

4 things you didn't know about Andy Warhol

By Trinity Foster, Staff Writer

Andy Warhol is well known for his distinctive screen printing style and brightly colored pop art ranging from Campbell's Soup Cans to famous figures like Marilyn Monroe. Unsurprisingly, his personal life was as vibrant as his art.

Grace Marston, Bloomfield resident and 11-year arts educator at The Andy Warhol Museum, explained some of the most intriguing aspects of Warhol's life.

He was shot and nearly died

Valerie Solanas, a radical feminist, shot Andy Warhol in the abdomen at The Factory, his studio in New York City, on June 3, 1968. The bullet went diagonally through his torso and damaged several organs before doctors declared him dead and revived him. Although Warhol lived another 19 years after the shooting, it had a lasting effect. He had to wear a surgical corset to stabilize his organs and had follow-up surgeries, medications and organ damage for the rest of his life.

Marston said unlike other feminists who believe in equality between the male and female sexes, Solanas hoped for female supremacy to "destroy the male sex," as stated in her manifesto.

"She wanted to eradicate men from the planet and create what she called a 'groovy, all-female world,'" Marston said. "She formed an organization called SCUM, an acronym for 'Society for Cutting Up Men,' and thought that, if she got enough followers, they could start this women's revolution."

Solanas approached Warhol at The Factory and pitched her screenplay about a man-hating prostitute who murdered her clients. Warhol rejected the obscene script, believing Solanas was a cop.

"At this time, the NYPD was raiding Warhol's studio on the suspicion that he was producing obscene materials with his films on a very regular basis," Marston said. "When he first looked at this screenplay, he thought it was a trap. He thought Valerie Solanas was an undercover cop and that, if he made this movie, she would arrest him."

Then, Warhol lost Solanas' script. Solanas, a paranoid schizophrenic, believed that he stole it. When she discovered that Warhol knew Maurice Girodias, the publisher of her "SCUM Manifesto," she suspected a conspiracy between the two men to destroy her work. Although the men barely knew each other, Solanas decided she must kill them both to protect her writing. Girodias was out of the country on June 3, 1968, but Warhol was not so lucky.

"She thought it would be good publicity for her if she assassinated him, because then she would be on the cover of magazines and newspapers and that would motivate more women to join her revolution. She turned herself in just a few hours after shooting Warhol so she could take all the credit and get all of the media attention," Marston said.

Prior to the shooting, The Factory was a hub for filmmaking, known for allowing anyone who entered to star in a movie. But the emotional trauma from the shooting pushed Warhol to change his work environment.

"From '64 to '68, The Factory had an open door policy. After the shooting, they tightened security significantly. In 1969, Warhol founded Interview Magazine, which was another catalyst to change the social environment," Marston said. "Rather than hanging out with a bunch of actors, drug addicts and people with mental illness, he surrounded himself with much more professional people."



John Blair | Senior Staff Photographer

The Andy Warhol Museum in Northside.

The court sentenced Solanas to three years in prison. Her screenplay later surfaced from a trunk in The Factory after Warhol's death in 1987.

2. He was a gay man and a devout Catholic

Warhol's sexuality was not widely discussed during his life, but greatly influenced his art, including his prints, films, TV shows, magazines and nude sketches. Warhol came out before many other celebrities at the time, such as Elton John or Freddie Mercury.

One could argue that Warhol was the most famous openly gay man of his time, according to Marston.

"His homosexuality did manifest in his art projects a great deal, whether in his homoerotic films from the '60s or Interview Magazine with a bunch of queer writers at the helm," Marston said. "Even though he wasn't marching in the streets for gay rights, he tried to empower other queer people in his community through his different art projects."

Another important facet of Warhol's identity was Catholicism. His family came from a Carpatho-Rusyn background and he was raised Byzantine Catholic, often attending church multiple times a week, according to Marston. Warhol's religion didn't make an appearance in his work until late in his life, when he did a series on da Vinci's "The Last Supper."

"It was something he was really private about. His friends knew he was raised Catholic, but they didn't know how often he was going to church and that there would be a rosary tucked underneath his turtleneck so no one would see it," Marston said.

It wasn't until Warhol's funeral, where attendees included members of his church and the Catholic soup kitchen he volunteered in, that his devout Catholicism was more publicized. Marston speculates that Warhol was more open about his sexuality because it was viewed more positively by his peers.

"It's cooler among the people he's hanging out with. He's hanging out with more queer people than devout Catholics throughout his adult life, or former Catholics who had since abandoned their faith," Marston said. "He was really interested in developing a personal brand. Being a devout Catholic doesn't really fit in with the brand."

3. He managed a rock band

Warhol was the manager of The Velvet Underground from 1966 to 1967, before they had achieved widespread recognition or even released an album. Interested in all forms of media, managing a band was Warhol's way of branching into the music scene, and he injected much of his own creativity into the group, according to Marston.

"[A Velvet Underground concert] was this multimedia phenomenon called 'The Exploding Plastic Inevitable,' where you got the band performing on stage and several different films by Warhol being projected onto the walls, as well as psychedelic patterns," Marston said. "Warhol's friends and assistants would be these 'backup dancers' grinding and cracking whips."

Warhol also designed the iconic cover of The Velvet Underground's debut album, which features a yellow banana as a sticker that could be peeled off to reveal a hot pink banana underneath.

4. His parents were impoverished Eastern European immigrants

By the end of the 1950s, Warhol had won almost every graphic design award in advertising and was earning \$70,000 a year, a healthy amount even by today's standards, Marston said. His childhood, however, was much less fortunate.

Warhol's Carpatho-Rusyn parents immigrated to the United States in 1914 from the Carpathian Mountains in Eastern Europe. Born Andrew Warhola in a shack in the Pittsburgh Hill District, Warhol lived in small homes without plumbing before eventually moving to Dawson Street in South Oakland where he shared a room with his two brothers.

Despite the poverty the family endured during the Great Depression, Warhol's mother Julia encouraged his artistic interests. An artist herself, Julia knew that Warhol couldn't follow a path of manual labor due to a childhood sickness of St. Vitus dance. Though she encouraged all of her children to create, Warhol had an obvious talent.

"They wanted to make sure that he got an education, and that's why he was the only one of the three brothers to go to college. They thought that he would become an art teacher," Marston said. "Growing up dirt poor in this really desolate rural village and then coming to Pittsburgh, their aspirations were not quite as high as a doctor or lawyer."

Warhol ultimately attended Carnegie Tech as a pictorial design major, according to Marston, where he developed the style that would make him one of the 20th century's most influential artists.