

Andy Warhol

Marilyn Monroe (Twenty Times), 1962

Firstly Andy Warhol reduces Marilyn Monroe's famous face to an abstract feature, graphic signs and colour fields which he then uses to compose decorative strips, like arabesque patterns on a gold background. To achieve this the American artist's first step is to select the photo: one that Gene Corman took of Monroe to advertise *Niagara*, the 1953 film that launched her career. Then Warhol executes a kind of surgical removal of the star's body from just under the base of her neck, cropping also the space around her hair. It is the photographic equivalent of the zoom used in film to focus viewers' attention on the face. Framed by her full hairstyle, the resulting head shows all of Marilyn's most famous attributes: platinum blond hair, her full, red mouth, her made-up eyes with the heavy lids. The artist chooses saturated, unnatural colours, from the acid green of her eyes and dress to the red, almost purple of her skin. Finally, the serial arrangement and unreal colours make the resulting vision a kind of obsession.

The icon thus exhibited seems menaced and overwhelmed by the black marks accrued on purpose during the process of silk-screen printing. In this way Marilyn's multiplied visages become wasted images, worn-out by time, just like advertising billboards faded by sunlight or newspaper sheets trampled underfoot. America's most famous actress is proposed in a corroded view, as if her time is already over, as if the bright and shiny glamour photograph is suddenly changed into absurd and deriding souvenir snapshots.

Warhol devoted many years of his career to investigating the idols of everyday life; he elaborated the celebrity faces and bodies that almost seemed 'possessed' by the public who have seen these figures hundreds of times. The artist's process of repetition in portraits doesn't serve to confirm authenticity but rather to create disorientation. Are so many Marylins still Marilyn? And which, among all the ones represented, is the real one?

Around the time this portrait was made, the actress died at the age of thirty-six. An event fully in keeping with the artist's final, underlying and dramatic meaning, as he openly stated during that period, «I realized that no matter what I was doing it had to be death.» Warhol executed many portraits of Marilyn during the 1960s, experimenting with different colours and backgrounds, with contrasting unnatural, sometimes violent tones. He played on the juxtaposition of positive and negative, light and dark, ex-

ploiting all the mechanical effects made available by silk-screening technique. The result is a compulsive collection of Marylins, a vast number of alien masks, ever farther from the original which, however, remains perfectly present and therefore disquieting.

Fig. 1 Andy Warhol, drawn lines to mark the cuts for his silk-screen image taken from the *Niagara* film poster.



Fig. 2 Andy Warhol, *Marilyn Monroe (Twenty Times)*, 1962. Mixed media on canvas, 190x 110 cm. Private collection.

