

ANDY WARHOL

Warhol in His Own Words: Statements (1963–87)

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.¹

I see everything that way, the surface of things, a kind of mental Braille. I just pass my hands over the surface of things.²

The reason I'm painting this way is that I want to be a machine, and I feel that whatever I do and do machine-like is what I want to do.³

I like boring things. I like things to be exactly the same over and over again.⁴

I've been quoted a lot as saying, "I like boring things." Well, I said it and I meant it. But that doesn't mean I'm not bored by them. Of course, what I think is boring must not be the same as what other people think is, since I could never stand to watch all the most popular action shows on TV, because they're essentially the same plots and the same shots and the same cuts over and over again. Apparently, most people love watching the same basic thing, as long as the details are different. But I'm just the opposite: if I'm going to sit and watch the same thing I saw the night before, I don't want it to be essentially the same—I want it to be exactly the same. Because the more you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel.⁵

* Andy Warhol, excerpts from "Warhol in His Own Words," untitled statements (1963–87) selected by Neil Printz and collected in Kynaston McShine, ed., *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective* (New York and Boston: Museum of Modern Art and Bullfinch Press/Little Brown, 1989), 457–67. By permission of Neil Printz, the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, and The Museum of Modern Art, New York. © 2012 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Excerpts from *Exposures* by Andy Warhol, © 1979 Andy Warhol Books, and excerpts from *America* by Andy Warhol, © 1985 Andy Warhol, both used by permission of The Wylie Agency LLC.

1. Gretchen Berg, "Andy: My True Story," *Los Angeles Free Press* (17 March 1967), 3. Reprinted from *East Village Other*.

2. Ibid.

3. G. R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters, Part I," *Art News* 62, no. 7 (November 1963): 26.

4. Read by Nicholas Love at Memorial Mass for Andy Warhol, St. Patrick's Cathedral, New York, 1 April 1987.

5. Andy Warhol and Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol '60s* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 50.



Andy Warhol, *Invisible Sculpture* at Area, New York, 1985. Art © 2012 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo © PATRICK MCMULLAN/PatrickMcMullan.com

I think of myself as an American artist: I like it here. I think it's so great. It's fantastic. I'd like to work in Europe but I wouldn't do the same things. I'd do different things. I feel I represent the U.S. in my art but I'm not a social critic. I just paint those objects in my paintings because those are the things I know best. I'm not trying to criticize the U.S. in any way, not trying to show up any ugliness at all. I'm just a pure artist, I guess. But I can't say if I take myself seriously as an artist. I just hadn't thought about it. I don't know how they consider me in print, though.⁶

I adore America and these are some comments on it. My image [*Storm Door*, 1960] is a statement of the symbols of the harsh, impersonal products and brash materialistic objects on which America is built today. It is a projection of everything that can be bought and sold, the practical but impermanent symbols that sustain us.⁷

What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.⁸

6. Berg, "Andy: My True Story," 3.

7. "New Talent U.S.A.," *Art in America* 50, no. 1 (1960): 42.

8. Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1975), 100–101.

Someone said that Brecht wanted everybody to think alike. I want everybody to think alike. But Brecht wanted to do it through Communism, in a way. Russia is doing it under government. It's happening here all by itself without being under a strict government; so if it's working without trying, why can't it work without being Communist? Everybody looks alike and acts alike, and we're getting more and more that way.⁹

Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Businessman or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kind of art. During the hippie era people put down the idea of business—they'd say "Money is bad," and "Working is bad," but making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.¹⁰

When I have to think about it, I know the picture is wrong. And sizing is a form of thinking, and coloring is too. My instinct about painting says, "If you don't think about it, it's right." As soon as you have to decide and choose, it's wrong. And the more you decide about, the more wrong it gets. Some people, they paint abstract, so they sit there thinking about it because their thinking makes them feel they're doing something. But my thinking never makes me feel I'm doing anything. Leonardo da Vinci used to convince his patrons that his thinking time was worth something—worth even more than his painting time—and that may have been true for him, but I know that my thinking time isn't worth anything. I only expect to get paid for my "doing" time.¹¹

I still care about people but it would be so much easier not to care. I don't want to get too close: I don't like to touch things, that's why my work is so distant from myself.¹²

If everybody's not a beauty, then nobody is.¹³

In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes.¹⁴

I don't feel I'm representing the main sex symbols of our time in some of my pictures, such as Marilyn Monroe or Elizabeth Taylor. I just see Monroe as just another person. As for whether it's symbolical to paint Monroe in such violent colors: it's beauty, and she's beautiful and if something's beautiful it's pretty colors, that's all. Or something. The Monroe picture

9. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?" 26.

10. *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 92.

11. *Ibid.*, 149.

12. Read by Nicholas Love (1 April 1987).

13. *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 62.

14. Andy Warhol, Kasper König, K. G. Pontus Hulten, and Olle Granath, eds., *Andy Warhol* (Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1968), n.p.

was part of a death series I was doing, of people who had died by different ways. There was no profound reason for doing a death series, no victims of their time; there was no reason for doing it all, just a surface reason.¹⁵

[On beginning the "death series":] I guess it was the big plane crash picture, the front page of a newspaper: 129 die. I was also painting the Marilyns. I realized that everything I was doing must have been Death. It was Christmas or Labor Day—a holiday—and every time you turned on the radio they said something like "4 million are going to die." That started it. But when you see a gruesome picture over and over again, it doesn't really have any effect.¹⁶

[On making Brillo boxes:] I did all the [Campbell's soup] cans in a row on a canvas, and then I got a box made to do them on a box, and then it looked funny because it didn't look real. I have one of the boxes here. I did the cans on the box, but it came out looking funny. I had the boxes already made up. They were brown and looked just like boxes, so I thought it would be great just to do an ordinary box.¹⁷

The farther west we drove [to California, fall 1963], the more Pop everything looked on the highways. Suddenly we all felt like insiders because even though Pop was everywhere—that was the thing about it, most people still took it for granted, whereas we were dazzled by it—to us, it was the new Art. Once you "got" Pop, you could never see a sign the same way again. And once you thought Pop, you could never see America the same way again. The moment you label something, you take a step—I mean, you can never go back again to seeing it unlabeled. We were seeing the future and we knew it for sure. We saw people walking around in it without knowing it, because they were still thinking in the past, in the references of the past. But all you had to do was know you were in the future, and that's what put you there. The mystery was gone, but the amazement was just starting.¹⁸

The Pop artists did images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in a split second—comics, picnic tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles—all the great modern things that the Abstract Expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all.¹⁹

When you think about it, department stores are kind of like museums.²⁰

15. Berg, "Andy: My True Story," 3.

16. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?" 60.

17. Glenn O'Brien, "Interview: Andy Warhol," *High Times* 24 (August 1977): 34.

18. *POPism*, 39–40.

19. *Ibid.*, 3.

20. Andy Warhol, *America* (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), 22.

The best atmosphere I can think of is film, because it's three-dimensional physically and two-dimensional emotionally.²¹

All my films are artificial, but then everything is sort of artificial. I don't know where the artificial stops and the real starts.²²

What we'd had to offer—originally, I mean—was a new, freer content and a look at real people, and even though our films weren't technically polished, right up through '76 the underground was one of the only places people could hear about forbidden subjects and see realistic scenes of modern life.²³

I think movies should appeal to prurient interests. I mean, the way things are going now—people are alienated from one another. Movies should—uh—arouse you. Hollywood films are just planned-out commercials. *Blue Movie* was real. But it wasn't done as pornography—it was an exercise, an experiment. But I really do think movies should arouse you, should get you excited about people, should be prurient.²⁴

Before I was shot, I always thought that I was more half-there than all-there—I always suspected that I was watching TV instead of living life. People sometimes say the way things happen in movies is unreal, but actually it's the way things happen to you in life that's unreal. The movies make emotions look so strong and real, whereas when things really do happen to you, it's like watching television—you don't feel anything. Right when I was being shot and ever since, I knew that I was watching television. The channels switch, but it's all television. When you're really involved with something, you're usually thinking about something else. When something's happening, you fantasize about other things. When I woke up somewhere—I didn't know it was at the hospital and that Bobby Kennedy had been shot the day after I was—I heard fantasy words about thousands of people being in St. Patrick's Cathedral praying and carrying on, and then I heard the word "Kennedy" and that brought me back to the television world again because then I realized, well, here I was, in pain.²⁵

The acquisition of my tape recorder really finished whatever emotional life I might have had, but I was glad to see it go. Nothing was ever a problem again, because a problem just meant a good tape, and when a problem transforms itself into a good tape it's not a problem any more. An interesting problem was an interesting tape. Everybody knew that and performed for the tape. You couldn't tell which problems were real and which problems were exaggerated for the tape. Better yet, the people telling you the problems couldn't decide any more if they were really having the problems or if they were just performing. During the 60s, I think,

21. *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 160.

22. Read by Nicholas Love (1 April 1987).

23. *POPism*, 280.

24. Letitia Kent, "Andy Warhol, Moviemaker: 'It's Hard to Be Your Own Script,'" *Vogue* 155 (March 1970): 204.

25. *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 91.

people forgot what emotions were supposed to be. And I don't think they've ever remembered. I think that once you see emotions from a certain angle you can never think of them as real again. That's what more or less has happened to me.²⁶

Interviews are like sitting in those Ford machines at the World's Fair that toured around while someone spoke a commentary. I always feel that my words are coming from behind me, not from me. The interviewer should just tell me the words he wants me to say and I'll repeat them after him. I think that would be so great because I'm so empty I just can't think of anything to say.²⁷

Now and then someone would accuse me of being evil—of letting people destroy themselves while I watched, just so I could film them and tape record them. But I don't think of myself as evil—just realistic. I learned when I was little that whenever I got aggressive and tried to tell someone what to do, nothing happened—I just couldn't carry it off. I learned that you actually have more power when you shut up, because at least that way people will start to maybe doubt themselves. When people are ready to, they change. They never do it before then, and sometimes they die before they get around to it. You can't make them change if they don't want to, just like when they do want to, you can't stop them.²⁸

A lot of people thought it was me everyone at the Factory was hanging around, that I was some kind of big attraction that everyone came to see, but that's absolutely backward: it was me who was hanging around everyone else. I just paid the rent, and the crowds came simply because the door was open. People weren't particularly interested in seeing me, they were interested in seeing each other. They came to see who came.²⁹

You really have Social Disease when you make all play work. The only reason to play hard is to work hard, not the other way around like most people think.³⁰

I suppose I have a really loose interpretation of "work," because I think that just being alive is so much work at something you don't always want to do. Being born is like being kidnapped. And then sold into slavery. People are working every minute. The machinery is always going. Even when you sleep.³¹

When I die I don't want to leave any leftovers. I'd like to disappear. People wouldn't say he died today, they'd say he disappeared. But I do like the idea of people turning into dust or

26. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

27. Berg, "Andy: My True Story," 3.

28. *POPism*, 108.

29. *Ibid.*, 74.

30. *Andy Warhol's Expositions* (New York: Andy Warhol Books/Grosset and Dunlap, 1979), 19.

31. *Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 96.

sand, and it would be very glamorous to be reincarnated as a big ring on Elizabeth Taylor's finger.³²

I never understood why when you died, you didn't just vanish, and everything could just keep going the way it was only you just wouldn't be there. I always thought I'd like my own tombstone to be blank. No epitaph, and no name. Well, actually, I'd like it to say "figment."³³

32. Read by Nicholas Love (1 April 1987).

33. *America*, 128–29.

* G. R. Swenson, excerpts from "The F-111: An Interview with James Rosenquist," in *Partisan Review* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 1965): 589–601. By permission of James Rosenquist/Licensed by VAGA, New York, NY.