**ANDY WARHOL:**
**LIFE AND ART**

# THE ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM

The beginning and end of Andy Warhol's life would fit inside a circle with a two-mile radius, drawn on the geographic center of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The midpoint would be at 73 Orr Street, where Warhol's parents, Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants named Andrej Warhola and Julia Zavacky, first established their family. To the southeast is the second family home, at 3252 Dawson Street in the Oakland section, near Holmes Elementary School; to the northeast, Schenley High School. Carnegie Institute and Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) are on the eastern edge of the circle; Warhol took free Saturday art classes at Carnegie Institute for four years beginning in the fourth grade and later graduated from Carnegie Tech's College of Fine Arts. On the western edge of the circle, at 117 Sandusky Street, is The Andy Warhol Museum--the institution that represents his artistic legacy. That legacy was created elsewhere, in New York. But Warhol, more than any other artist, understood how the distance between working-class Pittsburgh and glitzy New York could be both enormous and insignificant. His art plays on everyone's fantasies of an inaccessible glamour and celebrity, as embodied in Marilyn and Elvis, Jackie and Mick; at the same time, his art demonstrates, over and over, that Marilyn and Elvis, Jackie and Mick are available to everyone, as if they were cans of soup.

Writing in 1985, Warhol commented that

*Everybody has their own America, and then they have pieces of a fantasy America that they think is out there but they can't see. When I was little, I never left Pennsylvania, and I used to have fantasies about things that I thought were happening...that I felt I was missing out on. But you can only live life in one place at a time...[Y]ou live in your dream America that you've custom-made from art and schmaltz and emotions just as much as you live in your real one.*

Warhol had lived in just such a fantasy America at least since the age of six, when he began collecting autographed photos of movie actors. (He seems to have concentrated on the child stars who were his contemporaries: Shirley Temple, Mickey Rooney, Freddie Bartholomew.) The difference between this fantasy world and Depression-era Pittsburgh might have seemed insurmountable; perhaps that's why, when he graduated from college in June 1949, he immediately moved to Manhattan, accompanied by his classmate, Phillip Pearlstein. It took only three months for him to begin a brilliant career as a commercial artist; his first assignment, appropriately enough, was to illustrate an article in Glamour magazine, "Success is a Job in New York." But if Warhol could literally be a part of Glamour, then glamour itself, as experienced in America, had to be a very down-to-earth fantasy.

What's great about this country [he wrote in 1975] is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.

This conflation of celebrity worship and consumerism seemed shamelessly superficial to some people--those who looked to art for spirituality, transcendence, and heroic ambition, or for a critique of an unjust society. To them, Warhol did well to title one of his books The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again). But more than thirty years have now passed since Warhol's *annus mirabilis* of 1962, when he exhibited the Campbell's Soup Cans at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles; the Disasters, Coca-Colas, and Marilyns at Stable Gallery in New York; and the Dance Diagrams in the epoch-making exhibition The New Realists at the Sidney Janis Gallery, New York. Over the course of thirty years, more and more people have understood that Warhol's art opened up a territory as large as the world itself; that this territory includes not only stars and soup cans, humor and wit, but also mysteries, terrors, and an undertow of morbidity. In revealing this territory to us, Warhol accomplished something more difficult than "redefining art." He revived a function of art that had been moribund for over a century--its ability to address the public at large, creating icons of their living beliefs.

Andrej Warhola, born in 1886, emigrated from Mikova, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, to the United States around 1913 and found work as a coal miner. His wife Julia Zavacky (born in 1892), who had

married Andrej in 1909, stayed behind; she was unable to follow him to America until 1921. The following year, Julia gave birth to her first child, Paul, and in 1925 to the second, John. Her youngest, Andy, was born in Pittsburgh on August 6, 1928.

In Pittsburgh, Andrej Warhola became a laborer in heavy construction. To help support the family, Julia made paper flowers, which she planted in tin cans and sold door-to-door. In hindsight, we may note that she gave Andy his first exposure to the craft and commerce of art-making. She also took an active role in encouraging his love of drawing, painting, cutting designs from paper, and reading. (He specially liked comics and magazines--though he must have felt comfortable with other books as well, since he skipped grades one and five at Holmes Elementary School.) With Julia's blessing, Andy took free classes in studio art and art appreciation at nearby Carnegie Institute. A few years later, when Andy was 13 years old, Andrej Warhol fell ill and died from tuberculous peritonitis.

In 1945, at age 17, Andy enrolled in the College of Fine Arts of Carnegie Institute of Technology, where he majored in pictorial design. During his summer vacations, he worked as a window dresser at Horne's department store; he also taught art part-time at the Irene Kaufmann Settlement. We may judge his talent for provocation by the trouble he caused with a senior-year painting, The Broad Gave Me My Face, But I Can Pick My Own Nose. Jurors for the Associated Artists of Pittsburgh could not agree on whether to accept the work for their annual exhibition; the picture was eventually included in an alternative show. We may judge Warhol's enterprise from the fact that he left for New York within a week of his college graduation and immediately found work as a commercial artist.

Upon beginning his career in New York--his clients soon included Vogue, The New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar, Tiffany & Co., Bergdorf Goodman, Bonwit Teller, and I. Miller--Andy removed the final a from his name and became Warhol. Apart from the purchase of a hairpiece early in the '50s and a nose job in 1957, this was about the biggest change he made in himself, as he went from poverty in Pittsburgh to success in New York. In 1952, when he moved to an apartment on the Upper East Side, his mother relocated to New York, staying there until 1971, when she returned to Pittsburgh because of medical problems. Not only did Julia Warhola always live close to Andy; she also participated in his work. Andy mimicked her handwriting in his drawings, based his signature on the way she wrote his name, and even had her inscribe the texts for some of his books. (He left the misspellings intact.) Also, very quietly, Andy went everyday to his neighborhood church, St. Vincent Ferrer, and gave to charity through the Church of the Heavenly Rest. In these ways, he remained close to home.

In other ways, he lived a poor boy's dream of a Manhattan career. By 1952, he'd received his first medal from the Art Directors Club and had been given his first solo exhibition, at the Hugo Gallery. (He exhibited drawings based on the writings of Truman Capote, on whom he'd developed a long-distance crush.) By 1956, he was participating in a group exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art: Recent Drawings U.S.A. (His contribution: a drawing from his series of "personality" shoes.) That same year he also had two solo shows at the Bodley Gallery and went on a round-the-world tour. In 1957, he incorporated himself as Andy Warhol Enterprises to help manage his commercial work. Two years later, flush with success, he bought a townhouse on Lexington Avenue near 89th Street, where he installed himself with his mother.

All this time, Warhol had continued to paint; he also kept abreast of the avant-garde. We know he was aware of Jasper Johns's work--he bought a Johns drawing, Light Bulb, in 1958--and also of Robert Rauschenberg's art. In defiance of the prestige then enjoyed by abstract painting, both of those artists incorporated immediately recognizable, vernacular images into their works; Johns, for example, painted the American flag, while Rauschenberg inserted objects such as Coca-Cola bottles and photographs of President Eisenhower into his paintings. To Warhol, it was a matter of no small interest that the avant-garde could come so close to his own world of commercial art. In 1960, Warhol took up the dare and made his first paintings based on comic-strip characters. He exhibited them the following year--not in an art gallery, but in the window of Bonwit-Teller, as the background for a mannequin display. Then he visited the Leo Castelli Gallery and discovered, to his surprise, that Roy Lichtenstein was also making paintings based on comic strips. Apparently, Warhol was on to something. But if Lichtenstein had staked out the comics as a subject for art galleries, then Warhol would have to find something else.

What he found, beginning in 1962, was nothing less than the entire American scene. The art historian Robert Rosenblum has noted that, whereas other artists like Lichtenstein, James Rosenquist, and Tom Wesselmann where also working with Pop imagery in the early 1960s,

Warhol quickly emerged as a leader, choosing the grittiest, tackiest, and most commonplace facts of visual pollution in America that would make the aesthetes and mythmakers of the fifties cringe in their ivory towers: advertisements for wigs, trusses, nose-jobs, cut-rate appliances; a comic-strip repertoire that ran through Superman, Dick Tracy, Nancy, and Popeye; packaged food from the lowest-priced supermarket shelves with grass-roots brand names like Campbell's, Mott's, Kellog's, Del Monte, Coca-Cola; American money, postage stamps, and bonus gift stamps, vulgar tabloids (Daily News and New York Post); the most popular stars from James Dean and Elvis Presley to Elizabeth Taylor and Marlon Brando.

But this, as Rosenblum writes, was only the beginning of the story. He likens Warhol's art to a March of Time newsreel--"an abbreviated visual anthology of the most conspicuous headlines, personalities, mythic creatures, edible, tragedies, artworks, even ecological problems of recent decades." Everything and everybody is here: President Nixon, and the Thirteen Most Wanted Men, airplane crashes and volcanic eruptions, electric chairs, giant pandas, Santa Claus, the hammer-and-sickle, transvestites, and Raphael's Sistine Madonna. "With infinitely more speed and wallop than a complete run of New York Times on microfilm," Rosenblum writes, "Warhol's work provides an instantly intelligible chronicle of what mattered most to people, from the suicide of Marilyn Monroe to the ascendancy of Red China..."

Perhaps that key word in Rosenblum's account are "instantly intelligible." For many centuries, artists had in fact been charged with making images that could be read by everyone: the Crucifixion and the Resurrection, the Man of Sorrows and the Mater Dolorosa. Once an artists had worked out a memorable version of such an image, it might become a prototype, which he and others would reproduce with incidental variations, year after year.

When artists began to be quirky and individualistic in their image-making, as in the 1500s, the Church demanded a return to a more public style. So, in the first decade of the 1600s, Caravaggio set a new standard for instant legibility, with his figures, captured at a moment of high drama, it up as if by a stroke of lightning (or, to use a Warholian analogy, the flash of a photo booth). This sort of image-making could serve political ends too; Jacques-Louis David set the standard for that kind of art in the late 1700s, as chief painter-propagandist for the French Revolution and Napoleon.

But by the middle of the 1800s, a split set in. European artists who appealed to a broad public--the Salon painters--had begun to stage elaborate fantasies, set in the ancient world or exotic foreign locales. In general, these painters didn't address anything the public might care about in the here-and-now. On the other hand, highly gifted, innovative artists such as Manet and Degas did address such themes; but the public didn't like their pictures. For a hundred years, the gulf widened. Salon artists and their successors, the moviemakers, satisfied popular taste, while avant-garde artists challenged a small but influential elite. Those were the main choices in 1960: Stanley Kubrick's Spartacus, or a Mark Rothko painting of three bands of color.

Andy Warhol's first achievement was to bridge that gap. Everyone could understand his work at first sight, as people once had understood an icon of St. Catherine. The scandal, of course, was that Warhol had revealed our modern saint and martyr to be Marilyn Monroe. Predictably, he elicited a certain degree of outrage and mockery. But one fact was undeniable: for the first time in many years, painting was addressing the world at large, and the world knew it was being addressed.

But there was a second level to the scandal: not what Warhol painted, but how. Some of his first Pop pictures were made by hand, and to a knowing eye they gave evidence of great skill--for example, images of Campbell's soup cans with peeling labels, which are marvels of illusionistic brushwork. In other works, though, Warhol's hand was scarcely evident. To make his pictures of Marilyn and Elvis, he made silkscreens print of photographs, which he colored with the aid of stencils. This method offended people who wanted to see traces of the artist's personality on the canvas, or proof of his hard work. But that objection seemed to miss the point. Warhol had adopted the methods of mass production to make images of celebrities who were themselves

mass produced. Elvis existed not only as a flesh-and-blood person but as millions of pictures on album covers and movie screens, in newspapers and magazines. He was infinitely reproducible. Similarly, Warhol's Elvises were hybrids of photography and printing and (for that flesh-and-blood touch) a few strokes of paint.

In 1963, Warhol applied this method to the great public events of the day. For his paintings of that year, he chose photographs of a police attack on civil-rights demonstrators; of the electric chair, of Jackie Kennedy, after the assassination of the President. In another significant move of that year, Warhol relocated his studio to 231 East 47th Street. His associate Billy Name (Billy Linich) covered the entire space in aluminum foil and silver paint; soon the studio, known as the Factory, became a hang-out for a groups that included Gerard Malanga, "Baby" Jane Holzer, Brigid Polk (Brigid Berlin) and Ondine (Robert Olivio). Their presence in the Factory was doubly significant, because they became the cast for many of the films Warhol had begun to make. This was also they year he met Jonas Mekas, director of the Film-Makers' Co-operative, and bought a 16mm Bolex camera. Warhol's first film, and epoch-making experiment in the aesthetic of the blank stare, was Sleep: five hours worth of the poet John Giorno lying in bed. (The film appears to be nothing but a mechanical recording of the passage of time, with no principle of selection; but according to Giorno, Warhol actually spent a month filming Sleep, amassing thousands of rolls of footage.) Other films from the same year were more action-packed: Blow Job, Eat, Haircut, Kiss, and Andy Warhol Films Jack Smith Filming "Normal Love".

By 1965, Andy Warhol was no longer just making pictures of celebrities. He was a celebrity himself, his deadpan, silver-wigged face known around the world. When the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia mounted a retrospective of his work that year, some 4,000 people showed up for the opening--so many that the curators, foreseeing security problems, removed the paintings and hosted the debut in bare galleries. The blank walls seemed to suit Warhol well enough. This was also the year when he announced he would retire from painting and devote himself to filmmaking. His Factory associates now included the film director Paul Morrisey; his cast included Edie Sedgwick, Ultra Violet (Isabelle Collin-Dufresne, Ingrid Superstar (Ingrid von Schefflin), and members the rock band The Velvet Underground--Lou Reed, John Cale, Maureen Tucker, and Sterling Morrison. They were joined the following year by Nico (Christa Paffgen), International Velvet (Susan Bottomly), and Eric Emerson.

In 1966, Warhol began presenting the Velvet Underground as part of a traveling multimedia show called the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. For the first time, he put one of his films--The Chelsea Girls--into wide distribution. He also created two installations at Leo Castelli Gallery: a room covered in Cow wallpaper, and a room filled with Silver Clouds made of helium-filled mylar. In 1967, Warhol produced the Velvet Underground's first album, created Andy Warhol's Index (Book) for Random House, and Screen Tests: A Diary with Gerard Malanga for Kulcher Press; and began filming Lonesome Cowboys in Arizona. His cast now included Taylor Mead, Viva (Susan Hoffmann), Joe Dallesandro, and Candy Darling. He also made the acquaintance of Frederick W. Hughes, who was to become his business manager.

This frenetic activity came to an abrupt halt in 1968. A would-be writer and performer named Valerie Solanis, founder and sole member of S.C.U.M. (Society for Cutting Up Men), entered the Factory on June 3 and shot Warhol. This was the third such attack. In 1964, a woman with a gun had come into the Factory and shot at a stack of Marilyns. In 1967, a man had entered the Factory and put a gun to Paul Morrisey's head. Valerie Solanas's attack was the most serious. Warhol, who came close to death, was hospitalized for a month and a half. Also wounded in the attack was the critic Mario Amaya.

For the next few years, though his artwork continued to be the subject exhibitions worldwide, Warhol curtailed his activities. Paul Morrisey took over much of the filmmaking. Warhol's principal initiative was the founding of Interview magazine in 1969, edited by Malanga, Morrisey, Warhol, and John Wilcock. Originally, Interview consisted simply of unedited conversations with film celebrities. In the mid-'70s, under the editorship of Bob Colacello, Interview was transformed into something resembling a gay, right-wing People, dedicated. As Colacello once joked, to "the restoration of the world's most glamourous--and most forgotten--dictatorships and monarchies."

Warhol returned to painting in 1972, the year Julia Zavacky Warhola died in Pittsburgh. He began making commissioned portraits, painting as many as a hundred each year. Much of his work during the 1970s con-

sisted of these pictures; Warhol also traded on his celebrity during these years by endorsing various products, including Puerto Rican Rum, and U.S. News and World Report. But, in addition, he worked on a variety of uncommissioned series, which were more ambitious artistically; Maos, Skulls, Hammer and Sickles, Shadows, and the abstract Oxidations. His books of the 1970s included The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again).

The 1980s began for Warhol with the publication of POPism: The Warhol '60s, written with Pat Hackett, and with exhibitions of new works: portraits of the artists Joseph Beuys, portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century, and the Reversals series. Warhol traveled widely (including a 1982 trip to China); he created two cable television shows. Andy Warhol Television (in 1982) and Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes (shown on MTV in 1986); he created the official poster for the centennial celebration of the Brooklyn Bridge (1983); and he published America (1985) with Harper & Row.

Also, although much of the art world seemed oblivious to the fact, he was painting more actively than he had in years. His works from the 1980s include paintings based on Renaissance imagery (Leonardo's The Last Supper, Raphael's Sistine Madonna); the Camouflage series, self-portraits; and (in a return to his first great theme of the Pop era) advertisements. Among the most significant of these series were collaborations with two younger artists, Jean-Michel Basquait and Francesco Clemente, in which Warhol joined hands with the next generation.

Warhol had begun working on a History of Television when he fell ill in 1987. Following what should have been routine gall bladder surgery at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center, he died of a heart attack on February 22. After his burial in Pittsburgh, his friends and associates organized a memorial mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York on April 1, 1987. It was attended by more than 2,000 people.

"More than any other figure of his time, Andy Warhol challenged our way of thinking about art," concludes Tom Armstrong, [first] Director of The Andy Warhol Museum. "With his pop painting incorporating images of consumer products and movie stars, Warhol addressed the changes brought about in our society through mass communications and mass productions; in a way that was daring and yet instantly accessible, he reflected the contemporary culture of the United States, and therefore of a world culture that was coming more and more under the American influence. Beyond that, by creating artworks that looked indistinguishable from consumer products such as Heinz boxes, Warhol presented us with genuine philosophical challenges--which, remarkably enough, everybody understood. As for Warhol's impact on society, he invented a new approach to America's fascination with celebrity. He became a celebrity himself--something that had been done before by few, if any, American artists.

"Andy Warhol was a painter, a sculptor, a graphic artist, a filmmaker, a music producer, an author, a publisher. The scope of his creative activity was extraordinary--and it touched on the entire range of the era's popular culture."