

Did Andrew Warhola dream of mechanical sheep?

The journey takes its starting point in a little boy with Saint Vitus Dance Disease bedridden and coloring books for a Hierarchy bar, while growing up in the slums of Pittsburgh. A solitary child collecting stars autographs and dreams from the silver screen. A talented youth who went to college and later on moved to the big apple. A fairytale constructed with one part awkwardness, one part anything goes and one part darkness from the depths of the human soul. A man who came at a time when in his own words – "In the 60's everybody was interested in everybody. In the 70's everybody started dropping everybody. The 60's were clutter, the 70's are very empty". This man has been the herald of the new mantras and the era of "shop 'til you drop", coining such catchphrases as: "Everybody will be famous for fifteen minutes" and "Art is what you can get away with". In the 50's he bought his first television set and 1964 he married his tape-recorder.

This is what we know about the persona of Andy Warhol, a telltale, a construction. I myself will never forget the famous interview where he just answers "oh, yes and oh, no" to the interviewers questions, at one point you see him and his art-dealer laugh to the boyish prank they are playing with the reporter. The persona of Andy Warhol is still being moulded and it is a fun process, something other than the seriousness of the modernists. Something that cracks you up like a floating pillow of tinfoil or the endless repetition of a soup can. A mirror to the absurdity of contemporary life, and the era when "the Life-style" got invented and turned into a joke.

So when Thomas Broomé calls me up and asks me to write a text for his Paris show at the Bendana-Pinel Contemporian, and he tells me that it is about the 1988 Sotheby's auction of Andy Warhols estate. I am at first perplexed and I think: "What is so interesting about that?". But as the conversation progresses I am more and more won over, and now I am curios, so we set up a time for a visit to the studio. I think to my self: "Well if I do not like it, I can always say no". At Thomas studio I am thrown into a new side of Andy Warhol, or maybe we should call him by his real name: Andrew Warhola. The persona which I described in the earlier passage and the one imprinted on my mind; is nothing at all like the images I find myself staring at. This looks more like a renaissance residence of some count in Europe or maybe the governor in colonial America. Sure there is contemporary details like a telephone on the bedside table and electrical lamps. But in all it looks like something old and murky, festering in its own conservatism. With the beautiful precision that is the trademark of Thomas Broomé, he has carefully built up the pictures with thousands of thin lines in different colors and tones. Constructed, added and subtracted until the images we are given to look at, opens up and a new world of "Dunkel-schrift" materializes with details almost bordering on the maniacal. I loose myself in the images of the bedroom, the TV-room and the hallway. I stand silent, just watching, not really able to comment or ask an insightful question, I am flabbergasted. I never would have thought that this was the home of Andy Warhol! I guess that I never really thought about how he lived, but if I had this would not had been it.

After a while I tear myself from the paintings and look at Thomas, he smiles and says –"This happens a lot when people come to visit, I just give them the time they need and stay silent. They look at the work and I look at them, it is very nice. Most of the time I do not get to see the reactions of the viewer". We talk for hours about the different meanings of the paintings from Andrew Warhol's home. Thomas has revised his ideas about the pop art icon, –"now I think of him as a very lonely person with self-hatred for his looks, his body, his scars, it is sad in a way".

At Sotheby's there were over ten thousand items being sold of, all from a thirty room townhouse of which Warhol made use of three rooms as living quarters, the rest was packed with paintings, furniture's, cookie jars and collectibles. When I flicker through the catalogue from the sale I am amazed by the diversity of the collection and since I am an Art person; the quality of the modern and contemporary art. All the big names are collected here (all men of course) like: Pollock, Bueys, Duchamp, Picasso, Dali, Basquiat, Herring, Clemente and so forth. Names that are so well known that you only need to write out their surname to get across.

Thomas shows me a piece he is working on called "Lots" it is a table crammed with small paintings inspired from the images from the catalogue. Here art history is reinterpreted into a piece about collecting and hoarding treasures. Thomas tells me he fantasizes that the collector is devouring the pieces like some hungry force, slicing them into mouth size pieces and chewing them up. For me this piece is one of the most congenial works about our time that I have seen in recent years. A time when art left the walls and became a commodity an investment tucked away in heaps somewhere, never to be seen until the collector demises and the heirs open up the treasure vault. Thomas says that he wants to make this table into something like a flea market table. A table where you can still make a bargain and art is affordable. I do not know about that since the prizes he tells me are way over my budget. –"So, what do you think that they should cost than" he asks, "Well maybe around 500€", I say, –"Ok that sounds fair lets make it five hundred for the small ones and go from there", "Cool" I say and hope that his dealer does not have any other thoughts on the subject. A stack of paintings made to be a bargain but with the love and detail of his other paintings is something very generous and when was the last time I heard about a generous art world I think.

The conversation continues and we talk for a short time about the art market and exhibitions Thomas is involved in. To go back to painting and the so-called death of the medium, in Thomas studio it lives and breathes at least. I want to talk more about Andy Warhol, and Thomas tells me that he has done research and read a lot of books on the subject from biographies to exhibition catalogues. "Holy terror" by Bob Collacello he mentions as a favourite, he read the massive Warhol diaries, looked in time capsule no 21 and bought the DVD about Edie Sedgwick to just mention some of the things he tells me about. –"I collect a lot of information that not always seems relevant for the work, I mean what does Edie Sedgwick have to do with Andrew Warhol and his collection, she was dead when he started collecting.

For me it is about some kind of enrichment to the paintings I am making. I imagine that the knowledge I gather shows in the way I choose to make a painting, the size, how it feels and how the strokes are made, the density of it. It is almost like a good stock you boil it down, reduce it until it is almost only taste and nothing else". During our conversation Thomas returns to the notion of the body we live in, he says that he believes that Andrew was very self-conscious about his body and all the flaws he thought he had. Everything from hearsay like a scrotum that was disfigured from hemangioma to his skin problems and later in life the scars from the murder attempt by Valerie Solanas.

It seems to me that he hated his body and that is why I chose the title for the exhibition: "Not to touch the earth". For me it is about not being in the body, to be disconnected from the earthly and Andrew also talked repeatedly about wanting to be a machine, something clean and indestructible I imagine. At the end we talk about the strange LED painting or whatever it is he made, I have never seen anything like it. It looks like a slick arena television, but up close it becomes almost like an impressionistic painting with its dots of color. In a short loop a moth circles around the foundation of a lamp to fly off and bounce continuously at the naked electrical light bulb. –"It reminds me of our short time here and what we make of it", Thomas says. –"It is beautiful" I say, in some stupid obviousness that really need no comment. –"So is life" says Thomas.

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