

ANDY WARHOL

To Have and to Hold



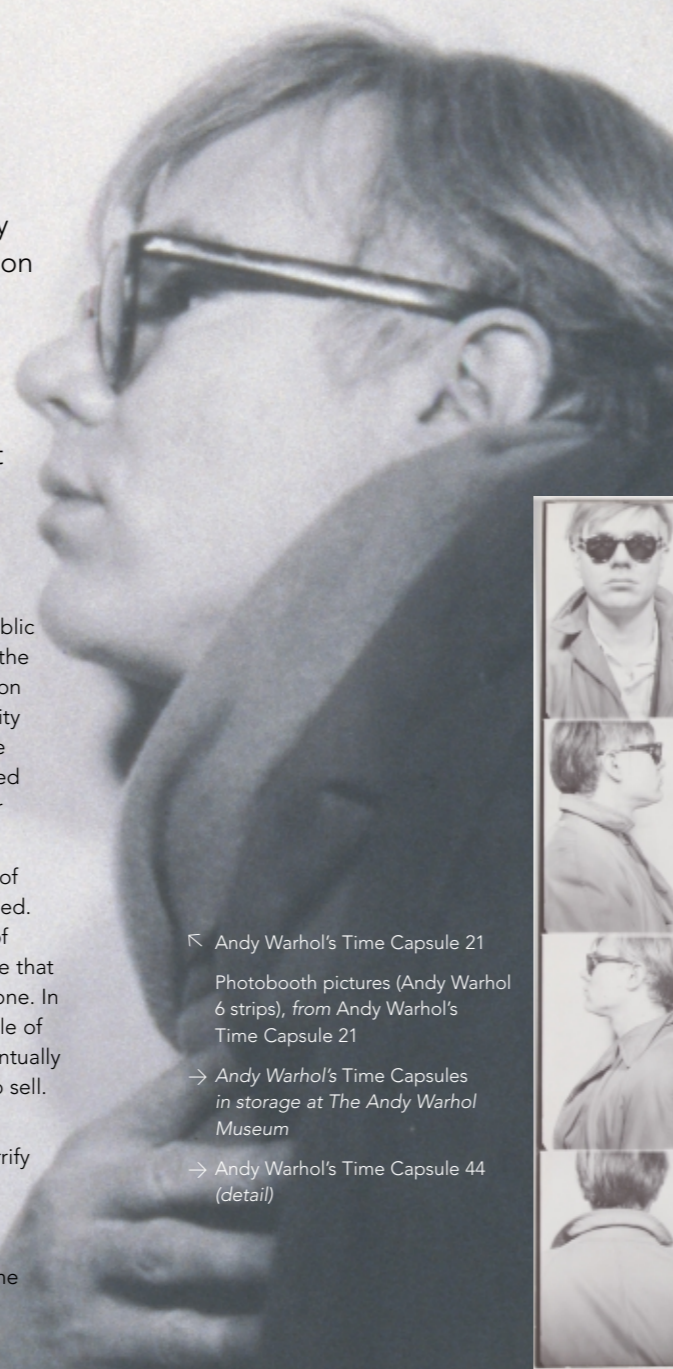
A Portrait of the Artist as Collector

The collecting practices of artist Andy Warhol were uncovered in an exhibition of 3000 objects he put into *Time Capsules* in the 1970s and 80s. Amy Barclay, Curator, International Art Exhibitions, at the National Gallery of Victoria, presents a portrait of the artist as collector in this extract from her catalogue essay

Until his death in 1987, little was known about the private life of Andy Warhol, whose high-profile public identity focused on his status as a major figure in the American Pop Art scene. It was not until the auction house Sotheby's was charged with the responsibility of selling off the artist's estate that the clandestine sanctum of his Manhattan townhouse was breached and a portrait of Andy Warhol, obsessive collector extraordinaire, began to emerge.

What was occurring in the private life and spaces of Andy Warhol amounted to a practice quite untamed. His five-storey Manhattan townhouse was so full of boxes, objects and junk he had amassed over time that he had been living in his bedroom and kitchen alone. In what *Time* magazine referred to as the 'garage sale of the century', the auction of the Warhol estate eventually comprised over 10 000 items and took ten days to sell.

Warhol's collecting habits arguably redefined the principles of art collection in a way that would horrify most connoisseurs. Starting from an early age by collecting the autographs of movie stars, Warhol effectively spent decades acquiring anything and everything of interest to him. Perhaps it was not the



- ↖ Andy Warhol's Time Capsule 21
Photobooth pictures (Andy Warhol 6 strips), from Andy Warhol's Time Capsule 21
- Andy Warhol's Time Capsules in storage at The Andy Warhol Museum
- Andy Warhol's Time Capsule 44 (detail)

collecting or the potential to attract the approval of others, but the having — the emotional satisfaction of possession — that Warhol was seeking.

Where Warhol identified an unexplored category of collecting, he would immediately seek to fill it. His sources ranged from New York's finest art galleries and most elite auction houses to its sprawling weekend flea markets. With his eclectic taste, Warhol would often purchase the original and the fake together.

Perhaps Warhol's collecting was an aberration of modern consumer culture. It is more interesting, however, to consider Warhol's shopping habits as another form of artistic practice and expression altogether. As sure as Pop Art was a highly self-referential movement, it is possible that, given his eccentric taste and broad collecting agenda, Warhol was effectively collecting himself.

In his 1975 book *THE Philosophy of Andy Warhol: (From A to B and Back Again)* Warhol ironically discusses the need to live in one big empty space, with cupboards for storage located elsewhere: 'What you should do is get a box for a month, and drop everything in it and at the end of the month lock it up. Then date it and send it over to Jersey. You should try to keep track of it, but if you can't and you lose it, that's fine, because it's one less thing to think about, another load off your mind.'

This philosophy had already begun to manifest. In 1974 Warhol moved house and studio. During the change of apartments, he and his associates bought a number of cardboard boxes to accomplish the move. Recognising their archival value, Warhol soon began filling uniform-sized removalist boxes kept beside his desk with ephemera from his daily life. He sealed them when they were full, sent them off to storage, and began to refer to them as *Time Capsules*. He later determined to fill one a month, but by the end of his life he had amassed over 600 capsules, nearly four times his original estimate.

For Warhol, the 'TCs' (as he referred to them) were a loose filing system, a way of forgetting but not discarding. If it fitted into the box and was of interest to him (and very little was not of interest to him), then into the box it went, permanently. Returning or selling was not a part of Warhol's nature. The capsules became a function of retaining possession and yet relieving the mind of responsibility, like long-term memory held in off-campus storage. They became a most effective method for Warhol to bestow some sense of order upon the chaos of his world. It was not a hobby; it was a function of daily life.

The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, is the keeper of Warhol's art and the *Time Capsules*.

They were gifted to the museum by the Warhol Foundation following their discovery in a number of locations including storage, studio and home. The museum views the *Time Capsules* as an important aspect of Warhol's artistic practice and ensures at least one capsule is always on display. Of the 612 capsules found, about 100 have been painstakingly inventoried so far. Every item contained within a Time Capsule is catalogued, housed in archival materials and put back in the box from which it came. Many items found in the *Time Capsules* have since been identified as source material for his art.

With Warhol's home and his *Time Capsules* spending many years hermetically sealed from the public eye, both can be seen to delineate in similar ways the boundary between the two sides of Andy Warhol, the public icon and the private person. Greater than the sum of their parts, the *Time Capsules* offer testimony to Warhol's many lives as artist, businessman, music producer and collaborator, magazine editor, film producer, collector and celebrity.

As anthropological samplers, the Warhol collection and the *Time Capsules* provide fresh appraisals of the art and life of the American post-World War II era and our comprehension of its histories. Individually and together, they also offer a kaleidoscope of opportunities for understanding the essential Andy Warhol. Never has the concept of self-storage been so ironically redefined.

Amy Barclay

Andy Warhol's Time Capsules was exhibited at the National Gallery of Victoria from 16 March to 8 May 2005. The exhibition was organised by The Andy Warhol Museum, one of the four Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh, USA, and the Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt, Germany

