

Arts & Entertainment

Warhol's time up; soup cans live on

One of pop culture's leading icons, the inimitable **Andy Warhol**, died Sunday in New York at age 58. The artist/filmmaker/superstar/publisher/self-promoter suffered a heart attack in his sleep after undergoing routine gallbladder surgery at New York University Hospital.

Warhol became a legend in the '60s when his paintings of Campbell's Soup cans and screenprints of **Liz Taylor** and **Marilyn Monroe** were shown in galleries across the world.



Harrah's Hollywood
by Scott Harrah

UNL film and English professor **Wheeler Dixon** used to work with Warhol as a camera loader. He said Warhol's death is a great loss to those who understood his genius.

"He was one of the primary visual stylists of the '60s," Dixon said. "His work is of great importance both as a graphic designer and as a filmmaker."

Dixon said that Warhol's early films — which he worked on — are perhaps the most misunderstood. "The Chelsea Girls," "My Hustler," "Vinyl" and "Empire" are of particular quality, Dixon said. Later, **Paul Morrissey** started making films under the Warhol name after the pop-art legend was shot in 1969 by a female protegee who claimed that Warhol tried to "control her life." Morrissey's films, such as "Trash," "Frankenstein," and "Dracula" were merely puerile copies of the experimentation Warhol pioneered.

Born **Andrew Warhola**, the son of Czech immigrants, he survived three nervous breakdowns as a child growing up in the industrial city of McKeesport, Pa.

He attended the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh and graduated with a bachelor's degree in pictorial design in 1949. Then he dropped the

final vowel from his surname and moved to the city that would become his kingdom and his muse, New York.

The Press

With his white hair, translucent skin and deadpan aura, he elevated his role as an artist into fame and personal PR, milking the media for everything.

"Say whatever you want to say about me, but make sure you spell my name right," he once told the press.

Fame was his forte, his world and his prescription for sanity. He worshipped celebrities and often took no-names under the infamous Warhol wing so he could turn them into stars. His most famous Warholette was the late **Edie Sedgwick**, a socialite from a wealthy New England family who dyed her hair the same color as Andy's, dressed in black and became the most fashionable neurotic since **Sylvia Plath**. She made the cult film, "Ciao, Manhattan" and committed suicide shortly afterward. A best-selling biography was written about her two years ago, attesting to the fact that those who were embraced by Warhol were charmed for the rest of their lives.

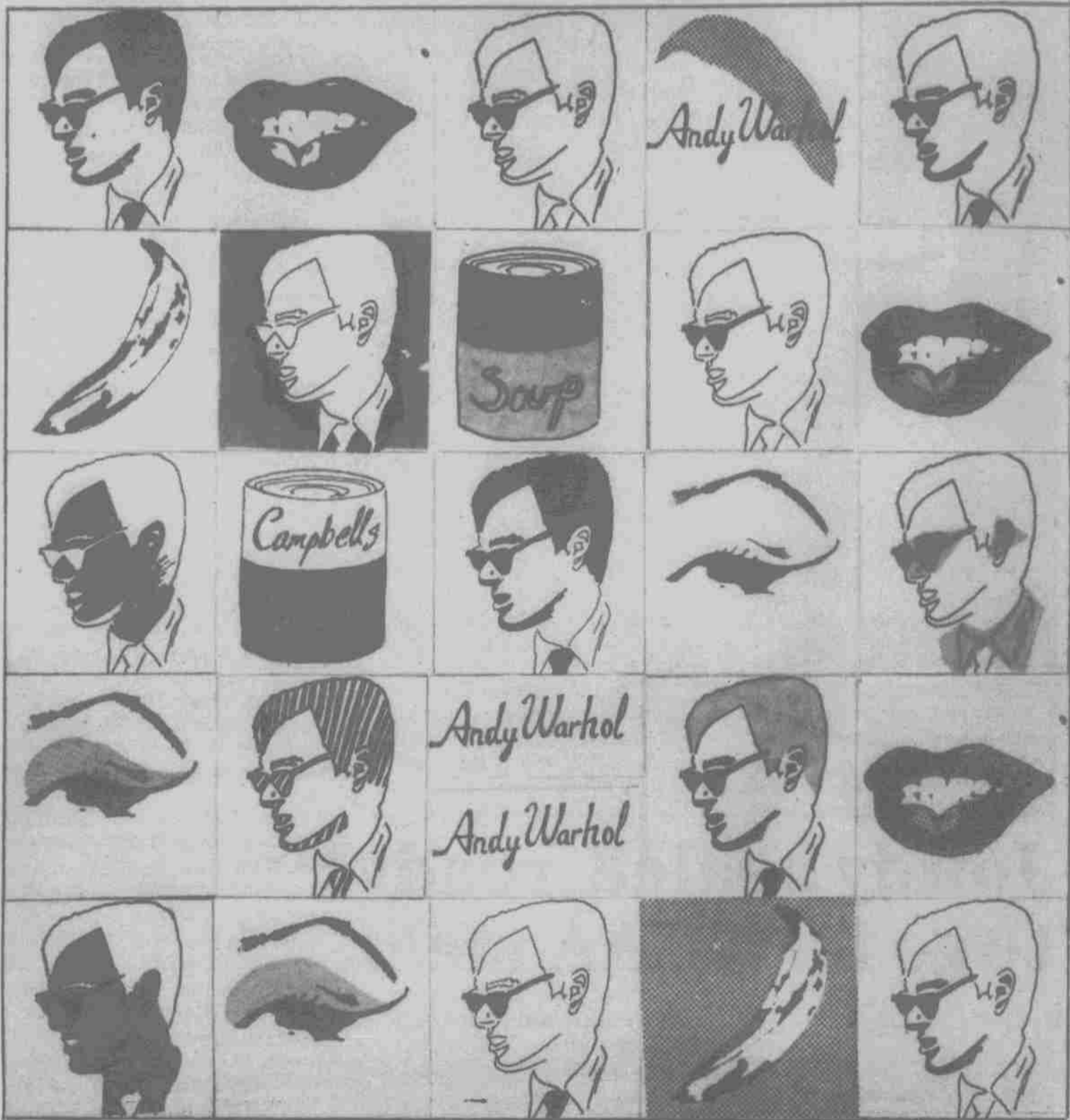
The Factory days

Warhol's studio, known as the Factory, became a hangout in the '60s for all of the Warhol clan, a strange assortment of groupies, drag queens, jet-setters and so-called "beautiful people." Many emerged as superstars of the underground movement, including **Candy Darling**, **Holly Woodlawn** and **Lou Reed**.

Only the latter was a real man. He created the legendary band the Velvet Underground, which illuminated the careers of **Nico**, **John Cale** and others. In 1969, he founded the phenomenally successful Interview magazine, a monthly compendium of jet-set gossip, high fashion and celebrity worship.

"In the future, everyone will be famous for 15 minutes," Warhol once said. The statement became his trademark, for Hollywood was his constant source of fascination.

Dixon said that Warhol loved those in the limelight because he felt that celebrities' lives were art forms in themselves.



John Bruce/Daily Nebraskan

Stardom as art

"People like Liz Taylor are constantly trying to make their lives into a work of art," Dixon said. "And Andy admired that tremendously."

Dixon said that many people were afraid to take Warhol seriously because they didn't understand his work. Although Warhol is best known for his pop-art interpretations of commercial products, he also made paintings of race riots and electric chairs that carried profound political connotations, Dixon said.

Village Voice columnist **Michael Musto** said in a phone interview that Warhol's scene was the forerunner of the now burgeoning "Downtown" art and club culture in lower Manhattan.

The scene, which Musto describes in his book "Downtown," is the child of the avant-garde netherworld Warhol thrived on back in the Factory days,

when journalists would crowd around the place hoping to get the scoop on the legend's latest project. Sometimes, according to the book "Popism and the Warhol '60s," Warhol and cohorts would make up a mock film title or artwork just to see how much media coverage they would get. Such tactics induced ridicule from art critics and film mavens, but Warhol overlooked all the bad press and continued to rise into immortality. Dixon said that Warhol's Factory crowd and his proteges were actually necessary elements of his career.

"Those people gravitated toward him," Dixon said. "He needed those people as a support line."

Andy in real life

As a person, Dixon explained, Warhol was quite shy and self-effacing.

"He never did drugs at all, he didn't drink, and he wasn't interested in sex,"

Dixon claims.

Warhol holds a unique place in Dixon's memory because he was one of his primary influences.

"He is the person who started me out by putting a camera and film in my hand," he said, then paused and solemnly added, "I can't believe I'm speaking about him in the past tense."

To many, Warhol was an innovator; to others, a source of laughter and a phony. But he was perhaps one of the key elements of popular culture and all that encompasses the notion of fame.

He was everything that made up the phrase "art for art's sake." He was shock value, hype and a constant source of energy and conversation.

"I never have liked the thought of death," he once said. "Because you're never around to experience it."

He is now. Andy Warhol, your 15 minutes are up.

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Courtesy of Omnibus Press

Andy Warhol and Lou Reed during the Factory days.