

the warhol:

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Portrait of the Sixth Prince Yi, 1905



Portrait of Prince Hongming, 1767

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THE ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM ANNOUNCES NEW SPECIAL EXHIBITION, *WORSHIPING THE ANCESTORS: CHINESE COMMEMORATIVE PORTRAITS*

(Pittsburgh, PA) . . . November 4, 2002... The Andy Warhol Museum presents *Worshiping the Ancestors: Chinese Commemorative Portraits*, on view February 2 through April 27, 2003. *Worshiping the Ancestors* features more than 30 brightly colored, nearly life-size commemorative ancestor portraits created in China between 1451 and 1943, and is the first major exhibition devoted to these rarely seen works.

Organized by the Smithsonian Institute's Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, where it was on view in summer 2001, *Worshiping the Ancestors* examines the historical and socio-religious importance commemorative portraiture has played in society. The Warhol will display these Chinese commemorative portraits in the 7th floor galleries alongside more than 30 of Andy Warhol's silkscreen portraits of celebrities and socialites, created in the 1960s through the 1980s. The juxtaposition of these two bodies of work will allow for cross-cultural comparisons and an in-depth exploration of social class in the enduring art of portraiture. In the galleries, a dowager empress of late 18th century China will be seen near an American socialite of the 1970s.

"Chinese commemorative portraits were painted to represent ancestors who were famous, wealthy and socially important; they were a marker of status for the descendants, as well as religious ceremonial objects," says Thomas Sokolowski, director of The Andy Warhol Museum. "Warhol's portraits are of these same kinds of high-society people. And while he never saw the particular ancestor portraits in this exhibition, Warhol understood that both our society and the Chinese were consumer cultures interested in how we are viewed, what we own, and what we value from a financial point of view."

Chinese Commemorative Portraits

In China, ancestor worship has long been considered an important cornerstone of the culture. Regular rituals were meant to honor them and ensure that the ancestors' spirit would confer blessings of health and prosperity on their descendants. Portraits of deceased parents and forebears have served, since the 16th century, as a focus for

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these private family rituals. Commissioned by relatives and typically created in workshops by anonymous artists, the portraits were painted on tightly woven silk with ink, mineral colors, Chinese vegetable pigments and gold fiber. Ancestors were depicted full-length and seated in a frontal pose, usually as a matching pair of father and mother. All were painted with the same symbolically somber and detached look. It was very important that the portrait recorded the deceased's face realistically, however, in order for it to function as a ritual object. If the face of a portrait was not accurately true to life, then the ritual might be misdirected to someone else's ancestor, resulting in family tragedy. The bodies were treated more generically, the focus being on the wearer's garments. These were encoded with symbols of court status and social position. These ancestors were not worshiped because of their overt goodness, but because of their status within the family and society. The earliest portrait in the exhibition dates to 1451, but the majority of the paintings are of members of the Manchu Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) imperial family and China's social elite.

Historically, ancestor portraits were kept in the family and rarely exhibited publicly because possession of the image of someone else's ancestor could bring a curse upon the owner. Many ancestor portraits reached the marketplace however, following the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and during the political upheaval and war with Japan that occurred during the first half of the 20th century.

Andy Warhol's Portraits

In the mid 1960s, Andy Warhol began transferring photographs of pop icons such as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and Elizabeth Taylor to canvas, beginning a series of silkscreen portraits of celebrities and socialites that would become one of the most central categories of his artistic output. Around 1970, seeing a promising business opportunity, Warhol began doing many of these portraits as commissioned works. Everyone from Swiss art dealer Bruno Bishofberger and his wife, to actor Sylvester Stallone, paid thousands of dollars to have his or her image, and therefore social status, immortalized in a painting by Andy Warhol. Just as commemorative portraits firmly established the wealthy imperial Chinese ancestors as worthy of worship and everlasting admiration, Warhol's portraits have done their share to perpetuate myths of glamour and wealth.

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Warhol's treatment of his subjects was similar to the ways in which the anonymous Chinese artists produced commemorative ancestor portraits. The subjects in Warhol's portraits were typically depicted as head-shots, with emotionless expressions. In both the Chinese commemorative paintings and Warhol's paintings, the colors are vivid and symmetry is essential. Where Warhol embellished his portraits with ruby red and turquoise jewel tones, Chinese commemorative portraits portrayed ancestors embellished with real opulent jewels and luscious fabrics with intricate patterns. Other such comparisons between Warhol's and the Chinese's portraiture style and technique will be explored throughout the exhibition.

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Located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the place of Andy Warhol's birth, The Warhol is one of the most comprehensive single-artist museums in the world. The Andy Warhol Museum is one of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh. Additional information about The Warhol is available at www.warhol.org.

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Hours: Tues, Wed, Thurs, Sat, and Sun 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Fri, 10 a.m. - 10 p.m.
Mon closed
Admission: Members - free
Good Fridays - free gallery admission, 5-10 p.m.
Adults - \$8, Sr. Citizens - \$7, Children/Students - \$4
The Warhol Store/The Warhol Café – free