

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

the

andyfactor



## the andy factor

Andy Warhol has never left us. But today, ten years after his accidental death (due to a bungled post-operative procedure), his shadow on the cultural landscape is as pronounced as ever. New books consider every aspect of his life and those around him (the Velvet Underground, the Factory), he is the subject of countless web sites on the internet, there is even a band in the United States called The Dandy Warhols who sing such songs as 'Lou Weed' and 'It's a Fast-Driving Rave-Up With the Dandy Warhols Sixteen Minutes'.<sup>1</sup> He has featured in two recently released films, *I Shot Andy Warhol* and *Basquiat*, his own films have been reappearing with greater regularity on the alternative film circuit, and comprehensive retrospectives of his work were staged at major museums in Tokyo and Barcelona last year. Amongst this activity, contemporary visual artists are drawing on the phenomenon of Warhol's art and persona, reinterpreting them and playing off them within the particular aesthetic and social environments of the 1990s.



Denis Chapman  
*Fake Elvis (Hand)* detail 1997

The current decade could be seen as a time in which a number of factors contributing to 'Warhol Mania' have converged. A new space has been created for a discussion of Warhol himself with the opening up of possibilities for sexual identification proposed by queer theory. Chris Berry's essay, 'White Hole: Queering Andy', which appears here, considers a range of socio-cultural and critical shifts which have occurred over recent years and which have provided a new framework in which to position Warhol and his art.

The art establishment has tended to celebrate and separate out Warhol's art practice from his identity, receiving him into the very institutions which he had himself critiqued (while at the same time seeking their acceptance) through his use of subject matter which was firmly anchored in the everyday world of consumer-oriented America (his art described then as Capitalist Realism). Recent years have seen contemporary visual art itself become increasingly aligned to aspects of mass culture including film, advertising and

fashion. This has in turn led to new forms of art production which draw on Warhol's Factory as a model for an interaction of visual art practice with underground film, music and commerce and a blending of high and low society.

While the artists exhibiting here share an interest in the life and art of Andy Warhol, their work moves beyond simple acts of tribute or quotation. Rather, they incorporate relevant aspects of his artistic legacy into their own individual practices. A number of them adopt stylistic practices of Warhol's image production while others engage with ideas which informed Warhol's work such as an interest in mass consumption or a fascination with glamour and fame.



Luke Roberts  
*ANDY (for 15 minutes)* detail 1989

Both Rea and Luke Roberts reference Warhol's image structures through the use of grids of repeated motifs. In *Lemons I-IV*, Rea plays off works by Warhol in which he presents multiple images of one widely recognisable identity or object (*210 Coca-Cola Bottles*, *Ten Lizes*) by presenting four panels of luridly coloured rows of fruit and flowers. Rea's floating lines of lemons are particularly reminiscent of *Marilyn's Lips*, a 1962 work by Warhol in which hundreds of the film star's grinning lips and teeth hover across a bold pink and white backdrop. What differentiates Rea's work from Warhol's, however, is that where Warhol subtly suggests sexual references through his selection of Hollywood icons and camp colour, Rea conveys an overt sexual message, a text detailing instructions for female safe sex practices. The title for her work is both accurately descriptive and a reference to labels used to denote lesbian stereotypes.

Luke Roberts presents a grid of repeated alternating 'portraits' of his alter ego Pope Alice and of himself in the guise of Andy, each photographed with 'adoring fans'. Adhered directly to the gallery





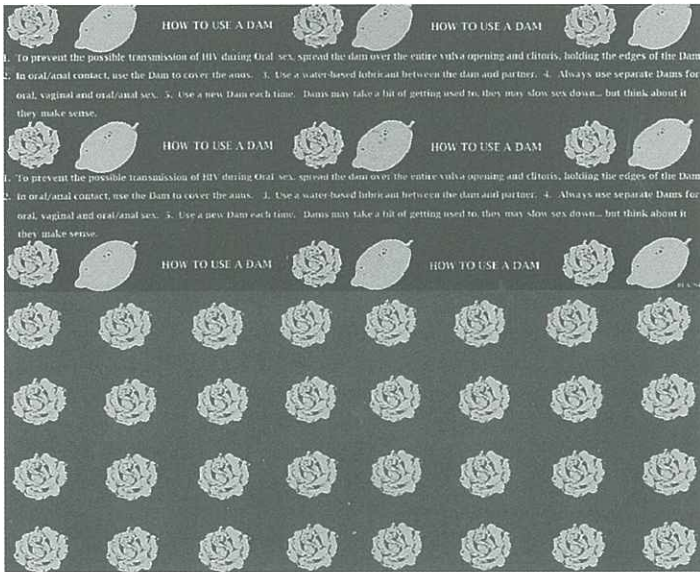
Christopher Langton  
Crush 1997

wall, these images suggest both Warhol's *Cow Wallpaper* (1966) and his serial portraits of celebrities and movie stars. The presence of identities from the Australian and international art world in these photographs reveals an engagement with Warholian notions of fame and glamour as being transferable through association, prompting the question 'who is making whom famous here?' As Pope Alice decrees, 'You're a saint (I should know, I'm a pope)'. Roberts toys with the mania around anything to do with Warhol with his cabinet of Warhol 'relics' shipped from New York which supposedly include a chip from a wall of the Factory and a photograph of Warhol's favourite pew from St Patrick's Cathedral. Such finds will undoubtedly enter the archives of Roberts's *Wunderkammer* project, a cabinet of curiosities which claims to contain everything from Andy's wig to Jackie O.'s sunglasses in a collection which spans natural specimens, exotic artefacts and kitsch memorabilia from the Old and New Worlds.

Visual references to Warhol can also be discerned in the works of Christopher Langton and Denis Chapman. Langton has created a group of helium-filled silver inflatables which extend his ongoing work with blow up toys and figures and make direct reference to Warhol's *Silver Clouds* installation of 1966. While altering the original shape of these floating forms, Langton emphasises the Warhol connection by applying a car accident image to their surface. By doing so he suggests a range of associations, from Warhol's own silkscreen paintings of car crashes, through those which we are constantly exposed to via the T.A.C. billboards in Victoria, to the cult status surrounding the recent film *Crash*, (not to

mention driver and passenger 'airbags'). Langton's combination of shocking subject matter with ethereal forms is distinctly Warhol-esque in its dualistic nature as simultaneously disturbing and vacant. Both artists allude to the numbing effects of a media which conflates road carnage with cosmetics, race riots with film stars.

Denis Chapman presents two works which each make stylistic references to Warhol's image-making, in which he made no distinction between painting and mechanical reproduction. His continuing project of transferring iconic images of religious and political figures onto rows of tin cans specifically suggests Warhol's series of Campbell's Soup Cans but also his interest in the mass production of both commodities and celebrity personalities such as Marilyn Monroe and Mao Tse-Tung. Chapman's current piece is drawn from an image of *The Last Supper*, itself a secondary version by an unknown Italian artisan of da Vinci's original. Much has been made of the fact that Warhol was working on a series of paintings based on *The Last Supper* at the time of his death, as though this act was somehow symbolic or premonitory. Chapman, however, is more interested in the way such images are commodified for huge domestic markets through mass production and the effect of such processes on the original unique image. A second piece by Chapman consists of a framed 'readymade' constructed from a found fragment of an advertising billboard, created using reproductive technology that Warhol would have undoubtedly taken advantage of if he had been alive today. The image is at the same time particular and abstract, a digitized detail of a hand bedecked with jewelry, the hand in fact of a fictional Elvis Presley, one of Warhol's favoured subjects.



Rea  
Lemons I-IV detail 1994



Shumack's *Hardground* series of photographs are clever plays on Warhol's films as well as photographs from the Factory in the 1960s by identities such as Nat Finkelstein and Gerard Malanga. These photographs played a central role in validating the social and sexual status of the models, celebrities and misfits who lounged about and partied there, bathing in the glow of fame that radiated from the ever-present but aloof Warhol. Shumack overturns the male domination of these images both behind and in front of the camera (with the exception of a few beautiful rich young women for decoration). By using an all-girl cast to portray Warhol and his entourage, she simultaneously extends and refutes notions of sexual identification, freedom and 'fluidity' promoted during the heady '60s in the light of queer theory and sexual politics of the '90s. Through these and previous restagings of fashion photography and film noir, Shumack parodies desire and glamour as conveyed in particular through the excessive gestures and styling of so-called 'lesbian chic'.



Kaye Shumack  
*Hardground* detail 1996

As the American art historian Robert Rosenblum replied when questioned whether he first thought of Marilyn Monroe or Andy Warhol when looking at Warhol's famous image of the screen queen, 'I can think of two things at the same time'<sup>2</sup>, so the works in this exhibition present the viewer with both a consideration of Andy Warhol's ongoing place within art and a range of individual practices and concerns by contemporary Australian artists. The existence and oeuvre of Warhol have been requisite for the particular determination of these later images, however Warhol's own continuing presence is equally reliant on those who follow him, keeping alive and extending an engagement with his concerns and that which his life came to represent.

Clare Williamson

- 1 'Andy's Candy', *Warhol Mania: An Interview Special*, *Interview Magazine*, April 1996, p. 122
- 2 Henry Geldzahler, 'Andy Warhol: Virginal Voyeur', *Andy Warhol Portraits*, Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London and Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1993, p. 13

## white hole: queering andy

**Producer:** This is Andy Warhol, and it's take one.  
**Bowie:** It's 'War-hole', actually.  
**Producer:** What did I say?  
**Bowie:** 'Hol'... 'Hole', as in 'holes'.

To me, he's always been Andy, never Warhol. He first reached me in the seventies through his public persona, not the art. This prologue to *Andy Warhol* from David Bowie's *Hunky Dory* album came back to me when I heard about Bowie acting Andy in *Basquiat*. (As someone who had other people paint his paintings and film his films, I like to think Andy would appreciate the fact that now he has other people being him, too.) I also recall my father repeatedly citing Andy as the epitome of What's Wrong With Art Today. So, when I thought of Andy, I thought of nothing. Transparency. A vacuum. A white hole, topped with a white wig.

More recently, however, I have begun to think of Andy as a queer white hole. And looking at some of the works in *The Andy Factor*, from lesbian restagings of scenes in the Factory to a camp-and-kitsch rendering of the ultimate all-male gathering on cans, I'm clearly not alone. In the film world where I spend most of my time, the more watchable Andy films like *Flesh*, *Trash*, *Chelsea Girls* and *Lonesome Cowboys*, all full of drag queens and rent boys, are on at the retro houses again, and young queer filmmakers seem to cite him often. American independent Bruce La Bruce is even producing his own public persona by playing off Andy's. Bruce appears in his own films like *Super 8 1/2* and *Hustler White* as a porn star or film director fascinated by rent boys and old Hollywood classics. He stumbles through faux improvised scenes and quotes from both Hollywood classics and gay porn flicks in the Andy manner. *Hustler*

*White* has even garnered the Andy-esque honour of being refused classification in Australia.

However, as Douglas Crimp points out in the back cover blurb for the *Pop Out* anthology on the new queer Andy, there's something very strange about all this. For surely no one ever mistook him for heterosexual?

There is an emphatic way of declaring 'thank you' that means, 'finally, someone has said the one thing that is on everybody's mind, but which until now no one has risked saying.' And that's what I want to say to the editors and writers of these essays. Thank you for calling Warhol queer, for calling his art queer, his public persona, his interviews, his philosophy, queer. After this book a lot of the old Warhol criticism is going to seem, well, peculiar.

So why has it taken so long to talk about Andy's sexuality? One reason must be that although we all knew he wasn't straight, it never seemed right to say Andy was gay, either. Polymorphous perversity, effeminism and other radical challenges to the way we thought about sex and gender might have been part of the early post-Stonewall days of the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement. But by the time I reached the USA in 1981, the bars of West Hollywood were full of gym-built Ken dolls in flannel shirts and 501s, most of them looking for another Ken to take a mortgage out with. Drag queens, rent boys and skinny queens like Andy were definitely not the face of the culture by then.

Andy illuminates the difference between gay and queer. And not just because he surrounded himself with the kind of queer people the gay and lesbian liberation movement gradually left behind as it went respectable. More profoundly, Andy's queerness comes from within his holey-ness.

Both the gay and lesbian liberation movement and Andy performed the magic trick of seeming to pull something out of thin air, of making the invisible visible. For liberationism, this took the form of coming out. In the process of tearing down the closet, it sought to take us from being people who did not or should not exist to full and equal citizens, with equal rights and equal social recognition.

Andy, on the other hand, performs the paradoxical trick of making the invisible visible as the invisible, of turning nothing into something that is still nothing. The soup cans that were still just soup cans are one example. What Andy does with whiteness is another. Richard Dyer has written a lot about whiteness, and in particular about whiteness as the unmarked racial category of the norm, the natural, and the taken for granted.<sup>2</sup> As I've already noted, Andy's whiteness is very marked. However, Andy's whiteness is not the whiteness of, say, Marilyn Monroe. Dyer points out that when

Hollywood uses Marilyn to make whiteness visible, it is made visible by transforming from the taken for granted into the polished sheen of all that is desirable. The gleaming platinum white of her hair. The pure sparkling transparency of the diamonds that were her best friend. The soft, warm, pinky whiteness of her skin under those clinging white dresses.<sup>3</sup> Andy's whiteness is the nylon white of the synthetic wig and the bleached, bone-white of his death-mask face. It could almost be a nightmare of emptiness and lack, were it not for Andy's affable blandness, which deprives it even of that substantial negativity.

In a very perceptive essay on this phenomenon, Thierry de Duve attributes Andy's ability to make absence present to the notorious way in which he appeared not to work on his art. This is how he understands Andy's own expressed desire to be a machine, interpreting this as a desire to erase both affect and work. In this way, Andy seemed to fulfill the post-war American dream of a society where everyone is a consumer, not a producer.<sup>4</sup>

De Duve goes on to argue that, paradoxically, in a society where people do have to work, this is a form of resistance that also punctures the dream by drawing attention to its impossibility and its



hollowness. I'm not so sure about Andy's resistant qualities. He has always seemed like a remarkably yielding sort of guy to me. Indeed, I think that Andy's incarnation as a celebrity was in many ways the logical fulfilment of that drive to be a machine. For celebrities only have to be. By virtue of their pre-existing fame, they do not have to do anything anymore. Artists like Jeff Koons are the inheritors of the Andy that managed to become absolutely vacuous.

If there is some sort of resistance in Andy, I think it comes from the time before he attained full stardom himself. Then he still had to do something to produce the nothing effect. And it is the things he chose for that purpose which sometimes disturb the smooth running of the machine. Those things included everyday consumer goods, other stars and celebrities, and sexually marginalised people. And when queer people appear in Andy's films, they do not appear as gay or lesbian versions of middle-American Hollywood dreams, with coherent narratives and neatly structured desires, fully integrated into the whole social machine. But nor do they appear as nothing at all. The effect instead is to make visible fragmented, directionless, fleeting desires in rambling improvised scenes that suggest sexualities and cultures that are something else altogether, something that does not fit and therefore potentially disturbs the existing categories and processes. And this is why Andy is so ripe for queering, because much of what drives queer is also directed to this end.

Chris Berry

## checklist

**DENIS CHAPMAN**  
Born 1958, Yorkshire, England  
Lives Melbourne

*Last Supper* 1997  
Colour laser copies on  
steel cans  
66 x 260 cm

*Fake Elvis (Hand)* 1997  
Digital inkjet print on PVC  
72 x 178 cm

**CHRISTOPHER LANGTON**  
Born 1954, Johannesburg,  
South Africa  
Lives Melbourne

*Crush* 1997  
Screenprint on metallized  
polypropylene,  
helium, electric fans  
Dimensions Variable

**REA**  
Born 1962, Coonabarabran,  
NSW  
Lives Sydney  
*Lemons I-IV* 1994  
Four computer-generated Type  
C photographs  
30 x 60 cm (each)  
I: Collection of David Abello  
II-IV: Private Collection

**LUKE ROBERTS**  
Born 1952, Alpha, Central  
Western Queensland  
Currently artist in residence,  
PS 1, New York.

*Alice Jitterbug* 1977  
Photographic performance  
Camera: Jane Ulrich  
119 x 129 cm (framed)

*Wendy Arthole's Wundercloset*  
1997  
Installation including details  
from photographic  
performances *POPEPEOPLE*,  
*FRIDAPEOPLE*,  
*ANDY (FOR 15 MINUTES)*,  
*WUNDERKAMMER* items  
collected in New York and  
details from *Wunderkamera*  
project

**KAYE SHUMACK**  
Born 1953, West Wyalong, NSW  
Lives Sydney

*Hardground* 1996  
Series of nine digital prints and  
one digital vinyl print billboard  
Prints: 65 x 90 cm (each)  
Billboard: 140 x 180 cm

Unless otherwise stated, all  
works courtesy of the artists

Chris Berry teaches in the Department of Cinema Studies at La Trobe University. Together with Annamarie Jagose, he co-edited the *Australia Queer* issue of *Meanjin* (1996:1).

- 1 Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley and José Esteban Muñoz (eds.), *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).
- 2 Richard Dyer, 'White', *Screen Autumn* 1988, pp.44-64.
- 3 Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: BFI, 1987), pp.42-4.
- 4 Thierry de Duve, 'Andy Warhol, or The Machine Perfected', *October* 48 (Spring 1989), pp.3-14.

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