

Art's analysis

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Andy Warhol, Marilyn, 1967. Art Analysis This image is a screen print by Andy Warhol of Marilyn. It is an instantly, heavy eyelashes and full lips, which are enhanced with lipstick. It has many of the qualities of a photograph in so far as it faithfully reproduces the proportions of the actress's face. The angle is almost exactly full face, with just a slight tilt to the subject's right. The image is, however, very unlike a classical painted portrait. One reason for this is that the face fills almost all of the space, leaving only a small dark background between the face and the edge of the picture. There is no neck and shoulders, and the black background is wider at the sides than at the top and bottom. The image is square, and not the elongated rectangle shape that most portraits have. All of this gives the impression that the image has been cropped from a larger image which no doubt had more background to it than this one does. The artist has not situated the face in any recognizable context. It is disembodied, having no identifiable time or place. Without a background, the outline of the head, with its asymmetrical hairstyle appears somewhat ghost-like - it has an unreal quality because it is separated from every normal and everyday object. There is also no foreground which would help to give depth and volume to the face. It is just one single plane, as if the person is caught in a bright light and captured in a single moment. The most striking feature of this print is the way that the white surface of the face dominates the whole image. The lighting is so harsh that there is very little gradation between the black and white in the picture. This has the effect of making the skin surface of the face look like a chalky mask, since it obscures the subtle shades that occur in natural skin. This stark black and white format reduces the human

face to its bare essentials, such as the dark hollows of eye sockets, nostrils and mouth. This technique is what gives the picture its very cold emotional tone. There is no life in the eyes, and no warmth in the cheeks, as if the flash of the camera light has just managed to capture the surface moment and snuffed out the depths of emotion that might be within the depths of this intriguing character. The minimalism of the picture can be seen also in the way that the hair has shading that is indicative of its overall shape, rather than an exact realistic representation. On the right side of the hair, for example, a white outline separates the part of the hair that is in shadow from the dark background. This part of the picture resembles a cartoon style in its reversal of dark and light lines to separate the subject from its context. The lines of the image are mainly curves, which have connotations of femininity but these are emphasized very heavily around eyes and mouth, even to the extent of making the image look like a caricature. The extreme pallor of the face is accentuated by the small dark beauty spot that is on Marilyn's cheek. This can be regarded as her particular trademark, making sure that the image is associated with this individual and not with pretty blonde women in general. The predominance of gray and black give the picture a sombre tone, and this is further accentuated by the way that the eyes are portrayed in deep shadow. The proportions of this picture resemble a passport photograph, or perhaps a police photograph, with an emphasis on capturing the physical features of this human being in a way that can be recognized. By heightening the contrast between black and white, the artist undermines the realism of the photographic medium. Leaving so much shadow in place allows a measure of mystery to creep back into the image, so that the viewer

has the impression of seeing the woman, but not of understanding anything about her thoughts and feelings. This is not a portrait, then, in the usual sense of that word, since there is no attempt to give an insight into the character of the person. The interplay of dark and light is so extreme that it suggests an artificial setting, since natural daylight or normal indoor lighting rarely produces such high contrast. This conjures up the world of Hollywood, which is all about imitations and images, rather than reality. It is deliberately false, and deliberately artificial, presenting an extremely sad vision of female beauty in this haunting image.