

ANDY WARHOL'S METHODS AND TECHNIQUES

*"I want to be a machine."
-Andy Warhol*

THE ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM

Collaboration: Working with Others

Andy Warhol collaborated with many people to make his art work. The first person to assist and work along side him was his mother, Julia Warhola. Later, Warhol collaborated with other artists such as choreographer Merce Cunningham, composer John Cage, and painter Jean-Michel Basquiat. He hired assistants to help him with studio processes like silkscreening and photography throughout his career. Warhol's instructions to his assistants were frequently and intentionally vague. Sometimes Warhol enjoyed the results when his assistants misinterpreted his instructions. Ultimately, it was Warhol who made the final decisions regarding form and content, by constantly defining his production parameters, surveying them and always approving final products.

Andy Warhol was very interested in exploring new technology and media in his art. He tried new technologies as they became available, including synthetic polymer paint, audio-taping interviews, instant Polaroid film, video production for MTV and computers. His interest in technology led Warhol to try many mediums and to easily cross traditional boundaries from one medium to another. He was a painter, a commercial artist, a filmmaker, a music producer, and a publisher as well as a celebrity. It was Andy Warhol's willingness to experiment and explore that made his work so innovative.

Below are two of the most asked about techniques employed by Andy Warhol.

Blotted Line Drawing

Andy Warhol first started experimenting with a special type of line drawing known as the blotted line technique while still a college student at Carnegie Tech. He later used it to great effect in his commercial art of the 1950's.

The blotted line technique is actually a very simple print making process. Warhol started his blotted line drawings by making a pencil line drawing on nonabsorbent paper. He would then hinge the drawing to a second sheet of more absorbent Strathmore paper. With an old fountain pen, Warhol inked over the pencil lines on the original drawing. Then the second sheet of paper was folded along the hinge and the freshly inked lines were transferred by simply pressing the papers together. Large drawings were done in sections. Completing a blotted line drawing might take quite a bit of time and multiple pressings. The process resulted in the stylistically broken and hesitant lines that are characteristic of Andy Warhol's illustrations. Warhol often colored his blotted line drawings with watercolor dyes or gold leaf.

Photo Silkscreen

Andy Warhol's use of photo silkscreen was innovative because it is a technique traditionally used for mass production for commercial purposes. Photo silkscreen is a printmaking technique that allowed Warhol to repeat images over and over. Warhol used photo silkscreen to create some of his most famous works of art.

Andy Warhol would send photographs taken by himself or others to a commercial silkscreen shop to have the photographic images transferred to silkscreens. At the commercial silkscreen shop, black and white or high-contrast color photographs were projected onto sheer silk or silk-like fabric stretched over a frame. The screen was first coated with a light-sensitive emulsion that hardened in the areas where it was exposed to light. The emulsion that was not exposed to light did not harden

and was then rinsed off leaving clear fabric. The pattern of light and dark from the projected image was thereby fixed on the screen.

To reproduce the image on paper or canvas, paint or printer's ink was applied through the screen. The paint was pushed across the screen's surface with a rubber blade called a squeegee. The squeegee forced the paint through the screen, but only in the unblocked areas. An even layer of tiny dots of paint came through the woven threads creating the printed image.

At the commercial silkscreen shop, Andy Warhol could have his images enlarged or reduced onto screens of almost any size. Once the prepared silkscreen was returned to Warhol from the shop, Warhol could print the images directly onto unstretched canvases which were usually laid out on the floor. The canvases were primed in advance and sometimes painted with solid color backgrounds. Often the canvases were hand-painted with colors that Warhol thought matched the depicted image such as skin tones and vibrant magenta eye shadow before the screened image was applied. Occasionally Warhol painted on top of his silkscreened images but usually the silkscreen served as a final defining layer.

Filmmaking Techniques

Andy Warhol became well known in the New York underground film community for his minimalist films. Warhol's black and white 16mm films had a unique visual vocabulary. The unit of production was often a 33 minute reel of film, rather than content. His early films were long and static. His famous film **Empire** is eight hours long, but the filming itself took six hours. To achieve his desired effect Warhol actually slowed down the film. He used a tripod to set up a single shot, stationary camera position and thus a paradox between still duration and film's natural application to record movement. This method of filmmaking was often used in many of Warhol's portrait films. Warhol's earliest films may seem technologically primitive, but they are examinations of film's purest form without an attempt to create a new reality.

Warhol's first films were silent, but later when he bought a camera that recorded sound, he began to experiment with narrative techniques and dialogue. The films would often interrupt a sequence of events already in progress. Warhol allows the audience only a splice of time. In the tradition of avant-guard performance work, Warhol wanted his films to have an element of chance and would frequently sabotage his own productions, often by not allowing the actors to read the scripts before filming, or only giving half the cast directions to see and record as finished product what occurred. Like his earlier films, the later films were calculated in their simplicity using little editing or camera manipulation. Warhol's early films were rarely edited. His one editing method was his trademark technique called 'strobe cutting.' The 'strobe cut' is a form of in-camera editing in which the camera is rapidly turned off and on again. This simple act creates a clear frame then a double exposed frame and then an electronic bloop on the sound track.