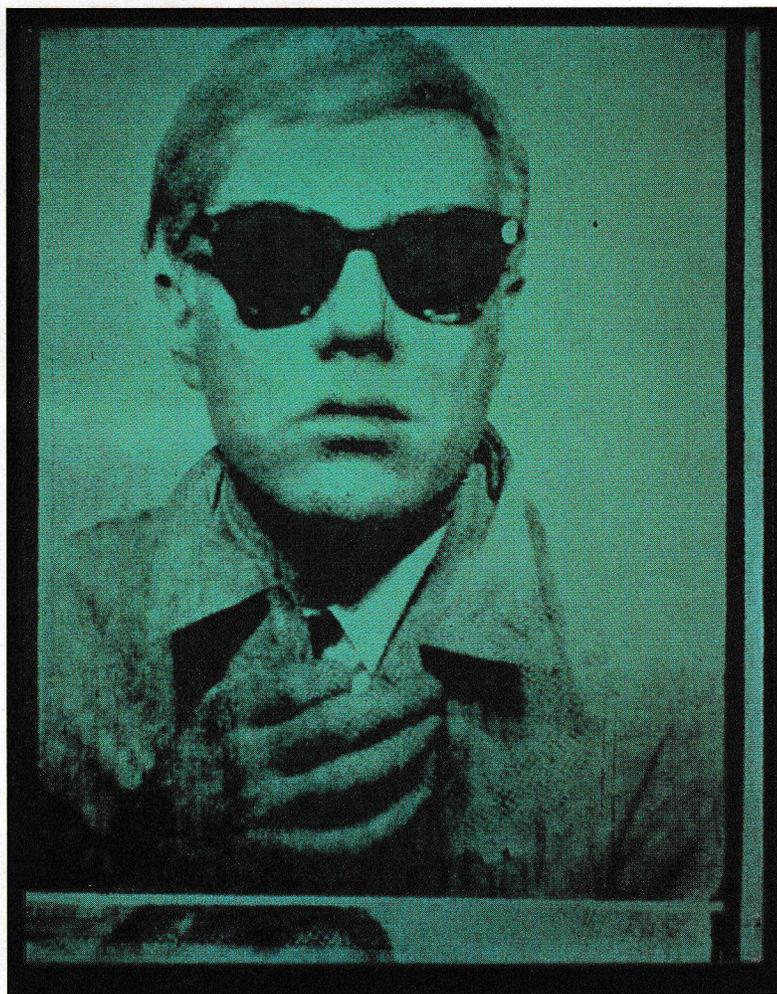


Andy Warhol's Homecoming



Self-portrait, 1964.

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Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art brings the Pop artist back to where he scored his first successes

BY HUNTER DROHOJOWSKA-PHILP

The artist who famously said, "In the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes," has considerably outperformed his own prediction. Andy Warhol, a founder of the 1960s movement Pop art, has become arguably one of the most recognized names in 20th-century art. He is renowned for his paintings of soup cans and portraits of Marilyn Monroe.

The poor boy from Pittsburgh, who used his modest talents as an illustrator to transform himself into an international art superstar, is the subject of "Andy Warhol Retrospective," a comprehensive body of more than 200 drawings, paintings, and sculptures. It is on view at Los Angeles' Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) from May 25 to August 18.

Warhol's considerable influence extended to developments in European contemporary art, so it is fitting that the exhibition was organized by the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin. It then appeared at the Tate Modern in London last winter before traveling to MOCA. The show's independent curator Heiner Bastian calls Warhol "the most important chronicler of the second half of the 20th century."

The last Warhol retrospective was mounted in 1989, just two years after the artist died of complications from a routine gallbladder surgery. At that time, opinion was divided on his legacy. Critics, curators, and collectors readily acknowledged the importance of his earliest Pop paintings, his work with alternative rock band Velvet Underground, and his radically different films such as *Empire* and *Sleep*. Yet even then he had enemies. He was shot by S.C.U.M. manifesto author Valerie Solanas in 1968. But Warhol survived to found *Interview Magazine* and to produce his controversial portraits of society ladies and Chairman Mao, rock stars and industrialists in the 1970s and 1980s. Then, in 1986, the man who was said to be making fun of fine art, to be collapsing the boundaries between high and low aesthetics, completed a series of major canvases based on Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. All will be on view in the retrospective, which features works that were not included in the European showings.

Warhol always received a warm welcome in progressive California. After his film *The Chelsea Girls* was not accepted by the Cannes Festival in 1967, it received its first screenings in San Francisco and Los Ange-

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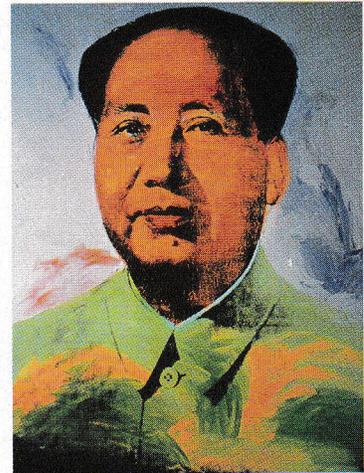
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ANDY WARHOL



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Mao, 1973.

les, with Warhol present. In L.A. in particular, collectors and critics, less in thrall of high culture than their Manhattan equivalents, were quick to grasp the significance of Warhol's fascination with popular culture. In 1962, Warhol's 15 Campbell's soup can paintings made their debut at L.A.'s now legendary Ferus Gallery, which showed his portraits of Elvis the following year. In 1970, the modest Pasadena Art Museum and L.A. art critic John Coplans were the first to organize a Warhol retrospective that traveled internationally. Then, in 1996, the notorious Campbell's soup can paintings were sold to New York's Museum of Modern Art for \$15 million, significantly solidifying Warhol's legitimacy.

For these historic reasons among others, MOCA director Jeremy Strick worked with the City of Los Angeles to become the only American venue to host this retrospective. He says, "Warhol brought together fine art and mass culture in a manner that truly transformed both. Before Warhol, artists were expected to delve beneath the surface of contemporary life, to reveal deeper truths. Warhol demonstrated that the deepest truths may lie right upon the surface." □

Hunter Drohojowska-Philp, who writes about art and design, has completed a biography of Georgia O'Keefe for Alfred A. Knopf.

The Andy Warhol Retrospective runs through August 18 and is expected to attract such a flood of visitors that the museum has extended hours and made timed and dated tickets available through Ticketmaster, (213) 365-3500. MOCA members, or those who become members, receive two free tickets. For more information, call (866) 4-WARHOL. For directions, opening times, etc., call (213) 626-6222 or visit www.lamoca.org.