Andy Warhol was born in 1928 in Pittsburgh to immigrant parents of (Ruthenian) Czechoslovakian stock. He studied pictorial design at Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh from 1945–49. After a successful and distinguished career as a commercial illustrator in New York in the 1950s, he began exhibiting his paintings with silkscreened Pop imagery in 1962. In 1963 he began making films. His art was thereafter shown widely in numerous exhibitions throughout the world.


Sanna, Jole de. “Andy Warhol, Galleria Refettorio delle Stelline,” Arterium, (Summer 1987), 131-152.


Andy Warhol was an artist of international renown, known for his influential pop art movement and his contributions to the world of contemporary art. His works often challenged traditional artistic boundaries and explored themes of consumerism, celebrity, and mass media.

The Last Supper, 1986
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
116 x 225 inches

The Last Supper, 1986
Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas
78 x 400 inches
Gallery Bruno Bischofberger, Zurich

The Last Supper, 1986
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
118 x 228 inches

Camouflage Last Supper, 1986
Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas
83 x 201 inches

Sixty Last Suppers, 1986
Silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas
114 x 258 inches

A changing selection of silkscreen collages on paper from the Last Supper series, 1986. All works approximately 23 1/2 x 31 3/4 inches.


Funding for this project has been provided by the Dia Art Council, the major annual support group of Dia Center for the Arts, and the Dia Art Circle.

Dave Hickey, a freelance writer and critic, Professor of Art Criticism and Theory at the University of Nevada in Las Vegas, will give a lecture on Andy Warhol: The Last Supper Paintings in the spring of 1995.
The Last Supper Paintings

The Last Supper of Leonardo da Vinci formed the subject of Andy Warhol’s final art, arguably, one of his greatest series of paintings. The impetus was the proposal for an exhibition to be held in a gallery in Milan located directly across the street from the church housing the celebrated Renaissance fresco. The invitation was extended by the dealer, Alexandre Iolas, whose suggestion of this subject must have been congenial to Warhol both because the artist had recently appropriated and adapted other masterpieces of western art history and because, albeit unknown to even the most close friends, he had not only been brought up but remained a devout Catholic. A copy of this painting reportedly hung in his family home in Pittsburgh while he was growing up.

Compared with his treatment of most other found or pre-existing images, Warhol tackled Leonardo’s the Last Supper with extraordinary vigor and ingenuity: he produced a dozen monumental paintings based on this iconography in 1986, together with a group of smaller canvases, each a square meter, and numerous works on paper. Moreover, he explored the image in several guises: typically, most consisted of low-grade renderings of the motif. In preparation for his series he had acquired reproductions of Leonardo’s icon in art books, plus several miniaturized sculptural renditions, one a cheap plastic replica, another an expensive hand-drawn gaily colored enamelled version. In the end he seems to have settled for quite a different depiction, both, characteristically from kitcsh, secondary sources: a detailed black and white reproduction based on a nineteenth century copy of the rapidly deteriorating original, and a schematic outline drawing of the kind found in children’s coloring books. 1 The former provided the source for the silk-screens, the latter for the so-called hand-painted works, made by tracing in acrylic the contour of the image projected onto the canvas with an epidiascope. Silkscreening was the technique that Warhol had favored since the sixties. It allowed him to employ images derived from popular culture—from advertising, the news, publicity prints, film stills and the like—in ways that directly recalled their sources in photography and their origins in mass reproduction. Regarded in some quarters as an icon of criticism and in others as a wide-eyed celebrant of the mass culture that provided the principal subjects of his art in the sixties, Warhol had discovered in this technique the means to a deadpan delivery that signaled a determined indifference to issues of good and bad taste. Repetition, with standardization, an integral component of contemporary production processes, was, equally a staple of his aesthetic strategy in these years. On occasion, the same image was doubled, even hundreds, of times to produce an effect, which according to one’s sensibility, was either of numbing neutrality or of incantatory munificence. Thirty Are Better Than One is the telling title that Warhol in 1963 gave to a painting with multiple images of Mona Lisa, (the only readymade from the realm of art in his oeuvre for almost two decades), perhaps thereby indicating his position regarding this procedure. 2

As the seventies unfolded, Warhol developed into a media star in his own right, and his art was correspondingly devoted to portraying the glamorous and the would-be glamorous doyen of glitter. The eighties, by contrast, witnessed something of a reorientation, as the range of his work expanded greatly, partly in response to miscellaneous but ever-growing requests from dealers and entrepreneurs cresting the art market boom, and partly on account of his collaborations with other artists. The most notable of these, a joint endeavor with Francesco Clemente and Jean-Michel Basquiat, began in 1983. As the burgeoning paintings moved between the studios of this trio, Warhol took to tracing his motifs by hand as well as silkscreening them onto the canvases. Such logos as those used by General Electric, Dove soap, and Mr. Peanut, were incorporated alongside images culled from the cheaper end of the advertising spectrum, images for products including sneakers, motorcycles, and wonder cures, as well as from cheap religious leaflets.

Although certain of these motifs were reemployed in the hand-drawn Last Supper paintings, in several memorable instances Warhol left the image untouched, a clear, if cursive, silhouette. In addition, he experimented by manipulating details of the figure of Christ or of groups of several apostles, treating them like elements in a collage, juxtaposing and repeating them on different scales, turning them, or filling them with flat primary hues. Likewise, in the screened version of his works, he varied the colors of the ground, from pink to red to yellow, or by overpainting it with a camouflage pattern. He also rearranged the multiple screens required to compose the vast image, repeating and inverting sections, and omitting others. Finally, shifts in the size of the individual image permitted a return to a mode of serial repetition akin to that found in his now “classic” works of the sixties.

This series based on the Last Supper was not, however, the sole occasion on which Warhol engaged with the work of Leonardo. As noted above, Mona Lisa had formed the focus of several early paintings, and she reappeared in two series begun at the end of the seventies, known as Reversals and Retrospectives. (The former were composed by a negative printing of the iconography; the latter constituted a compendium of the artist’s favorite motifs from previous decades.) In addition, a landscape detail from an oil by Leonardo of the Annunciation was used in 1984 for a group of works within the series Leonardo’s Last Supper, like the Sistine Madonna, remains for all its ubiquity and familiarity, an eloquent symbol. Indeed it may have been precisely this inimitable combination of cliché with spiritual resonance that elicited Warhol’s approbation, for it permitted him to veil whatever private sentiment or investment he personally might have felt for it under the mantel of an homage to one of the greatest artists of the past—and to do this without relinquishing its identity as a commonplace mass media motif, the echt signifier of the Pop Art movement to which his own contribution was so instrumental.