

# THE MAN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD

*The Life and Art of Andy Warhol*

Andy Warhol's famous 1964 portrait of model and actress Marilyn Monroe, titled *Shot Sage Blue Marilyn*, has become the most expensive 20th-century artwork ever, after selling at a Christie's New York auction for an estimated £158 million. The sale has cast a new light on the iconic pop artist, prompting renewed interest in his life.



unwittingly starting a chain reaction that would leave the world fundamentally changed for decades to come.

A bigger star now, in death, than he ever was in life, Andy Warhol transformed pop culture from the incoherent underworld ramblings of trendy 1970s beatniks, to revolutionary high art that would ultimately lead to his paintings selling for the kind of money that previously only the works of classic masters could command.

Licensed around the world, Warhol's works are, ironically, still reproduced to this day, and they remain as powerful symbols of the very pop culture that breathed life into his art. Warhol seemed to admire and loathe, yet profoundly understood popular culture, and reproduced his commentary on the subject, his art, with a level of genius that guaranteed his ascension to the pantheon of art's immortals.

## A UNIQUE VIEW OF LIFE

Warhol created, maintained, and brought this transformation of popular culture to high art to its logical conclusion, subverting both in the process. He had a hitherto unmatched ability to make art out of the very act of repetition. He planted the seeds for

Andy Warhol was born as Andrew Warhola on 6 August 1928 in a two-room apartment at 73 Orr Street, in a working-class neighbourhood of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants from an area in the Carpathian Mountains (present-day Eastern Slovakia), his parents, Andrej and Julia Warhola, had three sons, Paul, John, and Andy, the youngest.

As a child, Andy suffered from Sydenham chorea, a neurological disorder historically known as St. Vitus' dance, characterised by involuntary movements. When the disorder occasionally kept him home from school, Warhol read comics and Hollywood magazines and played with paper cut-outs. Growing up in Depression-era Pittsburgh, the family had few luxuries, but Warhol's parents bought him his first camera when he was eight years old,



everything from celebrity worship to reality television, personal branding, and meme culture.

In an era of extravagance, Andy Warhol set himself apart with his trademark silver wig and classic uniform – a white Brooks Brothers oxford button-down, navy Levis, and a black leather Perfecto jacket. This demure aesthetic echoed Warhol's withdrawn public persona. He was a man of few words, seemingly saving it all to be manifested later in his art, photography, films, books, magazines, record covers, and events.

Yet, Warhol was hardly a celebrity personality in the contemporary sense of the word. With an art school degree in pictorial design to his name, Warhol moved to New York City to pursue a career as a commercial artist, where he dropped the final “a” in his surname.

Now an illustrator by trade, Warhol's work first appeared in a 1949 issue of *Glamour* magazine, in which he illustrated a story called “Success is a Job in New York”. Warhol continued to be an award-winning illustrator throughout the 1950s, and some of his clients included Tiffany & Co., I. Miller Shoes, Fleming-Joffe, Bonwit Teller, Columbia Records, and *Vogue*.

#### WARHOL ARRIVES

Two dramatic exhibitions in 1962 announced Andy Warhol's entry into the art world. The first, in July at the Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles, exhibited his range of now-iconic “Campbell's Soup Cans”. Totalling 32 individual canvases, each featuring a different variety of the company's 32 soups, the canvases were lined up in a single row on a ledge that wrapped around the gallery. The paintings marked a breakthrough for Warhol, catapulting him from commercial illustrator to serious artist, and were among his first works based on consumer goods. The Campbell's Soup Cans also signified a much more significant artistic ethos, that of serial repetition, where each canvas was made to seem mechanically reproduced, although he hand-painted each one.

In the same year, Warhol's exhibition at New York's Stable Gallery displayed silkscreen prints with a flat uniformity that would become his signature style. Silkscreening, at the time considered mainly a commercial technique, allowed numerous repetitions and variations of his chosen subject, which for Warhol was several portraits of legendary actress Marilyn Monroe, whose recent

suicide sent shockwaves through American popular culture.

Throughout the 1960s, Warhol continued to mine the world of celebrity for his art, creating images of stars and public figures so familiar that they were often known by only their first name: Elvis, Jackie, and, again, Marilyn. Using printmaking techniques – including multiplicity, mirroring, transfer, and replication – Warhol laid a foundation that would prove central and enduring tenets in his work. His engagement with the subject of commodity culture found a sculptural release in his boxes silkscreened with the labels of Campbell's tomato juice, Brillo soap pads, and Heinz ketchup. “The more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel,” Warhol often remarked of this work.

#### CAPTURED ON FILM

Continually experimenting and innovating, Warhol also became a pioneering and prolific filmmaker. His most famous “Screen Tests” works, produced between 1964 and 1966, consisted of 472 individual filmed portraits of visitors to his legendary studio, known as the Factory. A testament to his perennial interest in

art immortalised

The Andy Warhol Museum tells Andy Warhol's story and explores his legacy through the most extensive collection of Warhol art and archives in the world. Located on the North Shore of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in the United States, it is the largest museum in North America dedicated to a single artist. The museum holds an extensive permanent collection of art and archives from the Pittsburgh-born pop-art icon, is one of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, and is a collaborative project of the Carnegie Institute, the Dia Art Foundation, and The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. [www.warhol.org](http://www.warhol.org)

portraiture, the "Screen Tests" starred non-professionals whose only task was to remain silent and still for the duration of a roll of film, challenging the *savoir-faire* of both his subjects not to be actors, and the audience to accept viewing non-celebrities mimicking the traditional role of the celebrity. Daring to be daring, Warhol also challenged the limits of audience attention with works such as "Empire", an eight-hour stationary shot of the Empire State Building. Drawing from various genres, Warhol made scripted, feature-length films that delved into New York's underground subcultures and transformed the Factory's collection of artists and Warhol's erstwhile groupies into "superstars."

By 1971, *New York* magazine had dubbed Warhol "The Zeitgeist incarnate," declaring, "The images he leaves will be the permanent record of America in the sixties." He had launched his own

magazine, *Interview*, in 1969, and in the years that followed, he circulated in the world of celebrity he had long represented in his art. In the 1980s, he returned to painting in works like the giant Rorschach. As suggested by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Annunciation* 1473, he also turned his creative attention to art history itself.

Warhol's own history also profoundly impacted his work, especially in later years. Throughout his life, Warhol fixated on his physical imperfections. Besides being afflicted with Sydenham chorea (St. Vitus' dance) as a child, he had pigment issues that caused discolouration of his skin, leading to the nicknames "Spot" and "Andy the Red-nosed Warhola." In response to his perceived physical flaws, Warhol cultivated different looks through his clothing, wigs, cosmetics, and plastic surgery to change the shape of his nose. Later in his life, Warhol developed premature baldness and had massive scars from gunshot wounds suffered in 1968. His lifelong interest in beauty regimes and skincare made its way into his work, with early paintings depicting a nose job, wigs, and pain

relief for corns. By the 1980s, Warhol had a near-daily exercise regime and took vitamin supplements to improve his hair and skin. Additionally, he incorporated bodybuilder imagery into his work and exercise equipment populates photographs of his studio.

As if to signal his imminent departure from the world, Warhol created a series of iconic monumental self-portraits featuring his gaunt face, fixed gaze, and a spiky wig, a mere nine months before his death. The works were larger than life, as was Warhol by this time, and some of the canvases measured nearly three metres (nine feet) square.

On 22 February 1987, Andy Warhol suffered complications following surgery to remove his gallbladder and died at New York Hospital in Manhattan. Now buried next to his mother and father at St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cemetery in Bethel Park, Pittsburgh, the flamboyant artist whose life had been cut dramatically short in the most modest of ways continues to have a lasting, irreverent impact on the world, on art, and on popular culture. ⑩



