

Andy warhol



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In 1960, after a decade of Abstract Expressionism and a short period during which Dada collages and assemblages were produced a new atmosphere prevailed in New York with the rise of Pop Art and the success met by such artists as Motherwell, de Kooning, Rauschenberg or Jasper Johns. Warhol was still outside that movement and painted a series of works inspired by comic books heroes such as Popeye, Superman or Dick Tracy. He then understood that he needed to adopt an impersonal and cold technique and after noting that the capital element in U. S life was the dollar bank note, he painted a series of dollar bills in different colours.

Then came the series of Campbell's Soup cans somewhat reflecting the American way of life, which he promoted with other consuming goods as art works. This time he had understood that hand-painting did not correspond with any faithful reproduction of already graphical objects that had to be repeated in various series. Bank notes and Campbell's Soup cans were produced in 1962 and Warhol adopted afterwards the serigraph method for other themes such as Coca Cola bottles, Heinz Tomato ketchup and the Brillo washing powder.

Warhol also embarked on producing series dedicated to other myths of the U. S society such as movie stars Marilyn Monroe and Liz Taylor or Rock N' Roll legend Elvis Presley. All these themes were multiplied or zoomed with various effects accentuating their obsessive meanings. The exhibition of such series at the Stable Gallery in November 1962 was a triumphal success for Warhol. At the same time he took part in a major Pop Art exhibition at Sydney Janis' gallery and participated in December in a Pop Art symposium

at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The following year he settled at 47 East Street in a huge studio, which he called "The Factory".

There with the help of Gerard Malanga he produced hundreds of his famous silk screen series that were immediately sold to galleries and collectors. Warhol went on to produce series of themes based on terror, which replaced the modern man subject such as Suicide in 1962, The Atomic Bomb and Car Crashes in 1963, Racial Riots, Portraits of Wanted Criminals or the Electric Chair in 1964. Warhol exhibited his series of Flowers in 1964 and in 1965 was almost trampled down by a mad crowd during the opening of his exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia.

He exhibited his series of Cows in 1966 when the close link that united photographic transcription with Duchamp's ready-made theory was established in his works. In both cases there was an appropriation of an object or an image taken from a daily context. With Duchamp the object taken off was promoted to the rank of an art object through the artist's sole choice whereas with Warhol such promotion was amplified by multiple reproductions and the various resources of mass communication well mastered by the former advertising designer.

Warhol reduced his painting activity in 1966 after deciding to promote "The Factory", which became through his sophisticated personality the true object of his creative action. "The Factory" was transformed into a movie studio where Warhol produced underground films with Paul Morrissey. Such films were mostly based on eroticism and homosexuality with an acute obsession regarding time passing by. One of these films, which lasted over 10 hours,

showed a man asleep or the Empire State Building at different hours of the day. Other less provocative movies dealt with sexual deviations.

As an artist and movie director, Warhol used advertising and mass media techniques mirroring America's isolated and amplified image that Warhol personified even more than his own works did. Warhol began his career as a successful commercial illustrator. He did window displays for Bonwit Teller and advertisements for I. Miller shoe company. Warhol first applied his silkscreen techniques in the 50's. Window displays of a Fifth Avenue department store featured his comicbook superhero images. Later, his signature style as an artist used commercial silk-screening techniques to create identical, mass produced images on canvas.

Having started as a commercial artist Warhol knew the importance of art in the business world of marketing and knew the importance of image in product promotion. The media and advertising were favorite subjects for Pop Art's often witty celebrations of consumer society, so there's little mystery as to why Warhol became part of a new form of art based on marketing and consumerism. In Warhol's mind everything could be seen as having a relationship to art. In his words: " Everything is beautiful.

Pop is everything". Therefore the label of a soup can was art in itself as was any object created by a designer. Up until 1962 Pop Art imagery centered around mundane objects and comics, and relied heavily on supermarket and advertising images. It was with the Marilyn portraits that Warhol introduced celebrity into Pop Art imagery. This distinguished his art from his fellow Pop artists and in the eyes of critics, elevated him above them. In 1953 the

movie Niagara would bring Marilyn Monroe critical acclaim and worldwide recognition.

A decade later a Niagara publicity shot would play a big part in bringing Andy Warhol the same. Warhol was never big on explanations. When asked in interviews to explain his art his answers usually were in the " umm" and " I don't know" variety. Surrounding his art in mystery only accentuated and heightened public interest. It's generally accepted that he intended his Marilyn portraits to be funereal and commemorative icons. He also intended to emphasize the notion of celebrity as a manufactured commodity. He wanted to portray Marilyn as a contemporary sex goddess, packaged for the public as a consumer item.

Perhaps Warhol could identify with Marilyn's desperate attempt to rid herself of the dumb-blonde stereotype and to be taken seriously as an artist. Many critics at the time dismissed Pop Art as consumerism so Warhol too struggled with trying to be taken seriously. Using the cropped Niagara publicity shot as a guide, Warhol painted large areas of the canvas by hand with garish pink, red, yellow and green colors. He outlined her face, hair, lips and eyes drawing emphasis to the material products like lipstick, eye shadow, hair coloring and make-up used in the transformation from women to sex goddess.

Warhol would outline these general areas of color before printing the black and white silk-screened image of Marilyn on top of them. Repeating the process allowed for variations to exist between one image and the next. Warhol also allowed the silkscreen image not to align perfectly each time

with the colored shapes which gave each work its own identity, despite being part of a repeated image. In the process Marilyn's youthful beauty as the quintessential Hollywood star is contrasted with the garish synthetic colors that suggest the artificiality of Tinseltown and the packaging of celebrity.

Orange Marilyn (one of the first in the Marilyn series) sold in 1998 for over \$17 million. A sum which solidifies Warhol's title of a Pop Art master and places him as the third most expensive contemporary artist, behind De Kooning and Johns. To put this price in art world perspective, \$17 million is close to the \$20 million price commanded by master works from the Impressionists. Warhol's other Marilyn portraits continue to increase in value and sell at auctions for millions of dollars. It could be said that Warhol had the spirit of an artist and the brain of a business man.

He understood the art of marketing and in a sense was able to package and market himself as a celebrity and his work as fine art. By the time of his death in 1987 he had achieved celebrity status. Like Marilyn he achieved the level of a cult figure, unlike Marilyn he died a multi-millionaire. Warhol's stature as an artist can not be argued, but part of the success of the Marilyn portraits can only be explained by Marilyn Monroe's mythical aura and her place as a leading Pop culture icon.