



Photojournalist Bernie Boston captured this scene on October 21, 1967 at a rally to end the war in Vietnam of a protestor placing a carnation into the barrel of a rifle held by a soldier. The photograph was nominated for the 1967 Pulitzer Prize. Boston documented the American social and political scenes from the 1960s to the 1980s.

FLOWER POWER

BY CAROL OCKMAN, Ph.D., Curator-at-Large, Selby Gardens



Warhol: *Flowers in the Factory* will be on view at Marie Selby Botanical Gardens from February 11-June 30, 2018.

Consummately cosmopolitan and cool, Andy Warhol in the great outdoors seems like an oxymoron. And yet, the man referred to as “the Pope of Pop,” known for multiples of deadpan Campbell’s Soup Cans, portraits of celebrities and the Death and Disaster series, made 10,000 flowers over the course of his career.

Warhol: Flowers in the Factory explores the surprising, and little known, role of nature in Warhol’s art and life. The centerpiece of this innovative exhibition are four of the artist’s silkscreens of *Flowers* on generous loan from the Williams College Museum of Art.

“SCREENING” FLOWERS

Made in 1964 in his new work headquarters, dubbed the Factory, this series constituted Warhol’s debut that fall at the cutting edge Leo Castelli Gallery, whose stable of contemporary artists included Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg and Frank Stella. These prints are striking because they are the artist’s first works to defy a clear sense of orientation—they have no clear top and bottom—and because of the melding

of techniques and media, namely silkscreen, pencil, acrylics and Day-Glo Paint. Warhol's process in these works, which enabled the printing of multiple images, involved transferring the photographs he had chosen and cropped to the mesh of a silk screen, then passing an inked squeegee over the mesh so that the image would print onto the canvas below.

Large and brightly-colored, the dark backgrounds of the prints might be said to compromise their cheerfulness, alluding to the transience of flowers on the one hand, but also to the violent images Warhol produced just before: the Death and Disaster series, the Most Wanted Men series and portraits of the recently dead Marilyn Monroe and recently widowed Jackie Kennedy. In fact, midway through the *Flowers* debut exhibition, Warhol added 42 silkscreened portraits of Jackie, drawn from press photographs of the assassination of JFK.

“LAND REALLY IS THE BEST ART.”

- ANDY WARHOL,
AMERICA, 1985, P. 169

Over the years the blooms recreated in *Flowers* have been identified alternatively, if incorrectly, as anemones, nasturtium and pansies. They actually represent hibiscus, which grow profusely at Selby Gardens, if not in Warhol's landscapes. Although the *Flowers* were reproduced and reprinted to the point of illegibility, as is the case with most of the artist's works, the source was something he copied: a photograph from the cover of *Modern Photography* magazine by its Editor-in-Chief, Patricia Caulfield. The subject is *Hibiscus fragilis* or Mandrinette, currently listed as “critical” on the red list of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, with only 36 wild specimens still extant around the world.

Flowers weren't a one-time fascination for Warhol. From his early commercial illustrations to later work from the mid-80s just before his untimely death, there are many examples of botanical imagery in the artist's body of work. Complementing the four hibiscus prints in our exhibition are two very different prints of *Poinsettias* originally made by Warhol as holiday cards for friends. On loan from the private collection of Sarasota art patron Flora Major, they evince, nearly 20 years after the 60s “Flower Power” movement, Warhol's long-lived preoccupation with nature.

When creating his *Flowers* in the 1960s, Warhol drew from the media revolution that exploded alongside revolutions in the streets of Chicago, Paris, Prague and Mexico City along with alternative cultures

informed by the space age, TV, the computer era, socialism, and sexual liberation it produced. But he also seems to have glorified the banal and superficial in ways that anticipate the triumph of mass culture and the waning of the intellectual. Do his impersonal images simply record the surface of our media-crazed culture, as detractors aver, or do they address issues of death, suffering, and commemoration, as enthusiasts claim? Is this art to consume in the seeming haste with which Warhol and his assistants churned it out or is it art for reflection? Perhaps both/and rather than either/or is the answer.

WARHOL & NATURE, PAST & PRESENT

Born Andrew Warhola, son of a Slovak-American coal miner in 1928, the self-styled Andy Warhol left his native Pittsburgh in 1949 for New York, straight out of Carnegie Tech (today Carnegie Mellon University). On the heels of a hugely successful career as a commercial artist, he established the Factory on East 47th Street in the heart of Manhattan.



Bushy rock rose at the Andy Warhol Preserve, Montauk (New York). ©Maria Terese Barbaccia

In 1972, together with film associate Paul Morrissey from the Factory, Warhol bought 15 acres of stony beach in Montauk at the tip of Long Island, NY. In the early 1980s he purchased another 40 acres of undeveloped land in Missouri Heights near Aspen, CO. Warhol hosted celebrity guests, including Jackie Onassis, Truman Capote, Mick Jagger and Dick Cavett, on his New York oceanfront property before gifting it to the Nature Conservancy some years before his death. It is now The Andy Warhol Preserve. In Colorado, where he went to ski, Warhol left the acreage wild, confessing to a reporter of *The Aspen Times*, “I'm not going to build on it, it's too pretty.” He even directed a foundation to support the preservation of urban parks. In short, Warhol was an advocate of conservancy.

EXPLORE THE FLORAL PLAYGROUND

For this exhibition, Warhol subsumes the garden much as his by now familiar images and formats have reconfigured our world. In the mansion: reproductions of historic photographs show us the Factory—entirely covered in aluminum foil and silver paint—and its stable of “superstars”—in dialogue with Warhol’s forays into nature; facsimiles of the artist’s preparatory sketches chart the evolution of the *Flowers* and reveal his signature grids; and select antiwar images from the sixties take us back to the time of “Flower Power.” In the conservatory and gardens: living displays emphasize the repetition, modular designs and seriality of Warhol’s work as well as the prominence of the hibiscus and poinsettia families on the grounds; and a food truck

replicates the “all-American” fare served at the Factory’s opening party, which, according to dealer Ivan Karp, “launched the sixties.”

A keynote lecture by the Curator will take place February 12. (see page 10)

Sources:

- Ric Burns, “Andy Warhol: A Documentary Film,” 2006
- Kelly A. Cresap, *Pop Trickster Fool: Warhol Performs Naivete*, 2004
- Thomas Crow, “Saturday Disasters: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol,” 1987
- Michael Lobel, *Andy Warhol Flowers*, 2012
- Matt Wbrican, “A View From the Archives,” *Warhol’s Nature*, 2015

A PLEA TO STOP THE PARTYING

In 1965 when Andy Warhol was electrifying New York at his workspace dubbed “The Factory,” not everyone was in favor of the escapades taking place there, including the late Alfred R. Goldstein of Sarasota and supporter of Selby Gardens’ exhibition series which bears his name.

On November 15 of that year Goldstein, president of Elk Realty in New York City, which owned The Factory, sent a letter to Warhol about parties being held at 231 East 47th Street. A portion of the letter read:

“We have been advised that you have been giving parties in the fourth floor space occupied by you. We understand that they are generally large parties and are held after usual office hours. We have found that your guests have left debris and litter in the public areas which you have never bothered to clean.”

Goldstein went on to remind Warhol that the indiscretions weren’t permitted in the building and violated his lease. Alas, parties at The Factory continued until 1968.

While this tale has been documented by many online publications in recent years, including *The Huffington Post*, Goldstein himself did not recall the letter when made aware of it last year.

“Oh, that was probably sent because there were these nuns that had a place in the building and they saw some things they didn’t want to see,” Goldstein said with a laugh during an interview.

ELK REALTY, INC.
1107 BROADWAY
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10010
AREA CODE 212
WATKINS 4-3560

November 15, 1965

Mr. Andy Warhol
231 East 47 Street
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Warhol:

We have been advised that you have been giving parties in the fourth floor space occupied by you. We understand that they are generally large parties and are held after usual office hours. We have found that your guests have left debris and litter in the public areas which you have never bothered to clean. Further, we feel that a congregation of the number of people such as you have had may be contrary to various applicable governmental rules and regulations and also might present a serious problem with the Fire Department regulations.

Your lease, of course, does not permit such use and occupancy and you hereby directed not to have any such parties in this building.

Very truly yours,

ELK REALTY, INC., Agents

Alfred R. Goldstein
President



Jean and Alfred Goldstein in 2012.