

# GUGGENHEIM BILBAO

Press release



The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents on February 26, 2016

## **Andy Warhol: Shadows**

## *Andy Warhol: Shadows*

- Dates: February 26 to October 2, 2016
- An exhibition organized by the Dia Art Foundation
  
- **The positive and negative imprints of *Shadows* alternate as they march along the walls of the gallery. Despite the apparent embrace of repetition, Warhol’s “machine method” is handmade and pictorial, emphasizing its irreproducibility and problematizing Warhol’s aesthetic of “plagiarism.”**
  
- **Each *Shadow* corresponds to a form that reveals its space with precision and self-awareness, directing the spectator’s gaze to the light, the central subject of the series. By focusing on the shadow to devise light—that is to say, sparks of color—Warhol returns to the quintessential problem of art: perception.**
  
- **Contrary to his professed emptiness, Warhol’s working process and the “assembly line” of his Factory heralded quite deliberate social and political transgressions.**

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao presents *Shadows* (1977–78) by Andy Warhol, a monumental artwork of 102 large format, silkscreened panels that reflect some of Warhol’s explorations with abstraction through his signature palette of bright and cheerful hues, which characterized a large part of his work. Curator Lucia Agirre is working on the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao’s presentation of *Andy Warhol: Shadows*, which is organized by Dia Art Foundation.

At 50 years old, Andy Warhol, the irreverent Pop Art icon, and chronicler of an era, embarked upon the production of a monumental artwork titled *Shadows* with the assistance of his entourage at the Factory. The work formalized earlier explorations with abstraction, seen the previous year in the *Oxidation*, *Rorschach*, and *Camouflage* paintings. In contrast to the *Oxidation* or *Piss* paintings, achieved through a process of staining in which a canvas coated in copper reacted to the acidity of urine spilled or dripped on it, the *Shadows* panels are silkscreened canvases. To understand the radical implications of Warhol’s *Shadows*, one must begin with the work’s form: the *Shadows* series was conceived as one painting in multiple parts, the final number of canvases determined by the dimensions of an exhibition space. In its first public presentation, only 83 canvases were shown. They were installed edge to edge, a foot from the floor, in the order that Warhol’s assistants, Ronnie Cutrone and Stephen Mueller, hung them.

The canvases, which were primed and coated with acrylic paint prior to the printing of the image, show Warhol's signature palette of bright hues with cheerful excess. While the color palette used for the grounds of the *Shadows* includes more than a dozen different hues, certain colors that are characteristic of his larger body of work—the translucent violet of *Lavender Disaster*, 1963, or the aqua green of *Turquoise Marilyn*, 1964—are present. Unlike the surfaces of earlier paintings, in which thin layers of rolled acrylic paint constituted the backgrounds onto which black pixelated images were silkscreened, the backgrounds of the *Shadows* canvases were painted with a sponge mop, whose streaks and trails add “gesture” to the picture plane. Seven or eight different screens were used to create *Shadows*, as evidenced in the slight shifts in scales of dark areas as well as the arbitrary presence of spots of light.

The “shadows” alternate between positive and negative as they march along the walls of the gallery. Despite the apparent embrace of repetition, Warhol's “machine method” is nothing but handmade. A significant and intriguing fact about *Shadows* is the irreproducibility of its assumed reproduction, a point that problematizes his aesthetic of “plagiarism” and positions Warhol's project as one that is primordially pictorial. This revelation, previously inferred by curator Donna De Salvo in the catalogue for the Tate Gallery's 2001 retrospective of Warhol's work, is crucial to our absorbing this monumental series 39 years after it was created. As De Salvo observed, “each of the visual strategies operative in these paintings is the same as those used some 17 years before. As with the earlier silkscreen paintings, although we at first believe each canvas to be the same—a belief emphasized here by the repeated patterns of the shadow—they are not.” Far from replicas, each *Shadow* corresponds to a form that reveals its space with precision and self-awareness, directing the spectator's gaze to light, the central subject of the series. By focusing on the shadow to devise light as sparks of color, Warhol returns to the quintessential problem of art: perception. As he asserted, “when I look at things, I always see the space they occupy. I always want the space to reappear, to make a comeback, because it's lost space when there's something in it.”

## The Artist

Andy Warhol was known for admitting his “fondness for dull things,” which by the early 1960s corresponded to his use of photographic reproductions of found imagery culled from newspapers, magazines, and image archives. Focusing his attention on “ready-made” icons of popular culture, Warhol compiled over the course of his career a pictorial repertoire that included consumer products, portraits of celebrities, socialites, and criminals, and snapshots of car accidents, electric chairs, and race riots, which were transferred onto canvas using commercial silkscreen techniques. It has frequently been claimed that Warhol's contradictory statements and fluctuating declarations of intention, which permeated his career, were mere “acts” within a carefully tailored self-parody.

Perhaps to Warhol's own astonishment, his deployment of superfluous and ordinary subjects would become a powerful model of political subversion for a generation defined as much as by Hollywood and popular music as by the Vietnam War and the Civil Rights Movement. In hindsight, Warhol's prolific oeuvre, which materialized in a wide range of media including drawings, prints, silkscreened canvases, Polaroid photographs, and black-and-white prints, as well as Super 8 and 16mm films, remains to this day unrivaled for its copiousness. Contrary to his professed emptiness—he once said, “if you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There's nothing behind it”—Warhol's working process and the “assembly line” of his Factory heralded with unprecedented irreverence and irony quite deliberate social and political transgressions.

## **Biography**

Andy Warhol was born in 1928, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and grew up in McKeesport, Pennsylvania. From 1945 to 1949, he studied art at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, receiving a B.A. in pictorial design. In 1949, he moved to New York to pursue a career as a commercial illustrator and began exhibiting drawings and paintings in the 1950s. In 1962, he exhibited his first hand-painted Campbell Soup Can painting at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles and his silkscreened paintings at Stable Gallery in New York. Thereafter, his work was widely shown in the United States and abroad. Warhol died on February 22, 1987.

## **Didaktika *In Focus: Andy Warhol***

*In Focus* is the name of the Didaktikas that are created to complement every monographic exhibition in Gallery 105 of the Museum. *Andy Warhol: Shadows* includes an educational area, and the activities offered there are specifically created to support the exhibition and the work of the gallery guides.

### **Educational Area**

Located in the same gallery, the educational area offers visitors an audiovisual experience, through color and light, which harmonizes with the key ideas in Warhol's production, including abstraction and the mechanical production of images. It produces an unfamiliar universe of the artist, in which the lights and shadows of the works literally surround the visitor.

### **Educational Activities *Andy Warhol: Shadows***

The visitor can explore the hidden details of the assembly line and other curiosities of the exhibition in these unique visits led by Museum professionals in the program Shared Reflections.

- **Curatorial Vision:** 02/03/2016. Lucía Agirre, Curator at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.
- **Key Concepts:** 09/03/2016. Marta Arzak, Associate Director of Education and Interpretation at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

### **Gallery Hosts**

To obtain more information about the contents of the exhibitions, visitors can approach the Gallery Hosts, a free service that the Museum offers daily from 11 am to 2 pm.

### **Cover Image:**

Andy Warhol

*Shadows*, 1978–79

Dia Art Foundation

View of the installation: Dia:Beacon, Beacon, New York

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Photo: Bill Jacobson

### **For more information:**

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**All information about the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao is available at [www.guggenheim-bilbao.es](http://www.guggenheim-bilbao.es) (press room).**

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**Andy Warhol: *Shadows***  
Guggenheim Museum Bilbao

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For further information, please contact the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao Press Department: tel. +34 944 35 90 08 and email: [media@guggenheim-bilbao.es](mailto:media@guggenheim-bilbao.es)

Andy Warhol

*Shadows*, 1978–79

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View of the installation: Dia:Beacon, Beacon, New York

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