

POPism

Andy Warhol, a painter and graphic artist, also produced a significant body of film work including the famous *Chelsea Girls*. Equally well known in the late sixties and early seventies as resident in his studio, the Factory, Warhol died in New York in 1987.

Pat Hackett worked closely with Andy Warhol for twenty years, co-authoring two books and a screenplay as well as serving as his diarist.

ANDY WARHOL and PAT HACKETT

POPism

The Warhol Sixties



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a (a novel)

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The Philosophy of Andy Warhol

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Because Steven M. L. Aronson is a great friend, he continued editing this book even after he left publishing. His wit, eccentric insights, and just plain discrimination were invaluable. Line by line, thread by thread, he shaped the scenes that were the sixties.

A. W. and P. L.

FOREWORD

This is my personal view of the Pop phenomenon in New York in the 1960s. In writing it, P
Hackett and I have reconstructed the decade, starting in '60 when I began to paint my fir
Pop canvases. It's a look back at what life was like then for my friends and me—at th
paintings, movies, fashions, and music, at the superstars and the relationships that made u
the scene at our Manhattan loft, the place known as the Factory.

—*Andy Warh*

1960–1963

If I'd gone ahead and died ten years ago, I'd probably be a cult figure today. By 1960, when Pop Art first came out in New York, the art scene here had so much going for it that even the stiff European types had to finally admit we were a part of world culture. Abstract Expressionism had already become an institution, and then, in the last part of the fifties, Jasper Johns and Bob Rauschenberg and others had begun to bring art back from abstraction and introspective stuff. Then Pop Art took the inside and put it outside, took the outside and put it inside.

The Pop artists did images that anybody walking down Broadway could recognize in a split second—comics, picnic tables, men's trousers, celebrities, shower curtains, refrigerators, Coke bottles—all the great modern things that the Abstract Expressionists tried so hard not to notice at all.

One of the phenomenal things about the Pop painters is that they were already painting alike when they met. My friend Henry Geldzahler, curator of twentieth-century art at the Metropolitan Museum before he was appointed official culture czar of New York, once described the beginnings of Pop this way: "It was like a science fiction movie—you Pop artists in different parts of the city, unknown to each other, rising up out of the muck and staggering forward with your paintings in front of you."

The person I got my art training from was Emile de Antonio—when I first met De, I was a commercial artist. In the sixties De became known for his films on Nixon and McCarthy, but back in the fifties he was an artists' agent. He connected artists with everything from neighborhood movie houses to department stores and huge corporations. But he only worked with friends; if De didn't like you, he couldn't be bothered.

De was the first person I know of to see commercial art as real art and real art as commercial art, and he made the whole New York art world see it that way, too.

In the fifties John Cage lived near De in the country, up in Pomona, and they'd gotten to be good friends. De produced a concert of John's there, and that's how he first met Jasper Johns and Bob Rauschenberg. "They were both of them on their hands and knees driving nails, building the set," De told me once. "They were penniless then, living down on Pea Street, and they'd take baths when they came out to the country because they had no shower at their place—just a little sink to take a whore's bath in."

De got Jasper and Bob work doing windows at Tiffany's for Gene Moore, and for those jobs, rather than use their real names, they both used the same pseudonym—"Matson Jones."

"Bob would have all these commercial ideas for the window displays, and some of them De once said, 'could be very bad. But a really interesting one he had was to put stuff down on blueprint paper so you'd get a transfer of image. That was around '55 when you couldn't give away one of his paintings.'" De laughed his hefty laugh, evidently recalling the wide range of Bob's ideas. "His displays that were crude were beautiful, but the ones that were sort of 'arty' were terrible." I remember De telling me all this so well, because right at the

point he said, “I don’t know why *you* don’t become a painter, Andy—you’ve got more ideas than anybody around.”

Even a few other people had told me that. I was never sure, though, what my place could be in the whole painting scene. De’s support and his open attitude gave me confidence.

After I’d done my first canvases, De was the person I wanted to show them to. He could always see the value of something right off. He wouldn’t hedge with “Where does it come from?” or “Who did it?” He would just look at something and tell you exactly what he thought. He’d often stop by my place for drinks late in the afternoon—he lived right in the neighborhood—and we’d usually just gab while I showed him whatever commercial drawing or illustrations I was working on. I loved to listen to De talk. He spoke beautifully, in a deep, easy voice with every comma and period falling into place. (He’d once taught philosophy at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, and literature at the City College of New York.) He made you feel somehow that if you listened to him long enough, you’d probably pick up everything you’d ever need to know in life. We’d both have a lot of whiskey out of some Limoges cups I had, my serving system at the time. De was a heavy drinker, but I had my fair share, too.

I worked at home in those days. My house was on four floors, including a living area in the basement where the kitchen was and where my mother lived with a lot of cats, all named Sam. (My mother had shown up one night at the apartment where I was living with a few suitcases and shopping bags, and she announced that she’d left Pennsylvania for good “come live with my Andy.” I told her okay, she could stay, but just until I got a burglar alarm. I loved Mom, but frankly I thought she’d get tired of the city pretty quick and miss Pennsylvania and my brothers and their families. But as it turned out, she didn’t, and that’s when I decided to get this house uptown.) She had the downstairs part and I lived on the upper floors and worked on the parlor floor that was sort of schizo—half like a studio, full of drawings and art supplies, and half like a regular living room. I always kept the blinds drawn—the windows faced west and not much light came in anyway—and the walls were wood-paneled. There was a somber feeling about that room. I had some Victorian furniture mixed in with an old wooden carousel horse, a carnival punching machine, Tiffany lamps, a cigar store Indian, stuffed peacocks, and penny arcade machines.

My drawings were stacked neatly, I was very organized about that. I’ve always been a person who’s semiorganized, constantly fighting the tendency to clutter, and there were always these little piles of things in bunches here and there that I hadn’t had a chance to sort through.

At five o’clock one particular afternoon the doorbell rang and De came in and sat down. He poured Scotch for us, and then I went over to where two paintings I’d done, each about six feet high and three feet wide, were propped, facing the wall. I turned them around and placed them side by side against the wall and then I backed away to take a look at them myself. One of them was a Coke bottle with Abstract Expressionist hash marks halfway up the side. The second one was just a stark, outlined Coke bottle in black and white. I didn’t say a thing to De. I didn’t have to—he knew what I wanted to know.

“Well, look, Andy,” he said after staring at them for a couple of minutes. “One of these is a piece of shit, simply a little bit of everything. The other is remarkable—it’s our society, it

who we are, it's absolutely beautiful and naked, and you ought to destroy the first one and show the other."

That afternoon was an important one for me.

I can't even count the number of people after that day who when they saw my painting burst out laughing. But De never thought Pop was a joke.

As he was leaving he looked down at my feet and said, "When the *hell* are you going to get yourself a new pair of shoes? You've been wearing those that way all over town for a year. They're crummy and *creepy*—your *toes* are sticking out." I enjoyed De's honesty a lot, but I didn't get new shoes—it'd taken me too long to break that pair in. I took his advice about most other things, though.

I used to go around to all the galleries in the late fifties, usually with a good friend of mine named Ted Carey. Ted and I both had wanted to have our portraits done by Fairfield Porter and we'd thought that it would be cheaper if he painted us in tandem and then we could cut them apart and each take half. But when he'd posed us, he sat us so close together on the couch that we couldn't slice a straight line between us and I'd had to buy Ted out. Anyway, Ted and I followed the art scene together, keeping up with what was going on.

One afternoon Ted called up very excited to say he'd just seen a painting at the Leo Castelli Gallery that looked like a comic book and that I should go right over there and have a look myself because it was the same sort of thing I was doing.

I met Ted later and we walked upstairs to the gallery. Ted was buying a Jasper Johns light bulb drawing for \$475, so it was easy to maneuver ourselves into the back room, and there I saw what Ted had been telling me about—a painting of a man in a rocket ship with a girl in the background. I asked the guy who was showing us the stuff, "What's that over there?" He said it was a painting by a young artist named Roy Lichtenstein. I asked him what he thought of it and he said, "I think it's absolutely provocative, don't you?" So I told him I did paintings that were similar and asked if he'd like to come up to my studio and look at them. We made an appointment for later that afternoon. His name was Ivan Karp.

When Ivan came by, I had all my commercial art drawings stashed away out of sight. As long as he didn't know anything about me, there was no sense bringing up my advertising background. I still had the two styles I was working in—the more lyrical painting with gestures and drips, and the hard style without the gestures. I liked to show both to people and goad them into commenting on the differences, because I still wasn't sure if you could completely remove all the hand gesture from art and become noncommittal, anonymous. I knew that I definitely wanted to take away the commentary of the gestures—that's why I had this routine of painting with rock and roll blasting the same song, a 45 rpm, over and over a day long—songs like the one that was playing the day Ivan came by for the first time, "I Saw Linda Yesterday" by Dickey Lee. The music blasting cleared my head out and left me working on instinct alone. In fact, it wasn't only rock and roll that I used that way—I'd also have the radio blasting opera, and the TV picture on (but not the sound)—and if all that didn't clear enough out of my mind, I'd open a magazine, put it beside me, and half read an article while I painted. The works I was most satisfied with were the cold "no comment" paintings.

Ivan was surprised that I hadn't heard of Lichtenstein. But he wasn't as surprised as I was

finding out that someone else was working with cartoon and commercial subjects, too!

I had a very good rapport with Ivan right away. He was young, he had an “up” attitude to everything. He was sort of dancing around to the music.

For the first fifteen minutes or so, he looked through my stuff tentatively. Then he dug in and began to sort it out. “These blunt, straightforward works are the only ones of any consequence. The others are all homage to Abstract Expressionism and are not.” He laughed and said, “Am I being arrogant?” We talked for a long time about this new subject matter of mine and he said he had intimations that something shocking was about to happen with it. I felt very good. Ivan had a way of making you feel good, so after he left, I sat down and wrapped the Little Nancy cartoon painting that he said was his favorite and sent it over to him at the gallery with a red bow on it.

The next day he brought by some people who had been receptive to Lichtenstein’s things to the back room at Castelli’s. (Castelli wasn’t officially showing Lichtenstein yet—it was an informal sort of thing.)

A few months later I asked Ivan how he’d come to have those first paintings of Roy’s in the gallery. He said that one day he was in the gallery lecturing to some college students on how you evaluate new artists’ works (how you decide whether or not you want to show them) when a nervous-looking young guy appeared in the doorway with his paintings—he was too shy to come in when he saw all the students there. Ivan had had to look at his paintings in the hallway. The students were naturally eager to see a real-life demonstration of what Ivan had just been explaining to them, and they naturally expected Ivan to be his usual confident, unflappable self. But when he took a look at Lichtenstein’s work, he got confused—they were “peculiar and aggressive,” very remote from anything he’d seen before, and he told Roy that he’d like to keep two paintings in back room racks to show to Leo Castelli.

Ivan, I found out, had started working for Castelli in ’59. “I was working with Martha Jackson then,” he told me, “and Michael Sonnabend came to me one day and said, ‘Ivan, you’re much too good for this, come have lunch with me and some friends.’ I said, ‘I’ll do anything for lunch.’ And it was the Carlyle, which I’d never been to, with very thick tablecloths and napkins, and standoffish, slightly disdainful waiters, and I’ll do anything for lunch like that, so I went to work for Leo Castelli, who was then still married to Ileana. [She later became Ileana Sonnabend.] With my first paycheck, I bought a new suit.”

Leo had an art history background and a very good visual sense, but it was Ivan who got him to be adventurous, to poke around new artists’ studios. Ivan was young and open to new possibilities; he wasn’t locked into any strict art philosophy.

Ivan managed to be “light” without being frivolous. And he was so good with words. His whole manner was like a witty aside, and people loved it. His loose, personal style of dealing went perfectly with the Pop Art style. Years later I figured out why he was such a successful art dealer—this may sound strange, but I believe it was because art was his second love. He seemed to love literature more, and he put the serious side of his nature into that. During the sixties he wrote *five novels*—that’s a lot of writing. Some people are even better at their second love than their first, maybe because when they care too much, it freezes them, but knowing there’s something they’d rather be doing gives them a certain freedom. Anyway, that’s my theory about Ivan’s success.

In the late post-Abstract Expressionist days, the days right before Pop, there were only a few people in the art world who knew who was good, and the people who were good knew who else was good. It was all like private information; the art public hadn't picked up on it yet. One incident especially brought home to me how low the general art world awareness was.

De had met Frank Stella when Frank was an undergraduate at Princeton, and they had stayed good friends. (De reminded me that he'd once brought Frank to my house and I pointed at a small painting of his that he had with him and said, "I'll take six of those." I don't remember that, but it must have happened, because I do have six of that painting.) One of Frank's black paintings hung in De's apartment on East 92nd Street. Around the corner from De lived a famous psychiatrist couple who I'll call Hildegarde and Irwin. They were what's known as straight eclectic Freudians. I tagged along with De to a few parties that they gave, and those parties were just remarkable: the guests who weren't psychiatrists were all black people from the UN or UNESCO—"all do-gooding groups," as De put it. He used to laugh and swear that over the years, at all of their parties combined, "I've met exactly one attractive woman; they're a terrible-looking group of people."

One afternoon I decided to stop by De's, and just as I got to the door, he was opening it and telling Hildegarde and another woman, a friend of hers who lived down the street, "Get out! I never want to see you again!" I couldn't figure out what was going on, because he and Hildegarde were very good friends, so I just walked on into the apartment as they walked out. It was a beautiful snowy day; the windows were open and the snow was blowing in.

De explained to me that it had all started with Hildegarde pointing over at the Stella on the wall and sneering, "What's that?" De had told her, "It's a painting by a friend of mine." She and her friend had burst out laughing. "A *painting*???" Then Hildegarde had walked over and lifted it off the wall and poured a bottle of whiskey on it. Then she'd picked up some rag, either they sniff in the streets during Carnival in Brazil that she'd just brought back from there, for De and she sprayed it all over the painting. The Stella was wiped out. De kept saying to me, but it was really to himself, "What can you do? You can't hit a woman..."

As De finished telling me the story, I suddenly saw the ruined Stella lying in a corner. I didn't know what to say. I just sat there with my galoshes dripping a puddle on the floor. The phone rang and, coincidentally, it was Frank. De told him the whole story. I couldn't believe it when I heard De say that the woman with Hildegarde was actually married to a sculptor—mean, it wasn't like some cleaning lady had seen an all-black painting and tried to scrub it clean with steel wool! De hung up the phone and said that Frank had promised to make him another one "just like it," but he wasn't consoled, he knew that it's not possible to make two paintings exactly alike.

Then the doorbell rang and it was Irwin, sheepishly holding a Motherwell. He said, "Can we give you this, and some money?" De told him to get the fuck out.

One evening De and I were having dinner at "21." I was always sort of starry-eyed, I guess asking him about the artists he knew, and this night he was describing for me "the greatest art exhibit" he'd ever been to. In the mid-fifties, Jasper Johns had called De up and very formally invited him to dinner "a week from Wednesday." De and his wife at the time—think it was his third—were on the kind of terms with Jasper where they'd call each other up and say what're you doing tonight? so this "week from Wednesday" business was unusual, the

kind of formal thing they never did. (“Jasper was reserved,” De said, “but he wasn’t *that* reserved!”) When the day came, De and his wife went down to the building on Pearl Street where Jasper and Bob Rauschenberg lived. In those days Pearl Street was so beautiful and narrow that if there was a car parked on it you couldn’t get by. Jasper’s loft usually had paint and materials strewn all over, De said, because he worked there, too, but this particular Wednesday it was immaculate, there wasn’t a sign of his everyday life visible, except that on the walls were *all* his early paintings—the big American Flag, the first Targets, the first Numbers. (For me, just thinking about what that must have been like was thrilling.) “I was knocked out,” De said. “You feel something like that with your insides; the words for it come later—*dryness, austerity*... And to think there were people who’d seen those pictures when they were first painted and had laughed, just like they’d laughed at Rauschenberg!”

I’ve often wondered why people who could look at incredible new art and *laugh* at it bothered to involve themselves with art at all. And yet you’d run into so many of these types around the art scene.

De always said that the hardest thing was to have a friend who was an artist whose work you just couldn’t respect: “You have to stop being friends with them, because it’s too hard to look at their work and think, ‘yuk.’” So everyone that De was friends with he respected. At a party of his once, I heard him answer the phone and tell someone, “Yes, I *do* mind, because I don’t like his politics.” Someone had wanted to bring Adlai Stevenson.

As we sat at “21” (I remember I had the *National Enquirer* in my lap—I was fascinated by all the Thalidomide stories) we talked about the art around town—about Claes Oldenburg and Jim Dine’s street exhibit at the Judson Gallery, about Oldenburg’s beach collages in a group show at the Martha Jackson, about Tom Wesselmann’s first exhibit of the Great American Nude series at the Tanager Gallery—but my mind kept going back to what De had just told me about that exhibition that Jasper had made for himself in his own loft. De was such good friends with both Jasper and Bob that I figured he could probably tell me something I’d been wanting to know for a long time: why didn’t they like me? Every time I saw them, they called me dead. So when the waiter brought the brandy, I finally popped the question, and De said, “Okay, Andy, if you really want to hear it straight, I’ll lay it out for you. You’re too swish and that upsets them.”

I was embarrassed, but De didn’t stop. I’m sure he saw that my feelings were hurt, but I asked him a question and he was going to let me have the whole answer. “First, the post-Abstract Expressionist sensibility is, of course, a homosexual one, but these two guys wear three-button suits—they were in the army or navy or something! Second, you make them nervous because you *collect* paintings, and traditionally artists don’t buy the work of other artists, it just isn’t done. And third,” De concluded, “you’re a commercial artist, which really bugs them because when *they* do commercial art—windows and other jobs I find them—they do it just ‘to survive.’ They won’t even use their real names. Whereas *you’ve* won *prize*! You’re *famous* for it!”

It was perfectly true, what De said. I was well known as a commercial artist. I got a real kick out of seeing my name listed under “Fashion” in a novelty book called *A Thousand New York Names and Where to Drop Them*. But if you wanted to be considered a “serious” artist

you weren't supposed to have anything to do with commercial art. De was the only person I knew then who could see past those old social distinctions to the art itself.

•••

What De had just told me hurt a lot. When I'd asked him, "Why don't they like me?" I naturally hoped to get off easier than this. When you ask a question like that, you always hope the person will convince you that you're just paranoid. I didn't know what to say. Finally I just said something stupid: "I know plenty of painters who are more swish than me." And De said, "Yes, Andy, there are others who are more swish—and less talented—and still others who are less swish and just as talented, but the *major painters* try to look straight; you play up the swish—it's like an armor with you."

There was nothing I could say to that. It was all too true. So I decided I just wasn't going to care, because those were all things that I didn't want to change anyway, that I didn't think I *should* want to change. There was nothing wrong with being a commercial artist and there was nothing wrong with collecting art that you admired. Other people could change their attitudes, but not me—I knew I was right. And as for the "swish" thing, I'd always had a lot of fun with that—just watching the expressions on people's faces. You'd have to have seen the way all the Abstract Expressionist painters carried themselves and the kinds of images they cultivated, to understand how shocked people were to see a painter coming on swish. I certainly wasn't a butch kind of guy by nature, but I must admit, I went out of my way to play up the other extreme.

The world of the Abstract Expressionists was very macho. The painters who used to hang around the Cedar bar on University Place were all hard-driving, two-fisted types who'd grab each other and say things like "I'll knock your fucking teeth out" and "I'll steal your girl." In a way, Jackson Pollock had to die the way he did, crashing his car up, and even Barnett Newman, who was so elegant, always in a suit and monocle, was tough enough to get into politics when he made a kind of symbolic run for mayor of New York in the thirties. That toughness was part of a tradition, it went with their agonized, anguished art. They were always exploding and having fist fights about their work and their love lives. This went on all through the fifties when I was just new in town, doing whatever jobs I could get in advertising and spending my nights at home drawing to meet deadlines or going out with a few friends.

I often asked Larry Rivers, after we got to be friends, what it had really been like down there then. Larry's painting style was unique—it wasn't Abstract Expressionist and it wasn't Pop, it fell into the period in between. But his personality was very Pop—he rode around on a motorcycle and he had a sense of humor about himself as well as everybody else. I used to see him mostly at parties. I remember a very crowded opening at the Janis Gallery where we stood wedged in a corner at right angles to each other and I got Larry talking about the Cedar. I'd heard that when he was about to go on "The \$64,000 Question" on TV, he passed the word around that if he won, you could find him at the Cedar bar, and if he lost, he'd head straight for the Five-Spot, where he played jazz saxophone. He did win—\$49,000—and he went straight to the Cedar and bought drinks for around three hundred people.

I asked Larry about Jackson Pollock. “Pollock? Socially, he was a real jerk,” Larry said. “Very unpleasant to be around. Very stupid. He was always at the Cedar on Tuesdays—that was the day he came into town to see his analyst—and he always got completely drunk, and he made a point of behaving badly to everyone. I knew him a little from the Hamptons. I used to play saxophone in the taverns out there and he’d drop in occasionally. He was the kind of drunk who’d insist you play ‘I Can’t Give You Anything but Love, Baby’ or some other songs that musicians thought were way beneath them, so you’d have to see if you could play it in some way that you wouldn’t be putting yourself down *too* much.... He was a star painter all right, but that’s no reason to pretend he was a pleasant person. Some people at the Cedar took him very seriously; they would announce what he was doing every single second—‘There’s Jackson!’ or ‘Jackson just went to the John!’”

“I’ll tell you what kind of guy he was. He would go over to a black person and say, ‘How do you like your skin color?’ or he’d ask a homosexual, ‘Sucked any cocks lately?’ He’d walk over to me and make shooting-up gestures on his arm because he knew I was playing around with heroin then. And he could be really babyish, too. I remember he once went over to Milton Resnick and said, ‘You de Kooning imitator!’ and Resnick said, ‘Step outside.’ Really, Larry laughed. “You have to have known these people to believe the things they’d fight over.” I could tell from Larry’s smile that he still had a lot of affection for that whole scene.

“What about the other painters?” I asked him. “Well,” he said, “Franz Kline would certainly be at the Cedar every night. He was one of those people who always got there before you did and was still there after you left. While he was talking to you, he had this way of turning to someone else as you were leaving, and you got the feeling of automatic continuity—sort of, ‘So long... So this guy comes over to me and...’ and while you may have flinched at his indiscriminate friendliness, he did have the virtue of smiling and wanting to talk all the time. There were always great discussions going on, and there was always some guy pulling out his poem and reading it to you. It was a very heavy scene.” Larry sighed. “You wouldn’t have liked it at all, Andy.”

He was right. It was exactly the kind of atmosphere I’d pay to get out of. But it was fascinating to hear about, especially from Larry.

The crowd at the opening had thinned to the point where we could move out of our corner. “You didn’t go to the Cedar ‘to see the stars,’ though,” Larry added. “Oh, sure, you may have liked being in their aura, but what you came back for night after night was to see your friends... Frank O’Hara, Kenneth Koch, John Ashbery...”

The art world sure was different in those days. I tried to imagine myself in a bar striding over to, say, Roy Lichtenstein and asking him to “step outside” because I’d heard he’d insulted my soup cans. I mean, how corny. I was glad those slug-it-out routines had been retired—they weren’t my style, let alone my capability.

Larry had mentioned that Pollock came in from the country every Tuesday. That was part of the big out-of-the-city-and-into-the-country trend that the Abstract Expressionist painters had started in the late fifties when they were beginning to make money and could afford to live in country places. Right in the middle of the twentieth century, artists were still following the tradition of wanting to get out there alone in the woods and do their stuff. Even Larry had moved to Southampton in ’53—and stayed out there for five years. The tradition was real.

ingrained. But the sixties changed all that back again—from country to city.

One of the first people Ivan brought by to see me that July was a new young “curatorial assistant-with-no-specific-duties” at the Met. Henry Geldzahler had grown up in Manhattan, gone to Yale and then to grad school at Harvard. Before coming back to New York from Cambridge, he’d gone to see Ivan, who had a gallery that summer in Provincetown. “I’m about to go back to New York,” he announced, “and I want you to tell me who I should meet, what I should do, what I should say, how I should act, speak, dress, think, carry on...” Ivan gave him a thirty-minute rundown and once they were both back in New York, they started going around together to all the artists’ studios. They were both avid to pick up new art before it got to the galleries—they’d drop by artists’ studios and lofts to catch a look at work before they were even finished. Just days after Ivan came up to my place for the first time, he discovered Jim Rosenquist, and Henry had taken him down to see Tom Wesselmann.

When Henry and Ivan came in, I could see Henry doing an instant appraisal of every single thing in the room. He scanned all the things I collected—from the American folk pieces to the Carmen Miranda platform shoe (four inches long with a five-inch heel) that I’d bought at an auction of her effects. Almost as quickly as a computer could put the information together, he said, “We have paintings by Florine Stettheimer in storage at the Met. If you want to come over there tomorrow, I’ll show them to you.” I was thrilled. Anyone who’d know just from glancing around that one room of mine that I loved Florine Stettheimer had to be brilliant. I could see that Henry was going to be a lot of fun. (Florine Stettheimer was a wealthy primitive painter, a friend of Marcel Duchamp’s, who’d had a one-woman show at the Museum of Modern Art in 1946, and her sister Carrie had made some fabulous dollhouses that I loved at the Museum of the City of New York.)

Henry was a scholar who understood the past, but he also understood how to use the past to look at the future. Right away we became five-hours-a-day-on-the-phone-see-you-for-lunch-quick-turn-on-the-“Tonight-Show” friends.

Of course, it’s easy for a young person to support new ideas. He comes onto the scene fresh. He doesn’t have any positions to defend or modify, no big time or money invested. He can be a brat, say whatever he pleases, support whatever and whoever he wants to without having to think, “Will they ever invite me to dinner again?” or “Will this conflict with that letter I wrote to *Art Forum* three years ago?” In the last half of ’60 Henry and I were both, in our very different ways, coming fresh into and up against the intrigues and strategies of the New York art scene, so that was good for at least four hours a day on the phone right there.

Henry liked all the rock and roll I kept playing while I painted. He told me once, “I picked up a new attitude toward the media from you—not being selective, just letting everything in once.” And over the years I picked up a lot from Henry; I often asked him for advice. I liked to compare our relationship to ones between the Renaissance painters and the scholars of mythology or antiquity or Christian history who doled out the ideas for their subjects.

I was never embarrassed about asking someone, literally, “What should I paint?” because Po comes from the outside, and how is asking someone for ideas any different from looking for

them in a magazine? Henry understood that, but some people had contempt for you when you asked their advice—they didn't want to know anything about how you worked, they wanted you to keep your mystique so they could adore you without being embarrassed by specifics.

Take my commercial drawings. By the time Ivan introduced me to Henry, I was keeping them absolutely buried in another part of the house because one of the people Ivan had brought by before had remembered me from my commercial art days and asked to see some drawings. As soon as I showed them to him, his whole attitude toward me changed. I could actually see him changing his mind about my paintings, so from then on I decided to have a firm no-show policy about the drawings. Even with Henry, it was a couple of months before I was secure enough about his mentality to show them to him. Henry knew that the only thing that counted was what showed up on canvas—not where the idea came from or what you were doing before you painted it. He understood my style, he had a Pop attitude himself. So I was especially never embarrassed about asking him for ideas. (That kind of thing would go on for weeks whenever I started a new project—asking everyone I was with what they thought I should do. I still do it. That's one thing that has never changed; I hear one word, or maybe misunderstand somebody, and that puts me on to a good idea of my own. The objective is just to keep people talking, because sooner or later a word gets dropped that throws me on a different train of thought.)

It was Henry who gave me the idea to start the Death and Disaster series. We were having lunch one day in the summer at Serendipity on East 60th Street and he laid the *Daily News* on the table. The headline was "129 DIE IN JET." And that's what started me on the death series—the Car Crashes, the Disasters, the Electric Chairs....

(Whenever I look back at that front page, I'm struck by the date—June 4, 1962. Six years—to the date—later, my own disaster was the front-page headline: "ARTIST SHOT.")

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I asked Ivan for ideas, too, and at a certain point he said, "You know, people want to see you. Your looks are responsible for a certain part of your fame—they feed the imagination." That's how I came to do the first Self-Portraits. Another time he said, "Why don't you paint some cows, they're so wonderfully pastoral and such a durable image in the history of the arts" (Ivan talked like this.) I don't know how "pastoral" he expected me to make them, but when he saw the huge cow heads—bright pink on a bright yellow background—that I was going to have made into rolls of wallpaper, he was shocked. But after a moment he exploded with "They're *super*-pastoral! They're ridiculous! They're blazingly bright and vulgar!" I mean, I loved those cows, and for my next show we papered all the walls in the gallery with them.

It was on one of those evenings when I'd asked around ten or fifteen people for suggestions that finally one lady friend of mine asked me the right question: "Well, what do you love most?" That's how I started painting money.

There were times, though, when I didn't follow advice—like when I told Henry I was going to quit painting comic strips and he didn't think I should. Ivan had just shown me Lichtenstein's Ben Day dots and I thought, "Oh, why couldn't *I* have thought of that?" Right

then I decided that since Roy was doing comics so well, that I would just stop coming altogether and go in other directions where I could come out first—like quantity and repetition. Henry said to me, “Oh, but your comics are fabulous—they’re not ‘better’ or ‘worse’ than Roy’s—the world can use them both, they’re both very different.” Later on, though, Henry realized, “From the point of view of strategy and military installation, you were of course correct. That territory had been preempted.”

Ivan got a bunch of us hooked on going out to the Fox Theater in Brooklyn to see Murray the K’s rock-and-roll shows—Martha and the Vandellas, Dion, Little Stevie Wonder, Dionne Warwick, the Ronettes, Marvin Gaye, the Drifters, Little Anthony and the Imperials, and everybody else you could imagine. Each group did their hit song of the week, only the headliner did more than one or two numbers. But even he was only on for about fifteen minutes. I can’t remember if there was a band or if they all lip-synced to their own records, which was actually the way the kids liked it best, with every sound exactly the way it was on the records—like if they were seeing, say, the Crystals, they’d expect to hear every little rattle in the Phil Spector production.

The audience was mixed, black and white, but the black acts got most of the applause. Murray the K would be up on stage screaming his “Ahhh-vey!’s” and talking about the “submarine races” and doing all his radio routines with the “Dancing Girls” and the Murray the K dancers. The kids would be going crazy all around us and Ivan would be screaming along with them one minute and the next minute saying things like “It’s so naive! It’s full of spirit and high rhythm! All the messages are basic love and alienation! There’s no complex worldly wisdom! It’s just good straightforward stuff with tremendous force and conviction.” (As I said, that was the way he really talked.)

We’d see the acts over and over. The Fox was a real movie palace, all velvet ropes and brass and marble fountains and purple and amber lights—sort of Moorish, with its high, dark lobby, always so cool in the summer—thousands of kids walking around, drinking sodas and smoking cigarettes. Ivan said to me years later, “Those days were very meaningful for me because I loved the music so much.”

(Of course, like everybody else in the fall of ’61, we were also running down to the Peppermint Lounge on 45th Street. As *Variety* headlined, “NEW ‘TWIST’ IN CAFE SOCIETY—ADULTS NOW DIG JUVES’ NEW BEAT.”)

“I’ve lost a fortune over the years, thanks to my lack of objectivity about you,” David Bourdon complained to me once. What he meant was that we were such good friends that he didn’t ever know what to think of my art, so he passed up the chance to buy a lot of my paintings in the early days when they were selling very cheap. David wasn’t one of the people who’d laughed at my work in the beginning. But on the other hand, he wasn’t one of the people who’d told me it was great, either.

We’d met in the fifties through a mutual friend who did the Bonwit Teller windows. David wrote art criticism (this was before he worked for the *Village Voice* and long before he worked for *Life*), and we both collected art. Soon we were going around to galleries together.

At the end of the fifties there was a year or so when I didn’t see him at all, and then one

day he called up and said, "I just picked up a magazine and read that a new artist named Andy Warhol is painting soup cans. Is that *you*?" I asked him if he wanted to come over and see for himself if that was me. He got right on the subway in Brooklyn Heights, where he lived, and was at my house in less than an hour. I showed him my work and waited for him to say something, but he just stood there looking puzzled. Finally he said, "Well, put yourself in my position: I've only known you as a commercial artist, and now you've become a painter, and yet you're still painting commercial art subjects. Frankly, I don't know what to think."

At least he hadn't laughed. I realized that I could always learn from David's reactions how other people in the art world who were sympathetic to my work but at the same time a little leery of it would react. I suppose it's always good to have at least one intelligent skeptic for a friend—you can't have only supporters around you, no matter how much you happen to agree with them.

I'd call David excitedly every time I saw my name in some art column as if to say, "Now will you admit Pop is legitimate?" And he'd say, "Well, I still don't know...." It was sort of a game, a regular routine.

(David tells me that I used to be generally much friendlier, more open and ingenuous—right through to '64. "You didn't have that cool, eyeball-through-the-wall, spaced look that you developed later on." But I didn't *need* it then like I would later on.)

When Ivan brought Leo Castelli up to my studio, the place was a mess, with the big canvases strewn around the living room—painting was a lot messier than drawing. Leo looked my studio over, the Dick Tracys and the Nose Jobs in particular, and then said, "Well, it's unfortunate the timing, because I just took on Roy Lichtenstein, and the two of you in the same gallery would collide."

Ivan had warned me that Leo was going to tell me, "The two of you in the same gallery..." so I can't say I wasn't prepared, but still I was really disappointed. They bought some small paintings to ease the blow and promised that even though they weren't taking me on, they would do everything they could to get me shown someplace else, and that seemed so nice it made me want to be with them even more.

To be successful as an artist, you have to have your work shown in a good gallery for the same reason that, say, Dior never sold his originals from a counter in Woolworth's. It's a matter of marketing, among other things. If a guy has, say, a few thousand dollars to spend on a painting, he doesn't wander along the street till he sees something lying around that "amuses" him. He wants to buy something that's going to go up and up in value, and the only way that can happen is with a good gallery, one that looks out for the artist, promotes him, and sees to it that his work is shown in the right way to the right people. Because if the art world were to fade away, so would this guy's investment. As usual, De put it better than anybody else: "Think of all those third-rate works in the basements of museums that you never see and of all the works that were destroyed, sometimes by the artists themselves. What survives is what the taste of the ruling class of the period decrees should survive, and this usually turns out to be the most effective work done within the canons and terms of that class. Go back as far as the time before Giotto, the time of Cimabue, there were hundreds and hundreds of Italian painters around, but today most of us only recognize the names of

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