

Andy Warhol *Shadows*

On Tuesday I hung my painting(s) at the Heiner Friedrich gallery in SoHo. Really it's one painting with 83 parts. Each part is 52 inches by 76 inches and they are all sort of the same except for the colors. I called them "Shadows" because they are based on a photo of a shadow in my office. It's a silk screen that I mop over with paint.

I started working on them a few years ago. I work seven days a week. But I get the most done on weekends because during the week people keep coming by to talk.

The painting(s) can't be bought. The Lone Star Foundation is presenting them and they own them.

Someone asked me if I thought they were art and I said no. You see, the opening party had disco. I guess that makes them disco décor.

This show will be like all the others. The reviews will be bad—my reviews always are. But the reviews of the party will be terrific.

I had the painting(s) hung at eye level. Any lower and people would kick them, especially at the party. The only problem with hanging the show was the gallery floor. One end of the gallery floor is a foot higher than the other.

But the kids helped me, and when we finished we all had lunch. I ate a pickle and drank some Evian and then some Perrier-Jouët.

The gallery looked great. It's a simple, clean space. My Mao show was bigger, but this is the biggest show I've had in New York City in a long time.

After we were finished, I took a walk with some friends. We stopped by at Ivan Karp's gallery, O. K. Harris. He told me that there are a lot of people now doing shadows in art. I didn't know that.

Then we crossed the street and went into Holly Solomon's gallery. I always like to see if the art across the street is better than mine.

—Andy Warhol¹

Andy Warhol penned these pithy remarks for *New York* magazine following the opening of his *Shadows* exhibition at Heiner Friedrich's gallery in New York City on January 27, 1979. The installation featured the environmentally scaled painting in multiple parts, which the artist created in 1978–79. Warhol's brief statement provides telling insight into what distinguishes this remarkable work within his oeuvre. As "one painting," *Shadows* consists of 102 equally sized canvases that are hung edge to edge and low (but not too low to be kicked) to the ground. While fixed by these physical terms, *Shadows* is nonetheless contingent in its

presentation. Since the number of panels shown varies according to the available size of the exhibition space, as does the order of their arrangement, the work in total contracts, expands, and recalibrates with each installation. For the work's first display, the gallery accommodated 83 panels that were selected and arranged by Warhol's assistants in two rooms: the main gallery and an adjacent office.

The all-encompassing (if modular) scale of *Shadows* simultaneously recalls Warhol's use of wallpaper to enhance the sensorial enclosure of an installation and his interest in mechanical reproduction (embodied by both the techniques of photography and serigraphy, which always have the potential for serial repetition).² In *Shadows* the rote silkscreens are offset and inflected by the loose, gestural mopping (to borrow Warhol's term) of color onto each canvas. In the late 1970s he increasingly explored the notion of abstraction. Warhol began to work without recognizable imagery and traditional painterly materials, or work with found subjects of abstraction, as evident in his series of Oxidation paintings (produced by the interaction of urine and metallic pigment) and Camouflage paintings, respectively. *Shadows* builds on these series, privileging the application of colored pigment to canvas support.³

As his interest in abstraction grew, Warhol began to explore the concept of a shadow by way of tonal variations of lighting in a set of studio photographs. These images would serve as the basis for a group of paintings to which *Shadows* belongs.⁴ The work is defined by a monochromatic canvas that is articulated by an abstract image, a shadow, likely derived from one of the photographs that Warhol's assistant Ronnie Cutrone took of a maquette created to experiment with the effects of light and silhouette. This was transformed to silkscreens and applied as either a positive or negative value onto the right side of each canvas.

Shadows features a wide variety of colors and hues, such as acra violet, cadmium yellow, cobalt blue, phthalo green, and the artist's signature silver. These colors were applied to each canvas using a sponge mop. Warhol is known for his brightly seductive palettes as evident in the psychedelic sequencing of acid greens and fluorescent pinks applied to self-portraits and images of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Marilyn Monroe, Mao Zedong, and other international celebrities. In these works, found photographs culled from popular sources are isolated

and altered through the abstraction of the silkscreen stencil and the application of color to reconfigure context and meaning. The repetition of each famous face drains the image of individuality, so that each becomes a stand-in for non-individuated and depersonalized notions of celebrity.⁵ The replication of a seemingly abstract gesture (a jagged peak and horizontal extension) across the panels of *Shadows* further minimizes the potential to ascribe any narrative logic to Warhol's work. Rather, as he dryly explained, the paintings are mostly the same except for their colors: that is, in *Shadows* color assumes the position of the work's subject. Despite Warhol's self-effacing dismissal of the works as "disco décor," as all color and context, these paintings substantiate a genuine interest in composition, method, and style, indeed the practice of painting itself.

Commissioned by Dia Art Foundation (then known as the Lone Star Foundation), *Shadows* is exemplary of the relationships that the burgeoning foundation fostered with artists.⁶ In addition to commissioning these canvases, Dia worked with Warhol to amass an unrivaled collection of his paintings and works on paper that were acquired directly from his studio. Dia's mission has always been to support artists through both the commission and long-term presentation of works of art. In fulfillment of this goal, Dia donated the vast majority of its Warhol holdings to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, where they became part of the museum's founding collection and permanent display when it opened to the public in 1994.

notes

1. Andy Warhol, "Painter Hangs Own Paintings," *New York* 12, no. 6 (February 5, 1979), pp. 9–10.
2. Lynne Cooke, "Andy Warhol," in *Dia:Beacon*, ed. Lynne Cooke and Michael Govan, 4th ed. (New York: Dia Art Foundation, 2014), p. 288.
3. Yasmil Raymond, "Ghost Painter," in *Andy Warhol: Shadows* (Chicago: Arts Club of Chicago, 2011), p. 6.
4. Cooke, "Andy Warhol," p. 287.
5. Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Andy Warhol's One-Dimensional Art: 1956–1966," in *Andy Warhol: A Retrospective*, ed. Kynaston McShine (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1989), pp. 51–52.
6. Founded by Heiner Friedrich, Philippa de Menil, and Helen Winkler in 1974, the foundation provided artists the resources and support to realize large-scale or experimental works of art, before it had established either a permanent building or collection.

Andy Warhol was born in Pittsburgh in 1928. He studied pictorial design at the city's Carnegie Institute of Technology, then moved to New York City upon graduation. Relinquishing a successful and acclaimed career as a commercial illustrator in New York in the 1950s, he began exhibiting paintings with silkscreened Pop imagery in 1962. In 1963 he began to produce films and other projects, including *Interview* magazine, which was first published in 1969. Retrospectives of his work have been organized by the Pasadena Art Museum (1970), Museum of Modern Art in New York (1989), and Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (2002). *Shadows* (1978–79) was first exhibited at Heiner Friedrich's gallery at 393 West Broadway in New York in January 1979. Concurrent with Friedrich's representation, Warhol was one of the key artists that the burgeoning Dia Art Foundation supported. In 1986 Dia presented Warhol's Disaster paintings (1963) and then in 1986–87 a selection of his early hand-painted images (1960–62) at 77 Wooster Street in New York. The artist was preparing a third exhibition, an installation of his series of Skulls (1976), at the time of his death in New York in 1987. Dia continued to exhibit Warhol's work in New York through the 1990s, and donated its entire collection of works by Warhol, except for *Shadows*, to the newly opened Andy Warhol Museum in 1994. In 2005–06 *Shadows* formed the centerpiece of the exhibition *Dia's Andy: Through the Lens of Patronage* at Dia:Beacon, a celebration of Dia's history with the artist. After its long-term display at Dia:Beacon, the work traveled to institutions across the United States and at venues in Bilbao, Paris, and Shanghai.

selected bibliography

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Shadows, 1978–79

Acrylic on canvas
Dia Art Foundation

Dia Art Foundation

Founded in 1974, Dia is committed to advancing, realizing, and preserving the vision of artists. Dia fulfills its mission by commissioning single artist projects, organizing exhibitions, realizing site-specific installations, and collecting in-depth the work of a focused group of artists of the 1960s and 1970s. For more information, visit www.diaart.org.

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Cover: Andy Warhol, *Shadows*, 1978–79, detail view. © Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York

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