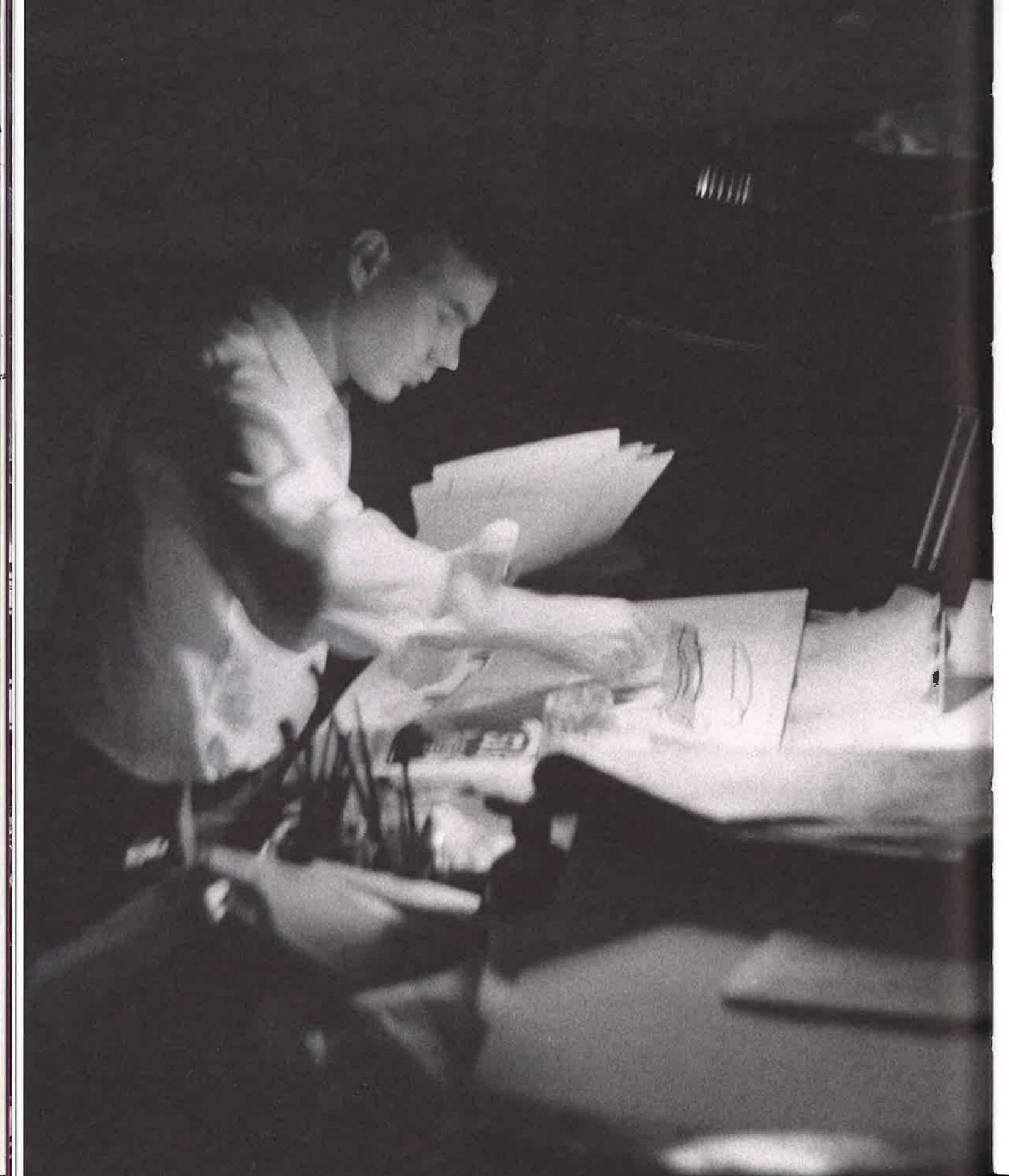




Adman Warhol before pop



Dual pursuits: Warhol's early drawings

Brett Littman

EDWARD WALLOWITCH
Andy Warhol 1957–58 (detail)
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

FOR MANY YEARS, LARGE PARTS OF ANDY WARHOL'S artistic output in the period between the late 1940s and late 1950s – comprising drawings and commercial and fashion illustrations – have only been accessible to visitors and researchers at The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh. Although these early works on paper have long been the most marginalised, undervalued and critically neglected component of the artist's oeuvre, they demonstrate how fundamental drawing was to Warhol at the beginning of his career. Drawing was his sole method of artistic output and also provided his livelihood.

In 1949, after graduating from Carnegie Tech, Warhol moved to New York where he quickly entered the burgeoning and creative world of Madison Avenue advertising and design. By 1951 he had a portfolio of illustrations for magazines, records, books and Christmas cards, and the following year he won his first Art Directors Club award for his newspaper illustrations for the CBS Radio Network serial *The nation's nightmare* (fig 10; pp 90–91): harrowing, hard-hitting and gimlet-eyed depictions of drug use, gang violence, abuse and alcoholism. Warhol's client roster grew to include NBC, *Harper's Bazaar* and the Dobeckmun Company, and a



Fig 10
ANDY WARHOL
'The Nation's Nightmare' 1951
partial LP cover for CBS radio program
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

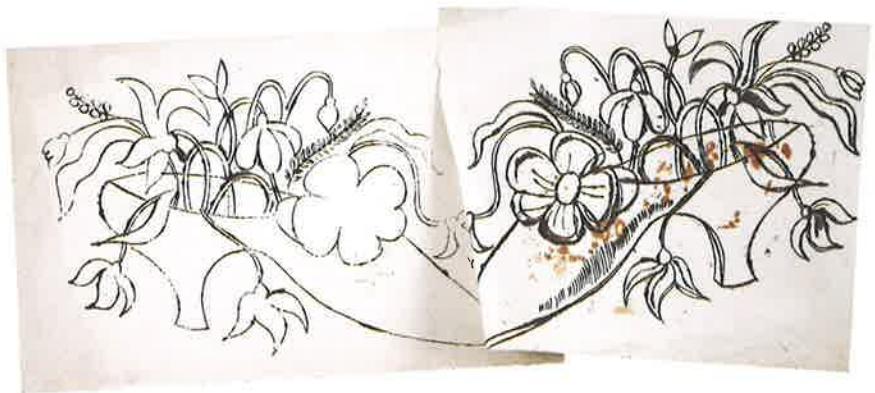


Fig 11
ANDY WARHOL
Truman Capote Shoe 1957
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh

ANDY WARHOL
Boy's Head 1950s
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh



commission to illustrate *The Amy Vanderbilt complete book of etiquette* (1952). In 1955, I Miller & Sons shoe company commissioned Warhol to illustrate their advertisements. The campaign ran for five years and brought him a great deal of acclaim and notoriety in the field.

Independently of, but concurrent with, his commercial work, Warhol pursued a career as a fine artist. His artworks from the late 1940s to the late 1950s can be loosely organised into the following groupings: drawings of hands and feet; portraits of children; portraits of men and women; self-portraits; drawings of flowers, butterflies, cars and shoes; and erotic drawings of male nudes. While some of these works were drawn from life and depict Warhol's friends and community, a great number are copies of images that he saw in LIFE and other popular magazines and advertisements.

Warhol held numerous exhibitions of his drawings in New York in the 1950s, including at Hugo Gallery, Loft Gallery, Serendipity 3, and the Bodley Gallery. In 1947–48 he began to develop his singular blotted-line drawing technique, in which a pencil drawing on waterproof paper is retraced with black ink (the source) and then pressed onto a second sheet to create a reproduced image

in reverse (the transfer). The 'counterproof' – a second reverse-image print made from a freshly inked first print – is a practice that has been used in printmaking for centuries. It is possible that Warhol came across the technique during his studies at Carnegie Tech. For Warhol, the counterproof was leverage against the traditional definition of drawing as an immediate, irreproducible image made by the artist's hand. The blotted-line technique – which prioritises reproducibility and transferability over unique marks – thus created the possibility for a more mechanical approach to drawing.

A group of drawings from 1952–53, in which the original drawings have been left taped to the blotted-line reproductions, gives us a clear view of how the blotted-line method operated for the artist. They also presage many of his ideas about quotidian source imagery, mimesis and photomechanical reproduction that dominated his thinking and art post-1960. In works such as those titled *Boy's Head* 1950s (pp 37, 156–57), Warhol combines an original, graphic, black-ink outline of a boy's face with its blotted-line reproduction. The original has an almost naive sentimentality. The boy, clean-cut and beaming after his hair- tonic treatment, embodies

the postwar American dream. The simulacrum, with its broken and jagged lines due to the imperfections and rudimentary nature of the transfer process, reads clearly not only as a reproduction but also as degraded and depersonalised. *Truman Capote Shoe* 1957 (fig 11) similarly illustrates the stylistic differences between the source and transfer drawings.

A series of drawings made between 1955 and 1959 are particularly intriguing because of their personal, sentimental and erotic nature. They seem anomalous to our received idea of Warhol as the godfather of pop art, appropriation and other postmodern techniques that predicated and celebrated the distancing of art from its maker. All of the drawings are unique ballpoint-pen portraits and not intended for any other form of reproduction. Drawings that Warhol made during his 1955 trip to the Far East, Middle East and Europe with his friend, the set designer Charles Lisanby, are meant to be evocative of the fashion, architecture and ambiance of the exotic places they visited. Other works, such as *Unidentified Male Portrait* 1950s (p 175), *Otto Fenn* c1953 (p 175) (Fenn was a fashion photographer and an early influence on Warhol) and *Self-Portrait* c1953 (p 173) are also personal,

and document Warhol's increasingly subversive gay and cross-dressing world. These works, however, are more taxonomic than revelatory in their approach. But others like *Dick* 1950s (p 38), a tender drawing of a male model with his arm behind his head, *Jack* 1955 (p 164), a profile portrait of the famous avant-garde performance artist and filmmaker Jack Smith, and *James* 1950s (p 165), a profile of a male model reclining with flowers behind his head, are arguably the most psychologically personal works Warhol ever made. Here, for perhaps the only time in his oeuvre, we feel a certain closeness to the image and see firsthand the development of a personal representational style.

The drawings in Warhol's 1956 exhibition *A Show of Golden Pictures*, and in his self-published *A Gold Book* 1957 (pp 202–03), include gold-leaf portraits of men and women based on photographs taken by his then boyfriend, Edward Wallowitch. *Male Nude* c1957 (p 39), for example, is much more open about Warhol's sexuality than his earlier male portraits, such as those in his 1955–56 *Boy Book* in which the subjects' nipples and penises are covered with hearts. These seem more about longing than confrontational eroticism. There is also a series of even more explicit drawings of men that Warhol



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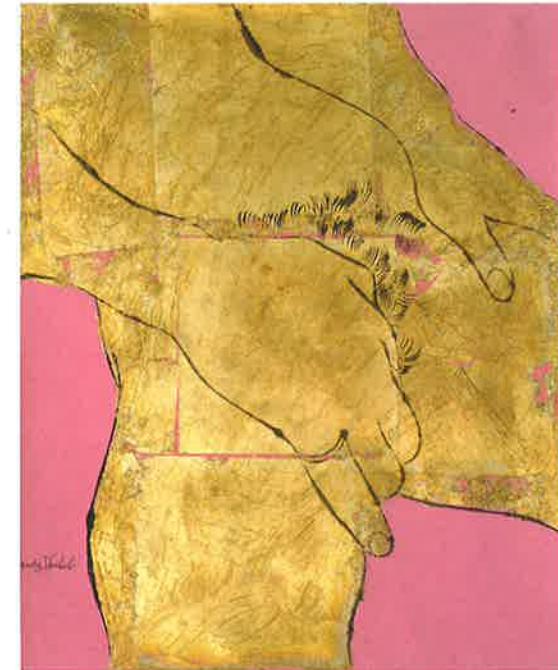
made in the 1950s. Although unpublished at the time, some of these drawings were posthumously collected in books like *Andy Warhol nudes* and *Andy Warhol: men*. A well-known quote attributed to Warhol's friend and studio assistant Ted Carey gives us a sense of how these drawings came about:

The other things that [Warhol] started to do [was] a whole group of cock drawings. Beautiful cock-penis drawings ... they're fabulous! He was going to do a book of [them] ... The cock drawings ... were done mostly through friends ... Like if he met somebody at a party or something, and [if] he thought they were fascinating or interesting, he'd say, 'Oh, ah, let me draw your cock. I'm doing a cock book.' And surprising [sic] enough, most people were flattered [when] asked to be drawn. So he had no trouble getting people to draw and he did a lot of beautiful drawings.¹

Male Genitals 1950s (below, p 169), a drawing of an ornate phallus tied with a bow, is more comical than sexual, but other more explicit images in this series show reclining male nudes and half-torsos with penises in different states of arousal. There is little left to the imagination; the works collapse all boundaries and show Warhol at his most transparent and vulnerable.

For Warhol, the 1950s was a decade of dual pursuits in drawing. On the one hand, he strived to develop a personal freehand drawing style in his commercial work and fine art. On the other, he spent a great deal of time and energy trying to deconstruct drawing through reproductive techniques. This tension, between unique representation and reproduction, led Warhol to his paintings referencing comic books, his Brillo box sculptures and Campbell's soup can paintings of the early 1960s – some of the most iconic works of his career. After 1959 Warhol rarely showed his drawings. He refused to attend the 1971 exhibition of his drawings, *Andy Warhol: his early works 1947–1959*, at Gotham Book Mart, and his 1977 exhibition of *Hammer and Sickle* drawings at Leo Castelli Gallery was not a commercial success. Although Warhol continued to draw late into his career, the medium was no longer as revelatory for him as it was in the 1940s and 1950s, when it seemed to provide all of the necessary impetus for his artistic practice and explorations.

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ANDY WARHOL
Dick 1950s
The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh



ANDY WARHOL
Male Nude c1957
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ANDY WARHOL
Male Genitals 1950s
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