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[contributors: John G. Hanhardt ... et al.]  

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"I never read, I just look at pictures." — Andy Warhol

THE MODERN STAR

The Museum of Modern Art, New York February 6 to May 2, 1989

ANDY WARHOL
A RETROSPECTIVE

"My paintings never turn out the way I expect them to but I'm never surprised." — Andy Warhol

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IN BRIEF: ANDY WARHOL

1928
August 6, born Andrew Warhola, in Pittsburgh.

1934–35
From about the age of six, Warhol collects autographed photographs of movie stars.

1945–48
Fall, enters Carnegie Institute of Technology, where he majors in pictorial design. Sometime during his college years he begins to experiment with the blotted-line technique.

1949
Graduates from Carnegie Institute of Technology, moves to New York, and starts working as a commercial artist.


1953
Begins to make paintings incorporating lines that look similar to those in his blotted-line drawings.

1954

1960
Paints his first canvases depicting comic-strip characters: Batman, Nancy, Saturday's Popeye, Superman, and Dick Tracy. Also paints first Ads and Coca-Colas.

1961
Newspaper Front Pages. April, displays the paintings Advertisement. Before and After, Little King, Saturday's Popeye, and Superman as background for manniquins in the window of Bonwit Teller.

1962

Exhibitions: Campbell's Soup Cans, Fenix Gallery, Los Angeles; and Andy Warhol, Stable Gallery, New York (Coca-Cola, Dance Diagrams, Disasters, Do It Yourself, Handle with Care — Glass — Thank You, Marilyns, a work based on a matchbook cover, Red Elvis).

1963

1964

Is commissioned to make a work for the New York State Pavilion at the New York World's Fair. Makes begins to produce multimedia presentations, called the Erupting (later changed to Exploding) Plastic Inevitable, featuring Nico and the Velvet Underground. These events include live music, dance, and monologues by the band and other Factory performers against a backdrop of Warhol's films.

Exhibitions: Warhol, Gian Enzo Sperone, Turin; Andy Warhol, Leo Castelli Gallery, New York (Cow Wallpaper and Silver Clouds); Andy Warhol Holy Cow! Silver Clouds!!

1965
Electrical Chairs.

Continues to film **** and begins filming Bike Boy; I, a Man; Lonesome Cowboys; The Loves of Ondine; and Nude Restaurant.

Exhibitions: Kahne and Schwebende kissen von Andy Warhol, Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne; Andy Warhol Most Wanted, Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne; Andy Warhol—The Thirteen Most Wanted Men, Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris.

Group exhibition: Expo '67, Montreal, United States Pavilion (Self-Portraits).

1966
Self-Portraits, Cow Wallpaper, Silver Clouds.


Holy Cow!, Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati; Andy Warhol, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles.

1967
Electric Chairs.

Continues to film **** and begins filming Bike Boy; I, a Man; Lonesome Cowboys; The Loves of Ondine; and Nude Restaurant.

Exhibitions: Kahne and Schwebende kissen von Andy Warhol, Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne; Andy Warhol Most Wanted, Galerie Rudolf Zwirner, Cologne; Andy Warhol—The Thirteen Most WANTED Men, Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris.

1968

1970

1971

1974
Exhibitions: Andy Warhol, Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and Kunsthernes Hus, Oslo; and Andy Warhol, Rowan Gallery, London (Most Wanted Men and Marilyn prints).

1975

1977
Athletes, Hammer and Sickles, Torso.

1979

1980
Joseph Beuys, Diamond Dust Shoes. 

1981
Crosseyes, Dollar Signs, Guns, Knives, Myths.

1982
Goethes, Stadiums.

1983
Munchs, Korschachs. Collaborates on paintings with Jean-Michel Basquiat and Francesco Clemente.

1985
Publishes America.

1986
Camouflage, Cars, Self-Portraits.

1987
Last Suppers. Begins work on The History of American TV.

February 22, dies.
Andy Warhol: A Retrospective, the first full-scale exhibition of the work of the Pop artist, features many examples of his art that have never been shown before. The show spans Warhol’s entire career from the early designs of the fifties to his last paintings of the eighties. The exhibition is arranged according to themes that occur in his work: celebrity portraits (Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, and Jackie Kennedy, for example), Disasters (Car Crash, Electric Chair), Campbell’s Soup Cans, Flowers, Mao, and more. Also on view are many of the Self-Portraits made throughout his life, numerous drawings, and the most recent works made just before his death in 1987.

One of the best-known figures of our times, Andy Warhol was a celebrity, and his paintings were enjoyed by a vast public. His art focused on the visible facts of contemporary American life, reflecting what was often disregarded or ignored, and illuminating what was not yet commonly perceived. Regardless of any feelings prompted by a particular subject, Warhol processed his visual observations through his unique aesthetic, maintaining a cool unwavering emotional detachment. His familiar images are derived from newspapers, magazines, and television, but on the canvas, they are isolated and treated as objects.

A prolific artist, Warhol worked inventively in many mediums. In the summer of 1965, he announced his “retirement” from painting in order to concentrate on films. He began painting intensively again in 1972, beginning with the Mao images. In the following years, Warhol continued to execute fifty to one hundred commissioned portraits each year until his death, produced several new series, and began collaborative projects with younger artists.

Organized by Kynaston McShine, Senior Curator of Painting and Sculpture at The Museum of Modern Art, this exhibition brings together Warhol’s entire body of work for the first time and should be on every museum-goer’s list.

“*I’ve made a career out of being the right thing in the wrong space and the wrong thing in the right space. That’s one thing I really do know about.*” — Andy Warhol

Born in 1928, Warhol came to New York after graduating from Carnegie Institute of Technology and quickly achieved notable success as a commercial artist. When he began to paint, about 1960, he adapted the look and techniques of his advertising work to the canvas. Along with a number of other artists—Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg, and James Rosenquist—Warhol became known as a Pop artist, challenging the values and philosophies of the previous generation of Abstract Expressionists. In contrast to the Abstract Expressionist artists’ emphasis on individual expression and the large-scale gesture, these artists responded to the specific urban environment: they took account of the most mundane facts of daily life in America—how ordinary things looked; and how most information was transmitted. As Warhol observed: “The Pop artists did images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in a split second—comics, picnic tables, men’s trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles—all the great, modern things that the Abstract Expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all.”
Serial Imagery Seen in Warhol Retrospective

Many artists have made use of serial imagery, but few with the variety, originality, and range of effect achieved by Andy Warhol. The term serial imagery can refer either to a group of artworks conceived as a series or to the repeated or sequential use of similar or identical units within a single artwork. Although Warhol often worked within the context of the series, his achievement in serial form is mostly to be seen in a range of individual works.

Warhol’s works in series run the gamut from the narrowly defined series of thirty-two Campbell’s Soup Cans, 1962 (the number of which was determined simply by the varieties of Campbell’s soup available), to the Flowers and Mao, all of which seem limitless and, when installed by Warhol, create an environment that transcends the specificity of the group.

The range of effects and meanings implied by Warhol’s use of serial imagery in individual works is impressive. The first works in which a single image is repeated are the Airmail and S & H Green Stamps and Dollar Bill paintings of 1962. They are among Warhol’s first paintings made by means of the silkscreen process. Not unlike the Flags and Targets of Jasper Johns, these works replicate real things which themselves act as stand-ins for other things.

Later in 1962, Warhol began to use silkscreens treated with a photosensitive layer so that he could transfer photographic images onto the canvas. Pulled from various sources, the photographs became Warhol’s primary unit of form. It is perhaps in the area of portraiture that Warhol brings to his art his most inventive and varied use of serial form. In the portrait of Natalie Wood, a single image of the young starlet’s face is screened in black ink onto a bare white canvas forty-eight times in six parallel rows. Texture and movement are suggested both by the varying densities of ink and by the overlap or space left between each image. The overall effect is an image of a movie star, ubiquitous yet elusive; it also says something about the artificial late-twentieth-century notions of stardom and celebrity.

The impact of movie stardom infiltrates Warhol’s portraits of the less famous, as for example in his portrait of the Pop art collector Ethel Scull. Instead of repeating the same image many times on one canvas, here Warhol joins thirty-six canvases with different images of the same person. As in his portraits of celebrities, the photographs used were not taken by the artist, but in a standard, mechanical photo booth. Thus the sitter plays a large role in the making of Warhol’s portrait. The result is a tour de force of compositional skill, for ten of the thirty-six panels are actually repeats of others, some are reversed, and some show the image cropped in a new way. The dime-store colors used for each panel further enhance the overall sophistication of the picture.

In contrast to the seemingly endless variety of the Scull portrait is the 1964 portrait of Watson Powell, then president of an insurance company in Des Moines, Iowa. His image is repeated thirty-two times with slight variation in color only. Titled The American Man — Watson Powell, the picture seems to gently ridicule the rigidity of American corporate culture.

Another level of meaning is suggested in Warhol’s treatment of the pho...
A similar range of effects is produced by the use of serial imagery in Warhol's Death and Disasters series. Take, for example, the various ways Warhol treats one group of subjects, the car crash. In White Burning Car III, the repetition of the gory image of destruction produces a numbing response on the part of the viewer.

Warhol's Portraits and Disasters intersect at many points, but perhaps nowhere else as effectively as in the series based on the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, featuring the president's widow, Jacqueline. In Jackie (The Week That Was) Warhol's multiple images offer the viewer an obsessive re-enactment, since the actual events had already been repeated ad infinitum on television; their inescapable repetition had itself become a part of everyone's consciousness of that time.

The artist's reaction to the assassination, reported in his book POPism, sheds light both on the work and on his use of serial imagery in general: "I'd been thrilled having Kennedy as president, he was handsome, young, smart — but it didn't bother me that much that he was dead. What bothered me was the way the television and radio were programming everybody to feel so sad." In other words, Warhol used serial imagery not only for its emotional effect but also to refer to the means employed by the media to portray the event.

"The interviewer should just tell me the words he wants me to say and I'll repeat them after him. I think that would be so great because I'm so empty I just can't think of anything to say."

—Andy Warhol
Factory, Fame, and Fortune

From childhood, Andy Warhol yearned to be someone else. More than anything he wanted to transcend the limitations of his immigrant family in rural Pennsylvania and partake of life in the glamorous America of movies, radio, magazines, and newspapers. Quite simply put, Warhol wanted most of all what he lacked by birth: beauty, wealth, status, or fame. As the writer Truman Capote said, “Andy Warhol wanted to be anyone but Andy Warhol.”

Constantly fascinated with beauty and stardom, tantalized by the sensational accounts of the rich and famous on the screen or in the tabloids, Warhol was preoccupied with celebrities. In the fifties he made drawings of shoes named after famous people, which he called “personality” shoes. In the sixties this obsession was expressed in the serial portraits of Troy Donahue, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, and others. Marilyn and Liz were the ultimate embodiment of glamour and fame; intrigued by the tragedy that plagued their lives, Warhol elevated them to iconic images.

“In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes.”
—Andy Warhol

In addition to producing a tremendous output of painting and sculpture, such as the Brillo Boxes, Warhol used the indigenous chaos of the Factory as a setting for many of his films. He recorded everyday events—sleeping, eating, gossiping, and love-making—and made them into films. For him it became an alternative to painting, a continual happening of sorts, and Warhol assumed the role of impresario and director.

Almost anyone who wandered in and out of the Factory was captured on film. Among the members of Warhol’s entourage who appeared on film were Edie Sedgwick, Ultra Violet, Viva, Brigid Polk, Joe D’Allesandro, Taylor Mead, Ingrid Superstar, Candy Darling, Jackie Curtis, and members of the Velvet Underground.

“Publicity is like eating peanuts. Once you start you can’t stop.”—Andy Warhol

By the mid-sixties Warhol began to acquire his own level of celebrity and notoriety as a Pop artist and cultural figure. Warhol’s studio, known as the Factory, was a legendary hangout for artists, poets, and socialites. There was a continuous flow of people that provided him with constant stimulation and dialogue. The crowd Warhol attracted to the Factory was always large and eclectic, and included assistants who worked on his art.

“Publicity is like eating peanuts. Once you start you can’t stop.”
—Andy Warhol

In the seventies Warhol began to accept numerous commissions for portraits from those generally referred to as “beautiful people.” Almost instantly Warhol was a fixture in the jet-set social scene, and he relished his fame: “A good reason to be famous, though, is so you can read all the big magazines and know everybody in all the stories. Page after page it’s just all people you’ve met. I love that kind of reading experience and that’s the best reason to be famous.”

Warhol’s place in the public eye was twofold: that of an artist/celebrity and that of an entrepreneur. From his Pop images, which both shock and endure, to his unforgettable epigrams, Warhol was one of the most influential and certainly the most famous artist of his time.

“I think we’re a vacuum here at the Factory, it’s great. I like being a vacuum; it leaves me alone to work. We are bothered though, we have cops coming up here all the time. They think we’re doing awful things and we aren’t.”
—Andy Warhol


"Despite his maxim, Andy Warhol's own fame has far outlasted the fifteen minutes he allotted to everyone else. During the last quarter-century of his life, from 1962 to 1987, he had already been elevated to the timeless and spaceless realm of a modern mythology that he himself both created and mirrored. And now that he is gone, the victim of a preposterously unnecessary mishap, the fictitious persona and the facts of his art still loom large in some remote, but ever-present, pantheon of twentieth-century deities."

"For one thing, the subject matter of his work, now that we are beginning to see it in full retrospect, covers so encyclopedic a scope of twentieth-century history and imagery that, in this alone, it demands unusual attention. To be sure, in the early sixties, his work could be sheltered under the Pop umbrella shared by Roy Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, Tom Wesselmann, and others, joining these contemporaries in what can now be seen more clearly as an effort to re-Americanize American art after a period of Abstract Expressionist universalism that renounced the space-time coordinates of the contemporary world in favor of some mythic, primordial realm. Within this domain, Warhol quickly emerged as a leader, choosing the grittiest, tackiest, and most commonplace facets of visual pollution in America that would make the aesthetes and mythmakers of the fifties cringe in their ivory towers."

Warhol as Filmmaker

By John G. Hanhardt, Special to The Modern Star

At the time of their release, between 1963 and 1968, the approximately sixty films produced by Andy Warhol were an integral part of his art practice and played a leading role in shaping his presence in American culture. To screen the films of Andy Warhol today, over twenty years after their production, is to relive another time and place in American culture and social history. The place was the Factory, a converted factory loft on East 47th Street, which, from 1960 to 1968, was Warhol's production center and a gathering place for the New York art scene.

The underground world in which Warhol moved, and for which the Factory became a stage, was a compelling subject for Warhol's camera. The silver-walled Factory became a place in which subculture heroes and transient strangers acted out their fantasies and mingled under the gaze of their main audience, that "tycoon of passivity," Warhol himself. They became part of Warhol's studio and underground star system, modeled on the "Hollywood dream factory" that had created myths and heroes for twentieth-century America.

"The lighting is bad, the camera work is bad, the projection is bad, but the people are beautiful."

—Andy Warhol

Warhol's films paralleled his art. The camera's mechanical means of reproduction echoed the "production line" system Warhol used to turn out his paintings, silkscreens, and sculptures. For all of these mediums the aesthetic was predicated on duplication.

Warhol controlled the entire production process of filmmaking, distribution, and exhibition. Within five years, he had recapitulated the history of the cinema, as the Factory's films went from silent to sound, from the use of a stationary, fixed-frame, contemplative camera to the exploration of a larger film space through zooms and pans and later to editing strategies that included strobe effects. Through this "discovery" of film techniques, Warhol constructed narratives that compressed the action and story within a single scene or achieved the same compression through ellipses. Both of these devices mirrored the proto-narrative achievements of filmmakers at the turn of the century. Warhol's later films took on a more conventional dramatic line, reflecting the established genres of Hollywood.

The different phases of Warhol's filmmaking career encompass a variety of filmmaking techniques. Postproduction (editing, rewriting, reshooting) was eliminated in a process that recalls the one-reelers produced at the turn of the century by filmmakers who were discovering a new medium. As Warhol put it: "With film you just turn on the camera and photograph something. I leave the camera running until it runs out of film because that way I can catch people being themselves." In Warhol's studio, in the words of author Stephen Koch, "the audience out there became part of the scene; everybody in the Factory knew he was being watched, and a glowing, theatrical self-awareness was built into the place's very life, endowing its most casual actions with a sense of moment. You couldn't make a wrong move; every impulse had its effect. Warhol's 16mm camera was a silent eye that recorded a culture of styles and gestures, of self-created superstars and outrageous scenes — the "cool" and "groovy" lifestyle of the sixties, in which, in Warhol's telling phrase, everybody was "famous for fifteen minutes." It was a new cinema whose raw energy became a powerful presence in the independent film community.
SPECIAL SCREENINGS: THE CHELSEA GIRLS

Wednesday, February 22, 6:30 p.m. Introduced by Jon Gartenberg, Assistant Curator, Department of Film, The Museum of Modern Art.

Wednesday, April 5, 6:30 p.m. Introduced by John G. Hanhardt, Curator, Film and Video Department, Whitney Museum of American Art.

Tickets are $8, Museum Members $7, and students $5, available at the Lobby Information Desk.

FILM SERIES ANNOUNCED

A selection of Andy Warhol’s films will be shown at The Museum of Modern Art on Tuesdays at 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m.

February 7 Sleep, Kiss, Empire
February 14 Eat, Blow Job
February 21 Henry Geldzahler
February 28 Vinyl> Beauty #2
March 7 The Life of Juanita Castro, My Hustler
March 14 Lonesome Cowboys

Tickets, free with Museum admission, are available at the Lobby Information Desk.

SYMPOSIUM TO BE HELD AT MUSEUM

A symposium titled “Reflecting on Warhol” will be held on Thursday, March 16, at 6:30 p.m. at the Museum. The moderator will be Walter Hopps, Director, The Menil Collection, Houston. Participants are Trevor Fairbrother, Associate Curator of Contemporary Art, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Richard Sennett, Professor of Sociology and University Professor of the Humanities, New York University; Kenneth Silver, Associate Professor of Fine Arts, New York University; and Amy Taubin, Film Critic, The Village Voice. Tickets are $8, Museum Members $7, and students $5, available at the Lobby Information Desk.

BOOK NEWS

The Museum has announced the publication of a lavish, authoritative book, Andy Warhol: A Retrospective, to accompany its historic Warhol exhibition. Inside its lively covers are an introduction by Kynaston McShine, illustrated essays by Robert Rosenblum, Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, and Marco Livingstone, a collection of Warhol’s writings, a portrait of the artist consisting of contributions by his colleagues, a chronology of his life, and a selected bibliography. The plate section provides the most comprehensive visual review of Warhol’s lifework available in print, with many images in full color. This is the definitive Warhol book. 480 pages, 460 plates (277 in color), 176 reference illustrations. Clothbound $66, paperbound $35. Available in The Museum Store.

"When you think about it, department stores are kind of like museums."

— Andy Warhol