

Business of Art

All Signs Point to Warhol

There often was – and sometimes still is – a deep divide between the art and business worlds. Art is about inspiration and imagination. Business focuses on production and the bottom line.

By Tom Schuman



Sarah Green, associate curator of contemporary art at the Indianapolis Museum of Art (IMA), puts it this way: “People in the art world tend to get uncomfortable when art and commerce co-mingle. But with (Andy) Warhol, he really loved that intersection.”

Adds Betsy Stirratt, director of the SoFA Gallery at the Henry Radford Hope School of Fine Arts at Indiana University in Bloomington, “I would definitely say that the world of contemporary art, in the last 10 years, has become much more tied to commercial endeavors and business because the values of contemporary art have gone up so much. Andy Warhol, of course, was the first real artist-entrepreneur who was well-known.”

Warhol, art and commerce come together again this fall. Indianapolis (at the IMA from October 10 through January 2, 2011) is the only scheduled destination for a new exhibit, *Andy Warhol Enterprises*. The PNC Foundation, which receives its principal funding from the PNC Financial Services Group, is the title sponsor of the exhibition.

“PNC (which completed its transition from National City Bank in its Indiana markets earlier this year) has a longstanding relationship with The Andy Warhol Museum in our headquarters city of Pittsburgh,” notes Jeff Kucer, PNC’s client and community relations director for Central Indiana. “We felt this was a very unique exhibit that we could help the IMA with. We wanted to make a big splash, and we felt this was a great way to do that.”

Straightforward approach

One summary of Warhol’s life described him as either “the greatest American artist of the second half of the 20th century or a corrupter of art, who destroyed painting and took us down the slippery slope of postmodernism.” Why the dramatically different interpretations?

“He was blatantly interested in money. He was a little bit of a provocative sort – ‘I love money’; ‘my work is about money,’” Stirratt relates. “He appreciated the fact that he would get attention for those sorts of comments, and he used that to his advantage. He made a lot

of mass-produced works. He made them in his 'Factory'; he actually named his workshop or studio the Factory. There were an enormous number of workers there. It changed the whole way art was perceived."

The IMA exhibit will feature more than 100 works in various media – paintings, drawings, sculpture, film and video among them. Warhol, who started his career in New York in the 1950s as a successful commercial illustrator, also ventured into magazines, television and business in other ways.

"Many of the techniques, skills and business acumen he acquired during that time (as an illustrator)," Green says, "he parlayed into his fine art career. I think a lot of people will come to the show with the knowledge of Andy Warhol as the creator of celebrity portraits, the Marilyn Monroe, or as the Campbell's soup can artist. I think people will be shocked to see his early drawings and that he was a very talented draftsman.

"I also think they will be able to see the variety of his work," she continues. "He was not just a painter; he created a lot of objects, films, magazines and TV. The breadth of his work will be a surprise. We will have a room in the exhibition that is entirely dollar sign paintings; they are from 1981. Visually, they are extremely dynamic. I want to show that he was not just a painter, but someone who was part of the wider cultural landscape."

The exhibit, Green adds, is a testament to the way Warhol (who died in 1987 at the age of 59) combined his artwork and business philosophy. "We really want to show he wasn't afraid of saying, 'This is art; it has value; it costs money; it has a fluctuating value, and this is something we need not hide.'"

And while Warhol may have been more interested in the present and the personal impact of his works, he has left a lasting legacy.

"No question about it," was Stirratt's immediate response when asked about Warhol's effect. "He was influential in so many ways; in fact, he made it all right for artists to think in a commercial fashion. Since that time, there have been many people who have taken even the next step from what he had been doing to become entrepreneurs with their own works.

"There is Damien Hirst – the British artist who is very well known for working the market to his advantage, the market being the auction houses and auction prices that really affect the values of his own works. It's just become much more acceptable for artists to be involved in the commercial and business end of what they do.

"Andy Warhol was the first and now there are many, many others."

On display

While Warhol combined art and business through various

means, the two also come together each day in the many offices throughout Indiana and beyond that showcase the works of artists. Some are simply being supportive, while others may have further goals in mind.

Stirratt, who has taught and helped run the art gallery at IU since 1987, says corporate art collections for financial investment purposes have lessened in popularity. But when it comes to displaying artwork, "A lot of it is community involvement. It's a very good public relations thing for businesses to talk about the arts." She notes that is particularly true in Bloomington, striving to market itself as a cultural destination.

"People in the workplace do like to be surrounded by beautiful things," she affirms. "The installation of artworks within a workplace environment has a proven value, and I think that's why a lot of people do it – to create a pleasing atmosphere for their employees."

Green, a three-year member of the IMA team following her graduate school work in New York, contends the bonding of business and art produces winners all-around.

"It's good for businesses and healthy for businesses to display to their clients and shareholders that they're interested in supporting the cultural health of their communities. I also think, of course, it gives companies a sense of sophistication to collect art. It's a very necessary and healthy aspect to the art world," she states.

"Whenever art is shown, whether it's at a nonprofit museum or within a corporation gallery or on their walls, it costs money and consumed resources to get the work there and

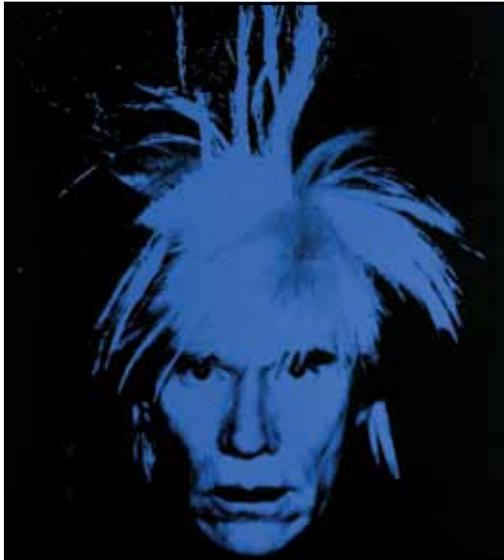
to put it up. I think it's interesting to view art in that context."

Major attraction

The community aspect (in addition to its Warhol connections) is what brought PNC to the table. Kucer points to a study a few years ago that showed Indianapolis arts organizations and audiences contributing \$469 million and about 15,000 full-time jobs to the local economy.

"What we're trying to do as we roll out the PNC brand is that we're looking at a lot of different areas we can support in the community, whether it's arts, whether it's education, economic development, community involvement," Kucer offers. "And really, in one way or another, this touches all of that. We think it ties in to all of the things we're about relative to giving back to the community."

It is anticipated that the Warhol name and the uniqueness of the exhibit will attract an audience from around Indiana and throughout the region. PNC will help develop events locally and provide information throughout its branches. Kucer says, "Whether it be Chicago or Louisville or Cincinnati or Columbus,



An Andy Warhol self-portrait from 1986 will be part of the IMA exhibit, along with the images on Pages 1 and 66 (all three are from The Andy Warhol Museum collection).

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we'd like to have people from around the Midwest come in and visit this exhibit."

Green concludes, "I do think we will draw a wide audience because Warhol himself was such a powerful brand. He was the first artist to understand the concept of branding, and he branded himself quite brilliantly. A lot of people, whatever their connection with Warhol might be, will be intrigued."

INFORMATION LINK

Resources: Sarah Green, Indianapolis Museum of Art, at www.imamuseum.org

Betsy Stirratt, Indiana University, at www.indiana.edu/~sofa/

Jeff Kucer, PNC, at jeffrey.kucer@pnc.com