

Press release

Andy Warhol – Photographs

16 May – 16 August 2013

In its new exhibition the focus21 gallery presents a selection of photographs (one of a kind silver gelatine prints) made by the American pop artist, Andy Warhol, during the period from 1976 to 1987. 26 years after his death (born in 1928 in Pittsburgh and died in 1987 in New York City) Andy Warhol is better known than ever before, which makes it all the more astounding that relatively unknown photographs are part of his life's work. In actuality, photography has a prominent position in the artist's work, as all of his emblemized paintings are based on photographic templates. This medium always played a decisive role in Andy Warhol's life. There is a remarkable sentence in one of his diaries: „I told them that I do not believe in art, rather I believe in photography“.

Especially in the 1970s and 1980s, he created an important reservoir of photographs that were taken with a multitude of compact automatic and polaroid cameras. The cameras were simple to use and they offered the possibility of photographing any motif anytime and anywhere at a moment's notice without being noticed. The photographs that were produced show general contemporary events as well as the personal obsessions of the artist and they document the USA as a fascinating country full of contradictions.

Warhol's radical aesthetics are more clearly reflected in the medium of photography than in his well-known works, by strategically using black-and-white films and pointing out the ever-present mass media pictures.

The photographic motifs follow the democratic equality of paintings, whereby on the one hand they document Warhol's well-developed attention to current events and on the other hand they attempt to oblivate the boundaries between art and commercialism. Newspaper dispensers, display windows full of wares, curiosities, the clichéd, but also the reality of social differences and poverty can be seen as motifs that are continuously repeated. Those everyday scenes represent the "American Way of Life" that culminate into a discrete iconography and an eloquent portrayal of America in Warhol's photographs.

The spontaneous aesthetics of snapshots again and again contrast thereby with the strict photographs that almost seem to be staged. The furniture, fruit, vegetable or also simple plate arrangements appear to challenge the artist to photographic experiments that approximate abstractions; and in and of themselves document his great aesthetic and stylistic interest in the medium. Andy Warhol's photographs express a unique art form in his works characterized by important ambiguities. They are part of the pictorial legacy of the artist: his visual memory.

Nowadays Warhol's photographic life's works are renowned the world around and already in 1981 they were summarized in a Warhol Catalog by Carl Haenlein (Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover, Germany) with the following words: *„'Everything is beautiful' is the motto – everything is beautiful, translates into: what a camera captures. So the world turns into a surface, from which Warhol selects a piece, turning the world into an outer world. No other artist could have thought this through with more decisiveness, passion, sobriety and success. For Warhol the world is everything that is reflected in the media. Only after newspaper, television and (his) camera have reacted, does Warhol become aware, does his glance fall on the world".* This quote underscores the unflagging strength of the charisma of Warhol's works. This is the accentuation of unique artistic continuity throughout the years.

The exhibited photographs are on loan from the Fine Art Invest Fund (www.FAIF.ch).

Preview: May 16, 6pm
Introduction: Prof. Klaus Honnef
Curator: Thomas Zander

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