

The Total Andy Warhol, Other Voices, Other Rooms

No other modern artist has become as widely-recognized outside the art world and left such a deep impression on popular culture as Andy Warhol. Born in Pittsburgh in 1928, Andrew Warhola moved to New York in the 1950s, and launched a successful career as a commercial illustrator. Through an editorial typo he became Andy Warhol. By the mid-1960s Warhol had become a major player on the New York underground scene and a central figure in the Pop Art Movement, famous for his iconic silkscreens¹ of Hollywood stars and his use of imagery from mass culture, as well as for his controversial avant-garde film. But while Warhol's Pop aesthetic has become a recognizable brand as widely known as the McDonald's logo, not many people are aware of the full extent of the Warhol empire.

Other Voices, Other Rooms, a new exhibition opening in October at the Hayward Gallery, seeks to take a fresh look at the entire spectrum of the Warhol legacy and open up new perspectives on the complex identity of this camp² cult figure. (...)

The exhibition's subtitle *Other Voices, Other Rooms* is taken from a novel by Warhol's favourite writer, Truman Capote, and alludes to the problematic identity that Warhol shared with the novel's protagonist. (...)

Ironically Andy Warhol, a master of publicity who was obsessed with stardom and celebrity, was very shy and tormented by insecurities about his appearance. He carefully constructed his image through visual representations in portraits and photographs, and also through interviews and memoirs mostly co-written by members of his Factory. Warhol's entourage of assistants played a considerable part in creating his public image. (...)

As Matthew Wilson Smith notes in his study of *The Total Work of Art*, the combination of a wide range of media, including visual art, film, video, performance, music, fashion, memoirs, TV shows and magazine publishing into a single system that openly celebrated commercial culture, was a characteristic feature of the all-encompassing³ multimedia project that went by the name of Andy Warhol. Towards the end of his life Warhol even launched his own modeling career (one could book him through model agency Zoli for TV appearances) and fantasised about having himself cloned. Warhol first started exploring the aesthetics of merging different art forms in 1965 with the Happening *Andy Warhol, Up-Tight* at the Film-Maker's Cinemathèque in New York, which combined his avant-garde films, slide projections, music by the Velvet Underground, dancing and photography. The following year he continued with an expanded version of this spectacle renamed *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* – a showcase of the many parts of the Warhol empire, which is now considered as one of the key events in the development of multimedia.

Warhol radically embraced the mass-cultural spectacle and continuously worked on the expansion of his brand across a wide range of different media. He moved swiftly⁴ from one new contemporary mass media form to the next, always quick to recognize the commercial potential of his latest vehicles. After his experimentation with *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* in the 1960s, his gossipy celebrity magazine *Interview* became a new platform for showcasing the Warhol philosophy in the 1970s. In the 1980s Warhol was involved in a series of TV shows including *Fashion*, *Andy Warhol's TV* and *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes* for MTV, in which he appeared alongside celebrity friends such as Debbie Harry and Jerry Hall.

Sandra Rehme, *Art & Music*, Autumn 2008

1. **silkscreens:** serigraphs.
2. **camp:** feminine.
3. **all-encompassing:** complete.
4. **swiftly:** quickly.

► Understanding the text

1 Answer these questions.

1. When and where was Andy Warhol born?
2. How did Andrew Warhola become Andy Warhol?
3. Name some of Andy Warhol's obsessions as listed in the extract.
4. Aside from painting, which other art forms did Warhol embrace?
5. Why can Warhol's work be considered a defining moment in the history of multimedia?
6. Why do you think Warhol would be interested in modelling?
7. What was the name of the magazine Warhol established?
8. What did Warhol devote much of his attention to during the 1980s?

► Beyond the text

- 2 What do you understand by the term 'multimedia'? Use a dictionary or the Internet to help you find a satisfactory definition and then apply it to Warhol's achievements.
- 3 What did Warhol understand about the importance of 'branding'? What did he brand?