulthood, and also reflect his remarkable early commercial success in New York. We can glimpse some of the themes and even some of the techniques that he would expand upon in his later career and other artistic incarnations.

A consistent value and characteristic of all the drawings in this room, some made for commercial purposes and some quite personal, is "economy of line." This minimalist technique was perfect for the advertising business, which was all about getting a clear message across quickly. (Go to drawing of young man shooting heroin in *The Nation's Nightmare*.) Here, it was the early 50s, and drug addiction had been described as "the Nation's Nightmare." An effective, quickly drawn line, and the viewer gets the message. Therein is the entire story.

In this first gallery we also encounter a technique that Warhol liked to employ known as "the blotted line." He would draw a picture and then blot it to make it look like a print. Warhol learned that if he made "good" Art that *looked* like advertising, if it was a *look* that was familiar - and therefore comfortable - people would be more likely to look at it. In that way they became engaged, which is the most essential task and challenge for any artist.

(Go to *Crowd With Communist Flag*.) Here we see the drawing next to it, the crowd scene - the collection of heads connotes the crowd - and the darker lines stress the communist flags, the hammer and sickle, stressing the threat of Communism in the McCarthy era. Warhol completely understood that the visual image rules us.



To appreciate the Art of Andy Warhol one does not have to reference Art history or have a Ph.D. in that field. His work simply came out of an entertaining vision of the world in which he lived. His Art is all about "the grand elaboration," for himself and the viewer, of "what Art is." If Art is a representation of a society's reality and if, for example, the Art of 16th- and 17th-century Spain was about saints and religion and mythology, then 20th-century America possessed the equivalent subjects that Andy Warhol pursued, encountered, understood, and examined.

He had a fascination with "the thingness of things." In the world of advertising he had learned to "sell the sizzle." He accepted that, just as a product was a subject, a subject could be a "product." To sell a product it had to be given a personality. He knew that "selling" was about illuminating these products via creative presentations, and that the people's attitudes would

usually follow. He also learned in advertising to make multiple versions of things, to create a variety. Essentially it was all about pleasing his clients and his audience. ("If they didn't like one drawing, he always had another to show them." As a legendary example, every Thursday in the New York Times, he had a different drawing of client "I. Miller's" shoes. Via the ad's message, the distinguishing appeal of "I. Miller" shoes was that whenever they were worn the wearer joined the ranks of the sexiest and most sophisticated women in New York.)

Andy Warhol worked in advertising for 10 years and was extremely successful, gaining recognition and winning many prestigious awards as he mastered that industry and medium. Being the visionary that he was, it was inevitable that he would move on to broader challenges. As well as his talent and ambition, it was his vision that impelled him to take the lead and to go forward with his work.



As we move into the next gallery, we know that Andy Warhol came into the Art world of 1960 as an accomplished and well-known commercial Artist. He made no apologies for his background and he expected to be taken seriously. With his unique point of view and his handling of images, he singularly liberated American Art, and the entire attitude of that world shifted from the time of his arrival. Abstract Expressionism had reigned during the 1950s, characterized by explosions of paint and stark, broad images, with a myriad of bewildering abstract images. Artists at that time like Jackson Pollack, Franz Klein, and De Kooning were engaged in a kind of aestheticism, with a very subjective, emotional presence in their work. ("Individually not a particularly pleasant group of guys, they basically had the attitude of, 'Listen, these are my paintings, and if you don't like them I'll break your teeth.'")

Andy Warhol virtually pulled the proverbial rug out from under that movement. In the 60s, along with Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Rauschenberg, he created what became known as Pop Art. Again, Andy Warhol was occupied with creating Art that people could connect with, as he essayed and interpreted modern life. Look around this room. Being a traditionalist, his work included portraits, still lifes, and sculptures. . . (Gather in front of *Liz*.) This is Andy's silkscreen portrait of Elizabeth Taylor, an image taken from a photograph (possibly an 8 x 10 movie still) of her at the time of her Oscar win for "Butterfield 8."

(Always an impulsive collector, when Andy was a child he collected his favorite images, loving most the Movie Stars, Shirley Temple being one of his favorites. He wrote to her requesting an autographed picture. She responded with a picture inscribed "To Andrew Warhola, my biggest fan.")

Many times when Andy would do a silkscreen portrait he would take the original photograph himself, using a Polaroid "Big Shot." Sometimes he would take as many as 60 pictures, always trying to capture the very moment when "Liz was Liz," or "Brando was Brando," or "Marilyn was Marilyn." (Always trying to pose for himself new problems to solve, he must have asked, "how am I going to deal with Jackie, or with Elvis, or with Mao. . ." Once he figured it out, he would move along to another challenge.)

Other times he would use a photographic image from another source. It was all about capturing that particular moment, and if another photographer had managed that, then that was fine with Andy. After choosing this image he would then decide where to crop it, later enhancing it cosmetically. He would trim the nose, elongate the neck, enlarge the lips, or clear up the complexion. Always he would stress the beauty of his subject. (Andy was absorbed with the dynamic of taking something and doing something else with it. It can be said that makeup is a metaphor for "the Art of making Art." "When done like Art, makeup can do nature one better. . . with some artificial is better." The protraction of the word Art is *Artificial*.)

He would later have the altered image blown up to a 40"x40" acetate, and from that the screen-printer would make a silkscreen. He would turn the positive image to a negative, and transfer the negative to piece of silk (like a silk stocking) which would then be stretched onto a wooden frame, which is then placed over the canvas. After doing his series of Movie Star portraits in the 60s, Andy took commissions from anyone who wanted to pay \$25,000 for an Andy Warhol original. The screen itself could be washed out and reused many times, which appealed to Andy, and each additional portrait would be \$5000, which he also liked. Throughout his career, portraits always represented a large portion of his annual income. No matter what other canvases he was working on for museums and gallery shows, there were always portraits in development. (One might say that Andy Warhol was the spiritual descendent of Toulouse-Lautrec, as exemplified in such a use of lithography, his instincts for commercial Art, and his interest in the *Demi-monde*.)

(Go to *Jackie* images)

It seems clear that Warhol was deeply touched by the JFK tragedy. Here again silkscreen is the medium, and once again Andy is using various photographs taken by other photographers for his imagery, here from the assassination period and funeral. This was really the first time Americans witnessed the moments of real history via the powerful medium of TV. Today, this is how we all have come to remember history. Through the images of Warhol's Art it became real again, but in a different way, with a different sort of reality. Our images of life and the world are nearly always experienced via a filter. As a society we are most influenced and informed via visual imagery, all relating to "the Power of Symbols," and all familiar to Andy Warhol.

(Go to *Car Crash*)

Andy Warhol was often obsessed with the tragedy and horrors that can occur in day-to-day American Life. He also understood that with repetition what originally may have been tragic or terrible becomes bland or banal. Through repetition one loses the immediacy of an event, and it all becomes more like theatre than "reality." Warhol colored the image and recreated it and gave it back its potency. (Reference Diana and the constant images of the car crash in the tunnel in Paris.) Seeing it more than once, after a while one becomes inured to it. These indelible moments are always filtered through someone else's eyes; and the world is rarely unfiltered. Andy Warhol understood this as well as anyone ever has.

(Go to *Dance Diagram*)

Andy loved diagrams, he was always interested in things that show you how the world works. With Warhol's work there is less of a boundary between the real world and Art. (Refer to *Heinz Boxes*) These boxes are made of painted wood, which were then silkscreened. As we mentioned before, Andy was a traditionalist. At the time they were created in 1964, Artists such as Donald Judd were doing massive abstract metal sculptures that required a crane to assemble. Andy did sculpture too, but he described something in the real world and something immediately recognizable. (Perhaps he was referencing the Pittsburgh of his youth and the Heinz factories there.)

(Go to photograph of **Andy Warhol** in his coolest days at The Factory.)

Andy Warhol referred to all artist studios as "factories" because they were places where people worked. His Factory was located on the east side of Union Square in an old industrial building.

(It was later moved to the north side of Union Square 32nd St., between Madison and Fifth Ave.) We see the silvered walls, not unlike factories from his youth in Pittsburgh, where metallic silver was the color of the insulation lining the walls. From 1967 to 1968, The Factory was open to everyone. It was constantly full of people. Everyone wanted to be there, from the hottest of current celebrities, to "Euro-trash princesses," to sports stars. However, all of that changed in June of 1968 when Warhol was shot and gravely wounded by a disturbed woman who had appeared briefly in one of his films. (So serious were his wounds that for the rest of his life he had to wear an abdominal belt to keep his internal organs in place.)

An important thing to remember about Andy is that he never drank or did drugs. Andy Warhol was a workaholic. Here he was surrounded by all these people dancing, doing drugs, having sex in the bathroom, and Warhol was there observing and trying to understand these people. He was always fascinated by people, always trying to figure them out. He was interested in everything. Among many others, he hung out with Edie Sedgwick, the "It Girl" of 1965. She would get him into the trendiest clubs, where he would study with fascination these people who just partied their lives away, their biggest concern being what party to go to next, or what to wear. Fascinated, Warhol (perhaps surprisingly) regarded them with the working class values with which he had been raised. Work was very important to Andy, and he could never understand how people could live without work. (To really get a feel for the man, read *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, which is on sale in the special Andy Warhol Gift Shop.) He possessed the traditional values of many of us. He valued family, returning frequently to Pittsburgh for visits. He went to Catholic Mass every day of his life. And invariably and without fanfare Andy Warhol spent holidays working in soup kitchens and shelters, and he gave much to charity.

A very private person, the real Andy Warhol was never known. He was certainly not a saint, nor did he lead a purely vicarious life. We know that he had a 9-year relationship with Jed Johnson, who later became a world famous interior designer based on how he designed Andy's home. An instinctive (if deliberate) trendsetter, Andy seemed able to effortlessly create a whole new style. For example, it was he who made chic the uniform of jeans and a tee shirt, and later the black turtleneck, jeans and leather jacket; and it was only when Andy Warhol went to Studio 54 that it became famous.

(Go to *Campbell Soup Cans*)

The quirky writing you see on some of his work belongs to his mother, Julia Warhola. Andy loved her calligraphy and even had her sign much of his work. His mother signed her own art work "Andy Warhol's Mother." (Reference the painted can.) Why paint a Campbell Soup can? Well. . . it was modern and attractive, it had fabulous colors, it was easy to read, and it came with a lovely golden seal of approval. It was the definitive contemporary, attractive product. Perhaps autobiographically it also referenced his childhood - when his mother, who was not a very good cook, made everything out of a can. (Andy once said that for 20 years he ate Campbell soup every day. In fact, his mother would rinse out each can, remove the labels, and snip the metal back with scissors and create a flower, which she would then paint. She would go around the working class neighborhoods and sell her cans for about \$1.50 apiece. Her own art, primitive as it may have been, paid for Andy's first art classes.) In 1962 Andy moved away from painting altogether as he perfected and utilized silkscreens. It was not until 1985 that he got back to traditional painting, often in collaborations with younger painters like Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquait.

(Go to *Silver Clouds* Gallery)

Among the myriad subjects in art history – let us use the Dutch Masters as an example - are cows. But when he addressed the subject, what cow did Andy Warhol choose to paint? What other than “Elsie the Borden Cow” - easily the most recognizable, charismatic and commercial of cows (actually it was from the cover of a farmers’ feed & seed catalogue) - and he chose the medium of wallpaper. (Perhaps he was responding to the critics who said the repetition of images in his work “looked like wallpaper.” To make the point that it *was* wallpaper, he hung “real” Art on it. As we will see around the corner with *Mao*.) His *Silver Clouds* were a commentary on the monolithic sculptural installation works of the 60s and 70s. His "metal sculptures" could *float*. (Show a *Silver Cloud* from the side, pointing the metallic seam.) So unique in 1966 and still so engaging, perhaps these *Silver Clouds* were an homage to his mother and the soup cans of his youth. (The "Exploding Plastic Inevitable" did a performance in front of them with a floating slide show.)

(Go to *Tuna Fish Disaster*)

All about the first botulism scares of the early 60s, Warhol offers a "Happy Cans vs. Sad Cans" sort of image. Incongruous though it would once have seemed, the familiar little cans have here become this powerful vector of death and tragedy. How could something so mundane and comfortable have become so deadly? (When considering Warhol’s take on this subject, try to think of the spin the media would have indulged were the tragedy new to us today.)

(Go to *Electric Chair*)

Here we have the ultimate American symbol of capital punishment: The electric chair from Sing Sing. Conveyed is the spare, dramatic intensity of image, theme and place – “and we have it offered in multiples of color to suit any color scheme (!).” From his days on Madison Avenue, Andy understood that selection and multiples please a client. (“No matter what color it is - it is no less good,” and it is also important to remember that each silkscreened image, on canvas or paper, is always slightly different.) Beyond simply another connotation of his inherent creativity, the *Electric Chairs* are representative of Warhol's commitment to pleasing his audience by making Art accessible and having it relatable to his audience. ("I need something to go over the sofa." / “The man likes green the woman likes purple.” / “This attitude can even be compared with prevailing colorist attitudes of the Abstract Impressionists - ‘This is my painting and if you don't like it I'll break your teeth’.” – *Tom Sokolowski*)

With *Electric Chair* we have a very subjective, emotional presence of the Artist in his work. Andy Warhol felt that an Artist has a presence in his work in many ways. What is so fascinating about Warhol was not the retinal image of the man who painted 50 Campbell Soup cans - but the man who had *The Idea* to paint 50 Campbell Soup cans, the idea of the technical expression, and *The Idea* of what the pictures would represent and become. Andy Warhol liberated the entire world of popular culture by his treatment of images and icons. The attitude of the Art World shifted fundamentally from the time of Warhol’s arrival. From the very beginning he was the ultimate Conceptual Artist. He had a preoccupation with the "thingness of things." Here he took a cheap public image from the newspaper, and instead of *painting* it he *reproduced* it. He was saying this *thing* we call a painting is a *thing* and, as a matter of fact, nobody even has to paint it, or my assistants can paint it. Quite simply, he caused a revolution.

(Go to *Dollar Signs* and *Cross*)

Symbols are very important to all of us. The juxtaposition of these works begs the question: could Warhol here be saying that the *Dollar Sign* has become more important than the *Cross*, that the everlasting symbol for nobility and truth is possibly not so enduring after all – replaceable in the public mind with such a crass symbol as the *Dollar Sign* (no matter how colorfully and attractively rendered)? Has the power of the *Cross* as a symbol become *so* diminished (and perhaps in part by the emphasis of the Church itself on the material and the acquisition of money)? Through his work Andy Warhol always seems to be saying, "I will be your mirror. I will reflect the world around you, using different sorts of objects and screens, and by using different colors." But we must remember that a mirror held up to a mirror reflects nothing. So Warhol requires a bit more from his audience, beyond the frame and the proscenium of the stage. We must not forget the value of the subjective in Art, that is, what we as viewers bring to it. The importance of ourselves, as the audience, is never lost in the presentation of Warhol's Art.

(Go to *Mao*)

Why Mao? He was not American; he was not pretty. Perhaps for Andy this was political commentary. After China's Cultural Revolution, everybody was saying, "Where's Mao?" Then the government would come out with a film of Mao swimming in the Yangtse river. How old was that video? Then, 5 years later the scenario was repeated: the same question ("Where's Mao - ?") and the same video of Mao swimming. (And when did Mao *really* die anyway?) We know that through Art someone dead can live – and tyrants have historically understood the power of Art better than almost anyone. Absolutely affecting the political life of a nation, when government needs to make a point they invariably turn to their Artists, and in a variety of media (from effigies and posters to national anthems). Art always provides the symbols. ("Augustus never got to Asia Minor but the coin with the image of Augustus did.") (There is the anecdote of Picasso's painting Gertrude Stein. She: "It doesn't look like me. He: Oh, but it will. . . ." As a direct political aside, in 1972 Warhol was asked to create a poster for a fund-raiser for Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern. He produced a monstrous image of a green-faced Richard Nixon with the words under it stating simply: "Elect McGovern." The poster must have been effective, for every year from 1972 until his death in 1987, Warhol was audited by the IRS.)

(Go to *Transvestites*)

Andy Warhol loved Drag Queens for their flair and social courage - and for their own art of transformation. He loved makeup and was always fascinated with the concept of taking something and "making it over." (And again we encounter the protraction of the word Art to *Artificial*.) The titles for Warhol's works are very important. Here the title is *Ladies and Gentlemen*, which operates on several levels and alludes to the fact that Drag Queens actually are both. Through "Artificiality" one thing could become diametrically opposite. We could here apply the formula: "Makeup + Deception = Figment." (*Figment*, it should be noted, was the single word that Andy Warhol requested for his epitaph.)

(Go to *Last Supper*)

Andy Warhol did his most sober works late in life. This silkscreen is of course based on Leonardo Da Vinci's famous fresco which is housed in a monastery in Milan. The original is now much faded, and can barely be seen. In classic Warholian fashion, Andy based his interpretations not on the original, but on the more modern, kitsch-like reproductions. All of us are familiar with the legendary Da Vinci original, and could each no doubt describe it; but, again, we know it through the medium of commercial reproduction. What was Warhol demonstrating by doubling the image: that we see better by such reproduction, or that, "if one is good, then two is better?" Andy Warhol could be termed an "investigative Artist," always trying to figure out the world around him and how to interpret it. In so doing he helped his audience to see life more clearly. In creating such a reproduction as this grand *Last Supper*, he was definitely seeking to tell us something new about it. By the way, the works in this series were exhibited in a gallery in Milan adjacent to the monastery. The exhibition opened in January of 1987, just weeks before Warhol's untimely death.

(Go to *Skull*)

Again we are reminded that Warhol was in fact a traditional Artist, a fine "drawer," and an excellent painter. In his still lifes, portraits, landscapes, and sculptures he frequently referenced Art history. Here we have the most classic of subjects, a theme of eternal concern - Death. Obviously a very sober subject ("ashes to ashes, dust to dust. . ."), because we all mourn and we all die. However, in Warhol's treatment here there exists hope, as represented in the face of the baby which can be seen in the shadow cast by the skull. Being a very religious man, perhaps Warhol is saying that, yes, Life follows Death. Yes, there is a hopeful future, and Death is not the end. Rather than as a printer, Warhol approached this silkscreen like a painter. Look at these broad, rich brush strokes. This is a work of great affirmation.

(Go to *The Shadow*)

The Shadow was a popular radio show from the period of Andy's childhood. ("The Shadow knows. . .") Perhaps as an accomplished adult, Warhol was here questioning what sort shadow it was that he would cast?" Reassuringly - as this exhibition indicates - his shadow has always been formidable, and will probably remain so, for Andy Warhol has never been more popular. (As an example, on this show's opening night - here in Norfolk, at The Chrysler (a museum with which he was very familiar, by the way) - 12 years after his death, hundreds of visitors of all ages thronged the galleries and demonstrated the strength of his growing and enduring appeal.

(Go to *Self Portrait*)

At the urging of a friend, in 1964 Andy began a series of self portraits that would continue until his death, with this being the last. The Artist presents himself here as an inscrutable, monolithic figure, an unexpected, disembodied head floating in a sea of darkness. Was this merely a frank frontal assessment of himself at the age of 58? The overriding message seems obscured by the direct power of the of the image. We encounter an enigma which, like the Sphinx, has something to tell us; but, like the Artist, we must ask the right questions. It will then no longer be an enigma.

Andy Warhol died on Feb 22, 1987, in New York following gallbladder surgery. After a memorable memorial service was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral in NYC, his funeral took place in Pittsburgh where he is buried.

The Art of Andy Warhol characterized more than one generation of Americans and basically defined how they – we – have come to define ourselves. America is a culture of consumer objects - *things* – to which we pay homage everyday. Andy Warhol beautifully and compellingly produced the artifacts of our culture. He also demonstrated that these things could even be attractive and deserving of artful attention – if only because he recognized that these are images that evolve from *ourselves*. In a *thing*-oriented world, Andy was a kind of shaman or seer. He gave us what we wanted - all the *things*: the movie stars, the "boxes," the American Dream in life, which, ultimately, is death. (Warhol thought death was so abstract, about departed friends he would say, "They've gone to Bloomingdale's, and haven't come back.")

Warhol was a grand, color-filled mirror, the great reflector of his own time, the poor child from Pittsburgh who worked very hard and became one of the most influential Artists of all time.

By Janice Salzberg
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