

Warhol

**LIKE-NESS:
Andy Warhol Prints and Photos
from the Permanent Collection**

February 20–March 20, 2020

All works donated by the Andy Warhol Foundation.

Our exhibition title, LIKE-NESS, was inspired by a reading for the seminar course in which students prepared to present some of the Rhode Island College Foundation's collection of prints and photographs by Andy Warhol. We learned that Warhol liked a lot of things. The root-word "like" also connects to themes of Warhol's artwork, which resembles, or is like, popular culture, thus helping to define the movement of Pop Art, and it is dominated by portraits, likenesses, that supported his career. Adding "ness" at the end of our title transforms "like" from the verbal action or describing adjective into a noun, and the hyphenation draws attention to the plasticity of Warhol's contributions. Warhol's inventive works are material manifestations of emerging ideas in the art world, such as institutional critique and the role of the artist in political life.

The life and career of Andy Warhol (1928-1987) touches on many facets of American visual culture including commercial art, film and television, painting, photography, celebrity worship, commercialism, repetition, and mass production. Born in Pittsburgh, Warhol was a first-generation American and the first in his family to attend college. He worked as a commercial artist after he moved to New York City and began exhibiting drawings in the 1950s. By the 1960s he had become well known, first for his series of paintings depicting Campbell's soup cans and then Marilyn Monroe as well as experimental film produced in his studio dubbed "The Factory." The objects at RIC come from the 1970s and '80s, an explosively prolific period and the last two decades of Warhol's life when he was active fulfilling society portrait commissions and taking snapshots for his visual diary. Clients came to the Factory to sit for dozens of preparatory Polaroid photographs from which Warhol and the sitter chose for the finished painted likeness. More than half of RIC's collection is made up of these Polaroid portraits, but we also have a few Polaroid still life and nude studies. In this same period, Warhol was accumulating thousands of black and white snapshots of the quotidian moments in his world, some developed into 8" x 10" gelatin silver prints as seen on display here. LIKE-NESS also includes silkscreen prints, representing Warhol's best-known medium, in which he enlarged subjects to monumental size and leveraged printmaking's technique for mass-reproduction saturating the art market with his work.

It was both a generous gift and a delicious obligation for the RIC community to receive these objects as part of the Andy Warhol Foundation's Photographic Legacy Program when it distributed over 28,000 images to more than 180 colleges and universities in 2007. This collection allows RIC students to engage with original objects and contribute original research about one of America's most distinctive artists. Many of these objects have little or no previous research making the scholarly work students perform that much more significant. And we think Warhol would have liked this work.

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– Sara Picard, Associate Professor of Art History, Rhode Island College

When the name Andy Warhol is mentioned today, most people's first thought is of his infamous *Soup Cans* series. Few realize the true extent of Warhol's work; from making films and taking Polaroids to writing books and even working with digital media, the artist produced an unparalleled amount of work during his life. Warhol began *Flowers*, his largest series, in 1964 and created over 900 prints in total, with each variant differing slightly from the last. The source image was taken from a 1964 issue of the magazine *Modern Photography*. The screen print in the Rhode Island College permanent collection dates to 1970 and features the same composition of four hibiscus flowers as the rest of the prints but with two flowers painted orange, one yellow and one purple. Through Warhol's seemingly endless repetition of prints in his *Flowers* series, he contrasts the machine-like process used to make the work with the natural subject matter. The subject matter of flora is one that can be found again and again in historical still life paintings, but Warhol's presentation of the four flowers in his work does not resemble anything like the flower still lives of his artistic predecessors. Instead, *Flowers* pushes the subject matter to the brink of even being considered natural at all and leaves viewers questioning their own consumption of mass media, wondering if content really is what it appears to be.

—Thomas Crudale



Flowers (1970), silk screen print, 40" x 40"

Beginning in 1976, Andy Warhol would allegedly call long-time friend, collaborator, and fellow New Yorker Pat Hackett almost every morning. She would transcribe the previous day's events as he recalled them to her aloud, and these intimate documented chats would eventually turn into *The Andy Warhol Diaries*, which Hackett published in 1989, two years after the artist's death. Warhol notoriously photographed his close friends and peers, and Pat Hackett was one of many muses and subjects who frequented his infamous Factory. Peeling back a banana, she may be referencing Warhol's iconic cover art for the Velvet Underground's 1967 album "The Velvet Underground and Nico." The original album cover included a sticker one could literally peel off as if they were peeling the banana, imagery intentionally rife with sexual innuendo. In this black-and-white photograph a decade and a half later, Warhol is simultaneously capturing a close confidant in a seemingly casual moment in time and using the banana as a recurring image throughout his career.

– Shannon Hadfield

Pat Hackett (1982), gelatin silver print, 10" x 8"



Originally commissioned by Italian art dealer Luciano Anselmino in 1974 for \$900,000, the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series was both a progressive turn for Andy Warhol and a problematic way of typifying a group of “others” for a voyeuristic public. One of the first depictions in the popular art world of drag queens and transgender women of color; *Ladies and Gentlemen* was lauded by the public as a sympathetic portrait of “victims” of America’s cruel racism and capitalism when it was first shown in a gallery in Ferrara, Italy. The sitters, including prominent trans activist Marsha P. Johnson, were originally unnamed, drawn from acquaintances and local drag queens and paid \$50 each for their time. Warhol, who himself took several self-portraits dressed in drag, ultimately produced over 500 Polaroids and 268 canvases for this series, more than double what was originally commissioned, proving that his interest in the subject matter was founded in much more than financial incentives. These Polaroids show Wilhelmina Ross, then a performer at the radical underground drag theater The Hot Peaches and the sitter Warhol photographed most for this series. Her enigmatic stare and beaming smile tell a complicated story of queerness and power dynamics in a shifting culture.

—Victoria Gao

Ladies and Gentlemen (Wilhelmina Ross) (1974), Polaroid, 4.25” x 3.25”



In 1981 Andy Warhol began to address the topic of the American dollar – a motif he had first explored in the early years of his career – with a series of approximately 60 silk screen prints titled *Dollar Sign*. Each image of this series depicts the symbol of American currency in variations of neon colors, with each dollar sign taking up nearly the entire composition. By doing so, Warhol chose to reinforce the importance of money in both the art market and the daily lives of American consumers. From his early childhood years in a working-class immigrant family, Warhol was fascinated with celebrities and the fame and fortune associated with them that initially seemed so far from reach. He made this particular *Dollar Sign* print only six years before his death, at a time when art and money were obviously linked yet almost never depicted. By using the silk screen process, which was a more commercial art form frequently looked down upon by his contemporaries, Warhol embraced the idea that making money was simply a part of the art business.

– Jenney Martinelli

Dollar Sign (1981), silk screen print, 20" x 16"



The Last Supper remains a persistent subject throughout western art history. Leonardo Da Vinci, Peter Paul Rubens and many more influential artists have offered interpretations. Even Warhol himself would go on to depict the scene again in a series of screen prints from the mid 1980s. These particular prints were based on da Vinci's 15th-century mural painting *The Last Supper*, in which Christ is seated at a long banquet table with his apostles on either side. This Polaroid example shows a porcelain centerpiece depicting the biblical scene. Making casual a traditionally precious subject, the image was not painstakingly painted, but merely snapped into being with the press of the shutter. Warhol forgoes the conventional Christ-centered composition, choosing instead to position the backside of Bartholomew in the center: This change leaves Christ in the upper-right corner, where his figure comes increasingly close to being pushed out of frame.

– Joel Dunn

The Last Supper (1985), Polaroid, 4.25" x 3.25"



Giorgio Armani, the Italian fashion designer famous for creating his eponymous luxury company, first met Warhol in 1980 at the opening of a showroom by Italian clothing manufacturer GFT. Both quiet men (Armani did not speak English at the time), they still had great respect for each other's work. Armani was producing high-quality clothing lines, perfumes, jewelry and other luxury merchandise; Warhol was creating commissioned portraits and taking his camera wherever he went to document his day-to-day life. At portrait study sessions, Warhol would use his Polaroid Big Shot to take both candid and posed photographs, and the work developed during those photoshoots served as the framework for his finished silkscreened and painted portraits. This image of Armani shows him posed as a strong, confident and successful man, with shoulders tilted forward and gaze directed towards the lens. It also creates the notion that imperfections are inevitable, due to the over-exposed Polaroid having vertical streaks of light running throughout it. Other photos in this series do not have this blemish; whether this was accidental or intentional is up for debate, but it conveys the message that nothing is perfect.

— Jared Hamel

Giorgio Armani (1981), Polaroid, 4.25" x 3.25"



This black-and-white photograph captures the candid movement of Victor Hugo, a Venezuelan artist and window dresser. Hugo was one of the first to display Pop-inspired fashion styles for Halston's Madison Avenue store in New York. Eventually he was able to get recognition from Warhol through his unique displays and later became an assistant to the artist and a member of the Factory, where many creatives would gather and influence each other. From creating window displays to modeling for Warhol, Hugo became a visionary collaborator for the *Sex Parts and Torsos* series from 1977. This image portrays a glimpse into Hugo's spontaneous personality and synchronicity with Andy Warhol's personality, style and interests. Though it is blurry and barely recognizable, it holds a personality of its own and captures a moment in time in the life of both Warhol and Hugo.

— Jessica Michicoj

Victor Hugo (c. 1980), gelatin silver print, 10" x 8"



Andy Warhol made silk-screen prints of several public icons throughout his career, but *The Reigning Queens* series from 1985, just two years before his death, is unlike any other. No one had commissioned this series, as was common in his late career projects, nor had he depicted a female leader before. The four reigning queens of the series include Queen Elizabeth II of the United Kingdom, Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, Queen Margrethe II of Denmark and Queen Ntfombi Tfwala of Swaziland (now Eswatini). In the portrait of Queen Ntfombi in the Rhode Island College permanent collection, she wears an orange emahiya (a traditional Swazi dress) with a green pattern and a white ligcebesha (a traditional beaded necklace). Blue streaks with orange and red pastels beam outwards from her head, highlighting the crown of feathers worn by Swazi royals. Still a ruling figure in Eswatini today as the Queen Mother; Ntfombi was named queen regent in 1983 and her image popularized around the world by Warhol's portrayal.

– Babyka Saroeun

Queen Ntombi Twala of Swaziland (1985), silk screen print, 40" x 31"



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Bannister Gallery is open
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