



# Andy Warhol biography

## SYNOPSIS

Born on August 6, 1928, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Andy Warhol was a successful magazine and ad illustrator who became a leading artist of the 1960s Pop art movements. He ventured into a wide variety of art forms, including performance art, filmmaking, video installations and writing, and controversially blurred the lines between fine art and mainstream aesthetics. Warhol died on February 22, 1987, in New York City.

## EARLY LIFE

Born Andrew Warhola on August 6, 1928, in the neighborhood of Oakland in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Andy Warhol's parents were Slovakian immigrants. His father, Ondrej Warhola, was a construction worker, while his mother, Julia Warhola, was an embroiderer. They were devout Byzantine Catholics who attended mass regularly, and maintained much of their Slovakian culture and heritage while living in one of Pittsburgh's Eastern European ethnic enclaves.

At the age of 8, Warhol contracted Chorea -- also known as St. Vitus's Dance -- a rare and sometimes fatal disease of the nervous system that left him bedridden for several months. It was during these months, while Warhol was sick in bed, that his mother, herself a skillful artist, gave him his first drawing lessons. Drawing soon became Warhol's favorite childhood pastime. He was also an avid fan of the movies, and when his mother bought him a camera at the age of 9 he took up photography as well, developing film in a makeshift darkroom he set up in their basement.

Warhol attended Holmes Elementary school and took the free art classes offered at the Carnegie Institute (now the Carnegie Museum of Art) in Pittsburgh. In 1942, at the age of 14, Warhol again suffered a tragedy when his father passed away from a jaundiced liver. Warhol was so upset that he could not attend his father's funeral, and he hid under his bed throughout the wake. Warhol's father had recognized his son's artistic talents, and in his will he dictated that his life savings go toward Warhol's college education. That same year, Warhol began at Schenley High School, and upon graduating, in 1945, he enrolled at the Carnegie Institute for Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) to study pictorial design.

## ARTISTIC CAREER

When he graduated from college with his Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1949, Warhol moved to New York City to pursue a career as a commercial artist. It was also at this time that he dropped the "a" at the end of his last name to become Andy Warhol. He landed a job with *Glamour* magazine in September, and went on to become one of the most successful commercial artists of the 1950s. He won frequent awards for his uniquely whimsical style, using his own blotted line technique and rubber stamps to create his drawings.

In the late 1950s, Warhol began devoting more attention to painting, and in 1961, he debuted the concept of "pop art" -- paintings that focused on mass-produced commercial goods. In 1962, he exhibited the now-iconic paintings of Campbell's soup cans. These small canvas works of everyday consumer products created a major stir in the art world, bringing both Warhol and pop art into the national spotlight for the first time.

British artist Richard Hamilton described pop art as "popular, transient, expendable, low cost, mass-produced, young, witty, sexy, gimmicky, glamorous, big business." As Warhol himself put it, "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."

Warhol's other famous pop paintings depicted Coca-cola bottles, vacuum cleaners and hamburgers. He also painted celebrity portraits in vivid and garish colors; his most famous subjects include Marilyn Monroe, Elizabeth Taylor, Mick Jagger and Mao Zedong. As these portraits gained fame and notoriety, Warhol began to receive hundreds of commissions for portraits from socialites and celebrities. His portrait "Eight Elvises" eventually resold for \$100 million in 2008, making it one of the most valuable paintings in world history.

In 1964, Warhol opened his own art studio, a large silver-painted warehouse known simply as "The Factory." The Factory quickly became one of New York City's premier cultural hotspots, the scene of lavish parties attended by the city's wealthiest socialites and celebrities. Warhol, who clearly relished his celebrity, became a fixture at infamous New York City nightclubs like Studio 54 and Max's Kansas City. Commenting on celebrity fixation -- his own and that of the public at large -- Warhol observed, "more than anything people just want stars."

In the 1970s, Warhol began expanding into new artistic mediums. He put together his first book, *Andy Warhol's Index*, in 1967, and released several other titles such as *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (From A to B and Back Again) and *Exposures* in the 1970s. Warhol also experimented extensively with video art, producing more than 60 films

## QUICK FACTS

**NAME:** Andy Warhol  
**OCCUPATION:** Painter, Filmmaker  
**BIRTH DATE:** August 06, 1928  
**DEATH DATE:** February 22, 1987  
**EDUCATION:** Carnegie Institute (Carnegie Museum of Art), Schenley High School, Carnegie Institute for Technology (Carnegie Mellon University)  
**PLACE OF BIRTH:** Oakland, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
**PLACE OF DEATH:** New York, New York  
**FULL NAME:** Andrew Warhola  
**AKA:** Andy Warhola  
**AKA:** Andy Warhol  
**AKA:** Andrew Warhol

## BEST KNOWN FOR

Illustrator Andy Warhol was one of the most prolific and popular artists of his time, using both avant-garde and highly commercial sensibilities.

during his career. Some of his most famous films include *Sleep*, which depicts poet John Giorno sleeping for six hours, and *Eat*, which shows a man eating a mushroom for 45 minutes.

Warhol also worked in sculpture and photography, and in the 1980s, he moved into television, hosting *Andy Warhol's TV* and *Andy Warhol's Fifteen Minutes* on MTV.

## DEATH AND LEGACY

Warhol died on February 22, 1987, at the age of 58. His personal life has been the subject of much debate and consideration. He is widely believed to have been a gay man, and his art was often infused with homoerotic imagery and motifs. However, he claimed that he remained a virgin for his entire life.

Warhol's life and work simultaneously satirized and celebrated materiality and celebrity. On the one hand, his paintings of distorted brand images and celebrity faces could be read as a critique of what he viewed as a culture obsessed with money and celebrity. On the other hand, Warhol's focus on consumer goods and pop-culture icons, as well as his own taste for money and fame, suggest a life in celebration of the very aspects of American culture that his work criticized. Warhol spoke to this apparent contradiction between his life and work in his book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, writing that "making money is art and working is art, and good business is the best art."

---

### How to Cite this Page: Andy Warhol

#### APA Style

Andy Warhol. (2013). *The Biography Channel website*. Retrieved 12:23, Oct 10, 2013, from <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875>.

#### Harvard Style

*Andy Warhol*. [Internet]. 2013. The Biography Channel website. Available from: <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875> [Accessed 10 Oct 2013].

#### MLA Style

"Andy Warhol." 2013. *The Biography Channel website*. Oct 10 2013, 12:23 <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875>.

#### MHRA Style

"Andy Warhol," *The Biography Channel website*, 2013, <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875> [accessed Oct 10, 2013].

#### Chicago Style

"Andy Warhol," *The Biography Channel website*, <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875> (accessed Oct 10, 2013).

#### CBE/CSE Style

Andy Warhol [Internet]. The Biography Channel website; 2013 [cited 2013 Oct 10] Available from: <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875>.

#### Bluebook Style

Andy Warhol, <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875> (last visited Oct 10, 2013).

#### AMA Style

Andy Warhol. The Biography Channel website. 2013. Available at: <http://www.biography.com/people/andy-warhol-9523875>. Accessed Oct 10, 2013.