

In the early 1960s, Warhol—along with artists such as Rosalyn Drexler, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and James Rosenquist—began exploring the signs and symbols of postwar America, creating the movement that came to be known as Pop art. Moving from hand-painting through stamps and stencils, Warhol arrived at his breakthrough silkscreen process. Using repetition, subtle surface variations, and different color combinations, he transformed quotidian subject matter such as dollar bills, self-improvement ads, instructional diagrams, soup cans, Coke bottles, and supermarket packaging into optically charged, painterly fields. Unlike in its commercial application, in which the silkscreen creates exact duplicates, Warhol varied the pressure on the silkscreen while printing in order to produce a varied effect. As he reached beyond Abstract Expressionism's quest to transcend ordinary life through the spiritual and mythic, Warhol found inspiration and even heroism in the everyday. He had an exceptional grasp of the parallels between contemporary painting and sculpture and the visual strategies of advertising, along with an intuitive understanding of what would read as serious art, even as he upended its hierarchies.

During his first decade in New York, as an illustrator drawing products for advertisements, Warhol's success hinged on his ability to "sell the sizzle, not the steak." Yet, in choosing to make the contours of the American Coca-Cola bottle the subject of a painting, he was celebrating both its iconic recognizability and its democratic appeal: "A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke."

The 1950s were a foundational decade for Warhol—a time when he worked for commercial clients while he also pursued a career as a fine artist. After graduating from the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Warhol moved to New York and quickly established himself as a successful commercial illustrator, working primarily in fashion as well as for companies ranging from CBS to Ciba Pharmaceuticals. Art directors valued Warhol's versatility and ingenuity, but it was his ability to internalize and quickly respond to feedback that made him an ideal collaborator. Warhol employed multiple reproductive devices, including stamps, stencils, and his signature blotted-line technique. By blotting a wet ink drawing with blank paper to produce a copy, he could create multiple versions of a single drawing. His most significant job was for the shoe company I. Miller and Sons, whose innovative, award-winning campaign featuring Warhol's idiosyncratic drawings successfully rebranded its line to appeal to a new, younger audience. His style and instincts were perfectly suited to a period when creating a personality for a product and being attentive to how it would appear in print mattered more than depicting it in accurate detail.

During the same time, Warhol was also making his own work. An astute social observer and openly gay man, he was producing paintings and drawings that were out of sync with the machismo of Abstract Expressionism. Instead, Warhol was drawn to imagery that could be interpreted on multiple levels, producing many works that employed a coded language fully comprehensible only to those in the know, such as close friends or regulars at the gender-fluid salon hosted by fashion photographer Otto Fenn. Some of the works in this gallery, such as the fantastical gold shoes, were shown publicly, while others, such as his intimate drawings of men's feet, were kept private.



Warhol continued to use in his fine art some of the reproductive techniques and tools he had employed in his commercial work and painting of the 1950s: the blotted line, rubber stamps, and stencils, as well as an overhead projector and photostat machine. In 1960 he began to apply these methods to subjects in mass circulation, such as front-page headlines, cartoons, and advertisements, astutely selecting images ranging from singular and iconic to humorous and campy.

*Coca-Cola [2]* (1961) and *Coca-Cola [3]* (1962), both based on ads for the soft drink, demonstrate a significant stylistic shift that took place during this brief but critical period. Like many of his Pop art contemporaries, Warhol felt compelled to emulate the style of Abstract Expressionism, which was still dominant at the time. The 1961 painting is expressive and drippy, while the 1962 work minimizes evidence of the artist's hand. Uncertain about the direction his paintings should take, Warhol invited gallerists Ivan Karp and Irving Blum along with curator Henry Geldzahler and political filmmaker Emile de Antonio to look at the two paintings. All four friends encouraged him to move in the direction set by the more machine-like version, with de Antonio noting that "it's our society, it's who we are, it's absolutely beautiful and naked, and you ought to destroy the first one and show the other." In embracing the more mechanical-looking Coca-Cola bottle as fine art, Warhol opened up the possibility of linking the worlds of commercial and fine art that he had previously held apart.

To create the works on view in the previous gallery, Warhol had painted by hand but imitated the effect of mechanical reproduction. The procedural shift to an actual mechanical process—the silkscreen technique—remains his most crucial breakthrough. In 1962 he built on this development by screenprinting photographic imagery directly onto his canvases, so that the photograph, selectively cropped, became both the subject of the painting and the means by which Warhol made it. Warhol had a long-standing fascination with celebrities and famous movie stars, often reflecting larger cultural obsessions. Many of his early silkscreened paintings were of Hollywood's latest crushes: Warren Beatty, Marlon Brando, Troy Donahue, Elvis Presley, and Natalie Wood. For Warhol the timing and selection of his subjects was crucial. He created portraits of Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe when their personal lives were made highly public: *Silver Liz* (1963) was made when Taylor had an affair and health crises while filming *Cleopatra*; the diptych of Monroe was created shortly after her fatal overdose.

Warhol's repeated photo-silkscreened images, such as the Elvis paintings from 1963, create a cinematic effect and foreshadow his move into filmmaking later that year. Initially, Warhol's short, silent films served as an extension of his drawing practice: a means to record intimate encounters and scenes from his daily life. Within a year, however, Warhol's film production became more ambitious, mimicking and subverting Hollywood's studio system by incorporating sound, scripts, location shoots, and a rotating cast of underground actors and Factory superstars like Paul America, Taylor Mead, Edie Sedgwick, and Viva. Warhol's films also converged with his work in other media: he shot an installation of the Elvis paintings (the film is on view in the gallery nearby) and created *Large Sleep* (1965) with two enlarged frames from his film *Sleep* (1963).



Warhol's Death and Disaster works can be seen as monumental history paintings—a genre developed to honor great men and their deeds—but Warhol transformed the tradition by highlighting the anonymity of disaster and its victims and the contradictions of life in 1960s America. Drawing on pictorial magazines of the period, such as *Life*, *Look*, and *Time*, Warhol featured images that captured the spectacle of violence as refracted through the lens of the media: suicides, car crashes, electric chairs, acts of police brutality, and poisonings. *Electric Chairs* (1963–71) and *Race Riots* (1963–64) are among the most overtly political of the series. In these works Warhol seems to editorialize with color, creating a shock of dissonance with *Lavender Disaster* (1963)—a serial reproduction of an electric chair—and a sense of poisoned atmosphere in *Mustard Race Riot* (1963), which depicts a brutal attack by the all-white police force of Birmingham, Alabama, on peaceful African American civil rights demonstrators. When Warhol first exhibited these works in Paris in 1964, he wanted to call the show *Death in America*—a title that suggests a desire to present evidence that violence is no less American than Coca-Cola's brand of optimism.

Warhol's portrait of Jacqueline Kennedy conflates three different iconic news photographs of events surrounding the assassination of her husband, President John F. Kennedy, on November 22, 1963. The first image was taken in Dallas just prior to the shooting; the second during his funeral; and the third as Lyndon B. Johnson was sworn in as president. The filmic nature of the arrangement emphasizes the stillness of the images; stopped in time and presented out of temporal sequence, imparting a sense of the public's grief and confusion.



Portraiture was a career-long preoccupation for Warhol, and his subjects included not only celebrities but socialites, art collectors, friends, alleged criminals, an insurance company president, and the artist himself. Unlike traditional painted portraits, his were created using different types of photographs—performative photo-booth strips, deadpan corporate publicity headshots, and dehumanizing mug shots—which not only pictured their subjects but framed them in social and cultural terms.

Warhol's *Most Wanted Men* (1964) originated as his first public art project, a mural commission from architect Philip Johnson for the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 World's Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens. Warhol found his source images for the work in a booklet of photographs titled *The Thirteen Most Wanted*, circulated by the New York Police Department. Although the booklet's producers were no doubt oblivious to any possible homoerotic double reading of "wanted" men, it seems to have been obvious to Warhol, who appropriated the concept for two nearly simultaneous projects made with very different audiences in mind: the public mural, *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, and an unambiguously homoerotic film series, *The Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* (1964–66, on view in the nearby film gallery). Alongside its other qualities, the mural constituted a sophisticated essay on the antihero, taking Warhol's selection of bad-boy celebrities—Marlon Brando, James Dean, and Elvis Presley—to another level. Before the fair opened, Warhol was asked to remove the mural. The fair's organizers found the subject matter too controversial, but not because of covert gay references: they were keen to promote an upbeat image and loath to implicitly condemn people who, though wanted for arrest, had not stood trial. Warhol did not remove the images; instead, he acceded to having the mural painted over in silver.



Warhol announced his retirement from painting in 1965 and shortly thereafter dramatized his farewell with an installation of *Cow Wallpaper* and *Silver Clouds*—helium-filled Mylar balloons that he described as paintings that could “float away.” As this gesture might suggest, Warhol’s “retirement” was, instead, a declaration that he would not be bound by the limits of any one artistic medium. At the height of his popular fame as a painter, Warhol put aside not just painting, but his signature appropriation of mainstream commercial products in favor of underground culture, drawing on many of the Factory habitués for his disparate ventures. He entered into a period of intense productivity, developing projects in new media, video, publishing, music, and fashion, while continually experimenting across media.

In 1966, for example, Warhol premiered the Exploding Plastic Inevitable (EPI), an immersive multimedia environment that combined performance, art, film, and music provided by the Velvet Underground. He published numerous periodicals, print portfolios, and books. Although he continued to make paintings, he did so by recycling subjects such as his electric chairs, experimenting with different color combinations and surface treatments in order to achieve new optical effects. He played with technology and perception—making paintings that had to be viewed with 3-D glasses or under ultraviolet light—and pursued a number of more conceptual projects, such as a work in which he vacuumed a room in a gallery. He also began experimenting with video, drawn to its ease and immediacy. Perhaps most remarkable, he directed and produced an unprecedented quantity of radical films.

On June 3, 1968, Warhol was shot multiple times by the radical feminist author Valerie Solanas, who had appeared in two of Warhol’s films. Although he required numerous surgeries and a lengthy convalescence, Warhol soon returned to a high level of productivity, reinvesting himself in his work.

By the 1980s Warhol had expanded his experiments and ventures in contemporary media. He launched his own television show and in 1986 even used one of the earliest personal computers, a Commodore Amiga, to render a portrait of celebrity singer Debbie Harry for a live audience. Warhol was also conscious of a younger generation whose re-engagement with popular culture, riffs on graffiti, and New York East Village locus intrigued him. In 1981 Warhol met Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente, and Keith Haring, who would all collaborate with Warhol on paintings. He was attracted to and energized by the expressive immediacy of their artistic approach, which in part triggered his return to making new work with the hand-painted technique he had used pre-silkscreen. In diary entries from the early 1980s, he mentioned Basquiat, Haring, Jenny Holzer, Barbara Kruger, David Salle, Julian Schnabel, Cindy Sherman, and other young artists, noting that the “1980s are so much like the sixties.”

As with his work of the 1960s, many of the subjects Warhol chose to incorporate into his work reflected political, economic, and social preoccupations of the period: Cold War military excursions, missile silos, Reagan-era economic reforms, the death of graffiti artist Michael Stewart at the hands of New York City police officers, and gentrification. Many of these works also held more personal significance, such as references to the burgeoning AIDS crisis, religious tracts, and physiological diagrams.



In the series *Ladies and Gentlemen* (1975), which depicts New York City drag queens and trans women, including activist Marsha P. Johnson and performer Wilhelmina Ross, Warhol engaged more explicitly with drag and the performance of queer identity than in any other paintings he had made since the 1950s. An Italian gallerist commissioned the work and specifically requested that Warhol not focus on cross-dressing or transgender Factory superstars such as Candy Darling, Jackie Curtis, and Mario Montez, who were known personalities. Rather he asked Warhol to make portraits that were more “anonymous and impersonal.” Warhol directed his assistants to recruit models from the Gilded Grape, a Times Square bar where many trans women hung out; the Christopher Street Pier; and other sites in downtown Manhattan. He photographed his subjects using a Polaroid camera, paying each fifty or one hundred dollars per session. The series developed into a very substantial project, comprising hundreds of paintings of various scale, more than sixty drawings and collages, and a portfolio of prints. Adopting a distinctive painterly style for the portraits, he worked directly on the canvases, often with his fingers, to create an unusually layered, textured surface in a wide color palette.

Unlike in his other portraits, Warhol did not name the subjects of this series. They were not, however, truly anonymous. Marsha P. Johnson, for example, had been a key player in the Stonewall rebellion that sparked the struggle for LGBTQ rights and, like Wilhelmina Ross, was a member of the performance group the Hot Peaches. In recent years, research into the other sitters’ identities has allowed their names to be instated.

Many of Warhol's major series of the 1970s and 1980s fall into traditional genres—portraits, still lifes, nudes, and landscapes—which, while seemingly straightforward, allowed for a vast range of formal and technical experimentation. For a series of still lifes begun in 1975, for example, he worked with assistants to make theatrically lit studio photographs of a variety of objects, such as a skull or a hammer and sickle, positioning them to cast shadows so dramatic that they took on identities of their own. In the years that followed, he created a number of paintings based on these photographs—the first time he used his own images as source material rather than appropriating it. A selection of the resulting photographs were then printed and some altered before being rephotographed and transferred to acetates and, finally, silkscreens.

It was through these investigations into photography—a medium most commonly associated with accurate representation—that Warhol was able to make works that read more overtly as abstraction. Beginning in 1978, he made a radical shift and did away with the objects entirely, producing an expansive series of more than one hundred paintings focused only on shadows, which he titled just that: *Shadows*. In these works Warhol freed himself from his Pop subjects by experimenting with something close to pure abstraction. At the time they were created, these works were not well received by critics, in part because they deviated from the iconography expected of him.



Warhol's experiments with abstraction—in the form of cropping, upscaling, simplifying, blurring, distorting, obscuring, patterning, or otherwise mediating the image—repurposed operations used routinely by art directors to create interest in a news story or product. Warhol was also deeply influenced by the reductive paintings of abstract artists such as Ellsworth Kelly, Barnett Newman, and Ad Reinhardt, and especially during his final decade, his work increasingly had the outward look of abstraction. Yet as the four monumental canvases in this gallery make clear, he never completely divorced himself from his sources, maintaining his connection to the everyday world while still playing with the problem of how images generate meaning.

Warhol posed this question in different ways from work to work until the end of his life, employing a variety of conceptual devices. In *Camouflage Last Supper* (1986) and *Sixty-Three White Mona Lisas* (1979), he used pattern and paint handling to simultaneously present the image and obscure it, complicating the relationship to the subjects—notably, two of the most celebrated works in the history of art. In *Sixty-Three White Mona Lisas*, he also referenced his own earlier appropriation of Leonardo's iconic portrait, once again destabilizing ideas of representation, reproduction, and authorship. Warhol's *Rorschachs* (1984) were made by painting on one vertical half of the canvas, then folding the cloth to imprint the image onto the other half (the blotting technique he had developed years earlier). In its reference to the Rorschach test, which analyzes a subject's perceptions of an inkblot, the painting is a potent reminder of Warhol's understanding of the mutability of the visual image and of art itself.



From 1963 to 1968 Warhol produced hundreds of movies. Although his filmmaking was informed by a wide range of film genres and styles—including underground cinema, Hollywood, documentary, pornography, avant-garde performance and theater, portraiture, and minimalism—he consistently worked to redefine both the film-going experience and the practice of filmmaking itself on his own terms, pushing the limits of spectatorship with unwatchably long films, constructing new definitions of film performance, and embracing the flaws inherent to the medium of film, accepting the notion of accident, chance, and imperfection.

Warhol began working with film in the summer of 1963. His earliest films, all single silent 100-foot rolls, were shot at the standard sound speed of 24 frames per second (fps), but projected at the silent speed of 16 fps—resulting in a kind of slow motion. Films in this gallery include a selection of his earliest, and surprisingly intimate, home movie-like shorts—which feature the artists, poets, and dancers in his milieu—and a sampling of his iconic *Screen Tests* (1964–66). One of his most ambitious investigations into the art of portraiture, Warhol's *Screen Tests* encourage their sitters to follow a rigorous set of rules, including to remain as still as possible, without blinking, for the duration of the roll—a little over three minutes. The films on view here distill a theme consistent throughout all of Warhol's films, his fascination with the mysteries of personality as revealed (and concealed) on the movie screen.

Later developments in Warhol's work as a filmmaker are on view in the extensive film program in the Susan and John Hess Family Theater on the third floor. He turned to avant-garde film in part because there he was free to explore raw, subversive subject matter in a way that he knew the conservative art world did not allow. He increasingly featured homoerotic imagery, foregrounded New York's subcultures—including those he created himself in the Factory featuring his superstars—and deconstructed the tropes of Hollywood cinema, even as his films' narrative structures grew increasingly complex.