

# **Andy Warhol: A Biography**

## **Youth**

Andy Warhol was born in 1928 in the industrial city of Pittsburgh. His parents had emigrated from the Carpathian Mountain Region of what is now the Slovak Republic. Warhol attended the Pittsburgh public schools and participated in Saturday morning art classes at Carnegie Institute. His mother encouraged her son's childhood artistic inclinations. At the age of 17 he was accepted at Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University). He enrolled in the Department of Painting and Design, where he was introduced to skills he would use throughout his working life.

## **Commercial Art**

After graduating from Carnegie Tech in 1949, Warhol moved to New York City and established a career as an illustrator. His drawings were reproduced in fashionable magazines and newspapers. His business expanded quickly, and he recruited assistants, including his mother, who had moved to New York City to live with him. Even though he won design awards and financial reward in the commercial art world, he wanted to be recognized as a fine artist. In the 1950s, fine art such as painting was appreciated for its expressive or inspirational powers, whereas commercial art was valued for its ability to sell products.

## **Pop Art and the 1960s**

In the 1960s, Warhol became known as a Pop Artist. Pop Artists painted people, places and things that Americans saw every day – things that were popular, such as movie stars, food and pictures from the newspaper. Warhol began making fine art directly based on products and advertisements in the late 1950s. He often created multiple paintings or sculptures of the same object. In 1962, he began using a silkscreen process that allowed him to repeat images easily, often on a single canvas.

Warhol's studio, which he called the "Factory," became a hangout for poets, musicians, actors and interesting characters. Instead of being distracted by the activity around him, Warhol used the excitement and stream of people to make art and films. He documented the frequent gatherings of beautiful young men and women in film, photography and audiotape. The openness of the Factory came to an abrupt and frightening end in 1968 when Warhol was shot and critically wounded by a visitor.

## **Late '60s and 1970s**

After recovering from the attempt on his life, Warhol shifted his focus to a safer crowd of entertainment personalities, fashion moguls and wealthy society beauties. In 1969, he created *Interview* magazine. The magazine began as a film journal and eventually became a means for him to meet, photograph and interview music celebrities, Hollywood actors and famous athletes. He also painted commissioned portraits of these rich and famous people. Over the course of his career, Warhol used all manner of photographic sources, from film stills to instant photo booth strips, Polaroids, and much later, medical CAT scans.

## **"Business Art"**

When Warhol moved his studio in 1974, he began making Time Capsules, which were cardboard boxes he filled with significant and insignificant mail, messages, souvenirs, and other odds and ends. The boxes were sealed, dated and stored when Warhol decided they were complete. He continued the project until his death in 1987.

Around this time Warhol stopped calling the studio the Factory and began referring to it as the office. He once said, "Business art is the step that comes after art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist." Warhol's honesty scandalized those with the traditional attitude that considerations of money pollute the purity of art. In the 1980s, Warhol worked on projects for broadcast television, including a regular series on MTV called "Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes." He also began a new career as a model, endorsing products in print and television ads.

### **Final Years**

Despite his numerous public guises, Andy Warhol the artist continued to make serious art throughout his life. In the 1980s, he returned to hand painting and looked again to commercial imagery and to art history for his subject matter. Collaborations with much younger artists like Jean-Michel Basquiat and Francesco Clemente allowed new, raw expression to enter his art. Andy Warhol died in 1987 as the result of complications following gall bladder surgery.