PREFACE

KLAUS BIESENBACH

"Andy Warhol: Motion Pictures" was a touring exhibition, beginning in 2004, that brought Andy Warhol's then lesser-known *Screen Tests* and non-narrative black-and-white films into the context of the museum. After traveling internationally from Kunst-Werke Berlin to Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, Miami, Moscow, and Prague, it returned to its origins at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 2010. While working on these shows, I kept noticing that the highly experimental nature of these works did not prevent them from striking a personal, even an intimate note amongst both visitors and museum employees. In the publication that accompanied the show, I shared a personal recollection:

"As a child I often visited friends of my parents, who had a candle in the shape of the Empire State Building in their living room cabinet. For many years I avoided taking a closer look, believing it to be indecent. Only years later, as a teenager, and knowing something about the building, did I realize what that ominous—and already long-gone—object actually represented.... The building's prominence motivated Warhol to take its portrait like a star, like a person. For eight hours, he focused the camera on the skyscraper for *Empire*, depicting it in a changing range of light situations. According to Warhol, 'It's an eight hour hard on. 'It's so beautiful. The lights come on and stars come out.'"

Exactly twenty years later, "Andy Warhol. Velvet Rage and Beauty" continues these explorations. The exhibition at Neue Nationalgalerie Berlin brings together some of the other lesser-known intimate bodies of work in Warhol's oeuvre.

Warhol began drawing his male classmates at a very early age. Despite the political and social climate in which he grew up and came of age, his drawings, photographs, paintings, and films continued to search for an ideal of male beauty. Perhaps it was a beauty he himself did not possess; perhaps it was a beauty he desired to embody. Definitely, it was a beauty he desired in his partners, but also more generally in his friends and collaborators. From the late 1940s until his untimely death in the 1980s, Warhol's pursuit of perfection, of the beauty of the male body he desired, often led him to create doubles. He was a double in and of himself—with and without the wig—in private and as a public persona. Warhol was also attracted to a certain doubleness in look-alike "superstars" such as Edie Sedgwick. Moreover, two of his boyfriends had grown up with an identical twin. Yet none of it ever seemed to be enough. The duality, multiplicity, and seriality of his work—images repeated over and over and over again—can be read as a record of never finding satisfaction. They point to a state of restlessness, always wanting more, constantly photographing and depicting, taking stock of beautiful faces and bodies, picturing them in detail, part by part, and reassembling them again in multitudes.

Warhol struggled to accept his own body, even as a child. As soon as he could, he sought to alter it by having plastic surgery and replacing his vanishing hair with a wig. The brutal attack on his life by Valerie Solanas in 1968 took away what his lovers had once described as a remarkably beautiful body, turning it into a stitched-together, fragmented, scarred self that literally needed to be kept under wraps, held together by bandages for the remainder of his life. He often said that if he ever went back to the hospital again, he would die there. He was proven right in 1987 when a gallbladder infection brought him back for the last time. Dying at the age of 58, in the prime of his life and at the height of his production, he left behind complex bodies of work which, unfinished though they may be, are so rich that there is still much to be discovered about an artist we presume to know all too well.

"Each Man Kills the Thing He Loves" as Jeanne Moreau sings in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's masterpiece *Querelle* from 1982. Warhol was obsessed with this movie, with Fassbinder and, of course, its protagonist, Brad Davis. He also designed the movie's poster. "Each Man Kills the Thing He Loves" sounds like a premonition or a description of an era that was just beginning. The imminent AIDS crisis, which would kill more than 40 million people worldwide, seemed to reaffirm older links between death and gay desire. Gayness had long been linked to death by being considered sinful, by its association with grounds for capital punishment, by sending gay "felons" like Oscar Wilde to labor camps, or through the outright murder of men like Pasolini. The close associations between death and queerness have only recently begun to be lifted from the community. But Andy Warhol died in a prejudiced, homophobic world that we hope is forever in the past. "Andy Warhol. Velvet Rage and Beauty" celebrates the freedom to define our own ideals of beauty and desire, the freedom of expression, and the ability to love and desire freely.

This exhibition at the Neue Nationalgalerie takes a new look at bodies of work that have never before been brought together on such a large scale. Many of these works have also never been viewed together comprehensively, despite depicting topics that were central throughout Warhol's life and artistic practice: the search for an ideal beauty, and the endless drawings, films, and paintings made in pursuit of that beauty, in order to depict it, and maybe even aspire to it.

Over the last two years, to prepare for this show, I conducted a series of informal conversations with some of the world's foremost experts on Warhol's life and work. At the outset, I envisioned an exhibition with the title "Drella," one of Warhol's nicknames—a portmanteau of Dracula and Cinderella—as a prompt to bring together the queer, fluid, drag, vulnerable, and other lesser-known versions of Warhol. During the conversations and the accompanying research, the exhibition concept developed, and the title changed along with it.

Its new title, "Andy Warhol. Velvet Rage and Beauty," pays homage to *The Velvet Rage: Overcoming the Pain of Growing Up Gay in a Straight Man's World*, a groundbreaking book by Alan Downs from 2005 that describes the feeling of living as a gay man in a predominantly heterosexual world. The exhibition and this catalogue seek to understand the historical context and personal circumstances behind these bodies of work and the challenges their production and presentation presented to an artist with an Eastern Catholic background who, even as an adult, lived not only in a deeply repressed society but also just upstairs from his mother's basement apartment.

Right now, in 2024 in Berlin, this exhibition seems possible. But even during its preparation, we were often asked if we were embarrassed or uncomfortable about showing these works so publicly. We responded by reminding skeptics that all the images in the exhibition are works of art, works that possess the magic that can be found throughout the legacy of one of the twentieth century's most important and fascinating artists.

The exhibition is presented in the main hall of the Mies building—at center stage where it belongs. A section in the downstairs galleries features lower light levels that lend themselves to film and projected works. In our world of seemingly ubiquitous online porn, it is unimaginable that movie theaters used to exist where X-rated movies were shown to large audiences. Every viewer was in the presence of other viewers, in the open, but in a very private state of mind. With a nod to this unique balance of public space and private feelings, which could be found in many parts of the Manhattan that Warhol inhabited, Neue Nationalgalerie has installed a series of small private theaters with vintage theater furniture in the lower-level part of the exhibition. These create a social but somewhat sheltered atmosphere to experience the films, which are projected at a larger-than-life scale as they were originally intended to be seen. As a whole, the exhibition is united by the artist's pursuit and depiction of timeless beauty.

My co-curators and I are endlessly grateful to some of Warhol's contemporaries, friends, companions, and teammates. We also owe a great debt of gratitude to curatorial colleagues, scholars, and writers who shared their insights with us.

Ever since my first inspiring and encouraging conversation with Joel Wachs from The Warhol Foundation. I can not thank him and the whole team at The Warhol Foundation enough, especially Michael Hermann and Maria Murguia!

One of the unique moments, in the preparation of this show, was watching the solar eclipse with the team of the Foundation while discussing the last changes of the publication and exhibition design.

We would also like to thank all of our lenders and especially our conversation partners—including Jessica Beck, Peter Brant, Bob Colacello, Vincent Fremont, Mario Codognato, Jeffrey Deitch, Keith Fox, Blake Gopnik, Wayne Koestenbaum, Aaron Levi Garvey, Amber Morgan, Patrick Moore, Maria Murguia, Alberto Mugrabi, Neil Printz, Gregor Quack, Gregory Pierce, Rob Roth, Donna De Salvo, Diana Widmaier Picasso, Patti Smith, and many others—for helping us as a team to reflect on our own ideas and dare to ask questions that are not as obvious as they may appear at first. A special thank you also goes to the invaluable editorial eye of Bettina Funcke. Understanding these dialogues as historical sources in their own right, the book preserves their conversational, even colloquial tone and opts to largely forego introductions or footnotes.

Last year, I visited The Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, and I want to thank the whole team there for allowing me such incredible access and giving me invaluable guidance, insights, and advice, especially Amber Morgan, Greg Pierce, Patrick Seymour, Marissa Arndt, Matthew Gray, Rikke Foulke, Ann Ordiway, Katie Briski, Erin Parks, Rachel Baron-Horn, Dan Law, Christian Lockerman.

In my personal view this exhibition is such a close collaboration with The Warhol Museum that I cannot overemphasize my gratitude to them. The team at The Warhol Museum were the most knowledgeable conversation partners and helped realize many exhibition ideas through making so many loans possible. I want to thank Lisa Botti and Nikola Richolt for forming such a close and encouraging curatorial team with me, especially because on my own, I would still have had too much hesitation and internalized shame to exhibit all these works in the glass hall of the Mies Museum, "out" there in the open. During the conceptual exhibition preparations, the walls of my office, which is quite public, were filled with print outs of works in the exhibition. Sometimes visitors would take photos of the visual evidence of the research through the large glass windows from the sculpture garden. It was interesting to see how guests from all walks of life looked at the more than two hundred small-but-explicit depictions on these walls. It is only thanks to Lisa and Nikola that I did not lose the courage to turn those reproductions into the presence of artworks upstairs.

We hope this exhibition will broaden perspectives on the art of Andy Warhol. We also hope, conversely, that sensitivity to his longing for an ideal beauty will also have an impact on the reception of his Marilyns and Elvises, his Flower paintings, and all the other works that made his fortune and also contributed to his status as one of the most successful and talked-about artists of our time. Our greatest hope, finally, is that this exhibition feels empowering to all kinds of beauties, in all their fluidities and shapes, and encourages everybody to embrace who they truly want to be.