

ART HISTORY – ANDY WARHOL

“Pop artist Andy Warhol passionate, if eccentric, commentator on American society.”

Andy Warhol was a marvel of his time, he confused art issues, he sabotaged modern art. He placed Marilyn Manson and the electric chair on the same level, and popularized the image of America in all the commercial aspects. Andy Warhol also popularized boring objects, from Coca-Cola bottles to the U.S. Dollar or to the hamburger making these everyday objects into art, this caused uproar amongst the art critics of the early 60's who discarded his work as being “Kitsch Postcards”. I am interested in his work to do with boring objects and how he manipulated these to become interesting, but another reason why I have picked him is because I really enjoy his work and looking at his life and how he came to be one of the most controversial artists of all time.

Even at birth his life started in a cloud of controversy and mystery. Andy Warhol was the son of a Czech Immigrant named Andrew Warhola- later known as Andy Warhol. His exact date of birth is not known, but we do know that he was born in-between 1928-1933 on the 6th August; even from here he was to maintain an artistic haze around his date of birth. At the age of seventeen he moved from his home town Pitsleugh, Pennsylvania to the “Institute of Technology” where he studied in pictorial design. During graduation “Warhol” moved to New York where he began to work as an illustrator for magazines like “Harper's Bazaar” and “Vogue”. He also, at the same time designed window displays for many retail stores.

Throughout the 50's “Warhol” enjoyed many successes, he won many awards from the “Art Director's club” and “The Institute of Graphic Art”. It was in these years that “Andrew Warhola” shortened his name to Andy Warhol. In 1952 “Warhol” had his first individual show at the “Hugo Gallery”, exhibiting 15 drawings based on the writings of Truman Capture, from here other exhibitions followed, including his first group show at the “Museum of Modern Art” in 1956.

During the 60's “Warhol” produced some of his most powerful Art works. He took everyday (boring objects) from the mass media and put them on the same level. I think “Warhol” not only wanted to turn the commonplace into art, but also make art its self



commonplace. I think personally he did this to great affect, take the “big torn Campbells” soup can (vegetable beef), 1962. He took an everyday soup can and turned it into art, he painted a soup can with wrapping half torn, this caused out rage and controversy amongst the art critics, just for this I like his work he questioned the “rules” of art and found there was none. In the late 50's and 60's art was “meant” to be pretty pictures! Landscapes and portraits he moved away from that idea. The critics still discarded his work as Kitsch Postcards, but not to be out done “Warhol” carried on producing works of art that caused controversy, perhaps his powerful pieces of art work, in my view was the “Marilyn Manson”

portraits that he produced in 1964. During this period of time it was said that “Monroe” was having an affair with J.E Kennedy, the president. It wasn’t until after “Monroe” death that “Warhol” produced the “Marilyn’s”. This created more shock than anything else, he took one of the famous icons of all time, who was dead and in a kind of way gave her a new lease of life, but some way he made her look comical, with the idea of giving her bright primary colours reminds me of a kids drawing it could be said by the art critics that he showed no respect, but then it could be said he was showing her character off in the study as being loud and centre of attention.

Again he took the most popular images from the media and made it in to art.

In 1964, “Warhol” pulled off a great coup, exhibiting cardboard boxes at the Stalder Gallery. These were wooden replicas of the cardboard “Brillo” boxes. As he piled them up, the controversy exploded. A writer by the name Sidney Tillian described “Warhol” act as “a gesture of aggressive passivity”. The exhibition aroused considerable interest but, in financial terms it was a “shocker”. I think in that year the impact of American art defiantly made its mark on the world and signalled the decline of Abstract Expressionism.



In 1976 he produced the first record of the rock band “The Velvet Underground” and between 1966 and 1968 he made several films with them, some of these films were controversial. He filmed “Chelsea Girls”, a sinister view of America in the 60’s it was stated as pornographic and was banned in the states. In 1970 “Warhol’s” exhibitions continuing to grow, it seemed as if the whole world was fighting over his representation of the media, of which he had become the greatest propagandist. In the same year “torn Campbell’s” soup can painted in 1962 was sold in New York for \$60,000, surprising for a “Kitsch Postcard”.

On 1st May 1971, the “Whitney Museum of American art” organized a “Warhol” retrospective. He displayed his work against a wallpaper background consisting of cow heads there he revealed a talent as a pun dry, vulgar and aggressive window dresser, a bit like America. In the same year when President Nixon returned from China, at the high of the Ping pong diplomacy, “Warhol” began his “Mao” series. He had never gone this far in simultaneously criticising politics and repressing by devaluing all points of reference this is not only controversy amongst art critics but that of governments also. He chose to paint Nixon over McGovern, because Nixon was the better known of the two. Here “Warhol” proved that he was the greatest artistic director of post-war.



