



Andy Warhol Portfolios: A Life in Pop

Works from the Bank of America Collection

Memorial Art Gallery | October 25, 2020—March 28, 2020

“It is an art which does not seem to be an art. One must avoid affectation and practice in all things a certain sprezzatura, disdain or carelessness, so as to conceal art, and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it.... obvious effort is the antithesis of grace.”

— Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*

At first glance, it seems strange to couple the postwar art of Andy Warhol with a sixteenth-century concept penned by Baldassare Castiglione in his 1528 etiquette manual for young courtiers. Whatever relevance could such a precious, stylized treatise have for the crown prince of New York City's demimonde? If there was anything that Andy Warhol embodied, both in his person and in his art, it was *sprezzatura* – “the cultivated ability to display artful artlessness.” In fact, the entire history of postwar American culture – and subsequently that of the world – can be traced to Andy Warhol's pursuit of a personal style and artistic demeanor that would allow him to blend his working-class, Eastern European heritage, his newly minted savoir faire for advertising lingo and imagery, and his gay sensibility into an amalgam that would suit the new consumerist urges of the Swinging Sixties.

Andy Warhol was born on August 6, 1928, in the Soho district of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a date and place he often denied or obscured when speaking to journalists and historians. While he never completely eschewed his heritage, at the age of ten Andy was busy beginning to construct another legacy in another world, where instead of names like Andrei Warhola and Julia Zavacky there were names like Jean Harlow and Shirley Temple, names certainly more suitable for his adopted land of birth, Hollywood. Engaged in neither sports nor the antics of the other working-class kids on the block, Warhol spent his free time sending away for movie-star fan photographs or entering contests that bore such titles as “Be a Million Dollar Artist!” Even his parents saw that their boy was different, that he could never make it in the steel mills, and so they saved several thousand dollars in U.S. Postal Savings Bonds for his college education. At Carnegie Tech, he studied under the legendary instructor Robert Lepper and completed projects that dealt with the transformation of one's environment, just the grist for his creative mill.

Not surprisingly, after graduation in 1949 Andy Warhol sought out the bright lights of New York. In the next two years, Warhol quickly became the highest-paid illustrator in the city, earning approximately a hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year during the 1950s. Soon, the young Pittsburgh transplant learned how best to employ the trade adage “Sell the sizzle and not the steak!” This notion of spin-doctoring, of mythmaking, of associative advertising was to become the bottom line of Warhol's art credo. It is easy to see how in the early 1960s, after having produced illustrations for everything from stockings to perfume, Warhol made the leap to consumer

products as the subject matter for his art. The influence of Warhol's early career could also often be found in the bountiful displays he crafted for the windows of Bonwit Teller, a department store on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. In the most famous of these displays, Warhol placed mannequins wearing summer frocks in front of canvases he painted around the theme of comic-book cartoons.



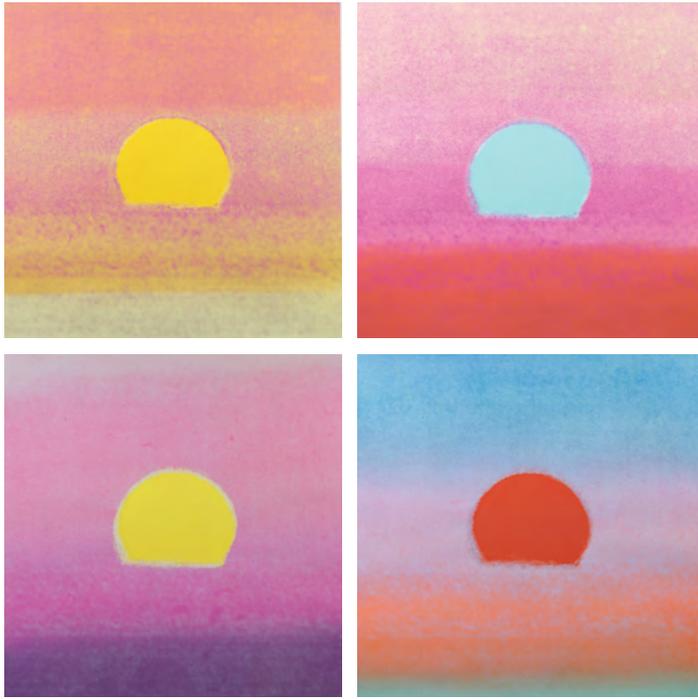
Andy Warhol

Flowers, 1970

From a portfolio of ten screenprints on paper, 28/250

Bank of America Collection

With this window display, Andy Warhol completed an entire transformation of himself and his art; the perfect modern flaneur had emerged in midtown Manhattan, and by the spring of 1962, Andy Warhol was an acknowledged art star. The covers of *Look*, *Time* and *Life* simultaneously proclaimed him the “Prince of



Andy Warhol

Sunset I-IV, 1972

Portfolio of four screenprints on paper, 31/40

Bank of America Collection

Pop.” As Warhol himself opined, “Once you have seen Pop Art, you can never look at an advertising billboard the same way again.” Warhol’s work came as a thunderous rebuke to the art of the surly Abstract Expressionist painters and their highbrow critics. Only young dealers, among them Ivan Karp, Irving Blum and Leo Castelli, knew what to do with this new phenomenon called “pop,” which so perfectly mirrored the world into which it had descended. The sexual revolution, Haight-Ashbury, British pop bands, the miniskirt and the ever-nearing end of the Cold War provided a perfect backdrop for Warhol’s *Campbell’s Soup Can* canvases.

Warhol searched for glamorous “young, fast things” to serve in his entourage. In quick succession, trust-fund socialites like Edie Sedgwick, male hustlers like Joe Dallesandro, unknown beauties and toughs were transformed into “superstars” emblazoned with such androgynous names as Ingrid Superstar, Ondine, Paul America and Ultraviolet. Warhol provided these thespians manqué with a stage set, the Factory. Located at 231 East 47th Street, this down-at-the-heels loft space was magically transformed: The floors and ceilings were painted silver; the walls were covered with rolls of aluminum foil. While

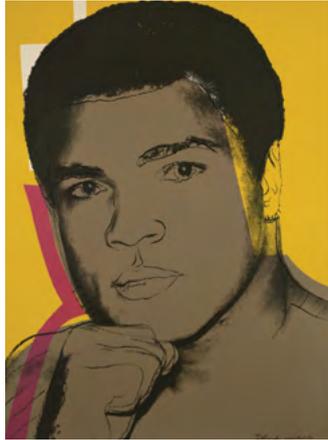
this reflective surface served as a marvelous backdrop for the antics of the Factory denizens, it also recalled the insulation, backed with aluminum foil, of factory walls in Warhol’s hometown. It has often been commented that the choice of the name “Factory” was Warhol’s paean to his working-class roots.

Andy Warhol’s self-transformation constantly trafficked in what one might call a “perfectly studied nonchalance,” be it the participatory nature of his working process, the seemingly hit-or-miss approach to subject matter, or even the notion of covering the walls of an old industrial loft space with aluminum foil. In each instance, the result was dazzling, and apparently effortless. Warhol would not have wanted the viewer to think that he had struggled over the creation of any of his artworks, a somewhat ironic pose for the son of a Depression-era coal miner.

Nowhere in Warhol’s art is this sense of studied nonchalance more apparent than in his brilliant use of printmaking – in particular silkscreen printing, which formed the very heart of his artistic practice and met the needs of his clients. While it is certainly true that almost every serious artist since the last quarter of the nineteenth century had, at one time or another, ventured into the realm of the artistic multiple, be it etching, engraving, mezzotint or lithograph, these mechanical media always played second fiddle to the primary arts of painting, sculpture and architecture.

The artist who perhaps comes closest to being a Warholian primogenitor was Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901). One of the greatest of the French Postimpressionist painters, Lautrec, though noble born, made a considerable fortune from the sale of his many posters and prints, which served as both advertisements and social documentation of the denizens (prostitutes, actresses, cancan dancers, circus performers) of Parisian café society. Choosing rarely to sell his canvases and drawings, Lautrec elevated the role of the artist’s poster to a new level, aggrandizing low-life performers into superstars, tasks that only Warhol, some ninety years later, was also able to achieve.

It is a short and easy leap from Lautrec’s extraordinary print oeuvre to Warhol’s own adroitness in the realm of silk-screening. The silkscreen was the foundation for almost all of Warhol’s art making. Even though it is traditional to separate Warhol’s prints from his paintings, it is crucial to point out that his paintings were produced from silkscreens. As one member of the Factory noted, “We called the paintings ‘paintings’ because they were done on canvas and the prints ‘prints’ because they were printed on paper.” In fact, in almost every case, Warhol did each subject in each medium throughout his oeuvre, jumping back and forth between them with considerable élan.



© 2020 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York
Muhammad Ali. © 2020 Muhammad Ali Enterprise LLC

Andy Warhol

Muhammad Ali, 1978

Portfolio of four screenprints on Strathmore Bristol paper, 45/150
Bank of America Collection

It should also be noted that Warhol's proclivity for silk-screening was based on very clear business principles. Like Lautrec, Warhol recognized that the mass production of prints allowed for more clients, who might be able to purchase a goodly number of works at a far lower price than what a large painting would have commanded. And there were additional advantages for the potential buyer: Oftentimes, the size of the print and painting would be the same; and print editions were made in a number of colors (generally ten), offering a broad choice. The perfect case in point can be found in the *Flowers* series, 1970. In addition to providing the variation in colors, Warhol allowed for the possibility that the collector might choose to hang each print in one of four configurations, namely by turning it at ninety-degree angles. Yet, whatever

the hue or configuration, the work is unmistakably a Warhol.

Warhol was clearly and astutely aware of his art-historical predecessors and of earlier compositional and stylistic prototypes. The prints from the Bank of America Collection range from portraiture to still lifes to animal images (*Endangered Species*, 1983) to mythological and heroic images (*Myths*, 1981, based on photos taken by Warhol), all well-trod categories in which any academically trained artist from the sixteenth century on would have been versed.

Perhaps the most intriguing portfolio is *Myths*, produced six years before the artist's untimely death in 1987. In every sense, this series encapsulates Warhol's artistic viewpoint as well as his intellectual scope of the world around him. *Myths* might be seen as the artist's take on the United States of America, America as it had been constructed both by formal ideology and by popular consent. Uncle Sam stands side by side with Superman, each conveying equal parts of reality and fantasy, each clearly a cultural construct conceived and amplified for a specific purpose, to move a nation or to dazzle a child.

Is one of the images, *The Shadow*, 1981, a profile or a self-portrait of the artist himself? The title references a famous radio drama of the same name that was widely syndicated during the artist's childhood years and, at the same time, recalls the art-historical legend of the thrown shadow on the wall, which, when traced with charcoal, resulted in the creation of the first image. Both of these stories are delicately linked together in this simple image. But finally, the image is, in fact, a portrait of Warhol, and thus begs the question, is he conferring mythic status upon himself? If the answer is in the positive, Warhol chose the great mythic creations of American movies and cartoons as his confreres, rather than placing himself amid other great artists and thinkers. But, if the answer is in the negative, one might recall his personal suggestion that the word "Figment" be put on his tombstone rather than his own name. In this manner, he probably suggested that the creation of Andy Warhol is no more real or no less fictitious than Superman, Howdy Doody, Uncle Sam or Dracula. Each serves a purpose in the collective, popular imagination. Ultimately, with his characteristic light touch and nimble step, Andy Warhol created art forms (including himself) that radically transform the art form itself and provide us with a brilliant mirror of the world of postwar America and a vector for the future.

— Thomas Sokolowski
Former Director, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

Cover image:

Andy Warhol

Marilyn Monroe (Marilyn), 1967

From a portfolio of ten screenprints on paper, 3/250

Bank of America Collection

© 2020 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. /

Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Marilyn Monroe. © 2020 The Estate of Marilyn Monroe LLC

Art in our Communities[®]

At Bank of America, we believe in the power of the arts to help economies thrive, while educating and enriching societies. That's why we are a leader in helping the arts flourish across the globe, supporting more than 2,000 nonprofit cultural institutions each year.

We use our art collection, which has come to us from many legacy banks that are now part of Bank of America, for the benefit of the community. The collection has been converted into a unique resource from which museums and nonprofit galleries may borrow complete exhibitions at no cost. Since 2009, more than 140 museums worldwide have borrowed exhibitions.



500 University Avenue
Rochester, NY 14607
585.276.8900 | mag.rochester.edu