

Andy Warhol

Whenever I am approached to express my views of Andy Warhol and his work, three points of departure occur to me, which I consider to be essential in seeking the gist of the artist's ego and work. They include his origin and the related faith and social environment in which he was growing up: aspirations of his youth; and his ability to psychologically analyse, or even insinuate himself, into the favour of art fans of a particular period. Andy Warhol as a typical American artist was of a most atypical origin with regard to an American superstar. He grew up in family of simple peasant who moved to the USA from Miková, a small Ruthenian village in the north-eastern part of Slovakia, in the first quarter of the 20th century with the aim to find a job. His father, Andrej Warchola, had to work apart from his family as a miner and road worker for the major part his short life.

Little Andy spent whole days with his mother July who was emotionally bound to her mother country. Being a simple countrywoman Julz could not speak English; therefore Andy's first language was Ruthenian (recently codified as a literary language of people living in the north-eastern Slovakia, south-eastern Poland, and Sub-Carpathian Ruse, the present-day Trans Carpathian Ukraine). Andy's brother John and Paul remember that their mother would talk about hard life in their mother country, where death became a commonplace of everyday life. Her first child, a girl, died from the run from the World War 1 events. John remembers his mother describing the war sufferings: "Dead bodies were scattered in forest and on meadows. Skulls of soldiers shined as large white mushrooms long after the war was over."

This picture of fear and horror presented in mother's narrative must have been imprinted on the mind of the little neurotic boy. The belief in God meant salvation and hope for the socially poor family. John Warhola comments on it as follows: "Our mother would tell us to turn to God when feeling poor."

These words marked Andy's life. His aunt (Eva Bezeková, mother's sister) maintains that, in the late 1960s, Andy would pray together with his mother and visit Byzantine church. His older brother Paul claims that Andy was a true Christian all through his life.

The following question comes to my mind: Aren't these facts one of catalysts of Andy Warhol's inclination to certain topics? The Skull painting series, his transposition of Leonardo's "Las supper" in accordance with his own ideas of the composition of colours and visual forms, a long series of death-related paintings (road and air accidents, suicides, the electric chair, and, once again, skulls) entail such a conclusion.

Hardships and poverty of his boyhood (based on narratives of John and Paul, after the death of their father, the family became very poor; to survive, their mother spent much time with handiwork of various kinds to sell them at local markets, and worked sporadically as a maidservant in a Jewish family) must have irritated the little Andy's dreams and desires of wealth and success. When a child he wished to be a famous as Truman Capote, and to become a superstar. At school he excelled in drawing and painting. John Warhola remembers Andy's teacher to have believed Andy to be an extraordinary figure of the 20th century arts. Though solitary by nature, he always manifested his abilities at school - either by ambiguous statements, or by his work. They say that he did not hesitate to approach his teacher with the following words when feeling very only: "I want you to amuse me today".

His dreams and desires came gradually true soon after graduating from a school of arts in his native Pittsburgh. As an excellent drawer, with minimum outfit, and with few dollars in his pocket, he set out to conquer the New York world of arts. At the outset, he lived very modestly, drawing for a number of journals by days, and producing various painting studies by nights. He is said to have noted the following: "Apparently, if I want to be successful and well-known, I must paint what can become successful and what is well-known." At the time, the art scene in New York was dominated by R. Rauschenbergh. Andy observed the circumstances of the birth of pop-art with envy, however with definite decision to push himself forward. His acquaintances introduce him to well-known personalities. Moreover, he continuously studies the life of constantly rushing New York. He is intrigued by shop-windows and shops full of widely known products, by billboards, and neon signs with portrait from famous personalities. His drawings made by nights reflect his impressions, or rather, specific forms of the seen and the known. He produces pictures of soup cans, portraits of well-known personalities, and pictures of topical newspaper articles. He believed that being close to a well-known thing or person meant a step toward his own fame. He inspired by a newspaper report of Marilyn Monroe. He immediately creates a series of her portraits, which makes the originally unknown author of advertisements a well-known artist. The first success is followed by successful exhibitions. Andy

realises more and more that he has started on way towards fame. His productivity is enormous, and, hardly anybody could compete with him in this respect at the time. He uses silkscreen printing to make 300 and more copies of his paintings. The demand for his portraits from Marilyn makes him increase the number of copies. The same is true of other paintings, such as Campbell's Soup, etc. Andy comes to be an omnipresent "silhouette" at a number of high society parties. The foremost galleries of modern arts do their best to get his works of arts. However, success and fame are accompanied with suffering. Andy says: "I am exhausted from all these parties. One wastes much time there. All the time it is the same." At home in his flat, where he was living till his mother's death, he escapes from the world of business and fame into the world of silence, his companions being antique furniture, pictures of classical painters, and a number from products, including trash. This is the longed-for world of his dreams, full of things about which he said when he was just a child: "One day, I will be famous, and my house will not only be decorated with comics, but also with paintings and furniture as the rooms of rich men". Here is no picture painted by himself in his flat. He sleeps alone in an old marriage bed surrounded with several TV sets. A completely different world, a far cry from a real pop-art star. A question emerges: Which of two worlds is authentic for his genuine ego, and what is merely a necessary outcome of business? Who in fact was he? Did he remain in his subconscious's a poor boy from the family fighting for social survival, or did he become in his outward and inner life a star of pop-art? Wasn't it just a game, a pretence? He both was and was not (as himself claimed) a painter, a film producer, a maecenas. Did he create his paintings as pieces of art or as goods? He is said to have stated that his greatest art was that of earning money. He did not study the history of arts because he considered himself to be the art. He uttered hundreds of contradictory statements and puns. On the one hand, he was able to behave as an extravagant superstar, enjoying fame and recognition to the full; on the other hand, he compensated it with meditation, alone in his cram-full flat, or with prayers along with his mother. Which of the two Andy's was the actual one? It seems today that we can know about Warhol everything and nothing at the same time. And, as if there were no difference between them. Andy Warhol goes on to be a veiled personality, world-known through his famous paintings, statements, and at the same time, mysterious in his real ego. A secretive person, a neurotic, genius, superstar, but also a simple man, rich man and poor man, good and bad, loved and cursed. Simply, Andy Warhol. A live and "dead" art in a single whole. The man who was unique in promoting banality to the status of arts; the man who in pursuing recognition and fame was able to get beyond an incredibly large barrier of poverty. To be frank with you, for me there are two Warhols. The famous Andy Warhol - the king of pop-art, and Andy Warchol - a son of poor Ruthenians from a small village Miková in eastern Slovakia. However, I am baffled by one thing. Which of them is true Andy Warhol?

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