WHO IS ANDY WARHOL?
’SUCCESS IS A JOB IN NEW YORK’
POP ANDY AND THE FACTORY
FOCUS (1) CAMPBELL’S SOUP CANS
FOCUS (2) MARILYN
FOCUS (3) FILM
THE ART OF BUSINESS AND THE BUSINESS OF ART
FOCUS (4) SELF-PORTRAITS
THE HAND AND THE MACHINE
FOCUS (5) PRINTS
FOCUS (6) OXIDATION PAINTINGS
FOCUS (7) SHADOWS
FOCUS (8) THE LAST SUPPER
CHRONOLOGY
FURTHER READING
LIST OF WORKS
Popular opinion crowned Andy Warhol (1928–1987) as the ‘Prince of Pop’, the artist who created a pantheon of pictures that became icons of American consumer culture in the 1960s. His bold, simple images of soup, cereal, soda and celebrity participated in the Pop Art revolution that introduced to the vocabulary of art such commonplace products as Campbell’s Soup and such screen stars as Marilyn Monroe. Warhol rummaged through mass media magazines, films and television, selecting key objects and people that represented his moment in time. He then transformed these media images with a bold, graphic directness that emblazoned them into our collective consciousness. In his paintings, Warhol portrayed an America shaped by the explosive economic growth after World War II and newfound political power. He also scraped the surface of the new America to reveal its darker side, the debris of a culture that littered its landscape with the shredded metal of car crashes strewn about the highways, harrowing suicides, dangerous criminals and the chilling emptiness of state-sanction execution in the electric chair. Warhol’s legions of grocery products, troubled celebrities, deaths and disasters, forced us to confront both the benefits of consumerism and the lurking cataclysms and tragedies that marred the idyll. By isolating everyday objects, Warhol allowed us to see them as emblems of American culture.

Warhol created a pantheon of images, marking an era that witnessed the explosion of mass communication media. He recognized that marketing and media defined his generation and he used it as his source and subject. By appropriating photographic images and reproducing them through mechanical processes, Warhol ushered in a fundamental transformation of our visual culture. The visual arts of the twentieth century had been dominated by abstract modern art. In contrast, Warhol reintroduced representational images from everyday life, and reproduced them en masse in his Factory to create an encyclopedia of visual signs. This alteration of the arts—from abstract to figurative and from handwork to the machine-made—continues to characterize the world in which we live. Having abandoned artistic touch and adopted photo-mechanical images as a basis for an individual’s artistic practice, Warhol forged the foundation of the cross-media era of conceptually based contemporary art that subordinates traditional artistic issues of medium, style and originality.
Warhol participated in the Pop Art revolution of the early 1960s that elevated representational images of commercial and popular culture into the vocabulary of art. Pop Art resonated throughout the western world, with recognizable images of familiar people and commonplace things that a broad public could understand and appreciate. Through his subjects and media, Warhol was able to communicate with his generation. He rebelled against Abstract Expressionist painting in the United States and Art Informel in Europe during the 1950s, as exemplified by works by Jackson Pollock (1912–1956) and Wols. His training in graphic design and illustration provided him with the tools to wed mass media and high art over the four decades of his career.

As a commercial illustrator in New York in the 1950s, Warhol participated in the ‘golden era’ of the fashion and glamour industries, when they blossomed on the wings of Madison Avenue marketing. Hollywood continued its exponential growth, promoting an ever-expanding universe of movie stars. By 1960 ninety per cent of American households had a television that served as the domestic altar and the principal purveyor of news and information. In the mind of Marshall McLuhan, a cultural theorist of the 1960s, mass media had solidified the shift from a literary based society. As he put it, ‘In the new electric Age of Information and programmed production, commodities themselves assume more and more the character of information.’ Warhol understood this sea change.

But Warhol did not simply create instantly accessible works of art. He also cultivated a persona that helped to spawn a new, bohemian subculture, setting trends in art, music and cinema of the 1960s. His eccentric personality and his entourage of acolytes captured media attention and altered the cult of celebrity. At the Factory, as his New York studio became known, Warhol was the wispy doyen, both the voyeur and the provocateur, overseeing a circus of reckless abandon, with drugs, sexual liberation, transgender charades, film, music and a menagerie of the tumultuous life of the 1960s unfolding before him. Warhol marketed his persona in film, television, magazines, night clubs and on fashion catwalks. He fused high art, low culture, high society and the avant-garde into a distinctive amalgamation that attracted the attention of millions and influenced generations of artists. In his art and lifestyle Warhol held a mirror up for us to see the world that we had created.
Warhol was a complex individual whose public persona and private life appear to be contradictions. He vamped the New York social circuit, but was painfully shy and feared contact with others. The man who sat on his chair in the Factory watching the events unfold before him was, in private, religious, and lived a quiet domestic life with his mother in a townhouse on New York’s fashionable Upper East Side. He sought celebrity, yet also lived a guarded, private life known only to a few of his closest confidants. The impression he made in numerous interviews swung wildly between his dullness, with his monosyllabic answers of ‘Yes’ or ‘No’, or ‘Gee, it’s great’, to glibness, with eminently quotable responses, such as ‘I’ll be your mirror’. Both the stubborn and the flip remarks masked the piercing intellect that the artist expressed through his work.

The contrast between Warhol’s public and private personas parallels the range of his art and his career. As a public figure he claimed to represent the common person with such strappings as Coke, hamburgers and chicken-noodle soup. He championed art as commerce and wanted to become a machine, cranking out serial images of Marilyn, Elizabeth Taylor, and Flowers in his popular Factory. Yet, he always identified himself as a painter and aspired to be compared to the world’s great artists, treating the ‘serious’ subjects of politics, religion and death. He rebelled against tradition and separated himself from his predecessors, the Abstract Expressionist painters, seeking ‘to do new ideas’. Ironically, throughout his life he admired and emulated those artists. Early in his career, he advocated interpretative content in his paintings, saying they were a ‘statement of the symbols of the harsh, impersonal products and brash materialistic objects on which America is built today’. Then, at the height of his Pop celebrity, he could reverse direction and emphasize the superficiality of his work, saying, ‘If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface: of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.’

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In approximately ten-year cycles, Warhol dramatically shifted his artistic direction. Beginning as a successful commercial illustrator in the 1950s, he reinvented himself as a hip cult figure in the 1960s. After a failed assassination attempt in 1968, Warhol became a fashionable society portraitist in the 1970s, before drawing together many of the techniques he had practised in an astounding tour de force of artistic innovation and productivity during his final decade. The sheer range and volume of his work is prodigious. At the core is Warhol’s training in graphic design and illustration, which shaped his choice of subjects and the execution of his works. He continually experimented with new materials and techniques. Throughout Warhol’s career we witness certain constants: his obsession with celebrity, beauty, glamour and wealth. Simultaneously, he knew the importance of politics and the finality of death, subjects that confront us with startling directness or lurk behind the glitter. Warhol understood these as the essential messages of his age and his art.
AN EDUCATION

The graphic design and illustration training that Warhol received at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, in his home town of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, launched him on his path as an artist. Raised in an immigrant, working-class family during the Depression, Warhol was fortunate to have had this opportunity. Czech immigrants, Andrei and Julia Warhola, struggled to provide for their family in this difficult economic period. Andrei recognized that his youngest son, Andrew, had the talent to become the first family member to receive a college education, and he saved money to realize that ambition.

As a boy, Andrew Warhola suffered two severe bouts of rheumatic fever that forced him into convalescence at home with his mother. During the many months of recovery, Andrew drew avidly, and assisted his mother painting flowers on porcelain to supplement the family income. In these long, quiet hours he also cultivated what would become a lifelong obsession with celebrity, collecting signed photographs of movie stars, his most prized being a photograph of child actress Shirley Temple. Because of his considerable graphic ability, Warhol was recommended for the free Saturday art classes at the Carnegie Mellon Museum. There he blossomed under the tutelage of an enthusiastic teacher, who sparked his burgeoning interest in art and earned him a scholarship to Carnegie Tech.

Enrolled in the Pictorial Design programme, Warhol learned to draw like the leading illustrators of the day, the Regionalist painter Thomas Hart Benton.
and the expatriate German Expressionist George Grosz. In the summer of 1946, Andrew worked with his brother Paul, selling fruit and vegetables door-to-door in Pittsburgh from the back of a huckster wagon. He bought a sketchbook and with a vibrant, serpentine line drew the renewed vitality of post-war Pittsburgh pulling itself out of the Depression. The elongated figures in *Women and Produce Truck* have the same vibrancy of line that is found in Benton’s prints and Grosz’s scenes of working class America. Unfortunately, Warhol struggled through school, facing academic expulsion on several occasions. During the first year at Carnegie his drawings and paintings did not stand out. One of his professors later admitted that, if he had been asked, Andrew Warhola would not have been a student ‘most likely to succeed’. After his junior year Andrew faced dismissal from the school.

The faculty required him to attend summer school to improve his drawing. If he could submit an acceptable portfolio at the end of the session, he would be reinstated. The class transformed Warhol. The instructor Professor Russell Hyde challenged him to develop a personal style, to ‘do it the way you see it’. As a fledgling artist entering school, he had cultivated the ability to render a likeness already seen in his earlier 1942 self-portrait. During his first years at Carnegie Tech, his work acquired the sinewy line of his huckster truck drawings. Over the summer of 1948, he developed a broken-line style that he would master as a commercial artist. In his study of the outspoken Louisiana Senator Huey Long, Warhol exploits an array of dense ink lines off jagged lines and energetic dashes to create a dynamic effect of figures densely compressed into a tight space. His draughtsmanship had become more stylized, with a range of markings that created a multifaceted surface texture and pattern, indicating his awareness of Ben Shahn, the principal American illustrator of the period, who had made the broken-line technique popular.

The graphic command that Warhol gained that summer impressed the faculty, who reinstated him into the programme, gave him an exhibition and awarded him a $50 prize. The quiet Andrew Warhola became the popular Andy, bolstering his fragile self-esteem and initiating his artistic daring. His self-confidence grew with the encouragement of his friends, who were entertained by the drawings that Warhol dashed off to amuse them. Boosted by the faculty’s response to his drawing and the popularity of his caricatures, Warhol became more daring. For his graduation exhibit, in May 1949, Warhol submitted *The Broad Gave Me My Face, But I Can Pick My Own Nose*. Despite the arguments for its inclusion by guest juror George Grosz, the other judges rejected the painting as obscene. Recognizing the publicity opportunity of his scandalous composition, Warhol exhibited it at a local gallery capitalizing on the picture’s notoriety, a strategy that would serve him well in the future.

**GLAMOUR ON MADISON AVENUE**

Immediately after graduation in June 1949, Warhol and his close friend and classmate, Philip Pearlstein (b. 1924) – who would himself become an important figurative painter – moved to New York City. With his youthful ambition, Warhol aspired to be a famous and wealthy commercial artist. On his second day in the city he earned a commission from Tina Fredericks, artistic director of *Glamour* magazine, who admired his portfolio and asked what he could draw. He boasted, ‘I can draw anything.’ Fredericks gave Warhol his first commission to illustrate women’s shoes. She loved them and then commissioned him to illustrate an article titled, ‘Success is a Job in New York’ (1949). The credit line for the drawings read, ‘Andy Warhol’, the magazine mistakenly dropping the final ‘a’ from his surname. Warhol liked the typo and kept the abbreviated surname as part of his new persona as a fashionable New York designer.
Fredericks’s commission launched Warhol’s career. Indeed, he became a ‘success’ over the next decade as the leading illustrator of women’s clothing and shoes, earning him design awards, countless contracts and a handsome income. His drawings appeared in Glamour, Harper’s Bazaar, Ladies’ Home Journal, McCall’s and Vogue magazines, and Warhol’s work found its way into homes, grocery stores and dentist surgeries across the United States. The demand for his illustrations expanded to television, record covers, theatre posters and illustrated books.

SHOES AND CELEBRITIES

Warhol spent his days making the rounds with his portfolio, soliciting clients for commissions. He compulsively worked late into the night sketching his ads campaigns, leaving them for his assistants to reproduce using his signature blotted-line technique that he had learned at Carnegie Tech. His sketch for Bird on Branch of Leaves illustrates how the ‘original’ drawing is transferred onto another sheet, which Warhol’s assistants would then hand-colour. Graphic illustration was the vogue in the 1950s, and Warhol had perfected a quirky, distinctive touch that gave his images vibrancy. His popularity led him to win the contract to become the chief graphic designer for the I. Miller Shoe Company in 1955. In weekly ads in The New York Times, Warhol generated great demand for I. Miller’s shoes with his elegant designs.

Warhol also sketched subjects of personal interest: literature, celebrities and young men. The 1950s witnessed the dawning of an openly homosexual culture in New York, to which Warhol was irresistibly attracted. While still a student, he had been captivated by Truman Capote’s book Other Voices, Other Rooms (1948), an autobiographical account of a young man who, in search of his father, discovers his homosexuality. The subject struck a nerve with Warhol’s own budding sexuality and he developed an obsession with Capote, producing portraits and self-portraits in the same likeness. Furthermore, his first professional art exhibition, in the summer of 1952 at Hugo Gallery in New York, was entitled ‘Fifteen Drawings Based on the Writings of Truman Capote’. The show received a guarded review in Art Digest that described the work as precious and perverse. At this point the overt homosexual tone of the drawings clouded their reception by the art media. His private passion for drawing men culminated in ‘Studies for a Boy Book’, shown at the Bodley Gallery, which he blithely opened on Valentine’s Day, 1956. Despite the public indifference to this show, several of the drawings were selected for a ‘Recent Drawings’ exhibition at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, later in 1956.

Warhol’s personal drawings attracted public attention later in 1956 when he combined his obsessions with shoes and celebrity in his ‘Golden Slipper Show’ at the Bodley Gallery during the Christmas holiday season. With the glamour of gold leaf and the delicacy of his line, his personifications of the famous through fantastic shoes were witty and beautiful. Their immense popularity resulted in commissions for shoe ‘portraits’ and a two-page spread in Life magazine (21 January 1957) championing his ‘Crazy Golden Slippers’. Recognizing the popularity of celebrities, Warhol followed with his self-published A Gold Book, which features a pensive James Dean as the frontispiece. Warhol capitalized on the public’s fascination with the actor and their instant recognition of his pose from Hollywood publicity stills, which he also included on the front cover.

A NEW GOAL

Warhol’s career as an illustrator peaked in 1956–7. He won several awards from the Art Director’s Club of America for his I. Miller ad campaigns. His personal drawings and books were widely distributed in magazines. Secure in his financial success, he purchased a townhouse on New York’s fashionable Upper East Side and established Andy Warhol Enterprises, Inc. to manage his business affairs. Then, in 1958, just a year later, his business empire began to crumble. The fashion for hand-drawn illustrations began to wane. I. Miller cancelled its contracts. Warhol scrambled for commissions to pay for his elaborate lifestyle. At the moment that his own success was beginning to slip, and his insecurity was increasing, Warhol witnessed a new paradigm of artistic success. Successive shows of the young painters Jasper Johns (b. 1930) and Robert Rauschenberg (1925–2008) in January and March 1958 at Leo Castelli Gallery, announced a significant shift in the art world away from the Abstract Expressionism of Pollock and Willem de Kooning (1904–1997). Their assemblages of everyday materials and subjects caused a sensation in the art world. Warhol admired their art and envied their success. Since his student days he had continually sought the new. He found it in Johns and Rauschenberg. Warhol became consumed with a new goal: to become a painter and to exhibit at Leo Castelli Gallery, a motivation that drove him on over the next decade.
Self-Portrait, 1942
Pencil on paper
48.3 × 34 cm (19 × 13 ⅛ in)
Private collection

Women and Produce Truck, 1946
Ink and graphite on paper
33 × 47.6 cm (13 × 18 ¾ in)
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh
11 Untitled (Huey Long), 1948–9
Pen and ink on paper
73.7 × 58.4 cm (29 × 23 in)
Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

12 The Bread Gave Me My Face,
But I Can Pick My Own Nose, 1948–9
Tempera on Masonite
94 × 45.7 cm (37 × 18 in)
Private collection