

Warhol, Andy

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Andy Warhol (1928–87) was an American artist, filmmaker, and pop culture avatar who first gained renown in the early 1960s as one of the founders of the visual art movement known as pop art. He subsequently came to be recognized as one of the most influential artists of the latter twentieth century by supporters and detractors alike. Warhol is known for his iconic representations of consumer products, advertisements, and celebrities. Subjects include: rows of Campbell Soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles, stacks of Brillo boxes, portraits of Elvis Presley, Jackie Kennedy, and Marilyn Monroe, and images derived from the media and other aspects of everyday life. He created paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, photographs, films, videos, and multimedia installations and performances, mixing mechanical processes with hand-rendered techniques. By the end of his life he was a celebrity in his own right, featured as an endorsement personality in advertisements, making guest appearances on television programs and in motion pictures, and living the life of an international society figure whose activities were chronicled in the media.

Before entering the art world, Warhol had a highly successful career as a commercial artist in New York City, starting in the late 1940s after graduating from art school in his hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and continuing throughout the following decade. During that time, he designed retail advertisements and promotional packages, illustrated books and magazine articles, and won several creative awards in the process

(Bourdon 1989). He was known especially for his technique of using blotchy lines of India ink to create whimsical drawings of shoes and other fashion items. His facility with commercial idioms and comfort with the dictates of commercial enterprise influenced his work as an artist and continued to be felt in all of his activities over his lifetime. Even at the height of his fame as an avant-garde artist, he continued to engage in commercial projects, such as designing long-playing record jackets for rock groups like the Velvet Underground, whose first recordings he also produced, and the Rolling Stones, as well as a series of advertisements for Absolut Vodka. He also founded the celebrity tabloid *Interview*.

As an artist, he is considered one of the progenitors of postmodernist art, generally considered a seismic shift in Western aesthetics. The philosopher and art critic Arthur C. Danto identifies Warhol's 1964 work *Brillo Boxes* as the culmination of Modernist art's quest to reveal its self-reflexive conditions, writing: "He in effect brought Modernism to an end by showing how the philosophical question of What is art? is to be answered" (2009, 52). Specifically, what constitutes a work of art, in Danto's estimation of the *Brillo Boxes*, is not any quality inherent within the work itself but an effect of something called the art world, a social-historical field that comprises a body of knowledge and network of relationships within which the work circulates (Danto 1964).

Erasing the apparent barrier between art and what Danto terms "mere things" registers an important aspect of Warhol's legacy in relation to consumption and consumer studies. Warhol's breaking down of the ostensible distinctions between high

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and low culture is a harbinger of the cultural omnivore, which Richard Peterson and Roger Kern (1996) identify as having become sociologically observable by the early 1980s. The embrace of Warhol in all his iterations stands as a repudiation of the culture industry critique put forth in the mid-twentieth century by the Frankfurt School that sought to establish autonomous art as an authentic respite from the base manipulations of the commercial marketplace. Instead, “the Warhol Economy” (Currid 2008) merges what were once considered the separate spheres of art and commerce into a seamless whole.

SEE ALSO: Celebrity; Consumption, Postmodern; Cultural Omnivores; Culture Industries; Frankfurt School; Popular Culture

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