

## **"I have no memory" – Andy Warhol's documentation strategies and obsession with collecting**

Curated by Jan Winkelmann

June 10 – July 29, 2006

"I have no memory" – this remark by Andy Warhol sounds like a basis for legitimising his passion for collecting and his almost compulsive attempt to document the sphere in which he lived and worked. In the summer of 2002, the exhibition "*Gee... how glamorous*" – *Andy Warhol: Stars and Theatricality*, curated by Jan Winkelmann and shown at the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig, looked at the major theatrical mechanisms in Warhol's work. This follow-up to that exhibition deals with the documentation and collecting strategies in Warhol's oeuvre. Warhol was fascinated by the artificiality of fame, glitter and glamour his whole life long and to the same degree he was enthralled by the idea of the (supposedly) 'neutral documentary record'.

As early as the *Death and Disaster* series of the early 1960s, which was based on newspaper photos of accidents and catastrophes, a strategy of appropriation (of existing pictures that have already been reproduced) becomes clear. Warhol used it to address the effect of the media on perceptions of reality at that time.

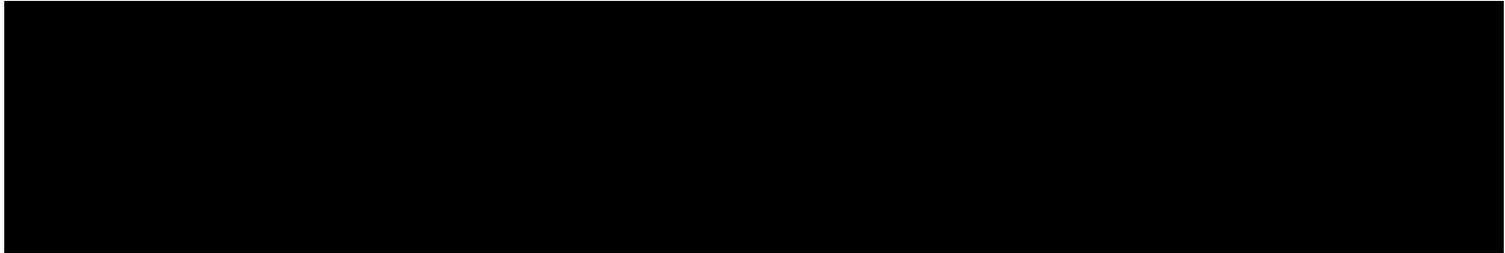
Between the two poles of personal involvement and dispassionate documentation, many of Warhol's early films were made as monotonous one-to-one representations of everyday actions, often at considerable length. Among them were: the six-hour-long film *Sleep*, which shows a sleeping friend of the artist; *Henry Geldzahler*, of a cigar being smoked over a period of one-and-a-half hours; *Blow Job*; and the *220 Screen Tests*, which were four-minute portraits of almost motionless people, most of them Warhol's friends or acquaintances, or visitors to The Factory. In all of these films, the viewer's experience of time is intensified by the use of the fixed camera angle and the length and monotony of the actions shown.

In addition to film as a medium, Warhol used a tape recorder in his almost manic drive to document things. He recorded hundreds of hours of conversations and telephone calls. He was also constantly taking photographs wherever he went. As a kind of 'visual diary', he took thousands of photos, which from the 1970s onwards also served in some cases as the bases of silkscreen prints. The magazine *Interview*, published by Warhol, constitutes a kind of chronicle and portrayal of the American celebrity world of the 1970s and 1980s.

In 1974, Warhol began to collect everything that he could not film, photograph, or draw, in what he called *Time Capsules*. By the time of his death, 610 of these *Time Capsules* had been created. They mostly contained photos, newspapers, magazines, fan mail, business and personal correspondence, exhibition catalogues, telephone messages and invitations to dinners, poetry readings, exhibitions and parties, among many other items. They give a further incomparable glimpse into Warhol's world.

Finally, between 1976 and 1986, Warhol would phone his personal secretary, Pat Hackett, each morning to dictate his experiences from the previous day in detail. This contemporary record, several hundred pages long, was published posthumously in 1989 under the title *The Andy Warhol Diaries*. It provides a deep insight into the last decade of Warhol's life.

All of these 'instruments' served Andy Warhol to document the sphere in which he lived and worked. This was not done merely in the conventional sense of a 'biographical record', however, but also adopting the more distanced role of an observer and chronicler of his time and ultimately as a kind of obsessive, personal appropriation of the world. Some of the 'results' that he achieved in this way



provided him with the raw material for visual artistic works, but for the most part no further use was made of them by Warhol himself. Today they make up a store of material that owing to its multiplicity and extent is almost impossible to sift through, but which nevertheless constitutes a complex record of Warhol's life and his social environment in the form of all sorts of different paraphernalia.

Last but not least, Warhol's own collections offer a unique insight into his passion for collecting. After his death, they were sold in a ten-day long auction at Sotheby's, bringing in a total of over 25 million US dollars.

In recent decades, there have been countless themed Warhol exhibitions, but almost all of them have tried to approach the artist in the classical way, by concentrating on certain subjects, or groups of work. Both "*Gee... how glamorous*" and "*I have no memory*" make it possible to look at Warhol's work in a different way, from a contemporary perspective. The aforementioned hypothesis is illustrated by documentary photos, books, catalogues, audio and visual recordings and other archive material. The overall presentation – consciously doing entirely without original works by Andy Warhol – furthermore investigates the value and aura of the 'original'.

The gallery will be closed from July 31 – August 26 for the summer break.

Opening hours: Tuesday to Saturday 11 am – 6 pm.