

Andy Warhol. The bomb

curated by Gianluca Ranzi and Doris Von Drathen
Vecchiato New Art Galleries - Padua
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After the great success due to the exhibition about Chinese artists and the recent tribute to the Nouveau Réalisme, the **Vecchiato New Art Galleries** is back with an international event, a mass-media event worthy of an artist who is the spokesman for the society of contemporary image: Andy Warhol.

Already in 1995 the gallery located at piazzetta San Nicolò had presented a solo exhibition on the artist and now, ten years later, presents again his versatile and sometimes bizarre universe, suspended in-between provocation and superficiality.

The exhibition **Andy Warhol. The Bomb**, curated by Gianluca Ranzi and Doris Von Drathen, offers a smart selection of thirty works, rigorously certified by the Andy Warhol Foundation, with **unique samples of serigraphs** and a **sculpture**. The exhibition retraces the important moments within the artistic career of Warhol, from the 1960s to the 1980s.

As the ultimate icon of modern times, Warhol is the most effective representative of a rampant as well as very brazen image of mass culture, which is plagiarized by the dollar symbol, corroded by boxed detergents, which mutters slangs and chews canned soups, peremptorily combined with the fizzy taste of Coca-Cola, or even more which is caught amazed by the umpteenth victim of a car accident or of war, or is filmed while frightened of the death penalty.

In this regards the known serigraphs appear, famous "supermarket icons", which recall the clever strategies of successful advertising themes, such as the **Campbell's soup can shopping bag** (mixed techniques on paper), **Velvet underground** (serigraph, cover for the record 'Andy Warhol's Velvet Underground & Nico') or the American best talisman, the known **Dollar Bill** (serigraph on canvas), contemporary hieroglyphic of the very politically correct.

The intuitive genius of Warhol has been to attentively build a new identity around the concept of the artist, meant as a machine for mass production, who endlessly repeats the same operation, without asking himself why. As for this it is well-fitting the quote: "isn't life a series of images that change as they repeat themselves?". And also: "repetition adds up reputation".

From the first series of Campbell cans to the adoption of serigraphy it is, indeed, a short step, interjected by the further (ironical) reflection on the role of creativity in the era of mechanical reproducibility. Under suggestion of his assistant, he adopts such a technique after several attempts of "mechanization" of his way of working (through the use of projectors, rubber and wooden stamps, etc). The first serigraph paintings belong to the series where the artist uses print to endlessly multiply the starting image, drawn by hand. Taking hint from a "very American" and quite "popular" invention within the "high" side of art, in a cleverly subtle way Warhol elaborates an explosive reflection on the concepts of copy and original, opposing homogenization to the necessary expressivity. Adopting a production line-like working process (which allowed him to complete a painting in four minutes), he stimulates the game with the unexpected, something that just happened and the "mistake" that frustrates reproducibility, making line images always different one from the other, paradoxically original.

To these works it must be added a piece of exceptional value: a never seen before sculpture of 1967, the only large-sized one made by the artist, named 'Bomb' (spray painted bomb model), inserted in the general catalogue 'Andy Warhol. Paintings and Sculptures, 1964-1969', suitable example of the innate pop culture, which is associated to the three-dimensional. The work holds a curious anecdote, as it should have been offered as the prize of a contest sponsored by the New York Magazine, subsequently published by The New York World - Journal Tribune. On 22 January 1967 in an article named "Come with me bomb", Ralph Schoenstein invited his readers to take part in a competition in designing a water bomb on these terms: "We celebrate the end of the water shortage going back to the greatest kids weapon, the only one that a peaceful man could see drop on Hanoi, considering

that the civilians of Ho could never be injured by a shower". To the readers he offered as the first prize an U.S. Air Force bomb, personally decorated by Andy Warhol. To testimony the occasion there is a lively photograph portraying the artist hugging his silver handiwork, which was published together with the article by Schoenstein.

In addition the exhibition proposes a fine gallery of **famous portraits**, in Vogue cover style, of Enzo Cucchi, Karen Kain, Rauschenbusch, Jean Paul Barbier, Joan Collins, Mildred Scheel, Karen Lerner, Natalie Sparber, Charles and Diana. They are all famous faces of that mundane New York that created pop art, together with the related jet set made up of fashion, parties, encounters and brief appearances. The customers themselves provided Warhol with the photographs that he used for the portraits so reducing as much as possible the artist's intervention, as per Warhol's very words: "the maximum of the product with the minimum of subjectivity". This abstract quality of the image, which gives up psychological depth, is obvious in the authoritative frontal view of the portrait of Paul Barbier, in the dampen elegance of the one of Karen Kain, or in the fine lines that define the face of Jacques Bellini. Another relevant work is 'Joseph Beuys in Memoriam': an incentive to a face-to-face confrontation between the two artists, which offers an effective key to interpretation in order to understand the ideology at the base of art during the second postwar and the differences between American and European art in the same period. If one embodies indeed the faith in the American success, Beuys shows the crisis of conscience typical of the European intellectuals, derived from the weight of a bulky tradition in favour of the American dream.

In addition to the artistic side, Warhol clearly anticipated the system of the present media society, where life becomes fiction and also the other way around, which nowadays becomes evidence in a society of realities and the myth of tv-appearance, a society that the artist was able to reveal half a century before, demonstrating the possibility of building a new system of power based on the abuse of visibility.

To the works on display are added some evenings of discussion on memorable **underground films**, 'I a Man', 'My Hustler', 'Blow Job', 'Empire', 'Kiss', 'Mario Banana', 'The Chelsea Girls', 'Lonesome Cowboys', 'Nude Restaurant', 'Vinyl/the Velvet Underground & Nico'.

A series of seven limited edition photographs by **Fabrizio Garghetti** accompany the exhibition, taken during the exhibition "L'Ultima Cena/the Last Supper" by Warhol which took place at the Credito Valtellinese Gallery at the Palazzo delle Stelline in Milan in 1987.

On the occasion a catalogue is published by Vecchiato New Art Galleries with all the works on display.