

Level 1 Module AR1015  
Contextual Research

## Research File

Artist: Andy Warhol  
Title: Untitled (*from Marilyn collection*)  
Date: 1967  
Dimensions: 910x910 mm  
Materials: Screen print on paper  
Locations: Tate Liverpool, UK



Works from the Marilyn Collection:



Above: Marilyn Diptych



The Marilyn print I'm studying was silkscreen printed in 1967, but the collection was started in 1962 when Marilyn Monroe was pronounced dead due to an overdose of sleeping pills. This came at roughly half way through Warhol's career when he was a very well established artist and the public were well aware of his works and exhibitions. He was considered a celebrity himself at this time and even featured in some self-portraits.

Pop art emerged in the mid 1950's in England but it realised its fullest attention in New York, USA where Warhol's art studio 'The Factory' was based. As the Marilyn prints were done in the mid 60's the Pop Art movement was well underway in imitating the explosion in advertising, celebrities and cinema. Pop art acts to explore the everyday and mass-produced images of today's popular culture. The media's influence and advertising to the consumer culture were favourite subjects for pop artists such as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and James Rosenquist. It was a major milestone in the transition of art at that time from 'high' to 'low' art. Before pop art was considered to be for the 'social elite' and the general public's everyday workingman wasn't considered eligible enough to view work in galleries. Pop aimed to bring art into everyone's world with images that featured in everyone's lives everyday, e.g., the Coca Cola logo and Campbell soup cans that Warhol produced.



This progressed onto portraits of famous celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe, Liz Taylor and Elvis Presley. When asked what pop art was, Roy Lichtenstein replied 'Outside is the world, its there. Pop art looks out into the world'. The lecture on post modernism briefly looked at some pop artists (namely Warhol, Lichtenstein, Rosenquist, Kruger etc...) and how they broke away from the previous modernistic ideas of experimental work (colour, texture, tone etc...) through the invention of television and other new medias. I was very interested in this as the lecture gave me small insight into how art changed from being so 'Avant Garde' in nature to so commercialised and media

influenced in the mid 50s to 60's.

Since the 60's many artists of fine art, music and film have taken inspiration from Warhol's collections. Basquiat and Stephen Sprouce became renowned for their association with Warhol with very colourful and simple images appearing in their work. CD covers from Kiss, Queen and U2 have all taken inspiration in their design and even musicians have named themselves after him ('The Dandy Warhol's') or included his work in their videos (Michael and Janet Jackson's 'Scream' and Duran Duran's 'Do you Believe in Shame?').



A silkscreen method has been used in the Marilyn collections. This is where a template is made from an image (Warhol used Marilyn's portrait from the 1953 film, 'Niagara'), which is then printed onto a surface through a frame stretched with thin material with a rubber squeegee pushing the printing ink through.

This gave irregularities though as factors such as squeegee softness, amount of ink on the screen and pressure applied all gave different results. When Warhol's assistant, Nathan Gluck pointed this out, Andy's reply was simply 'Oh, but I like it that way'. The small differences from print to print gave each face a slightly different 'mask', making the point that although Marilyn's face had been re-produced endlessly, she was more than the plastic consumer product she had appeared to have become.

The finished work has a very mass produced feel, a quality that Warhol wanted to create. It gave additional impact to the familiarity of Marilyn's portraiture image in everyday society, on the TV, in magazines and on billboards on the street. It itself was a meant to look like a mass produced product for the consumer culture. When the Marilyn collection was first created she had just committed suicide so her image was at that time particularly widespread in the media for some weeks. Warhol also chose the slickest, retouched and superhumanly glamorous publicity shot of Marilyn, which he then went to increase the contrast and add garish colours. It turned her image from the frightened child Norma Jeane of the past to Marilyn Monroe, a fantasy invented by the media, an unthreatening half-person that sex goddesses are supposed to be. In her unfinished biography she stated:

*'I knew I belonged to the public and to the world not because I was talented or even beautiful but because I had never belonged to anything or anyone else'.*

The constant repetition of Marilyn and other portraiture prints symbolised again the way in which her image was everywhere in society. She was the ultimate glamorous movie

star who every man loved and every woman wanted to be. Madonna is a good equivalent in today's society with her being the stunning celebrity that all the public read about and watch on TV.

I feel that as Warhol started the Marilyn collection just after the time of her death, it was her public suicide and her media presence which gave him the inspiration to capture her image as the beautiful movie star who would not die. Her image seemed to swamp the world in newspapers, documentaries and TV reports. As the public were talking, watching and reading about Marilyn through all types of media she became the perfect subject for Warhol to concentrate on. He wanted to highlight her status as that very popular film star with bleached blond hair, loud makeup and voluptuous body with a constant presence in the media. Even the colours that he used in the portraits mimicked the make-up and fashion colours of the time. This use of colour again linked to the popular colours used to advertise products; all relating back to Warhol's aim to characterise the consumer culture.

Marilyn became a fantasy figure, which belonged to the public through mass media. Her image and name are still a multinational business to this day.