

Andy Warhol's Time Capsules

EDUCATION RESOURCE





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INTRODUCTION

To many people the name Andy Warhol is synonymous with American Pop Art of the 1960s; in particular, his colourful screenprints of Hollywood legends, rock stars and fashion icons, and his multiple images of Campbell's soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles come to mind. What is less known is that Warhol was also a sculptor, designer, film-maker, author, publisher, music producer, businessman and collector. Warhol's Time Capsules – over 600 cardboard boxes containing a vast collection of everything from expensive art objects and original works of art to receipts, photographs, newspaper headlines and unpaid bills – represents a treasure trove of historical references to the artist's personality, as well as being windows on the culture of his time. The fifteen capsules included in this exhibition represent around 3000 separate items.

From 1974 until his death in 1987, Warhol comprehensively and obsessively documented and catalogued his daily existence. By way of instilling order into a chaotic world, he made a habit of emptying the contents of his desk into cardboard boxes, along with objects, both significant and common, that he purchased, made or souvenired. In sealing these boxes, sending them off to storage and calling them Time Capsules, his collection became art as well as archive.

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Andy Warhol was born in 1928 in the industrial city of Pittsburgh in the USA. His parents were working-class immigrants from what is now known as the Slovak Republic in Central Europe. At the age of seventeen he was accepted into the School of Art and Design at the Carnegie Institute of Technology. After graduating in 1949, Warhol moved to New York where he changed his name (originally Andrew Warhola) and began to work as a commercial artist and illustrator, his drawings and designs being reproduced in fashionable magazines and newspapers of the day.

In the 1960s Warhol began creating fine art as opposed to commercial art, directly inspired by consumer products and advertisements. In 1962 he began using the screenprinting process which allowed him to repeat images, often on a single canvas, thus mimicking the mass-produced nature of American consumer society.

Warhol's studio, which he appropriately called The Factory, became a hangout for poets, artists, musicians and actors, many of whom he used to make films and to photograph. This creative atmosphere ended in 1968 when Warhol was shot by Valerie Solanas, a woman claiming to be the founding member of the Society for Cutting up Men (SCUM).

In 1969, having recovered from this assassination attempt, Warhol created *Interview Magazine*, which allowed him to mix with celebrities in the music, film and fashion worlds, as well as politicians and sport stars, and to paint commissioned portraits of the rich and famous. In addition to photographic screenprints, he used a variety of photographic techniques including film stills, instant photo-booth strips, Polaroids and x-rays. In 1974, when he moved to his new studio and called it The Office, rather than The Factory, he began to create his Time Capsules.

In the 1980s Warhol returned to painting and looked again to commercial imagery and art history for his subject matter. He also began a series of major collaborations with other artists, including Jean-Michel Basquiat, Francesco Clemente and John Cage. Warhol died in 1987 of complications resulting from gall-bladder surgery.

POP ART AND CULTURE

The term Pop Art (Pop for popular) first appeared in Britain in the 1950s. It referred to the growing interest of artists in images of mass media, mass production, advertising, comic-strip production and design, and fashion and consumer culture in general. It reflected a post-Second World War consumer boom and coincided with the youth and pop music phenomena of the time. In Britain it is often associated with artists like Richard Hamilton and Peter Blake, who designed album covers for Elvis Presley and the Beatles.

In the 1960s in America, Warhol continued this trend, looking more to the commonplace, becoming fascinated with consumerism and cultural debris and drawing on images from the media and modern life. In the process he made art more popular and less academic. Through alteration and repetition, he objectified cultural imagery into a new form of art.

Warhol's Time Capsules reflect much of this cultural background, while containing specific examples of Pop Art itself. For example, in *Capsule 21* there are cartoon-like images of cow heads, stamped by Warhol in rows like a small-scale design for wallpaper. There is a brightly covered Dick Tracy comic-book cover, whimsical designs for women's evening shoes and a copy of the Rolling Stones album cover *Sticky Fingers*, both of which Warhol designed. Other capsules contain such items as shoes worn by Clarke Gable and a Jean Harlow silk-velvet gown.

In addition to the capsules themselves, the exhibition also contains a colourful 1986 self-portrait of the artist (in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria) completed a year prior to his death. It is a large photographic screenprint on canvas with a distinctive Pop feel, designed in bright, almost fluorescent colours, using an American army camouflage pattern to screen the artist's face. The Pop element in Warhol's groundbreaking films, and his connection to musicians such as the Rolling Stones, Lou Reed, Velvet Underground, Joe Cocker, the Ramones, David Bowie, Bob Dylan, Patti Smith and Blondie was also very strong, as is evidenced in the dozen films and television productions also seen in this exhibition.

CAPSULES AND COLLECTIONS

There are many different kinds of collections in the world, ranging from the large-scale collections of art galleries, libraries and museums, to smaller, private individuals' collections of items such as coins, stamps, insects, plants, jewellery, autographs and books. It might be said that we are all collectors, some preferring to catalogue and compose their collections in rational, even archival ways, while others are driven to collect and often hoard things with seemingly little order or reason. One basic question to ask is why do most, perhaps all, people collect things in the first place? What does this drive say about us?

For Warhol it seems it was a necessary way to make sense of his world and his culture, especially as an artist, even if the objects were never viewed as a whole in his lifetime, nor were intended to be. As he packed each box, sealed it and dispatched it to storage, it might even have been a kind of relief. After one such process Warhol was reported to have said, 'Well at least that is one less thing to worry about'. It has also been suggested that perhaps he was collecting himself.

ISSUES AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

The dictionary defines a time capsule as a 'box, etc. containing a selection of objects chosen as representative of life at a certain time, to be buried for discovery in the future'.

Do you think this definition aptly describes Warhol's boxes?

Have you ever been involved in making a time capsule?

Do all cultures collect things? Which cultures might collect the least and why?

Do you ever go to garage sales or flea markets? Is there any pattern to what you might collect or purchase there?

Would you describe yourself as a hoarder? Why is it often so hard to let go of the things we own or have acquired?

Do you think Warhol's Time Capsules can be called art?

Do you think an exhibition of his Time Capsules can be called art?

Discuss whether Warhol's Time Capsules would be better displayed in a museum than in an art gallery.

Andy Warhol began to collect pedestals, an act which could be seen as reinforcing the discovery that any object placed on a pedestal can assume the status of art. Discuss.

Discuss whether any aspects of Warhol's art or vast collection of memorabilia reflect the politics of his time.

The Great Depression of the 1930s and the Second World War taught people to save. Were Warhol's acquisitive desires and obsession simply the product of an impoverished childhood?

Compare Warhol's Time Capsules with the work of contemporary artists who are also interested in the idea of collecting. For example: Elizabeth Gower, Kathy Temin, Rosalie Gascoigne, Isabelle Davis and Joseph Cornell.

QUOTATIONS BY ANDY WARHOL FOR DISCUSSION

'In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes.'

'Art is what you can get away with.'

'I'm afraid that if you look at a thing long enough, it loses all of its meaning.'

'An artist is someone who produces things that people don't need to have but that he – for some reason – thinks it would be a good idea to give them.'

'If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it.'

'Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.'

THE ROLE OF THE CURATOR

Interview with the coordinating curator of the Time Capsules exhibition, Amy Barclay, Curator, International Art Exhibitions, National Gallery of Victoria.

What is a curator?

A curator is essentially someone who cares for and interprets a collection, in this case, a collection of art. This may be divided, as it is at the NGV, into departments such as contemporary art, prints and drawings, decorative arts, international art and so forth. I happen to be a curator of exhibitions; therefore I am solely concerned with the temporary exhibitions at NGV International.

What courses have you taken that prepared you for this position?

I studied fine-art photography (as opposed to commercial photography) for five years at TAFE and then university. I was concerned about losing my writing skills so I completed a postgraduate diploma in fine art (history and theory). I then undertook another postgraduate qualification in museum studies, which comprised study of industrial as well as theoretical areas of museum development and activity. The two latter courses contributed significantly to my development towards becoming a curator, but I enjoy that fact that my background also offers me a practical perspective.

What are the great moments of your job?

Watching a new exhibition being installed and seeing the relationships between the individual works of art emerge is always exciting. Assisting people to enjoy art and the gallery is rewarding. I'm grateful daily that I am shuffling papers on art, not finances or engineering! And the opportunities for professional development available to curators that involve art, people and travel are just inspiring – overseas courier trips, study grants, giving talks and listening to lectures.

How long have you been preparing for the exhibition Andy Warhol's Time Capsules?

The Time Capsules project has been in preparation for the last year or so. I became more closely involved after the opportunity arose for me to visit the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, USA, in May 2004. It is very advantageous for cross-institutional relations for those involved in the travelling of an exhibition to have met in person.

What planning and preparation is required when putting together a major exhibition?

Numerous lists, publications and activities contribute to the development of a major exhibition, and many of them must occur simultaneously. The NGV is lucky to have a number of departments comprised of experts in their field. Different departments contribute to the development of an exhibition in various interconnecting ways. For instance, the curatorial department researches and selects the content of the exhibition, compiles the checklists of the works of art to be involved and interprets the exhibition in the form of a room brochure or a much larger, bound catalogue. The publications and graphic design departments would also be involved with the design and production of these. Marketing is concerned with the promotion of the exhibition in appropriate places to the target audience. Sponsorship works to find the additional funding required for a major exhibition. Exhibition management monitors the scheduling of all the related activities that result in the exhibition being installed, such as liaising with the registrars and the art handlers. Registrars receive and track the work's location within the building, and are responsible for its safe delivery and return to the owner. Multimedia create the related web sites, information touch-screens, and any digital film or promotional footage required by the curator or marketing. Photographic services and copyright permissions record the exhibition and arrange copyright clearance, ensuring internal and external access to the images available to promote the exhibition. The communications team handle enquiries and promotion of

the exhibition to the media. Exhibition design creates the look and concept of the way the gallery spaces will function. Conservators compile a condition report of every work of art to ensure minimum or no change occurs in the work during its time at our gallery. Education and public programs ensures school groups and the public have access to accurate and multiple levels of interpretation of the exhibition so that visitors of all ages and backgrounds can enjoy it. And that's not everyone!

How was the NGV able to obtain this exhibition?

Sometimes a gallery offers an exhibition to another gallery in a letter between directors. Sometimes a gallery hears of an exciting exhibition and asks the organising institution whether it would be possible to be considered as a host venue. The answer depends on such things as whether the work is stable enough to withstand travel (conservation) or whether we have the right size gallery to host it at the time it is available, and whether we can afford it (exhibition management and registration, loan fees, insurance, freight costs and so forth).

I believe the NGV heard very positive reports about this exhibition and was stimulated by how unusual its content was – a good counterpoint to some of the more art-historical exhibitions we have had and a lot of fun too!

Who do you collaborate with?

Anyone with whom I have to share information about the exhibition. Additionally, I work via email and, occasionally, the phone, with relevant colleagues at the international gallery from which we are loaning the exhibition. In the instance of *Andy Warhol's Time Capsules*, my closest contact was someone I met at the Andy Warhol Museum, Matt Wrbican, the assistant archivist. He has worked there for over ten years, and has the most amazing wealth of information about all things Warhol.

What associated events will you participate in during the exhibition?

Everything from media interviews, media launches, floor talks with conservators, members' special previews, education programs and lectures in the form of breakfast viewings, evening teachers' previews, standard lectures to the public and also to staff here – shop assistants, voluntary guides, security and other art-skilled and administration staff. But the best event by far is the exhibition opening function, when, after all the speeches, it becomes open to the public for the first time.

What factors have influenced the presentation and display of the Time Capsules?

The phenomenal amount of material (over 3000 objects – a typical major show may have seventy to 120 works) to display influenced it greatly. Had we produced the vitrines (display cases) from metal, they would have cost five times more than their inventive, recycled cardboard and acrylic counterparts. The exhibition designer used a previous installation plan of the exhibition at another venue as a guide to the order in which the viewer should encounter the Time Capsules. We also wanted to incorporate the bright colours Warhol used in so many of his screenprints, to visually punctuate the rooms.

What does the exhibition reveal about Andy Warhol?

It tells tales of Andy Warhol's private side. We recognise his name as associated with the Pop Art movement, so public and loud, but I think this exhibition is likely to reveal less well-known aspects of Warhol's life and personality, depending on the item viewed and the age and background of the person viewing it.

Overall, I think *Andy Warhol's Time Capsules* provides some fascinating questions to muse upon about the potential for the emotional satisfaction of possession, and what it can mean to different people to collect items of great monetary value and items of personal value. I think audiences will be reminded of their own personal collections, travel journals,

photographs, letters, posters of significant happenings, and the tangible evidence of landmarks in our lives.

They may even question why it is so important to keep these things, why it becomes increasingly hard to part with the smallest things you have kept for a long time. The stuff in our homes, in our diaries or safekeeping boxes, are really indicative of our lives and our personalities, the things we treasure are testament to what matters, what we value as individuals. Collectively, like the content of Andy Warhol's Time Capsules, the things we preserve paint a portrait of us.

THE ROLE OF THE EXHIBITIONS CONSERVATOR

Interview with Catherine Earley, Senior Conservator for Exhibitions, National Gallery of Victoria.

What is an exhibitions conservator?

Generally, a conservator will train in a particular speciality such as paintings, objects, textiles and so forth. An exhibitions conservator at the NGV is someone who has stepped outside a particular discipline and works on all exhibitions that are borrowed or loaned by the Gallery.

The primary aim is to have each work of art return to its home in the condition in which it arrived. This involves assessing and documenting the condition of works in all media, making sure each work is physically prepared for travelling (often involving in-house conservators and specialists in particular media) and examining incoming loans against their condition reports to ensure that their condition has not changed since they were packed and sent. If any instability is found, permission is sought from owners to treat and stabilise the problem. The exhibitions conservator also makes sure that display environments such as light levels, humidity, showcase materials and so forth are suitable and that any special safety requirements a work may have are met.

What courses have you taken that prepared you for this position?

Art history, both at school and university, has been a great bonus, though not a prerequisite. My fine-arts degree was a practical one. I majored in painting and sub-majored in gold and silver-smithing. Familiarity with these materials and techniques has been extremely valuable. I then completed a Bachelor of Applied Science (Conservation of Cultural Materials) degree. To qualify for this course I had to do HSC Chemistry at night school as I had been a straight humanities student till then. In addition, the course convenor had advised getting experience in the field, so in the five years leading up to starting the conservation degree, I also volunteered one day a week in the paintings conservation studio at the NGV.

Currently you have been working on Andy Warhol's Time Capsules, what has been your role in the preparation of this exhibition?

First, I obtained a list of the contents of the exhibition to find out what types of media were involved. I then checked that the environmental conditions where the works were to be displayed and the proposed display mechanisms were suitable. This included checking for any unusual stipulations that may have been requested in the contract by the lender. Given the number of works and the weeks it would take to check in, I then ensured that there would be enough conservation staff to work on the exhibition. I was also consulted on the display-case design. As it employs unusual materials, I was asked to prepare a conservation report of its suitability for submission to the lender. Finally, as the works were unpacked, conservation staff examined them for any new damage prior to installation.

How is this exhibition different to other exhibitions you have previously worked on?

The sheer number of items in the exhibition makes it unusual in a logistics sense and the overlapping and layering of items in each case makes the installation quite complex. Fortunately, the show is accompanied by someone who has overseen its installation and de-installation many times.

What conservation procedures were put into place when the Time Capsules travelled from The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh?

The works have recently been assessed and any necessary treatments undertaken in preparation for this venue. Brief, written reports and digital-image records of the works travel with the exhibition. The works are transported by truck and plane. This involves packing against vibration and crating against temperature and humidity fluctuations in transit. Time spent outside climate controlled/air-ride suspension trucks and aircraft is kept to a minimum. This is facilitated by an accompanying courier. The courier can oversee the crates delivered to the air-cargo sheds, the palleting of the crates and their loading onto the aircraft, and the de-palleting and trucking to the gallery at the other end.

What was the procedure when the Time Capsules arrived at NGV?

The crates arrived amid high security and sat unpacked for over twenty-four hours so that they could slowly acclimatise to the environment before being unpacked. This is a usual procedural stipulation.

What records do you keep?

It's important to check that everything has arrived without sustaining any damage. The items are checked against a condition report, both for insurance reasons and to catch anything that might require treatment. The number of items in this exhibition is so large that the format for the individual condition reports has had to be kept quite succinct. Every item has a very brief report and a digital photograph. When examining each item, it's a case of knowing what is old damage and only commenting on what appears new. It's a type of forensic examination – does this tear look fresh?

Laptops, digital cameras, portable printers, lights and magnifying head-loops were used in the checking in. Two equipment trolleys were on standby so that minor treatments could be carried out on site. The documentation stays on the premises while the exhibition is here and is used to recheck the items before repacking, and travels on with the exhibition.

What is the most effective way to care for the items while on display?

Much of the material is fragile paper. The closed cases prevent movement caused by air currents. They also protect against dust and provide security as most of the works cannot be secured individually. They allow close viewing while providing care for the works.

These items are often very brittle and need to be supported when moved. They are handled with paper triangles and cotton gloves. Bare hands are not used as oils and moisture may transfer to the work. Larger format works may be picked up at diagonally opposite corners and lifted with a slightly slack tension. Works are transported horizontally on a rigid support. Paper folders or boxes prevent movement in air currents during transport. Non-paper items are generally handled with nitrile (rubber-free) gloves.

What other departments and staff do you collaborate with?

Many departments are involved under the umbrella of the exhibition management team. Much of the conservation work for an exhibition is done in conjunction with the registration, installation and design departments, who are all concerned with the physical aspects of the exhibition. Through meetings, both formal and informal, a timetable is produced for the preparation of spaces and cases, the arrival, unpacking and condition reporting of the works and their installation and lighting.

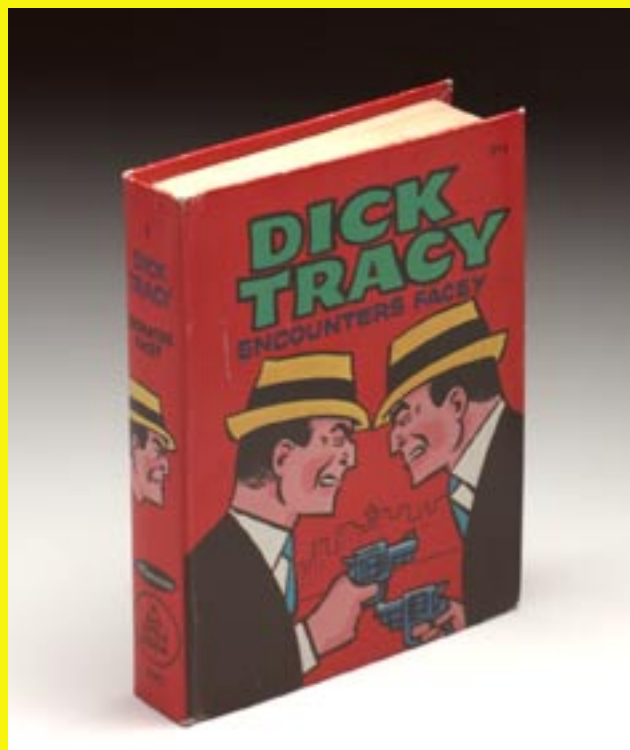
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For further information on the artist, visit the Andy Warhol Museum, <<http://www.warhol.org/>> and the Andy Warhol Foundation, <<http://www.warholfoundation.org/>>

Certain material in this exhibition may offend some viewers.



Above: Children's book, *Dick Tracy Encounters Facey* by Paul Newman, © 1967
The Chicago Tribune – New York News Syndicate, Inc., from Andy Warhol's *Time Capsule 21*.

Back cover: *a novel*, printed material, from Andy Warhol's *Time Capsule 21*.
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