

Andy Warhol and the representation of postmodernism in his work

This essay shall investigate postmodernism and how Andy Warhol contributed to the movement. A goal is to define postmodernism, discuss its different characteristics, the challenges faced by postmodern artists, and why it became well known and more accepted in the 1960s. Furthermore, this essay shall explore the role of Andy Warhol and how his work focused on cultural issues. For example, the iconic *Campbell Soup* and the *Shot Marilyn*.

Postmodernism can be defined as “a reaction against modernism.” According to Barry (2017, p.86) “postmodernism rejects the distinction between high and popular.” This means the concept of traditional art was rejected by using different practices and themes. During the period of the 1960s, postmodernism was introduced due to the changes in society. This time was described as a “major social movement which included the Civil Rights” (Targeting News Team, 2018). The 1960s were a time when “movement and culture became more vibrant and unique” (REF). It is likely that this had a profound influence on postmodernism as a movement, as this era of art is defined as “characteristic and striking” (Barry, 2017, p.86).

Postmodernism can be broadly described as an art movement that defies a definition or style. According to a definition provided by Tate (2022) “it embraces many different approaches to art making and may be said to begin with pop art in the 1960s”. While there are a variety of what defines postmodernism, this represents that there’s no extent of what really postmodernism can be defined as. Furthermore, Tate (2022) had also implied that Postmodernism “collapsed the distinction between high culture and mass or popular culture, between art and everyday life.” This has the connotations of postmodernism behind art, highlighting symbolism within the meaning of the piece and not the work itself.



Warhol 1962 *Campbell's soup cans*

In addition to this movement, Andy Warhol's work would be an example which illustrates postmodernism due to Warhol's experimental series. For example, one of Warhol's silkscreen series is the *Campbell's Soup Cans*, of which is many of his consumers pieces that represent. From this example, the art is represented in a repetitive form where it's the same series of imagery, that is formed with different layers of colour, such as, red, white, black, and gold. the technique that Warhol has

used is a form of commercial technique. This series of screen-printing reflects how Warhol redefined the concept of Art, and how his style challenged modernism due to Warhol not only being "influential" but also created "a whole new genre of contemporary art – pop art" (Artwork Group 2020). This quote emphasizes that Warhol had furthered the art industry of new ways of creating, due to his new take on postmodernism and the American Culture

The central theme of Warhol's series of work is inspired by the symbolism of American Culture. For instance, *Campbells Soup Cans* is a commercialised product that was created as an American soup that are bought in stores. The significance of this soup can was that Warhol had a connection to it by having it "every day, for 20 years, the same thing over and over again" (history, 2022). *Campbells soup cans* can be defined as more of a nostalgia product to Warhol as it had been a part of his daily routine, which symbolises the repetitiveness in his daily life and would also explain repetitiveness in his work. The commercialized products are presented as objects to give the viewer the idea of contemplation. that further creates a simpler concept for the objects, presenting them as art rather than something that you pass in your everyday life. According to Berger (2008) "it's purposes to each of us that we transform ourselves, or our lives, by buying something more", from this text I can see that branding and consumerism are affected by image and presentation, without imagery it can affect the persons familiarity with the product. This is evident in the case of certain products can take a part in people's lives, which further the inquiry that Warhol had a connection to this soup, such as the viewers of his work.

Furthermore, Warhol's work represents postmodernism due to Warhol's work portrays "less is more" (Miës van der Rohe's, *Beginning Theory*, p 86) which forms their opinion on how simple this genre of

art is, however, his effectiveness of such a big empire that is targeted towards American culture, by producing art from big companies in family homes. That furthers the concept of Warhol's art and the effectiveness off consumerism due to the familiarity of this product design. This implies that “we think only in signs” (Pierce 1931-58,2.172) which furthers my semiotic analysis that this is not any ordinary soup can, it is a representation of Warhol’s series, which he displayed for immersive thinking, for the viewer even in the smallest fraction.



Warhol 1967 *Shot Marilyn*

There is a growing body of theme in Warhol's work, with his receptiveness of symbols. However, Warhol had taken a new route of symbolisation with consumerism of celebrity Icons and death. The most iconic version of this art piece would be the “Shot Marilyn (1967)” which displayed 10 versions of this portrait, however, using vibrant colours for each individual piece. The inspiration for this piece was due to the actors passing, where Andy wanted to represent Marilyn not just as a Hollywood star but as a masterpiece. Which made many question whether Warhol had created these series of celebrity prints to use them as symbols, however it was much deeper than that as Warhol had found himself creating two consistent themes “death and cult.” the process of this piece was his familiar silkscreen paintings, using Marilyn’s publicity photograph in the Niagara film 1953 (Tate 2020). Warhol produced in an edition of 250 repeated silkscreens that had

furthered multiple 'pop' colours transformations that captured the essence of his previous pieces. Warhol's strived not to depict an individual but to examine Marilyn as her and what the meaning 'her' would be.

As Marilyn is an iconic figure within her beauty but I believe that this piece had created not just the description of Marilyn with words but an image that would describe Marilyn to viewer.

Warhol had produced a vast amount of these Screen-prints that it pushed the concept of postmodernism due to the ironic technique of the advertisement industry, which reminds us of the typical advertisement technique that is newspaper printings. This would support that Warhol had challenged the concept of traditional art and had changed the classical representations that was modern art. The further meaning that Warhol wanted to represent in this series of work was that "you look at the same exact thing, the more the meaning goes away, and the better and emptier you feel" (Moma, 2022). This implies that the image only represents the imagery of Marilyn however, due to the passing it gives greater impact, which furthers into emotions that will fade away such as her life. This depicts that culturally the viewer can interpretive what this piece means to them, but further in time this piece will lose its meaning or significands as it's no longer relevant.

The semiotics representation of this piece is "accustomed to being addressees by these images that we are scarcely notice their total impact" (Berger, 1972, p131,140), that addressed the further representation of what it means to be affected by an image rather than the words to describe it. When further looking into this analysis I had also found from (Berger, 1972, pg139) "publicity is the culture of the consumers society" which is what postmodernism entail due to the abstraction of what is considered in culture and at that time the new decade of fashion, music, and film an era that celebrated that lifestyle. To further represent this piece, Barthes believes that (1957, pg110) "pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful," that furthers shows that after

Marilyn's passing became a greater impact, as to create this portrait of this actor would represent morning a greater emotion from this imagery, which gives impact, and the entitlement of who is Marilyn to the viewer.

In conclusion, the result of this research supports the study of Andy Warhol changing the modernistic views of art and creating the new era of postmodernism, due to Warhol's representation of cultural views in his work. Which Warhol has the connotation of finding new ways to create his established pieces such as the *Campbell Soup Cans* and the *Shot Marylin*, that furthers the idealistic of postmodernism from his views, creating and the use of imagery in his work. In addition to this research, it gives a deeper sense in Warhol's work, thus the impact of his use of bright colour, thick bold black lines and his inspiration. which stems on how art was inspired by Warhol's creations as he had rebelled against on the definition of art at that period, the 1960's. This furthers my conclusion that Andy Warhol art defines postmodernism, and he has given many examples of repetitive work defining his genre of art and the inspiration of this art movement.

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