



© A. Warhol, TDK commercial (still), 1982.
Collection of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, USA.

warhol tv

curator: Judith Benhamou-Huet

Andy Warhol (1928-1987) is one of the twentieth-century's best-known and most highly-mediatised artists. His work is inseparable from its context of post-war American society; an environment which Warhol sketched in drawings, paintings, silk-screen prints, photographs, sound recordings, archives, magazines, films and videos. It seems there is nothing left to say about Warhol, whose work has been the subject of countless exhibitions. And yet his television productions remain one of the lesser-known aspects of his oeuvre. Through *Warhol TV*, Judith Benhamou-Huet sets out to shed light on this part of his work, with a selection of the most representative extracts of his made-for-TV programmes. These documents have

been subtitled in French, for the exhibition, by the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh.

Television was inherent to American post-war culture. In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back Again)*, Warhol recalls buying his first TV set in the 1950s: "On the way back from the psychiatrist's, I stopped in Macy's and out of the blue I bought my first television set, an RCA 19-inch black and white. I brought it home to the apartment [...] and right away I forgot all about the psychiatrist. I kept the TV on all the time, especially while people were telling me their problems, and the television I found to be just diverting enough so the problems people told me didn't really affect me any more. It was like some kind of magic. [...] I started an affair with my television which has continued to the present, when I play around in my bedroom with as many as four at a time." A self-confessed TV addict, Warhol could watch and enjoy anything, re-runs and commercials being his favourites. Each week he would go through the TV listings and circle the shows he wanted to see.

Warhol's first foray into the media was in print form with the creation, in 1969, of *Interview* magazine. It was only in the late 1970s that he turned to the ultimate mass medium of television. In 1979, Warhol asked Vincent Fremont (VP of *Andy Warhol Enterprises*) to come up with an idea for television and to put together a team. Fremont took charge of production, and recruited Don Munroe, a pioneer in fashion videos who at that time was working for Bloomingdale's, a bastion of fashion, as director. *Andy Warhol TV Productions* had a full-time team of five at its disposal plus its own studio equipment. Under Warhol's supervision, the company went on to produce 42 programmes between 1979 and 1987. The first, *Fashion* (ten episodes broadcast in 1979 and 1980 on Manhattan Cable Television network), was a

kind of televised glossy magazine. It was followed by *Andy Warhol's TV* (18 episodes shown between 1980 and 1982 on Manhattan Cable Television Channel 10, and a further nine shown in 1983 on the Madison Square Garden Network), a talk show whose combination of popular and underground culture, fashion, music and the visual arts was borrowed from *Interview* magazine. The last series was *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes* (five episodes aired on MTV between 1985 and 1987), a reference to Warhol's famous prediction that "in the future, everyone will be world-famous for fifteen minutes." It ran along similar lines to the previous shows, but was faster-paced. Warhol died before the fifth episode could be filmed.

While cable channels spread across the United States during the 1980s, they broadcast to relatively small audiences meaning there was no real spin-off from the shows. They were, however, expensive to produce, and Warhol funded them through his art which was, in contrast, highly lucrative. In the light of Warhol's ambition to "finish as a business artist," this shows how important television production was to him. *Warhol TV* channel-surfs Warhol's work for television, and should be viewed as a kaleidoscope portrait of the artist with his obsessions, fears and fascinations, and the company he kept.

1 Warhol's Special TV

Warhol has been described as a shy and insecure personality by the people who knew him well. Warhol himself had an ambiguous attitude towards his image, which he gradually learned to control and exploit. He appears in his shows in various guises, as an interviewer, a silent and remote presence on the fringe of the action, or an iconic figure in the opening sequences, sometimes in comic skits (Andy doing push-ups, Andy on an exercise bike, etc.). Warhol's presence suggested that television could be something fanciful, original, even unpredictable.

2 Screen Test: Marcel Duchamp

Between 1964 and 1966, Warhol filmed close to 500 black-and-white screen tests of regulars at his Factory studio, with its silver-foil walls, and personalities from New York's bohemian fringe. These screen tests are as much a portrait of their models as they are a fragmented portrait of Warhol himself, through his friends, references, fascination with facial expressions and his instinct for the photographic image. Andy Warhol filmed Marcel Duchamp on several occasions between 1963 and 1966. Each portrait is filmed in extreme close-up, with a static camera and bright lighting, and lasts around four minutes or the length of a 30-metre roll of film. The film is then shown at 16 or 18 frames per second to give the impression of a ghostly, floating image.

3 The Lester Persky Story

Soap Opera (The Lester Persky Story) is a 1964 experimental film in which silent sketches, mostly showing couples in domestic or erotic situations, are spliced with footage from commercials, produced by Warhol's friend Lester Persky (hence the subtitle). Shot using 16mm film, this *Soap Opera* overlaps Warhol's interest in experimental film, advertising and popular TV. Its structure imitates that of television in general: fictions intercut with advertising. By only including sound with the commercials, Warhol seems to suggest that they are the more important of the two.

4 Soap Operas

In 1970, Warhol acquired a portable video camera which he used to film his *Factory Diaries*, along with hundreds of hours of screen tests and improvisations for offbeat sitcoms starring regulars at the Factory. Reality and fiction are indistinguishable in

these early TV projects, none of which were ever fully edited or shown. *Vivian's Girls* (1973) is a sitcom-style film about relationships between a group of young people living together under the same roof. *Phoney* (1973) is a compilation of friends' telephone conversations (the title is a play on words between people who are phoney and people on the phone). *Fight* (1975) is an amusing improvisation built around two fighting couples. Warhol's soap operas are more than scenarios; they are configurations in which the dynamic of human relationships escalates into uncontrollable situations.

5 Warhol Promotion

Throughout his career, Warhol stage-managed his appearance, where he was seen and with whom, what he said and what he didn't say. He produced multiple self-portraits and created a persona whose fame spread well beyond the art world where, in terms of instant recognition, only Salvador Dalí's moustache could equal Warhol's silver shock of hair. Having worked in advertising in the 1950s, Warhol knew this was the dominant language of the era, and one he would exploit in his work (Campbell's Soup and Coca-Cola). In around 1969, he appeared alongside the boxer Sonny Liston in a commercial for Braniff Airlines (Dalí also featured in the campaign). In 1979, he signed up with Zoli Models then with Ford Model Agency, and was subsequently hired to play himself in magazine ads (Vidal Sassoon hairspray) and TV commercials, including for Japanese electronics firm TDK in 1982, and for the Diet Coke launch in 1985. Other than the fact they were no doubt extremely well-paid, these appearances allowed Warhol to occupy media space, keep his image in the public eye, and boost his popularity.

6 Talent Scout

Warhol was interested in creativity in all its forms, and his television shows were full of people from the worlds of fashion, advertising, music and cinema. One of the duties Warhol assigned his team was to track down new faces. Warhol, with his assistants, showed a natural flair for unearthing the up-and-coming talent that would feature in his shows. In the extracts shown here, a young Marc Jacobs, fresh from his first collection, is interviewed perched on a ladder ("Jacob's ladder"); Steven Spielberg breaks off from promoting *E.T.* to answer Bianca Jagger's questions. Not only did Warhol find new faces; he revived the interview format by releasing it from its rigid studio-chair setting.

7 Beauty & Sex

Warhol was fascinated by beauty, those who had it and those who made it. He surrounded himself with gorgeous young people, actors, models and singers who glowed in front of the camera. Even before the term "supermodel" was coined, he gave them, both men and women, an opportunity to express themselves. An entire episode of *Fashion* was given over to male models.

8 Fascination for artists

Warhol was curious about the creativity going on around him, and generous enough to invite other artists onto his shows. He was especially interested in the New York "new wave" and artists such as Keith Haring, Kenny Scharf and Jean-Michel Basquiat whose work was influenced by street art. Warhol and Basquiat even worked together on paintings. While these interviews touch on the subject of art, they are more concerned with the artists' lives, habits and tastes. Warhol treat artists like any other celebrity, engaging them in light-hearted conversation with the aim of revealing something of their intimacy.

9 Ladies & Gentlemen

Transsexuals, transvestites and drag queens were all part of Warhol's entourage from the Factory years on. They shared a love of make-up, transformation and provocation. Warhol photographed himself as a woman, with an elaborate hairstyle and mouth heavy with lipstick. *Ladies & Gentlemen* is the title of a 1975 portfolio of portraits of anonymous black transvestites. Sexual ambiguity and androgynous dressing were all the rage in the 1980s, especially in the music business through New Romantic groups such as Duran Duran. However, transformation wasn't always about dressing up: the fetching uniforms worn by New York's mounted police also caught Warhol's eye.

10 Saturday Night Live

Saturday Night Live has been one of America's most popular entertainment shows since it first aired in 1975. Towards the late 1970s, Warhol was invited to be the subject of an entire show. He refused, partly because he wanted complete control of direction and editing, but most of all because he didn't feel ready. When in 1981 he was asked to take part in the show for a second time, he had a team at his disposal, and two years' experience of TV production. He refused to go out live, but agreed to supply three sequences to be inserted in the show. These three one-minute spots each star Warhol in person. They are, to borrow Judith Benhamou-Huet's expression, "concentrated Warhol spirit."

11 Vanity Fair

"A good reason to be famous, though, is so you can read all the big magazines and know everybody in all the stories. Page after page it's just all people you've met. I love that kind of reading experience and that's the best reason to be famous," wrote Warhol in *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (from A to B and Back Again)*. Warhol was

at the heart of New York's underground culture in the 1960s; in the 1980s he rubbed shoulders with the jet set. A party wasn't a party without Andy, and Warhol was on the guest list for every major event in the New York social calendar. His friends and followers (Liza Minnelli, Courtney Love, Jerry Hall, etc.) all appear in his TV shows.

12 Love Boat

The Love Boat, which aired on the ABC cable network between 1977 and 1987, was one of America's most popular series. Its co-producer, Douglas Cramer, collected contemporary art. He put a deal to Warhol whereby he would commission a portrait from him, in exchange for which he would appear in the show. Warhol appeared in the 200th episode in 1985, playing himself. The storyline put him on the same cruise ship as Marina del Rey, a former Warhol superstar who fears he may reveal her steamy past to her husband. Warhol, who was nervous in front of the camera and fluffed his lines, struggled through filming.

13 The Last Show

Andy Warhol died unexpectedly on February 22nd, 1987 following routine surgery. The fifth and final episode of *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes* was broadcast after his death, on MTV. It was a retransmission of the memorial mass held for the artist on April 1st, 1987 in St Patrick's Cathedral in New York. The ceremony was attended by New York's glitterati and by former Factory regulars, with orations and readings by Brigid Berlin, Yoko Ono and John Richardson.

14 Hello Again

The artist's death marked the end of *Warhol TV* but his videos continue to be shown. Asked by pop singer Ric Ocasek, Warhol made a video for Ocasek's group The Cars. Warhol threw himself into the project, auditioning young actors for the different

parts and even appearing himself, as a bartender. His diary entry reads: "I can't believe no one else has asked us to shoot their video, after this." A fabulous journey into 1970s and 1980s New York, Warhol's television productions give us deeper insight into his world and are perfectly coherent with the rest of his work: the desire to blur the boundaries between "popular" and "intellectual" culture, to document the ebb and flow of the world around him, and to be part of the media circus. Most importantly, they show Warhol's fascination with the "society of the spectacle" to which he belonged.

The exhibition Warhol TV was conceived with the support of The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, PA, USA

Vitra



mika rottenberg
videos and sculptures 2004-2008

For her first solo show in France, Mika Rottenberg (born 1976, based in New York since 1991) presents three recent installations that associate video with sculpture.

Whereas Andy Warhol's television productions are about America's beautiful people, the first two of Rottenberg's videos to be shown here – *Tropical Breeze* and *Dough* – are concerned with a different face of America: blue-collar workers, confined in claustrophobic spaces and employed in alienating, endlessly repetitive, assembly-line tasks.

This reality, a recurrent theme in Rottenberg's work, is depicted here in scenarios that appear to follow a logical and methodical progression. As the camera sweeps the area in which the action takes place, the spectator witnesses, one by one, the

different stages in the manufacturing of a product. There is, however, something so unusual about each element (the production site, the workers' physique and the products they are making) that the entire scene slips into the realm of fantasy.

As is often the case in Rottenberg's work, the videos are shown in specific settings which she conceives as sculptures. *Dough* (2005-2006) is shown inside a plywood and lino construction, its low ceiling lined with acoustic tiles, that smacks of artificiality. The spectator, confined within this vaguely unsettling environment, develops a heightened awareness of his or her own body, becoming psychologically immersed in the work. The tears that form and drip to the floor are the key to the action. *Dough* (both bread and money) gives the impression of an assembly line set up in cramped office booths. The employees who are squashed into these spaces transform a shapeless mass into individually-wrapped portions of dough. Raqui, an elephantine woman, begins by shaping the dough into a long ribbon, part umbilical cord, part digestive tube. At regular intervals, she breaks off to perform another, strange task: she smells a bunch of gerberas. Her allergic reaction to the flowers provides the means to transform the dough, as the moisture from her evaporating tears is channelled onto the dough to make it rise.

At first glance, Rottenberg's assembly line obeys the rules of Fordism, a mode of labour organisation developed at Ford Motor Company in the mid-1900s and based on specialisation, standardisation and a continuous assembly line. However, the complexity of the system in *Dough* seems to fly in the face of any notion of efficient or profitable production. Worse still: the end product is the excess risen dough, a unit whose value is a measure of the time and work involved. The initial mass of dough remains the same, making this a desperately pointless, and potentially endless, task.

Moreover, the physical idiosyncrasies of the actors Mika Rottenberg has chosen are clearly at odds with modern industry's ideal of an anonymous, interchangeable man-machine. This is a consistent visual aspect of her work. Rottenberg recruits people (mainly women) with "extreme" bodies who have made this physical difference their livelihood: body builders, obese women who hire their services as fantasy wrestlers, female giants, women with inordinately long hair or nails... Rottenberg recruits them via their personal websites where they advertise the physical differences that are their stock-in-trade. However, she turns the tables as these physical features are not what enable them to perform their assigned tasks, but what save them from anonymity.

Rottenberg's scenarios call on the human body in all its dimensions: for its mechanical power, as one would expect in this context of production, but also for its visual impact and as a subversive force when it challenges the norm. Most of all, it contributes its secretions, growths and fluids.

In *Tropical Breeze* (2004), an assembly line has been set up inside a truck to manufacture moist tissues. These are soaked in the sweat of the driver, body-builder Heather Foster. Added value is created by exploiting a physiological process: perspiration. Foster accelerates this process by swallowing Stay Awake Energy Boosters and drinking a lemon-flavoured drink to give her sweat a lemon scent. The ingenious system at work inside this truck-factory draws on the most rudimentary technology. Pedal and chain, washing line, pulley and chewing gum form a mechanism which, however derisory, seems to operate with the efficiency required of a modern production system, as movements are rationalised in an autonomous production unit that manufactures, promotes and distributes the product all in one.

Rottenberg ridicules the entire system behind consumer society. She delivers an ironic critique of our obsession with creating and consuming increasingly outlandish products: products that are superfluous to our needs, and made by alienated workers in restrictive environments. Ultimately, these are implausible, even repulsive products that are worth less than the labour it took to make them.

In her latest video installation, *Cheese* (2008-2009), Rottenberg leaves claustrophobic sweatshops behind and heads out into the open air. Shown inside a dilapidated wooden shack that mimics the decor, *Cheese* tells the story of six women with improbably long hair. The imagery at work in this modern-day fable is a cross between fairytale (*Rapunzel* by the Brothers Grimm), shampoo commercial and true story. Indeed, Rottenberg found inspiration in the lives of the seven Sutherland sisters, who lived on a farm by the Niagara Falls and became famous in the late 19th century for their floor-length hair. They toured the United States with Barnum & Bailey's "Greatest Show on Earth" and became rich by selling a men's hair tonic which, it was said, contained mist collected from the Falls. The Sutherland sisters were truly pioneers: the original supermodels and girl band, they were first to cash in on spin-off products. When the magic of legend meets capitalist thinking...

In *Cheese*, women with hair between 1m80 and an astonishing four metres long live in pen-like structures where they dress, brush their hair, milk goats or collect spray

from the Niagara Falls which is then trickled along their hair. We observe them over the course of the day as they go about their work, performing sometimes understandable, sometimes ritual or eccentric tasks. Once again Rottenberg makes light of clichéd notions of femininity as she explores the associations between women, nature and the fertility of the earth. The sisters, dressed in long white gowns, their hair floating in the breeze and surrounded by farm animals, convey a complex image of femininity that is both "pure" and endowed with magic and mystery as they pump milk from the earth or sneeze rabbits.

It is tempting to see Mika Rottenberg's videos as parodies of America, of its obsession with the body and appearances, and the bizarre impulses of consumer society gone adrift, when she in fact addresses themes that go beyond national characterisation. Her work can be viewed as a series of social and psychological metaphors on the fetishisation of the body, its exploitation as a "territory" for production or consumption, and how capitalist society alienates the individual through work. With no trace of dogmatism, Rottenberg transforms these serious subjects through studies of movement, in which female bodies deploy their sculptural force with sensuality. These actions, illustrated not by dialogue but by a dense soundtrack in the manner of a Jacques Tati film, form an absurd universe that singles out, with humour, the foibles of our consumer societies.



marie denis
*i giardini di marzo**

An installation produced by *les amis de la maison rouge* for the patio.

Each year, *les amis de la maison rouge* produce a work specifically for the foundation's patio. This year, members were invited to vote for one of three artists, selected by Aurélie Voltz, an independent curator chosen by the board of the society of friends.

"Marie Denis proposes to take over the patio with five majestic sculptures of box-tree balls set inside immaculate domes. These immense emerald-coloured jewels are a fusion of very different worlds: that of topiary, which is the art of clipping evergreen shrubs and trees into shapes, and that of agricultural machinery, from which the dome-silo has been taken. This unexpected encounter is nonetheless rooted in a world of similar, universal shapes: the sphere. Marie Denis revisits this timeless geometric form, used from classical gardens to the decoration of town squares and roundabouts, confronting two elements to introduce a poetic force.

The patio, which is almost submerged by these oversized sculptures, resembles a waking dream."

"The patio at la maison rouge comes across as the perfect site for the French artist Marie Denis, whose work deals extensively with plants. This former Villa Médicis resident has no doubt brought back from her time in Rome a taste for exceptional settings, architecture in-the-making, and absurd situations, constantly challenging our relationship to scale and size, making light of society's established rules and transforming ordinary moments of life into poetry. Through her observation of nature shaped by human hands, and the light which her installations and sculptures made from organic materials shed on cultural practices, her work sits harmoniously between the universal and the everyday." (Aurélie Voltz, December 2008)

Marie Denis was born in Ardèche, France in 1972. She lives in Paris and works everywhere. Her sculptures and installations make use of various shapes and techniques, giving second life to materials and re-exploring the art of gardening. For more information : <http://www.labomedia.net/marissima/>

Aurélie Voltz is an independent curator in Berlin. Her most recent projects were at La Maison Populaire in Montreuil (*L'homme nu* trilogy), the Musée de l'Objet in Blois (*Le Revolver à cheveux blancs*) and Artissima in Turin (*Retour à soi*). She is a member of the Artist Pension Trust Berlin curatorial committee and contributes to *Flash Art* and *o2* magazines.

*This evocative title is taken from a ballad by the Italian singer Lucio Battisti, whom Marie Denis describes as having "atmospheric" or particularly inspirational qualities.

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