

in the Company of...



“Love Parades and Superstar Effects” Terri C. Smith

In 2008, the Andy Warhol Photographic Legacy Program donated a collection of 158 photographs by Andy Warhol to the Housatonic Museum of Art. Drawing on Warhol's interest in the social and the collaborative, *In the company of...* is a group show that places the works of Jeremy Kost, Rashaad Newsome, Billy Sullivan, and Andy Warhol (as well as other artworks and pop culture materials) in the company of each other. In doing so, the exhibition explores some ways in which artists include their social circles as a subject or as a medium in their work. The title is, consequently, twofold: These artists are in the company of one another in the gallery and the company they keep outside of this space influences their work.

This exhibition takes one aspect of Warhol's practice as a starting point for contemplating how some artists incorporate dynamics of personal relationships, social scenes, and professional networks (including celebrities) into their art. All of these artists are part director, part observer, part social alchemist, but their



Andy Warhol
Selected Polaroid
photographs donated
to the Housatonic
Museum of Art by
the Andy Warhol
Photographic
Legacy Program

Rashaad Newsome
Shade Compositions
(Screen Test 2), 2008
Video Still
HD DVD
Courtesy of the artist and
Galeria Ramis Barquet



styles and media vary widely. Kost, Newsome, and Sullivan share an attention to the social with Warhol, but also emphasize elements not located in Warhol's practice, including intimacy between artist and subject (Sullivan), intricately directed/edited reworking of observed behaviors (Newsome), and highly stylized environmental portraits that imply a narrative (Kost).



In the 1960s Billy Sullivan began taking photographs of friends in the downtown New York scene. Today, his studios (in New York City and the Hamptons) are hubs where friends -- who include artists, models, students, and curators -- gather. Sullivan then captures them in quiet, seemingly inconsequential, moments. In his paintings and pastels such as *Andrew & Missy* (2006) and



been an ongoing subject in Kost's work, applying and removing his makeup provides a meditative foil to the episode of *Warhol's TV* where *Divine* (film director John Water's diva) has her makeup applied while Warhol conducts an interview from off screen.

Also off screen in his video *Shade Compositions* (*Screen Test 2*) (2008), Rashaad Newsome, among other things, puts his own spin on the Warhol screen test. Warhol made 500 screen tests from 1964 and 1966, with a handful of them on view here. In Warhol's tests, the subjects were told to sit perfectly still and not even blink. Warhol and collaborator Gerard Malanga would then leave the room until the three minutes of film ran out. With *Shade Compositions*, Newsome's voice can be heard directing the women who are "throwing shade" (an African American phrase for non-verbal

Billy Sullivan
Andrew & Missy, 2006
Oil on linen
Courtesy of the artist and
Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery



Rachel Reading (2010), intimacy is palpable, diminishing a sense of voyeurism, and settings are casual, suggesting that these are found rather than fabricated scenes. In this exhibition, Sullivan demonstrates what essayist Brooks Adams describes as "acute visual and social intelligence" in a grouping of photographs, ink drawings, pastels, and paintings whose dates range from 1971 to 2010. There is a gentleness to and camaraderie in Sullivan's work that stands in marked contrast to Warhol's stark Polaroid photographs, which served as source

material for his painted screenprint portraits during the 1970s and 1980s, as well as his black and white photos that often capture social affairs with an assertiveness akin to the paparazzi.

Jeremy Kost began taking photographs in nightclubs after he picked up a friend's Polaroid camera ten years ago. Initially, like Warhol, the camera was a tool for introduction. Similar to Warhol's candid black-and-white photographs of everyone from former New York Mayor Ed Koch to art dealer Leo Castelli, Kost's photographs exhibit a keen understanding of the camera's power as paparazzo tool. He explores this in his video *Tom and Kate, 7:22 p.m.* (2007) and the photos in his series titled *Blinded by the Light* where the artist intentionally shoots Polaroid photographs of celebrities with his camera directed at Paparazzi flashbulbs. The result is an ethereal distortion of familiar faces like Beyonce and Madonna. In some of Kost's most recent works, his nightclub friends are enlisted as characters in intricate Polaroid collages such as *Sulking Cuz We Can't Get in* (2010) and *In the Arms of An Older Woman* (2010). With his video *Rainblo* (2007) a quiet moment shows Kost's sensitivity to persona and performance. His video of *Rainblo*, who has

communications that express annoyance) using what the artist identifies as "sassy vocalizations." The simple backdrop, focus on a single person/action, mining of familiar surroundings, and the video's title overlap with qualities of Warhol's screen tests. The two artists part ways, however, with Newsome's interactive approach to directing and what he describes as an anthropological practice of taking "things from different cultures" to "remix and reframe them and make them something everyone can understand."

While this exhibition primarily focuses on the four artists discussed above, other contemporary artists who use peers and celebrities in their work are woven into the exhibition. In honor of Andy Warhol's childhood hobby of collecting fan magazines and signed photos of movie stars, Harmony Korine's *Collected Fanzines* is added to the mix. When contemplating friends and fame as subject, one would be remiss to exclude Elizabeth Peyton. Her works *Tony reading about Napoleon* (1999) and *David* (1998) are matched with specific Warhol photos. These additions, and a handful of others, are embedded in the exhibition to encourage additional moments of contemplation about the tensions between public/private, historic/contemporary, and reality/entertainment that inhabit *In the company of...*

ANDY WARHOL: GAY ART STAR

Warhol worked very hard to complicate the accepted ideas of what an artist was supposed to be in post-World War II America. He began his creative career as an illustrator for ad agencies -- an environment in which being a gay man was not uncommon. Entering the fine art world in the early 1960s, however, Warhol encountered macho attitudes that were encouraged among Abstract Expressionist painters such as Jackson Pollock and mirrored those of U.S. culture at large. Rather than hide his homosexuality, Warhol made a concerted effort to queer the art star five years before the gay rights movement gained momentum with New York's Stonewall riots in 1969. Wayne Koestenbaum elaborates: "Warhol's decision to become a painter in the first place was an attempt to queer the Pollock Myth -- to prove that art stardom was a swish affair: all this business of men dripping paint on floors and posing in T-shirts and khakis in barns!"

In the end, Warhol's media machine far surpassed Pollock's. Where Pollock received unprecedented mainstream magazine coverage for an artist in the late 1940s, Warhol took art celebrity to the next level: garnering appearances in television commercials and print ads; creating his own TV shows; and starting his own magazine called *Interview*. In addition to creating a sexual foil to the Abstract Expressionists, Warhol, like other Pop artists, rejected the brushy emotive style of that movement for machine-like renderings of everyday objects such as soup cans and media images ranging from celebrities to race riots.

WARHOL'S PHOTOGRAPHY

There have been many Warhol exhibitions. Since every institution that receives a gift of photos from the Andy Warhol Photographic Legacy Program (more than 180) is asked to create a show using Warhol's photographs, many exhibitions have included photographs much like these. This is a relatively new phenomenon, however. Warhol did not exhibit photographs during his lifetime. The Polaroids were used as source material for his larger-than-life portraits of the 1970s and 1980s. Black-and-white Paparazzi photographs like those seen here were primarily published in books such as *Andy Warhol's Exposures*. Warhol's photographs, however, are an integral part of his artistic production from early to late career. After being sued for copyright infringement in 1966, Warhol was more cautious about using found imagery and began taking his own photographs, first with the Polaroid SX 70 Big Shot around 1971 and then, from 1976 on, also carried a small 35mm camera everywhere he went.



Jeremy Kost
Not Yet Titled (Lady Gaga),
2009
Digital C-print from Polaroid
Courtesy of the artist

Opposite side:
Billy Sullivan
Andy Warhol, summer 1971
Photograph courtesy
of Billy Sullivan

Housatonic Museum of Art

900 Lafayette Blvd.
Bridgeport, CT 06604

For information call
203-332-5052.

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