



Cranbrook Art Museum

WARHOL ON VINYL: The Record Covers, 1949–1987+

June 21, 2014–March 15, 2015





**WARHOL ON VINYL:
The Record Covers, 1949-1987+**

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Curated by Laura Mott



Fig. 1
A Program for Mexican Music conducted by Carlos Chávez, 1949.
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Fig. 2
Melodic Magic by Lew White at the Organ and His Orchestra, circa 1953.
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Fig. 3
Progressive Piano (detail), circa 1954.
 © 2014 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York, NY.



Fig. 4
Both Feet in the Groove by Artie Shaw and His Orchestra, 1956.
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Andy Warhol was a lightning rod for popular culture, and the thunder that accompanied its bright flash was music—rock, classical, musicals, opera, jazz, soul, experimental, and everything in between.

Warhol had a fervent appreciation for all types of music. When entering the Factory it was not uncommon to find him working with two stereos blasting simultaneously, one playing Bach and the other rock-n-roll.¹ Sometimes Warhol would listen to the same piece of music one hundred times in a row without tiring; he explained it was done “in order to understand what it meant.”² His role as cultural provocateur and producer of The Velvet Underground is well known, and the combination of art and music was a constant throughout his professional life from 1949 until his death in 1987. However, his design of record covers was the only medium in which he worked consistently throughout his nearly forty years of artistic production. During this period he created close to sixty unique cover designs, and when one adds the variations of size and color—much like his serial paintings and prints—as well as his designs appropriated by other artists after his death, the complete collection of Warhol imagery on vinyl records exceeds well over two hundred.

The record covers offer an extraordinary opportunity to better understand this iconic artist who, despite his universal notoriety, remains an elusive figure. Warhol created a persona that was intentionally a façade, his public self often reduced to a clever quote and a silver wig. He famously explained in an interview with Gretchen Berg in a 1966 issue of the *East Village Other*, “If you want to know all about Andy Warhol, just look at the surface of my paintings and films and me, and there I am. There’s nothing behind it.”³ For any Warhol viewer, the record covers can feel like the discovery of a golden thread; one can follow it through his entire career and encounter Warhol not only through his imagery, but also in his full-bodied passion for music.

From the outset, Warhol envisioned the prolific reach of the record cover as a method for disseminating his name as an artist, as it allowed his images to reach larger audiences than would be possible with a painting. Warhol once proclaimed “repetition adds up to reputation,” an ethos that also fueled

his attraction to the inherent reproducibility of the print medium. Curator Donna De Salvo explains that for Warhol, “being in print represented a change in condition, a shift from the private and inner world, to the one that was external and public. It suggests desirability, that something was wanted by more than one person.”⁴

Warhol and the LP record had parallel lifespans—a destined pairing for all they would accomplish for one another. Columbia Records premiered the LP in 1948 and, in 1949, the forty-five appeared in American record stores for the first time, the same year Warhol arrived in New York City and received his first record design job. Similarly, the final years of the vinyl record as the prominent method for distributing music coincide with the artist’s death in 1987. The introduction of the LP was a major turning point in the distribution of music because it was realized through a durable plastic that could contain up to fifty minutes of audio. Post-war America had recently witnessed the development of commercial packaging, which was designed to increase sales, and the arrival of the LP launched a multibillion-dollar industry to a worldwide public.⁵ Thus, there was high demand for the marketing of music. Many talented artists worked as illustrators to create drawings for record covers and were tasked with conveying the music visually. Warhol’s first album commission, *A Program for Mexican Music* (figure 1), was a concert of Aztec music presented in conjunction with an exhibition of Mexican art at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. The music was played on instruments fabricated according to specifications found in the *Codex Florentinus*, a sixteenth-century document written by Spanish conquistadors. Likewise, Warhol was inspired directly by an illustration from the document, but he reoriented the graphic as if it were a roll of film or a comic strip.⁶ After this first assignment, Warhol apparently proceeded to go to record shops and flip through their bins, making note of the record companies that produced the albums he liked, and then cold-called their headquarters to ask for work.⁷

The early album covers offer insight into Warhol as commercial illustrator and the opportunity to explore his abilities as an accomplished draughtsman, which can be an exciting discovery for those who know him best as an iconic Pop artist. His earliest album illustrations were executed primarily using the blotted-line technique, which consisted of Warhol using a heavily inked nib pen on paper, then quickly transferring the image to another sheet while the ink was still wet. This created an intriguing effect of broken, delicate lines

Fig. 5
Count Basie, 1955. © 2014 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts / ARS, New York, NY. Reproduced by permission of Sony Music Entertainment.



punctuated occasionally by dark pools of ink. The blotted line was Warhol’s signature style for his advertising campaigns and records, the popularity of which led other commercial designers to emulate his style. Subsequently, Warhol’s early illustrations can be difficult to authenticate. Scholars use traditional art historical methods such as similarities in drawing technique and handwriting comparison—which is ironic given that Warhol is famed for his machine-like factory production of images.

The discovery of Warhol’s work from his commercial design period (1949–1962) is ongoing; for example, this exhibition includes the world premiere of a record cover that scholars recently confirmed as Warhol’s design: *Melodic Magic* (figure 2), by Lew White on the Organ and His orchestra, Camden CAE 193. The stars and fireworks drawings are similar to other magazine illustrations by Warhol, and the handwriting is a perfect match (figure 3).

In the early days of the LP, the image of the singer or musician was not important to the record labels, which is why Warhol’s first album covers often depict whimsical graphics or the musical instrument (figure 4). However, artists like Elvis Presley shifted marketing strategies to focus on creating a persona to match the music. Warhol’s cover for *Count Basie* (figure 5) from 1955 is an excellent example of his skilled hand, and it holds the distinct honor of being the first celebrity portrait in the artist’s oeuvre. The inspiration for the illustration is a black-and-white photograph provided by the RCA label. The method of working directly from photographs is prominent throughout Warhol’s body of work; his serial celebrity portraits were generated by Polaroid photos he took himself. In these portraits Warhol



Fig. 6

Giant Size \$1.57 Each, 1963.
© 2014 Andy Warhol Foundation for
the Visual Arts / ARS, New York, NY.

distilled the basic features of the face to create a saturated, graphic image. The Count Basie portrait distinguishes itself because, while he utilizes the outline of the blotted-line technique, he also brushes on a gentle ink wash that gives dimension to the musician's face.

Warhol infamously subverted notions of the unique image in his paintings and prints, which were directly informed by his experience as a commercial illustrator. He shifted professionally to being a fine artist in 1962, the year he first exhibited the Campbell Soup Can series at Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles. De Salvo describes the process as "transforming the mundane to the chic, from handbags to dishwashers to shoes to pharmaceuticals, into reproductions. In part because he had to adjust his drawings to the art director's guidelines, he learned to put less emphasis on original drawings; in this world, the reproduction was the ultimate barometer of success."⁸

In 1963, in conjunction with the exhibition *The Popular Image* at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art, Warhol produced his first Pop album cover: *Giant Size \$1.57 Each* (figure 6). The title image was appropriated from a conventional supermarket poster. The record consists of interviews by curator Billy Klüver with major artists of the Pop Art movement: Jim Dine, George Brecht, Jasper Johns, Roy Lichtenstein, John Wesley, Robert Watts, Tom Wesselmann, Claes Oldenburg, James Rosenquist, Robert Rauschenberg and, of course, Andy Warhol—one of the few times his voice is actually "on vinyl," not just his designs.

Warhol was perhaps most prolific in his knowledge of the cultural power of images, particularly those that developed from the collective American consciousness. Art critic Arthur Danto explains, "Warhol had the tremendous

Fig. 7

The Velvet Underground and Nico,
1967. © 2014 Andy Warhol Foundation
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NY. Rights Holder: EMI Group Limited/
Universal Music Group.



gift of understanding which were the defining myths of a generation. . . . These images distilled and energized the lives of a vast portion of the population."⁹ Warhol understood the domestic power of branding; his sculpture of stacked Brillo boxes was an emblem of cleanliness and brightness, a metaphor for what suburban America wanted the world to be like—sane, safe, and sealed from intrusion. Warhol took the aesthetics of modern society and presented it right back. The artwork functioned as a subversive critique, which aligned him with the mindset of the youth counterculture of the 1960s. His finger was on the pulse, and the pulse beat to the rhythms of The Velvet Underground and The Rolling Stones.

Andy Warhol became the manager and producer of The Velvet Underground and helped to establish them as leading figures in the New York avant-garde. Their live performances were legendary for being complete immersive spectacles that included kaleidoscopic lighting effects and film projections. The infamous cover for *The Velvet Underground & Nico* (figure 7) from 1967 marks a breakthrough in the commercialization of music in several ways—the most prominent being the complete absence of an image of the band, their name, or the type of music on the cover, which was unprecedented. Instead, it features an image of a banana and the signature of Andy Warhol. Warhol was better known than the band at the time, so he designed the cover as an autonomous artwork.¹⁰

Warhol began to simplify the design of his compositions to appeal to the largest possible audience. He looked to contemporaries, such as the theater production of *Hair* and *Rolling Stone* magazine, to hit the right mixture of counterculture and slick commercialism to attract the youth market.¹¹ One



Fig. 8

Silk Electric by Diana Ross, 1982.
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the Visual Arts / ARS, New York, NY.
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Music Entertainment.

of his most successful records was the cover of The Rolling Stones' *Sticky Fingers*, which controversially featured on the front a black-and-white close-up of a man's crotch in jeans and the perspective of his rear on the back. The record was certified gold by the RIAA only eighteen days after its release and, in 2000, certified as platinum.¹² This was the moment when Warhol fulfilled his desire to be collected by the masses—while only a fortunate few own a Warhol painting, millions own *Sticky Fingers*.

Sticky Fingers, *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, and *Academy in Peril* by John Cale were the three “discovery” albums made by Warhol. Each record required active participation to find an image hidden behind the initial image: the fruit is a sticker that when peeled reveals a pink banana; the jeans when unzipped reveal the male model's underwear; and the *Academy in Peril* cover when flipped shows pictures of Cale inside the Kodak slide frames. Unlike paintings, Warhol record covers are meant to be handled, and he cleverly utilized the potential of the medium.¹³

In the 1970s and 1980s, Warhol's production in serial celebrity portraiture was the dominant aesthetic of the covers, which he created for performers such as Paul Anka, Billy Squier, Liza Minnelli, Aretha Franklin, and Diana Ross (figure 8). Warhol generated the business himself through his activities in the New York social scene at places like Studio 54, where he solicited portrait commissions at \$25,000 apiece. The work was executed by the combined efforts of Warhol and his Factory, and during this time they produced close to a thousand portraits using the same method: a Polaroid of the subject shot, the photograph converted to a half-tone positive, the details erased, the most dominant features accentuated, and a silk screen

Fig. 9

Menlove Ave. by John Lennon, 1986.
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Universal Music Group.



executed—snap, convert, edit, print. Musician John Cale of The Velvet Underground explained, “It wasn't called the Factory for nothing. It was where the assembly line for the silkscreens happened. While one person was making a silk screen, somebody else would be filming a screen test. Every day something new.”¹⁴ Record covers were perfectly suited to the Factory method, and Warhol welcomed the additional final step—snap, convert, edit, print, and distribute. The one exception in this era of mass-production was the artist's cover of *Menlove Ave.* (figure 9), an album of unreleased recordings by John Lennon. It was produced after Lennon's death, and Yoko Ono entrusted the design to Warhol, who took great care in creating the portrait of his friend.¹⁵

Warhol died the next year in 1987, yet nearly thirty years after his death he is still vitally present. Perhaps Warhol's most intriguing contribution was to the culture of appropriation, which is now ubiquitous. The catalogue raisonné *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers, 1949–1987* by Paul Maréchal gives a catalogue number to an unauthorized German bootleg of The Rolling Stones album titled *Emotional Tattoo*, which (badly) reproduces a Warhol silk screen of Mick Jagger for its cover. Its inclusion in the scholarship of the Warhol record covers is a testament to the artist's reciprocal influence on popular culture.

In an effort to give volume to this idea, *Warhol On Vinyl* includes a sizeable collection of vinyl and CD covers that appropriate Warhol's artwork or imagery—a multiple-year search mission undertaken by collector Frank M. Edwards. Appropriation is now embedded into twenty-first-century life; Warhol was an oracle and we live his prophecy. Information is distributed

on Internet sites in split seconds, rapidly reproducing images and video, an infinite cycle of grabs and shares. Social media has led us to each create a separate public persona, blurring everyday life into spectacle, every day a new media sensation. The future is now, and as Warhol predicted, everyone is famous for fifteen minutes.

Never yielding, both Andy Warhol and the vinyl record continue on in altered states of production. Warhol is in constant circulation from the highest art auction sales to free search engines. Individuals insistent on a tactical experience with music now produce the vinyl record themselves, and vintage albums—like the Warhol collection—are sought after by a zealous fan base. Like their parallel beginnings, Warhol and the LP have similar afterlives: both are collector's items appreciating in value over time.

Endnotes

- 1 Roberta Smith, "The New Warhol Museum: A Shrine for an Iconoclast," *The New York Times*, May 26, 1994.
- 2 Victor Bockis, *The Life and Death of Andy Warhol* (London: Bantam Press, 1989), 99.
- 3 Gretchen Berg, "Andy Warhol: My True Story," *East Village Other*, November 1, 1966.
- 4 Donna De Salvo "God Is in the Details: The Prints of Andy Warhol," *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1962–1987* (New York: D.A.P., Ronald Feldman Arts, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2003), 19.
- 5 Paul Maréchal, *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers 1949–1987: Catalogue Raisonné* (Munich: Prestel, 2008), 12.
- 6 Maréchal, *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers*, 23.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 12.
- 8 De Salvo, "God Is in the Details," 22.
- 9 Arthur Danto, "Warhol and the Politics of the Prints," *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1962–1987* (New York: D.A.P., Ronald Feldman Arts, Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, 2003), 10.
- 10 Maréchal, *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers*, 139.
- 11 Andy Warhol, *POPism: The Warhol Sixties* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1980), 314.
- 12 Maréchal, *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers*, 151.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 14–15.
- 14 Jonathan Tate, "My 15 Minutes," *The Guardian*, February 11, 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2002/feb/12/artsfeatures.warhol>.
- 15 Maréchal, *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers*, 211.

Exhibition Checklist: Andy Warhol Record Covers

Unless otherwise noted, all record covers are in the collection of the Cranbrook Art Museum, a 2014 gift from Frank M. Edwards and Ann M. Williams.

- 1 *A Program of Mexican Music* conducted by Carlos Chávez, 1949 (blue and green color variations)
- 2 *Alexander Nevsky* by The Philadelphia Orchestra, 1949 (blue and green color variations)
- 3 *Night Beat* by NBC Radio Network, 1952, Collection Paul Maréchal
- 4 *The Nation's Nightmare* by CBS Radio Network, 1952
- 5 *Latin Rhythms* by The Boston Pops, circa 1952
- 6 *Piano Music of Mendelssohn* by Vladimir Horowitz, circa 1952*
- 7 *Madrigal's Magic Key to Spanish*, 1953 (two volumes)
- 8 *Melodic Magic* by Lew White, circa 1953, Collection Guy Minnebach*
- 9 *William Tell Overture, Semiramide Overture* conducted by Arturo Toscanini, 1954
- 10 *Monk* by Thelonious Monk, 1954
- 11 *Progressive Piano*, circa 1954/2013 (reproduction)
- 12 *Count Basie*, circa 1955 (two size variations)
- 13 *Daphnis and Chloe* by Boston Symphony Orchestra, 1955 (five illustrations)
- 14 *Swan Lake—Acts II and III* conducted by Leopold Stokowski, 1955 (six illustrations)
- 15 *Chopin: Nocturnes, Vol. II* by Jan Smeterlin, circa 1956 (three color variations)
- 16 *4 Divertimenti* conducted by Bernhard Paumgartner, 1956
- 17 *Cool Gabriels*, by Conte Candoli et al., 1956
- 18 *I'm Still Swinging* by The Joe Newman Octet, 1956
- 19 *Rhapsody in Blue* conducted by Hugo Winterhalter, circa 1956*
- 20 *Porgy and Bess* conducted by Fabien Sevitzky, circa 1956 ***
- 21 *Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto* by Erica Morini, circa 1956*
- 22 *Both Feet in the Groove* by Artie Shaw, 1956
- 23 *Trombone by Three*, Jay Jay Johnson et al., 1956
- 24 *Waltzes by Johann Strauss, Jr.*, by Century Symphony Orchestra, 1956
- 25 *Kenny Burrell*, 1956
- 26 *Any Old Time* by Artie Shaw, circa 1957*
- 27 *The Congregation* by Johnny Griffin, 1957
- 28 *The Story of Moondog* by Moondog, 1957
- 29 *Blue Lights* by Kenny Burrell, 1958 (two volumes/color variations)
- 30 *Tennessee Williams Reading from The Glass Menagerie, The Yellow Bird and Five Poems*, 1960
- 31 *Giant Size \$1.57 Each*, 1963, Collection of Guy Minnebach
- 32 *Giant Size \$1.57 Each*, 1963/2013 (reproductions, four color variations)
- 33 *This is John Wallowitch!!!*, 1964

- 34 *This is The Other Side of John Wallowitch!!!*, 1965
- 35 *The East Village Other, Electric Newspaper, Hiroshima Day, USA vs. Underground*, 1966
- 36 *ASPEN Magazine, Vol. 1, No. 3*, December 1966 (selection of contents)
- 37 *The Velvet Underground & Nico*, 1967
- 38 *Andy Warhol's Index (Book)*, 1967
- 39 *White Light/White Heat* by The Velvet Underground, 1968
- 40 *Sticky Fingers* by The Rolling Stones, 1971 (three zipper variations, two size/language variations)
- 41 *Academy in Peril* by John Cale, 1972
- 42 *Ultra Violet*, 1973
- 43 *The Painter* by Paul Anka, 1977
- 44 *Love You Live* by The Rolling Stones, 1977
- 45 *The Joke* by Walter Steding and The Dragon People, 1980
- 46 *Liza Minnelli Live at Carnegie Hall*, 1981
- 47 *Honi Soit... by John Cale*, 1981
- 48 *Made in Italy* by Loredana Berté, 1981
- 49 *Silk Electric* by Diana Ross, 1982 (four cover variations)
- 50 *Emotions in Motion* by Billy Squier, 1982
- 51 *Querelle*, soundtrack to film, 1982
- 52 *Emotional Tattoo* by The Rolling Stones, 1983**
- 53 *Made in Spain* by Miguel Bosé, 1983 (two title variations)
- 54 *Soul Vacation* by Rats & Star, 1983
- 55 *The Smiths*, 1984
- 56 *RatFab*, 1984*
- 57 *Aretha* by Aretha Franklin, 1986
- 58 *Menlove Ave.* by John Lennon, 1986
- 59 *Rockbird* by Debbie Harry, 1986 (two variations)
- 60 *Sheila Take a Bow* by The Smiths, 1987
- 61 *MTV High Priority*, compilation, 1987

*Record covers that will be added to the second edition of *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers, 1949–1987: Catalogue Raisonné* by Paul Maréchal to be published in 2014.

**Recognized bootleg numbered in *Andy Warhol: The Record Covers, 1949–1987: Catalogue Raisonné* by Paul Maréchal, 2008.

*** Authentication under consideration

The exhibition also includes a substantial selection of music covers with unauthorized use of Andy Warhol imagery in a section called *Appropriating Warhol: Bootlegs, Rip-Offs, and Homages*.

Credits and Sponsors

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Cranbrook Art Museum

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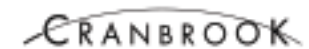
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Cranbrook Art Museum
 39221 Woodward Ave.
 P.O. Box 801
 Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48303-0801

248-645-3323
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GIANT SIZE
157
EACH

THE SMITHS

ALICE BURNETT
and
AT GARDNER WALK

Government

FM STYLE SWINGING

ARTIE SHAW

RAT FAB
RAT FAB
RAT FAB

ULTRA VIOLET

GIANT SIZE
157
EACH

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