

## Topic Page: [Warhol, Andy, 1928–1987](#)

Definition: **Warhol, Andy** from *Philip's Encyclopedia*

US painter, printmaker, and film-maker, innovator of pop art. Warhol achieved immediate fame with his stencil pictures of Campbell's soup cans and his sculptures of Brillo soap pad boxes (1962). In 1965, he gave up art to manage the rock group *The Velvet Underground*. He continued to make films, which often have a voyeuristic quality.



Image from: [Warhol at the opening of his 1978 ica exhibition in Great Lives: A Century in Obituaries](#)

### Summary Article: **Warhol, Andy**

From *Encyclopedia of American Studies*

Artist Andy Warhol was born Andrew Warhola in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on August 6, 1928, to Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants Andrej and Julia Warhola. His father, a construction worker, died in 1942. Julia Warhola cleaned houses and sold flowers she made of tin. She taught her sons about Catholicism, their cultural heritage, and art. Andy drew and painted throughout childhood and began taking photographs at age nine.

Warhol finished high school in 1945, after skipping eleventh grade. With money his father had saved, Warhol attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology (later, Carnegie Mellon University), becoming the family's first college student. Although he struggled in some classes, Warhol frequently exhibited his student work. After graduating in 1949 with a pictorial design degree, he moved to New York City with fellow student Philip Pearlstein.

Warhol began his career as a commercial illustrator. He published his first illustration in a 1949 *Glamour* magazine article and went on to win several awards for his work in various publications. Warhol's distinctive method shows his early interest in reproducing images: he blotted a sheet of paper over a wet ink drawing, transferring the lines. Repetition would later become a hallmark of his paintings.

In 1952 Warhol's first solo exhibition, *Fifteen Drawings Based on the Writings of Truman Capote*, opened at a New York gallery. That year Warhol's mother came to live with him. Julia worked with her son on a number of book projects, embellishing his stamped and stenciled artwork with decorative lettering.

During an international trip in 1956, Warhol made the decision to become a painter. For his first pop paintings (short for “popular”), he used a projector to enlarge comics and newspaper ads and transfer them to canvas. In 1962 Warhol's thirty-two *Campbell's Soup Cans*, one for each variety Campbell's made, became the quintessential pop art works. He used a stencil to duplicate the paintings, which the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles exhibited on a shelf, like a supermarket display. *Soup Cans* established Warhol in the art world.

Warhol's use of familiar images in pop art countered the intellectualism and elitism of 1950s abstract expressionism. Warhol challenged the traditional definition of art. While previous artists strove to create original works that were prized for their authenticity, he appropriated photographs, reproduced images, used assistants, and even signed works he had not created.

Warhol abandoned the hand-stenciling method in the early 1960s for the slick photo—silk screen, which

became his signature technique. He based his first silk-screened works on publicity photographs of such celebrities as Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe. Warhol's next series, nicknamed the "Disasters," revealed his interest in death and the macabre. He used media images of plane crashes, suicides, riots, and even an electric chair as source material.

In 1963 Warhol painted his East Forty-seventh Street studio silver and dubbed it "The Factory." The Factory became a gathering place for artists, actors, and other celebrities who appeared in Warhol's films and in portraits based on photo-booth snapshots. The tongue-in-cheek studio name referred both to Warhol's prolific production of silk-screened paintings and his use of assistants. He publicly emphasized the assembly-line nature of his work, saying, "I think everybody should be a machine."

In 1965 Warhol announced his retirement from painting to concentrate on filmmaking. His first films were silent, unedited, and showed one shot over an extended period. In *Sleep* the camera focused on Warhol's sleeping friend John Giorno for eight straight hours. As in his paintings, Warhol used film to elevate the ordinariness of everyday life to something noteworthy. He also examined the very nature of film by using a dynamic medium to show a static subject.

Despite his proclaimed retirement from painting, Warhol continued making art. In addition to paintings, he silk-screened wooden boxes with such commercial motifs as *Brillo* and *Heinz*. These sculptures almost exactly replicated cardboard packing cases. Warhol exhibited his sculptures on the gallery floor, without traditional pedestals, to evoke a warehouse setting.

In 1968 Valerie Solanis, founder of the obscure group SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) and occasional Factory visitor, shot and nearly killed Warhol in his Union Square studio. The experience changed Warhol profoundly. He emerged from two months' hospitalization less trusting, obsessed with death, and terrified of illness. The same year also brought his first retrospective exhibition, held in Stockholm, Sweden, and the publication of his book *A: A Novel*.

Always interested in the trappings of fame, Warhol became increasingly involved with elite society. In 1969 he founded *Interview* magazine, continuing his lifelong interest in Hollywood. Originally about film, *Interview* later encompassed more of popular culture and pioneered the practice of celebrities interviewing each other. During the 1970s Warhol produced commissioned portraits of society's privileged, using his silk screen technique that featured large areas of flat, bright color. Warhol also made political paintings in the 1970s. He produced a series of portraits of the Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse Tung (Mao Zedong), used the Soviet Union's symbols in the *Hammer and Sickle* silk screens, and revealed his ironic sense of humor in garishly colored portraits of Richard Nixon bearing the slogan "Vote McGovern."

From 1974 until his death Warhol contributed almost daily to one of his personal "Time Capsules," approximately six hundred cardboard boxes containing a wide range of objects: original artwork, source material for paintings, press clippings, family heirlooms, letters, and ephemera. The Time Capsules show that, despite his status as a "superstar," Warhol also had a profoundly private side.

In 1975 he published *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back Again)*, followed a year later by the *Andy Warhol Diaries*, which detailed his daily life for several years. In 1980 he produced a television show, *Andy Warhol's TV*. In 1983 he began collaborating with painters Jean-Michel Basquiat and Francesco Clemente. Warhol held his final exhibition in 1987 in Milan, Italy, where he hung his *Last Supper* paintings in a gallery directly across the street from Leonardo da Vinci's original, then under

restoration. Warhol died on February 22, 1987, in New York City while recovering from gall bladder surgery.



*Andy Warhol (left) and Tennessee Williams (right) talking on the S.S. France. 1967. James Kavallines, photographer. New York World-Telegram and the Sun Newspaper Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.*



*Andy Warhol's Campbell's Soup Cans, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA). New York, N.Y. 2007. Wikimedia Commons.*



*Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art. Medzilaborce, Slovakia. 2008. P. Matel, photographer. Wikimedia Commons.*

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