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## Warhol Warhol Everywhere

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A quarter century after Andy Warhol's death, his work resonates more than ever. Several museum exhibitions are focusing on his influence in painting, photography, film, performance, and more



Deborah Kass, 16 Barbras (The Jewish Jackie Series), 1992, a Warhol-inspired series with wit and irony added

COURTESY THE ARTIST AND PAUL KASMIN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

“The worst thing that could happen to you after the end of your time would be to be embalmed and laid up in a pyramid,” Andy Warhol wrote in his 1975 book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)*. “[I] like the idea of people turning into sand or something, so the machinery keeps working after you die . . . I guess disappearing would be shirking work that your machinery still had left to do.”

Few artists are so eager and able to accurately assess their legacy, but there is something eerily prescient about Warhol's grainy conception of death. His machinery, it seems, is still very much ticking away. His themes, processes, personas, and approach to making art are evident in everything from the ready-mades and Pop portraits of his direct descendents to the work of some

of the most boundary-pushing conceptualists, abstract painters, and video artists working today.

With his Factory, his Marilyns, his films, and his many riffs on banality, seriality, and kitsch, “Andy knocked down obstacles that no one ever thought about before,” says critic Arthur Danto, who has written extensively on Warhol's work. “What Andy did is far more innovative than anything else I can think of. Andy did commonplace things, and yet he did them in a way and in a number that has nothing really quite like it. Everything he did was different.”

Which is why 50 years after his public debut and 25 years since his untimely death, Warhol remains, some would argue, the major touchstone for contemporary art. “He's like Picasso in the sense that you just don't run out,” says Jeffrey Deitch, director of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles. “He has become one of the most influential people in all of contemporary culture. You see the influence in painting, sculpture, performance, photography, film, even journalism. Life as performance, life as art, reality TV—it's all Warhol's world.”

Several recent exhibitions have taken up the charge as well, most notably this fall's blockbuster-scaled “Regarding Warhol: Sixty Artists, Fifty Years,” opening September 18 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which will travel to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh next year. The works on view span several generations and nearly all media. They demonstrate the wide variety of ways in which artists have ingested Warhol's politics, practices, and Pop-friendly fixations and spit them out to express new zeitgeists, new anxieties, and candidly personal points of view.

In “Regarding Warhol,” the artist's soup cans and Brillo boxes have given way to Coca-Cola-emblazoned Neolithic urns by Ai Weiwei, as well as Tom Sachs's luxury-branded weaponry, and Damien Hirst's bountiful cabinets of prescription drugs. Warhol's Marilyns, Jackies, and Maos have been recast as Maurizio Cattelan's topless

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supermodel-turned-art-collector Stephanie Seymour, Elizabeth Peyton's elegiac renderings of Kurt Cobain, and Luc Tuymans's steely depiction of Condoleezza Rice. And the Factory has been mirrored in the production methods of Neo-Pop masters, like Takashi Murakami and Jeff Koons.

The loan-heavy exhibition stemmed from a sentence that cocurator Mark Rosenthal says he kept encountering in conversations, articles, and books: Warhol is the most important artist of the last 50 years. "I thought it would be kind of amazing to see what that looks like," he says. "He's with us whether you love him or hate him, and in so much of the work that's been produced since. Because of Warhol, everything changed."

"Certain people bend the course of art history," agrees Chuck Close, whose 1969 *Phil*, a colossal rendering of composer Philip Glass, is in the show. "Somehow, they deflect it from the direction in which it was going and send it off somewhere new," Close continues. "They make something so surprising that it doesn't look like art." Until, eventually, what they've made starts to define it.

Warhol's most obvious legacy is his astute appropriation of mass-produced products. Of course, he was not the first artist to use everyday imagery and ephemera in his work. He was predated by Marcel Duchamp, with his ready-mades, and then Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who, in the late 1950s, were estheticizing and recontextualizing objects from their everyday lives. But Warhol's hard-edged, brand-savvy, serial approach was quite different.

"For me, the art world in the 1960s really broke down into two notions about figuration," Close says. "There were those people who were trying to breathe new life into what was essentially 19th-century portraiture versus those people who were intent on making a truly modernist form of figuration." Warhol, he adds, really "kicked the door open for an intelligent, forward-looking, modern kind of painting."

The trajectory begins in 1962. It was the year of the first Coca-Cola bottles, the first soup cans, the first Marilyns, and Warhol's groundbreaking exhibitions at the Ferus gallery in Los Angeles and the Stable Gallery in New York. Reverberations were felt throughout the art world almost immediately. Whether his contemporaries realized it or not, something was, indeed, in the air.

Edging toward banality themselves, John Baldessari and Ed Ruscha immortalized their local gas stations in the mid-'60s and Vija Celmins made photorealist paintings of catastrophic imagery pulled from the news, shortly after Warhol debuted his own "death and disaster" series. "I don't know whether Andy Warhol was so much an influence," she told "Regarding Warhol" cocurator Marla Prather in an interview to be published in the exhibition catalogue. "But, in retrospect, I can see that . . . his influence must've been everywhere."

Indeed, by the 1970s, Warhol was a household name whose factorylike take on fine art prefigured current studio practices and today's staggering market demands. But his singular approach to found imagery and appropriation also set the stage for the Pictures Generation, argues Prather, from Richard Prince's Marlboro men to Cindy Sherman's self-styled Hollywood film stills to Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine's loaded snapshots of other people's art. "Appropriation may have been more or less invented by Duchamp," Rosenthal says. "But it hadn't really been dealt with much since. Warhol turned it into a movement."

Rosenthal and his colleagues are also looking at some of the less expected Warholian threads that have populated his intergenerational wake: abstraction, identity politics, and sex. Of the latter, Prather insists, "You couldn't have Nan Goldin without Andy Warhol."

Films like *Blow Job* (1964) and *Lonesome Cowboys* (1968), as well as the screen-printed *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* (1964), which cleverly suggested that the FBI's hit list was somehow akin to Warhol's own, granted a sort of permission "to come out of the artist's closet," she adds. "When you think about artists like Rauschenberg and Johns, that work is much more coded in terms of gay issues and lovers."

In this sense, Warhol paved the way for photographers like Robert Mapplethorpe and Catherine Opie. Prather also draws a connection between Warhol and the ambisexual characters in video works by younger artists like Ryan Trecartin and Kalup Linzy.

As for identity politics, Warhol's famously indifferent demeanor was also famously a front—he loved his mother, he regularly went to church, and, like most of us, he wished he looked like a movie star. It's a reading of Warhol that Brooklyn artist Deborah Kass spent years tackling in her practice. "I consider Andy's work to be really autobiographical, very deeply felt, and

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the opposite of everything he said about it,” says Kass, who is in the Met show and has a major midcareer retrospective opening October 27 at the Andy Warhol Museum.

In “The Warhol Project” (1992–2000) the artist cast her personal icons—most notably, Barbra Streisand—in several Warholian motifs and roles. Streisand appears in a string of tightly cropped, screen-printed profiles, and in a series of paintings, called “My Elvis,” which portray the diva multiplied on canvas in her cross-dressing *Yentl* garb.

As a Jewish girl growing up on Long Island, Kass explains, “Barbra was the first Hollywood star I could identify with. I loved Marilyn Monroe, I loved Clark Gable, but I didn’t know what I was missing until I saw Barbra—someone who looked like everyone I knew. She was someone who understood the power of her difference and who wasn’t easily absorbed into a male narrative. She was completely aspirational.”

It was a way of identifying with Warhol and “his outsidersness,” she says. In that sense, his style and character became something of a tool. She adds, “I could use it to say what I wanted to say.”

Meanwhile, MOCA director Deitch is leading the way in positioning Warhol as a major progenitor of today’s foremost riffs on abstraction. He mounted a group show at the museum this summer featuring works by a dozen or so contemporary abstract artists—Tauba Auerbach, Mark Bradford, and Wade Guyton among them. Auerbach showed a handful of her acrylic-on-canvas “Fold” pieces—photorealistic renderings of creased and crumpled fabrics that, from a distance, look like abstract tableaux. Bradford presented a series of his signature collages composed of flyers, scraps, and other detritus collected in sociopolitical hot zones like South Central Los Angeles, and Guyton showed several new impressions on linen. Guyton’s cleverly conceived works use an inkjet printer’s inadvertent streaks and hiccups to produce stark, abstract effects.

Titled “The Painting Factory: Abstraction After Warhol,” the exhibition made the argument that many of the most pervasive trends in abstraction today are firmly rooted in Warhol’s work. His screen-printed shadows, his camouflage paintings, and his 1980s renderings of Rorschach blots were all representational endeavors in practice that, on the surface, appear abstract.

“It’s the mechanical approach, the mediation, the ability to embed social or personal content into an abstract image,” Deitch says. “Even though he wasn’t a pretentious philosopher, Warhol was very conscious of his contributions to a new way of thinking.”

Either that, or it’s all just a self-fulfilling prophecy, a posthumous extension of Warhol’s own 15 minutes of fame. As Guyton put it, “It’s like he has a PR firm on retainer after death.”

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