

Art & Activities / Screen Tests:



Overview:

After viewing and discussing Warhol's Screen Tests, students will develop their own on-screen personality and film one another, using Warhol's "Recipe." Students will compare and contrast Warhol's Screen Tests to Hollywood Screen Tests and discuss how "living portraits" can be created through the use of film.

Grades: 6-12

Subjects: Art, Creative Writing, Film, Technology

Pennsylvania State Standards:

Arts and Humanities:

9.1.8 K Incorporate specific uses of traditional and contemporary technologies in furthering knowledge and understanding in the humanities.

9.3.8 D Evaluate works in the arts and humanities using a complex vocabulary of critical response.

Objectives:

- Students will distinguish between Hollywood screen tests and Andy Warhol's *Screen Tests*
- Students will explore formal qualities in Warhol's films
- Students will develop personalities through facial expressions and body language
- Students will produce a video based upon Warhol's artistic formula
- Students will assess screen tests to determine hypothetical roles for individuals
- Students will summarize characteristics of successful screen tests

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Andy Warhol, "Screen Test: Jane Hol-zer," 1964. 16mm film, black and white, four minutes, Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum, Founding Collection, Contribution the Andy Warhol Founda-tion for the Visual Arts, Inc. © 2006 The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, All rights reserved.

About the Art:

Warhol's Screen Tests are revealing portraits of hundreds of different individuals, shot between 1963 and 1966. The subjects include both famous and anonymous visitors to Warhol's studio, including poet Allen Ginsberg, actor Dennis Hopper, and artist Salvador Dali, along with many other diverse individuals. When asked to pose, subjects were lit and filmed by Warhol's stationary 16mm Bolex camera on silent, black and white, 100-foot rolls of film. Each Screen Test is exactly the same length, lasting only as long as the roll of film. The standard formula of subject and camera remaining almost motionless for the duration of the film, results in a "living portrait." The films, projected in slow motion, last four minutes each. Outside of Warhol's standardized process there are subtle lighting and focus variations in the Screen Tests. Jane Holzer's is in soft focus and suffused with light, creating an ethereal, hypnotic effect while Piero Heliczer's is darker in mood. In addition, there are a number of Screen Tests that diverge from this format entirely, the sitter purposely mov-ing, gesticulating, or using props.

These film portraits, referred to by the Hollywood term of "screen test," were not created for the purpose of actually test-ing or auditioning actors. A traditional Hollywood screen test is a method used to judge whether an actor is suitable on film, and beyond that, if they are right for a specific character. Usually he or she is given a scene, a script, and instruc-tions to perform in front of a camera. The director then watches the test to make a determination about the actor's appearance and film qualities. In these short films, Warhol creates his own cache of "Superstars." Superstars are actors interesting enough to carry a film on their own—not by playing a particular role but simply by being "themselves." Some of the individual screen tests were selected for Warhol's conceptual projects, such as "Thirteen Most Beautiful Women" and "Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys." Screen Tests were also featured as part of the light show for his 1966 multi-media happenings, the Up-tight and the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. In these shows, The Velvet Underground and Nico per-formed their ear-splitting, urban-style drone music, accompanied by Superstar dancers bathed in colored lights in front of large projections of slides and Warhol's films.

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Points of View:

“Beauties in photographs are different from beauties in person. It must be hard to be a model, because you’d want to be like the photograph of you, and you can’t ever look that way. And so you start to copy the photograph. Photographs usually bring in another half-dimension. (Movies bring in another whole dimension. That screen magnetism is something secret – if you could only figure out what it is and how to make it, you’d have a really good product to sell. But you can’t even tell if someone has it until you actually see them up there on the screen. You have to give screen tests to find out.)”

Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, p. 63.

“The resulting films drastically reduced the roles of director and viewer alike. The director’s function was limited to choosing the subject, setting up the shot, turning the camera on and off and deciding whether or not to exhibit the result. And the viewer, for the first time in the history of the commercial exploitation of persistence-of-vision, was relieved of the obligation—perhaps even a large part of the desire—to pay attention to the screen. The standard ‘film-as-wallpaper’ definition of the early Warhol films doesn’t stand up, since their entire meaning and effect spring from the fact of their projection on a screen in a darkened room.”

Tony Rayns, writer in “Andy Warhol: Film Factory”

“The many Screen Tests evidence a variety of behavior of its portrait subjects, but amazingly little improvisation. The subjects actually look like they are captured and about to be interrogated, but the interrogation never happens, because Andy wanted to capture the essence of the person only, no interference, just like no interference with the camera as it recorded each “moving” still-life. The “Screen Tests” rank in the Warhol pantheon along with the Campbell’s Soup cans, Marylins, and self-portraits.”

Billy Name-Linich, Factory photographer

Discussion Questions:

1. What is a Hollywood screen test? How does it differ from a Warhol Screen Test? What are the formulas or “recipes” for each?
2. Are these films more or less realistic than a photograph, than a painted portrait?
3. Discuss the formal qualities of Andy Warhol’s films (light, movement, focus, etc.) that differ in each screen test. What do you think Andy Warhol means when he says, “Movies bring in another whole dimension”?
4. What is screen magnetism?
5. As you look at a Warhol screen test what clues or elements in the film reveal the person’s aura or character to you? What can you tell about a person by observing his or her gestures, such as blinks and swallows?

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Materials:

Video Camera or smartphone
Computer for uploading and viewing digital videos
Direct Light Source (to create strong contrast between light and shadow)
Variety of Props and Costumes (wigs, hats, sunglasses, feather boas, etc.)



Project Procedure:

1. Familiarize yourself with Warhol's Screen Tests and process by viewing them online. Notice that:
 - Subject sits in a chair facing the camera.
 - Subject is very still with as little motion as possible.
 - Three minutes in length.
 - The chair is illuminated by a directed light source.
 - Filmed in black and white.
2. Decide whether to portray an aspect of your own personality or a created one.
3. You may use simple props to accentuate personality characteristics.
4. A single person or a group can be filmed at one time. The filming space should be dark with only a directed light source shining on the subjects.
5. Sit in front of the camera, look directly at the lens, and stay as motionless as possible for three minutes during filming. (You may film for shorter segments to save time.)
6. Rotate so each person gets a chance to be filmed.

Extension:

Students will create a written character sketch of three different personalities captured in the class screen test.

Assessment and Wrap-up:

As a group, watch the screen test and discuss the on-screen personalities. Based upon the footage, students determine which person would be best suited for various film roles: a villain, a best friend, a hero or a royal personage, etc. Students also critique the formal quality of their screen tests.



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