

*"How can you say one style is better than another? You ought to be able to be an Abstract Expressionist next week, or a Pop artist, or a realist, without feeling you've given up something.. I think that would be so great, to be able to change styles. And I think that's what's is going to happen, that's going to be the whole new scene."*

## **SYNOPSIS**

Andy Warhol was the most successful and highly paid commercial illustrator in New York even before he began to make art destined for galleries. Nevertheless, his screenprinted images of Marilyn Monroe, soup cans, and sensational newspaper stories, quickly became synonymous with Pop Art. He emerged from the poverty and obscurity of an Eastern European immigrant family in Pittsburgh, to become a

charismatic magnet for bohemian New York, and to ultimately find a place in the circles of High Society. For many his ascent echoes one of Pop Art's ambitions, to bring popular styles and subjects into the exclusive salons of high art. His elevation to the status of a popular icon represented a new kind of fame and celebrity for a fine artist.

## KEY IDEAS

- Warhol's early commercial illustration has recently been acclaimed as the arena in which he first learned to manipulate popular tastes. His drawings were often comic, decorative, and whimsical, and their tone is entirely different from the cold and impersonal mood of his Pop Art.
- Much debate still surrounds the iconic screenprinted images with which Warhol established his reputation as a Pop artist in the early 1960s. Some view his *Death and Disaster* series, and his *Marilyn* pictures, as frank expressions of his sorrow at public events. Others view them as some of the first expressions of 'compassion fatigue' - the way the public loses the ability to sympathize with events from which they feel removed. Still others think of his pictures as screens - placed between us and horrifying events - which attempt to register and process shock.
- Although artists had drawn on popular culture throughout the 20th century, Pop art marked an important new stage in the breakdown between high and low art forms. Warhol's paintings from the early 1960s were important in pioneering these developments, but it is arguable that the diverse activities of his later years were just as influential in expanding the implications of Pop art into other spheres, and further eroding the borders between the worlds of high art and popular culture.
- Although Warhol would continue to create paintings intermittently throughout his career, in 1965 he officially retired from the medium to concentrate on making experimental films. Despite years of neglect, these films have recently attracted widespread interest, and Warhol is now seen as one of the most important filmmakers of the period.
- Critics have traditionally seen Warhol's career as going into decline in 1968, after he was shot by Valerie Solanas. Valuing his

early paintings above all, they have ignored the activities that absorbed his attention in later years - films, parties, collecting, publishing, and painting commissioned portraits. Yet some have begun to think that all these ventures make up Warhol's most important legacy because they prefigure the diverse interests, activities, and interventions that occupy artists today.

## **ARTIST BIOGRAPHY**

### **Childhood**

Andy was the third child born to Czechoslovakian immigrant parents, Ondrej and Ulja (Julia) Warhola, in a working class neighborhood of Pittsburgh. He had two older brothers, John and Paul. As a child, Andy was smart and creative. His mother, a casual artist herself, encouraged his artistic urges by giving him his first camera at nine years old. Warhol was known to suffer from a nervous disorder that would frequently keep him at home, and, during these long periods, he would listen to the radio and collect pictures of movie stars around his bed. It was this exposure to current events at a young age that he later said shaped his obsession with pop culture and celebrities. When he was 14, his father passed away, leaving the family money to be specifically used towards higher learning for one of the boys. It was decided by the family that Andy would benefit the most from a college education.

### **Early Training**

After graduating from high school at the age of 16, in 1945, Warhol attended Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University), where he received formal training in pictorial design. Shortly after graduating, in 1949, he moved to New York City, where he worked as a commercial illustrator. His first project was for *Glamour* magazine for an article entitled, "Success is a Job in New York." Throughout the 1950s Warhol continued his successful career in commercial illustration, working for several well-known magazines, such as *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *The New Yorker*. He also produced advertising and window displays for local New York retailers. His work with I. Miller & Sons, for which his whimsical blotted line advertisements were particularly noticed, gained him some local notoriety, even winning several awards from the Art Director's

Club and the American Institute of Graphic Arts.

In the early 1950s, Andy shortened his name from Warhola to Warhol, and decided to strike out on his own as a serious artist. His experience and expertise in commercial art, combined with his immersion in American popular culture, influenced his most notable work. In 1952, he exhibited *Fifteen Drawings Based on the Writings of Truman Capote* in his first individual show at the Hugo Gallery in New York. While exhibiting work in several venues around New York City, he most notably exhibited at MoMA, where he participated in his first group show in 1956. Warhol took notice of new emerging artists, greatly admiring the work of **Robert Rauschenberg** and **Jasper Johns**, which inspired him to expand his own artistic experimentation.

In 1960, Warhol began using advertisements and comic strips in his paintings. These works, examples of early **Pop Art**, were characterized by more expressive and painterly styles that included clearly recognizable brushstrokes, and were loosely influenced by **Abstract Expressionism**. However, subsequent works, such as his *Brillo Boxes* (1964), would mark a direct rebellion against Abstract Expressionism, by almost completely removing any evidence of the artist's hand.

## Mature Period

Andy Warhol worked across many media as a painter, printmaker, illustrator, filmmaker and writer. In September 1960, after moving to a townhouse at 1342 Lexington Avenue, on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, he began his most prolific period. From having no dedicated studio space in his previous apartment, where he lived with his mother, he now had plenty of room to work. In 1962 he offered the Department of Real Estate \$150 a month to rent a nearby obsolete fire house on East 87th Street. He was granted permission and used this space in conjunction with his Lexington Avenue space until 1964.

Continuing with the theme of advertisements and comic strips, his paintings throughout the early part of the 1960s were based primarily on illustrated images from printed media and graphic design. To create his large-scale graphic canvases, Warhol used an opaque projector to enlarge the images onto a large canvas on the wall. Then, working freehand, he would trace the image with paint directly onto the canvas without a pencil tracing underneath. As a result, Warhol's works from

early 1961 are generally more painterly.

Late in 1961, Warhol started on his *Campbell's Soup Can* paintings. The series employed many different techniques, but most were created by projecting source images on to canvas, tracing them with a pencil, and then applying paint. In this way Warhol removed most signs of the artist's hand.

In 1962 Warhol started to explore silkscreening. This stencil process involved transferring an image on to a porous screen, then applying paint or ink with a rubber squeegee. This marked another means of painting while removing traces of his hand; like the stencil processes he had used to create the *Campbell's Soup Can pictures*, this also enabled him to repeat the motif multiple times across the same image, producing a serial image suggestive of mass production. Often, he would first set down a layer of colors which would compliment the stencilled image after it was applied.

His first silkscreened paintings were based on the front and back faces of dollar bills, and he went on to create several series of images of various consumer goods and commercial items using this method. He depicted shipping and handling labels, Coca-Cola bottles, coffee can labels, Brillo Soap box labels, matchbook covers, and cars. From autumn 1962 he also started to produce photo-silkscreen works, which involved transferring a photographic image on the porous silkscreens. His first was *Baseball* (1962), and those that followed often employed banal or shocking imagery derived from tabloid newspaper photographs of car crashes and civil rights riots, money and consumer household products.

In 1964 Warhol moved to 231 East 47th Street, calling it "The Factory." Having achieved moderate success as an artist by this point, he was able to employ several assistants to help him execute his work. This marked a turning point in his career. Now, with the help of his assistants, he could more decisively remove his hand from the canvas and create repetitive, mass-produced images that would appear empty of meaning and beg the question, "What makes art, art?" This was an idea first introduced by **Marcel Duchamp**, whom Warhol admired.

Warhol had a lifelong fascination with Hollywood, demonstrated by his series of iconic images of celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor. He also expanded his medium into installations, most

notably at the Stable Gallery in New York in 1964, replicating Brillo boxes in their actual size and then screenprinting their label designs onto blocks made of plywood.



Wanting to continue his exploration of different mediums, Warhol began experimenting with film in 1963. Two years later, after a trip to Paris for an exhibition of his work, he announced that he would be retiring from painting to focus exclusively on film. Although he never completely followed through with this intention, he did produce many films, most starring those whom he called the Warholstars, an eccentric and eclectic group of friends who frequented the Factory and were known for their unconventional lifestyle.

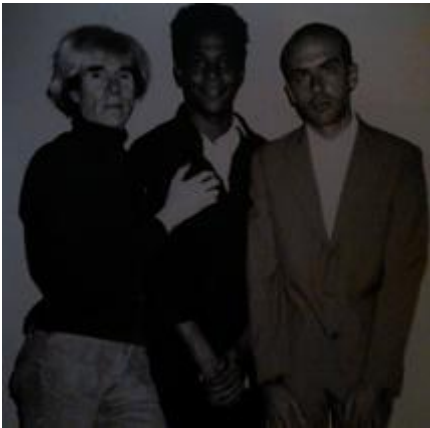
He created approximately 600 films between 1963 and 1976, films ranging in length from a few minutes to 24 hours. He also developed a project called *The Exploding Plastic Inevitable*, or EPI, in 1967. The EPI was a multi-media production combining The Velvet Underground rock band with projections of film, light and dance, culminating in a sensory experience of performance art. Warhol had also been self-publishing artist's books since the 1950s, but his first mass produced book, *Andy Warhol's Index*, was published in 1967. He later published several other books, and founded Interview Magazine with his friend Gerard Malanga in 1969. The magazine is dedicated to celebrities and is still in production today.

After an attempt on his life in 1968, by acquaintance and radical feminist, Valerie Solanas, he decided to distance himself from his unconventional entourage. This marked the end of the 1960s Factory scene. Warhol subsequently sought out companionship in New York high society, and throughout most of the 1970s his work consisted of commissioned portraits derived from printed Polaroid photographs. The



most notable exception to this is his famous *Mao* series, which was done as a comment on President Richard Nixon's visit to China. Lacking the glamour and commercial appeal of his earlier portraits, critics saw Warhol as prostituting his artistic talent, and viewed this later period as one of decline. However, Warhol saw financial success as an important goal. He had made the shift from commercial artist to business artist.

## Late Years and Death



Ironically, in the late 1970s and 1980s, Warhol made a return to painting, and produced works that frequently verged on abstraction. His *Oxidation Painting* series, which were made by urinating on a canvas of copper paint, echoed the immediacy of the Abstract Expressionists and the rawness of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings. By the 1980s, Warhol had regained much of his critical notoriety, due in part to his collaboration with Jean-Michel Basquiat and Francesco Clemente, two much younger and more cutting-edge artists. In the final years of Warhol's life, he turned to religious subjects; his version of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* is particularly renowned. In these works, Warhol melded the sacred and the irreverent by juxtaposing enlarged logos of brands against images of Christ and his Apostles.

After suffering postoperative complications from a routine gall bladder procedure, Warhol died on February 22, 1987. He was buried in his hometown of Pittsburgh. His memorial service was held in St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and attended by more than 2,000 people.

## LEGACY

Andy Warhol was one of the most influential artists of the second half of the 20th century, creating some of the most recognizable images ever produced. Challenging the idealist visions and personal emotions conveyed by abstraction, Warhol embraced popular culture and commercial processes to produce work that appealed to the general public. He was one of the founding fathers of the Pop Art movement, expanding the ideas of Duchamp by challenging the very definition of art. His artistic risks and constant experimentation with subjects and media made him a pioneer in almost all forms of visual art. His unconventional sense of style and his celebrity entourage helped him reach the mega-star status to which he aspired.

Warhol's will dictated that his estate fund the Warhol Foundation for the advancement of the visual arts, which was subsequently created later that year. Through the joint efforts of the Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, Carnegie Institute, Dia Center for the Arts, and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., the Warhol Museum was opened in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1994, housing a large collection of his work.

*Original content written by **The Art Story**  
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## ARTIST QUOTES

"Buying is more American than thinking, and I'm as American as they come."

"Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist."

"In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes."

"The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do."



## Major Works:



**Title:** 100 Cans (1962)

**Materials:** Oil on canvas

**Collection:** The Albright Knox Gallery, Buffalo, New York

**Description:** It is said that the gallery owner and interior designer Muriel Latow gave Warhol the idea of painting soup cans, when she suggested to him that he should paint objects that people see every day. Painted in 1962, *100 Cans* is an early example of Warhol's repeated image of a mass produced consumer good. He began by projecting a source image on to canvas, then he traced the image repeatedly, creating a two dimensional graphic aesthetic. Warhol went on to produce several tributes to Campbell's soup cans, sometimes as a single portrait. *The Campbell's Soup portraits* are divided into two types based on their execution. One derives from an illustrated image, and is classified as the "Monchengladbach type" (This term comes from the Städtisches Museum Abteiberg, Monchengladbach, where the most widely known example of this type is displayed.) The other type derives from the logo printed on a Campbell Soup Company envelope, and is referred to as the "Ferus type" (Ferus stemming from the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles where he exhibited 32 canvases of this type in 1962.)



**Title:** Orange Car Crash Fourteen Times (1963)

**Materials:** Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on two canvases

**Collection:** Museum of Modern Art, New York

**Description:** *Orange Car Crash* is from the *Death and Disaster* series that consumed much of Warhol's attention in this period. Often using gruesome and graphic images taken from daily newspapers, he would use the photo-silkscreening method to repeat them across the canvas. Although the repetition of the image, and its fragmentation and degradation, are important in creating the impact of the pictures, the areas of the canvas that Warhol left blank, as richly colored monochromes, are also important in evoking the emptiness of death.



**Title:** Brillo Boxes (1969 version of 1964 original) (1969 version of 1964 original)

**Materials:** Acrylic silkscreen on wood

**Collection:** Norton Simon Museum, Pasadena, California

**Description:** Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* were first exhibited at the Stable Gallery in 1964. Still using the silkscreen technique, this time on plywood, Warhol presented the viewer with exact replicas of commonly used products found in homes and supermarkets. Presenting such objects as art represented a provocative commentary on the American consumer society: ordinary objects had been elevated into icons.



**Title:** Untitled from Marilyn Monroe (Marilyn) (1967)

**Materials:** Silkscreen

**Collection:** Museum of Modern Art, New York

**Description:** After her sudden death in August 1962, Marilyn Monroe's life and career became a worldwide obsession. Warhol, being infatuated with fame and pop culture, obtained a black-and-white publicity photo of her, taken in 1953 for her film *Niagara*, and used the photo to create several series of images. Each *Marilyn* work was an experiment of dramatically shifting colors and shadow. With the help of his assistants, and the printing technique used, Warhol was able to recreate images such as this at a fast rate. *Marilyn* is an example of the successful evolution of Warhol's goal of erasing signs of the artist's hand from the production process.



**Title:** Oxidation Painting (1978)

**Materials:** Urine on metallic pigment in acrylic pigment on canvas

**Collection:** Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

**Description:** Created late in Warhol's career, *Oxidation Painting* is part of a series of works that was produced by the artist alone, or with a group of his friends, and made by urinating on a canvas of copper paint that was placed horizontally on the floor and then allowing the result to oxidize. The result was a metallic sheen with a surprising depth of color and texture; a surface reminiscent of works by Abstract Expressionists such as Jackson Pollock. Warhol put much thought and design into these works, and is quoted as saying, "[these paintings] had technique, too. If I asked someone to do an Oxidation painting, and they just wouldn't think about it, it would just be a mess. Then I did it myself -- and it's just too much work -- and you try to figure out a good design."



**Title:** Mao (1973)

**Materials:** Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas

**Collection:** The Art Institute of Chicago

**Description:** Warhol combines paint and silkscreen in this image of Mao Zedong, a series that he created in direct reaction to President Richard Nixon's recent visit to China. The painting is very large, 448.3cm by 346.7 cm, its scale evoking the dominating nature of Mao's rule over China. It also echoes the towering propagandistic representations that were being displayed throughout China during the Cultural Revolution. The graffiti-like splashes of color, red rouge and blue eye shadow, literally 'de-faces' Mao's image - an act of rebellion against the Communist propagandist machine by using its own devices against itself.



**Title:** Rorschach (1984)

**Materials:** Synthetic polymer paint on canvas

**Collection:** MoMA, New York

**Description:** Although Warhol's earliest work declared a dramatic break with Abstract Expressionism, he remained interested in abstraction throughout his career, and, in 1984, focused his ideas into his large series of *Rorschach* paintings. They were inspired by the so-called Rorschach test, devised by the Swiss psychologist Hermann Rorschach. The test requires patients to say what they see in a set of ten standardized ink blots; in this way Rorschach believed we might gain access to unconscious thoughts.

Warhol believed that much abstract painting functioned in a similar way: instead of artists being able to communicate thoughts through abstract form, as many believed, he thought that viewers' simply projected their own ideas on to the pictures. His *Rorschach* pictures were therefore a kind of parody of abstract painting: they were mirrors which reflected the viewer's own thoughts, and at times they seemed to resemble genitalia or wallpaper designs.



**Title:** General Electric with Waiter (1984)

**Materials:** Acrylic and oil on canvas

**Collection:** Collection unknown

**Description:** It was at the suggestion of art dealer Bruno Bischofsberger that Warhol began collaborating on paintings. He worked first with the Italian Francesco Clemente, and with the much younger, Haitian-American painter Jean-Michel Basquiat; later he produced work with Keith Haring. Warhol's reputation was flagging in the early 1980s, and he had painted little since the 1960s, but his collaboration with Basquiat, which spanned two years between 1984-5, energized him and placed him amidst a young and more fashionable generation. *General Electric with Waiter* is typical of the pictures the pair produced together: Warhol contributed enlarged headlines, brand names and fragments of advertisements; Basquiat added his expressive graffiti. The success of the series rested on the cartoon qualities inherent in both Pop art and graffiti.



**Title:** Self-Portrait (1986)

**Materials:** Synthetic polymer paint and silkscreen ink on canvas

**Collection:** National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

**Description:** Warhol's self portraits that he created throughout his career reveal an underlying theme of performance. By using repetitive images, each slightly different to the next, Warhol produces the illusion of movement. Created towards the end of his life, *Self-Portrait* (1986) displays the artist in his signature wig; it also makes dramatic use of shadow and light. This work is also a good example of Warhol's use of the combination of photography, silkscreen, and painting.