

# a dream interview with **ANDY c. 1975** by andycox@TWDC.com

Andy walked into McDonalds wearing a platinum wig, dark glasses, chestnut DeNoyer velveteen jacket, Levis, boots by Berlutti di Priigi, Brooks Brothers shirt, red and gray Brooks Brothers tie, and a brown wool V-neck Yves Saint Laurent pull-over. He was definitely a head-turning sight. He joined me in the line at the counter. We both ordered a Filet O' Fish and a coke and I also ordered a large fries. We retired to a corner table and started to chat.

Description of attire from *Interview Magazine*, November 9, 1973, quoted in **Victor Bockris, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol***, Bantam 1989, p 277.

**INTERVIEWER: Andy, could you say something about why you wanted to meet at McDonalds ?**

There was a McDonalds opposite the Factory at 860 Broadway, where Andy sometimes went for a Filet o' Fish. See Bockris, op cit, p 283.

**ANDY:** The most beautiful thing in Tokyo is McDonalds. The most beautiful thing in Stockholm is McDonalds. The most beautiful thing in Florence is McDonalds. Peking and Moscow don't have anything beautiful yet.

Andy Warhol, ***THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol (From A to B and Back Again)***, Harvest, 1975, p 71. Moscow now has a McDonalds.

**It's good to see you looking so well. It's been a long time since the shooting; clearly a traumatic experience. How did it affect you ?**

Valerie Solanes shot Andy at the Factory on June 3, 1968.

Well, uh, gee...before I was shot, I always thought that I was more half-there than all-there--I always suspected I was watching TV instead of living life. People sometimes say that the way things happen in the movies is unreal, but actually it's the way that things happen to you in life that's unreal... Right when I was being shot and ever since, I knew that I was watching television. The channels switch, but it' s all television.

*Philosophy*, p. 91.

**I know you've always dreamed of having your own network TV show called Nothing Special. Could you tell me why this dream is important for you ?**

Andy knew all about hyperreality.

If you were the star of the biggest show on television and took a walk down an average American street one night while you were on the air, and if you looked through the windows and saw yourself on television in everybody's living room... Can you imagine how you would feel?

see Bockris, op cit, p. 314.

**So, if you're already watching TV, rather than living life, at least if you had your own TV show, you'd be able to watch yourself all the time rather than other people who might not interest you as much.**

***Andy Warhol's TV***, based on the *Interview* format, first aired in 1978 and ran for 9 years. In 1985 Andy appeared on the ***Love Boat***. "To Middle America, Andy Warhol was no longer a New York weirdo. He was a star." Bockris, p 336.

Gee, I guess so... I'd never thought of it that way.

**For now, though, you're heavily involved in making films. I'm interested in the topics you've chosen. *Flesh for Frankenstein* opened last summer to critical acclaim. I've heard it suggested that the film is a kind of acting out of your death demons. What was your role in the making of this film. Is it to any extent autobiographical?**

This question was suggested by a description of the film in Bockris, op cit, pp 273-275.

Oh, I don't know, I just go to the opening parties...

**What about the link between the Frankenstein myth and the merger of man and machine in the late 20th century?**

See my essay *Terminator 2 - Judgment Day - A Critical Dialog*, in this volume

The world would be easier to live in if we were all machines. It's nothing in the end anyway. It doesn't matter what anyone does.

Andy to the *New York Herald Tribune*, mid 60's, quoted in Bockris, op cit, p 106.

**Let's move on to your paintings. You're now doing mainly portraits of stars--I'd like to talk about that in a minute, but first can you tell me something about work such as your Campbell's soup cans?**

Andy's soup can paintings were first exhibited at the Ferus Gallery, Los Angeles in 1962. The series of 32 sold out for \$1000.

I just paint things I always thought were beautiful, things you see everyday and never think about... I just do it because I like it. I wanted to paint nothing. I was looking for something that was the essence of nothing, and that was it.

*Time*, May 11, 1962

**Henry Geldzahler said that the Campbell's Soup Can work is the *Nude Descending a Staircase* of pop art. What debt does pop art owe to Duchamp?**

To Aaron Fine, quoted in Bockris, op cit, p 115.

Who?

See Bockris, op cit, p 121.

**It has also been suggested that the repetition in your art is aimed to illuminate the banality of existence. Do you think pop art is...**

This question suggested by Bockris, op cit, p 94

No.

A "real" interview segment, c. 1963, quoted in *Andy Warhol: 1928-1987*, Prestel, 1993.

**What?**

No.

**Do you think pop art is...**

No. No, I don't

**OK, then. Andy, could you tell us something about how you approach your work?**

Oh, gee, sure... I don't think about making art, I just get it done. I let everyone else decide whether it's good or bad, whether they love it or hate it. While they're deciding, I make even more art. And I always go after the easiest thing, because if it's the easiest, for me it's usually the best.

*Philosophy*, p 83.

**How important is it for you to sell your work?**

Say you were going to buy a \$200,000 painting. I think you should take that money, tie it up and hang it on the wall. Then when someone visited you the first thing they would see is the money on the wall.

*Philosophy*, p 133

**So what you're saying is that expensive art is just a status symbol, just like money, so why not just display the money. Is art just another way of projecting an image?**

If I had \$200,000 to spend I wouldn't waste it on buying paintings, I'd go to Macy's and spend it all on Jockey shorts. The kind of image I would like to project is that I can wear a fresh pair of jockey's every day for the rest of my life without having to ever get them laundered. Buying is much more American than thinking, and I'm as American as they

On Andy's fascination with shopping, especially for Jockey shorts see *Philosophy*

come. But, to be honest, it's not the thing I want so much as the idea of the thing...

p 229 passim.

**Then, if it's just the *idea* of the thing, everything just comes down to advertising. Talking of which, I just read that advertising expenditure has risen to over \$50 per capita.**

See Bockris, op cit, p 51. Andy worked as a commercial artist in advertising from 1952 to about 1962.

I think they should take all the money they spend on advertising and hand each person the equivalent in underwear.

I'm certain that Andy must have said this. In the 80's, Andy would appear in TV ads for Sony and Coca Cola, among others.

**It seems that your work and that of the other pop artists like Lichtenstein and Oldenburg fits right into the current Keynesian economic paradigm of consumption rather than production being the key to economic growth. And, to go further, pop art is so much part of this economic ideology that it has lost all potential to critique the system; all it can do is advertise it...**

This question is the basic premise of the book **Pop Art and Consumer Culture**. I thought that Andy might like the chance to reply. James B. Twitchell sees the merger of "art" and advertising as having the positive benefit of the collapsing cultural hierarchies. (**ADCULT USA**, Columbia University Press, New York, 1996)

During the hippie era people put down the idea of business--they'd say that money is bad and working is bad, but making money is art and working is art and good business the best art.

*Philosophy*, p 92.

**Does pop art then, lack the transcendent ideals of modernism? You know all that stuff about art giving people something to contemplate that will help them transcend their current circumstances.**

The idea for this question came from Robert Hughes' rant against Andy in his 1982 essay **The Rise of Andy Warhol**, in Brian Wallis, ed., *Art After Modernism - Rethinking Representation*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984.

Oh gosh, I don't know, I guess I'd have to agree with that. I mean, you just never know with people. You just never know what they'll like, what you should do for them.

*Philosophy*  
How can an artist know what people want?

**Last year you did that magnificent huge installation of Mao wallpaper and Mao silkscreens in Paris at the Musée Galleria. What did this work mean to you? Are you suggesting that there's really no difference between propaganda and art and between art and advertising.**

Andy silkscreened the image from Mao's **Little Red Book**.

What does it matter anyway? If people like it that's fine. Who am I to say what's what? We did a film called the Life of Jaunita Castro based on the diaries of Fidel Castro's sister, but it didn't mean anything. It was just a lot of fun. It could have been anybody's diaries. We just happened to come across those.

The film was shot in 1965. Based on a thorough review of Andy's philosophy, I truly believe he could have said this.

**OK, to get back to the portraits we mentioned earlier. I've heard that you're now working almost exclusively to commission to paint portraits of superstars. Some people have called you a sell-out, but I think it was David Bourdon who said that you transform your sitters into glamorous apparitions, presenting their faces as you think they should be remembered. So are the sitters important to you, or are you just doing it for the fame and the money?**

Oh, no. My sitters are very important to me. For example, Liz Taylor has changed my life: now, I too, have my own hairdressers. I've taken my business manager and my photographer and my redactor and my social secretary and made them all hairdressers.

By late 1974, Andy's celebrity portrait business was bringing about \$1 million per year. Each canvas cost \$25,000. Bockris, op cit, p 284.

Andy first took a Polaroid of the "sitter", blew up the image and then silkscreened it onto canvas using paint. For discussion of Liz Taylor's hairdressers see *Philosophy*, p 169.

**Andy, what's your most memorable encounter with a superstar?**

Oh, that's easy. I remember one time in, Rome. I really like Rome because it's a kind of museum, just like Bloomingdale's is a museum. Anyway, we were waiting in the lobby of the hotel when Ursula Andress appeared at the top of the stairs. She looked beautiful. She was talking to her hairdresser. I could tell they were talking about her hair. He was making gestures around it as if he were giving her ideas. It was a very glamorous scene. Although it must be difficult to be a superstar, because you'd want to look like the photograph of you, and you can't ever look that way. And so you start to copy the photograph.

*Philosophy*, p 170.

**Wow, that does sound like a magical experience. I've always loved Ursula, especially in Gold Finger, or was it Dr. No, when Bond meets her as she walks out of the sea. That also was a very glamorous scene. But getting back to the portraits. David Bourdon says that they are not so much documents of the present as they are icons awaiting a future...**

Whatever.

See Bockris, op cit, p 285.

One thing I miss is the time when America had big dreams about the future. Now, we all seem to think it's going to be just like it is now, but worse.

Andy later included this statement in his book **America**, Harper and Row, 1985.

**So you seem to be quite pessimistic about things in general.**

Oh, I don't let anything get me down. Sometimes people let the same problem worry them for years when they should just say, so what. That's one of my favorite things to say. My mother didn't love me. So what. My husband won't ball me. So what. I'm a success, but I'm still alone. So what. I don't know how I made it through so many years before I learned how to do that trick. It took a long time for me to learn it, but once you do, you never forget.

*Philosophy*, p 112.

**Thanks, Andy. Sorry to take so much of your time.**

Thanks, but you were much too serious--it was a nightmare.