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Andy Warhol Screen Tests: The Films of Andy Warhol, Catalogue Raisonné, Volume One

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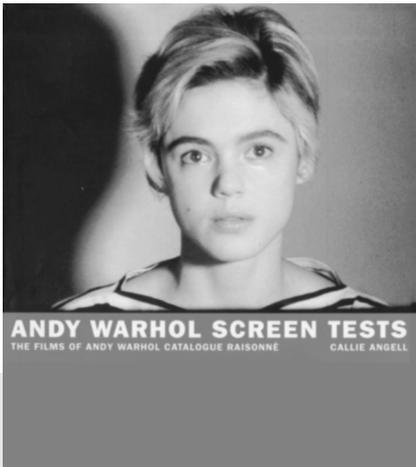


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seems so close to each detail he loses perspective on the whole. One aspect absent from this chapter (and most of the book) is humor. The author appreciates that the films are funny but is not successful in communicating it.

Tunes for 'Toons is a good introduction to the work of composers in the animation units of the major Hollywood studios. It makes excellent use of black-and-white illustrations, with preparatory sketches and frame-enlargements providing vivid support for the author's arguments. Not every chapter is equally successful, but each offers valuable information based on an impressive array of source material.



***Andy Warhol Screen Tests:
The Films of Andy Warhol,
Catalogue Raisonné,
Volume One* by Callie Angell**

HARRY N. ABRAMS, 2006

Ara Osterweil

Very few people still associate Andy Warhol solely with his silk screens of Campbells soup cans, Coca-Cola bottles, Elvis Presley, and Marilyn Monroe. However, of the many proverbial hats Warhol wore atop his infamous silver wig—as advertiser, pop artist, self-styled media icon, stargazer, starmaker, writer, band manager, magazine guru, collector—his role as filmmaker has been most underestimated. In spite of the fact that Warhol created hundreds of innovative experimental and narrative films between

1963 and 1968, their existence as both cultural artifacts and aesthetic objects has been more mythical than meaningful. Not only were most of Warhol's films rarely screened in his lifetime and almost never commercially, but in 1970 the artist hoisted them out of circulation and pitched them into deeper obscurity, where they remained, unseen and dust-laden, until the artist's death in 1987.

Whatever doubts still linger concerning Warhol's status as the most prolific filmmaker of the twentieth century will certainly be expunged by the long-awaited publication of the first volume of Callie Angell's extensive catalogue raisonné of Warhol's screen tests. As adjunct curator of the Andy Warhol Film Project at the Whitney Museum and consultant to MoMA on its ongoing and often painstaking preservation of Warhol's films, Angell is more knowledgeable about Warhol's cinema than anyone around the globe has ever been—including, perhaps, Warhol himself. In this splendid, image-saturated volume, Angell combines the precision of a master archivist with the lucid, insightful prose of a cultural critic without, however, submerging Warhol's films within a particular interpretative agenda.

Between 1964 and 1966, Warhol created more than four hundred black-and-white moving image portraits or "Screen Tests" of luminaries, celebrities, and wannabes from the art, literary, music, dance, film, and modeling worlds. Originally dubbed "stillies" by Warhol for their subjects' uncanny lack of movement in a moving picture medium, these approximately three-minute, 16mm silent films were first inspired by Warhol's discovery of a New York Police Department brochure that contained mug shots of the *Thirteen Most Wanted* criminals. Ever anxious to eroticize the illicit, Warhol derived an idea for a series of portrait films called the *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys*, which would combine the artist's obsession with collection and classification with his emerging fascination with duration. Over the course of two years, far more than thirteen portraits were made, and not solely of boys. In the catalogue, Angell accounts for 472 portraits of 189 individuals with a collective running time of over thirty-two hours.

By 1966, these films came to be known as "screen tests" in spite of the fact that they

were not used to determine the subject's desirability for future film projects. Being asked to pose for Warhol's camera often flattered visitors to the Factory with the lure of fame and glamour, as well as the possibility of screen immortality, but submitting to Warhol's sado-masochistic rules tended toward the unbearable. In addition to mandating the conventions that applied to official portraits like passport photos—the camera should not move, the background should be as plain as possible, and the subject should be well lit and centered—Warhol added a few requirements that were nearly unthinkable in a moving picture format. Before walking away from his Bolex camera and allowing the subject to endure the camera's intractable gaze, Warhol instructed his sitters to refrain from any kind of movement whatsoever, including talking, smiling, and even blinking.

As can be expected, only a handful of individuals managed to acquiesce to Warhol's physiologically unfeasible decrees. Indeed, many of the most evocative portraits are of those conscientious objectors who conspicuously rebelled against Warhol's attempt to discipline and punish them: underground actress Beverly Grant, who entangles herself in her serpentine hair in homage to the histrionics of silent film stars; Pop artist James Rosenquist, who spins around on a swivel chair for the entire time, refusing to be pinned down by a rival painter; or society upstart Baby Jane Holzer, who sensuously brushes her teeth in the most seductive of the many orally fixated screen tests depicted in Angell's book. For the few subjects who managed to not even *blink*—like the beatific Ann Buchanan, whose physically uncontrollable tears make her resemble a weeping icon or Maria Falconetti's profoundly expressive Joan of Arc—the still images captured in the catalogue cannot come close to the unique experience of watching the exquisite conflict between voluntary and involuntary motion unfurl on the human visage.

Inevitably, looking at the stills in the catalogue raisonné is not the same as actually *watching* the screen tests, which were recorded at twenty-four frames per second but deliberately projected at silent speed to achieve a kind of otherworldly slow-motion languor. Nevertheless, what the catalogue lacks in spectatorial effect, it compensates for in information.

Angell's lucid essays paint more complete biographical portraits of each subject than the screen tests themselves, which included neither the person's name or any other data. Indeed, each of Angell's mini-bios are so thorough regarding the lives and loves of each subject that they threaten to demystify the rumors that Warhol himself loved to promulgate about his own artistic practice.

In an academic community in which Warhol's films remain more talked about than seen, the value of Angell's fastidiousness is immeasurable. Much contemporary criticism *still* contains conspicuous factual errors about Warhol's cinema that undoubtedly will be rectified by the research Angell has done. Of the many revelations contained in this volume, one of the most salient is Angell's identification of the supposedly "anonymous" star of Warhol's pornographically titled film *Blow Job* (1964). In spite of the fact that the film restricts its immobile frame to the face of a young man as he presumably receives fellatio offscreen, *Blow Job* has become a pivotal text in the reevaluation of Warhol as pornographer by queer theorists and avant-garde film historians. As Angell points out, though Warhol himself claimed to never remember the name of the good-looking kid who "happened to be hanging around the Factory that day," "DeVerne Bookwalter"—the name of the aspiring actor from Warhol's home state of Pennsylvania who also died in 1987—was marked on the canister in the artist's own hand.

For anyone who has struggled to sketch even a few branches of their own family tree, Angell's detailed descriptions of each subject's identity is astounding. As it turns out, it took more than a village—Greenwich Village that is—to raise Warhol's brainchild from the ashes of history. In her acknowledgments, Angell lists hundreds of Warhol scholars, collectors, critics, historians, curators, friends, and associates who assisted in what may be the greatest whodunit (or *howwasit*) of contemporary art history. (Bookwalter was actually recognized in 1994 when the film was screened at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh by a fellow alumnus of Edinboro State College.) Although the majority of subjects have been identified, there are still a few individuals whose known identity extends no further than their first name; their relative

anonymity invites us to peruse their faces as purely physiognomic objects. Throughout her search, Angell periodically placed ads in *The New Yorker*, in which photos of the remaining unknowns were presented in much the same way as the “Wanted” ads that first inspired Warhol.

Angell’s resourcefulness as an archivist leaves nothing to be desired. In her meticulous distinction between the material properties of each screen test as a physical object and its screening characteristics (reel length vs. running time), she demonstrates her grasp of the dual nature of the film “object.” By paying careful attention to the often subtle details of the film’s actual physical condition—by noting the scratch marks on the celluloid, discerning the handwriting on the canister, or distinguishing between splices and in-camera edits—Angell is able to decipher the otherwise imperceptible histories of each screen test’s production, exhibition, and, in some cases, evaluation by different Factory personnel.

In addition to Angell’s elegant introductory essay and the detailed notes on each screen test, this first volume of the catalogue includes a number of other valuable features. Angell devotes an entire chapter to the 107 screen tests Warhol made during the fall of 1964 of his then-boyfriend Philip Fagan, as well as a chapter to the Conceptual Compilations of the screen tests, including the *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys and Girls* series, and Warhol’s collection of *Fifty Fantastics and Fifty Personalities*. There is also a section that explores the use of the screen tests as background reels to many of the multimedia events that Warhol staged, including live performances of the Velvet Underground (aka the Exploding Plastic Inevitable) and readings of Gerard Malanga’s poetry (aka *Screen Test Poems*).

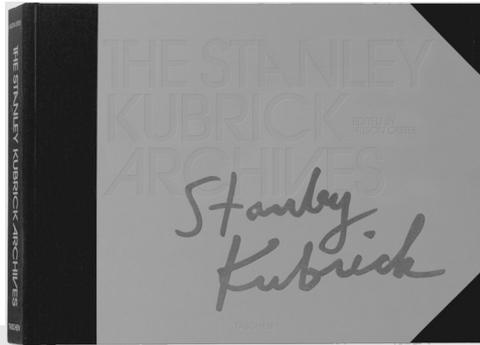
For the nonarchival audience, the catalogue raisonné still possesses inestimable charms. Regardless of the reader’s particular interest in experimental cinema, the wide spectrum of Warhol’s ethnographic gaze, as well as the beauty of the screen tests’ presentation in the catalogue, makes this book a must-have for anyone interested in the counterculture of the sixties. From his multiple tests of mercurial society darling Edie Sedgwick and 1964 “Girl of the Year” Baby Jane Holzer, to his portraits

of notable figures like Salvador Dalí, Marcel Duchamp, Susan Sontag, Allen Ginsberg, and Bob Dylan, to his inclusion of unknown aspirants who evidentially “gave good face,” Warhol emerges as the greatest chronicler of his time. Though most of his subjects are highly pedigreed art-world or society dignitaries, Warhol’s who’s who is an incomplete time capsule, which makes it all the more interesting to decipher its idiosyncrasies. In true Warholian fashion, the lowbrow and highbrow collide as heiresses mingle with hustlers. Even more suggestive than these serendipitous juxtapositions, however, are Warhol’s telling omissions. Perhaps the most interesting ethnographic category is Warhol’s inclusion of artists’ wives, such as Julie Judd, Susanne De Maria, and Clarice Rivers, and the simultaneous exclusion of their more famous husbands Donald, Walter, and Larry. Coming from a man who ironically referred to his tape recorder as *his* wife, there was clearly more to Warhol’s decision than the desire to confirm the old adage that “behind every good man lies a better woman.”

Warhol was perennially intrigued by portraiture, as evidenced by his decision to paint the mug shots of the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* as his commissioned contribution to the 1964 World’s Fair (before being forced by the authorities to paint over them!) and the photo-booth portraits Warhol often used as the basis of his silk screens. However, from the scope of the screen tests, it is clear that the largest contribution Warhol made to the genre of portrait making was in the medium of film, rather than within the two-dimensional still images for which he is currently more famous. Not only did Warhol extend portraiture to the cinema but in doing so he shifted the focus of portrait making from the finished product to the all-too-revealing process involved in composing oneself before the camera and the anticipated viewer. By transposing the formal idioms of one medium (still photography) to another (motion pictures), Warhol created hybrid objects—part living sculpture, part photograph, part movie—that were able to access the otherwise hidden psychological, physiological, and emotional truths of subjectivity.

In time, Angell’s scrupulously catalogued, delightfully readable, and aesthetically engrossing study of Warhol’s contribution to cinema

may provoke as profound a reconsideration within film studies as the “discovery” of the early motion studies of Etienne Jules Marey or of Oscar Micheaux’s response to the incendiary race politics of D. W. Griffith. Like these earlier finds, Angell’s book allows us to see the history of cinema differently by sketching alternative paradigms of film production and spectatorship. The second volume, which will be devoted to the rest of Warhol’s cinema, is bound to complete the picture.



***The Stanley Kubrick Archives* Edited by
Alison Castle**

TASCHEN, 2005

Gabriel M. Paletz

You, lucky cineaste, have been chosen to see the archives of elusive filmmaker Stanley Kubrick. You sail across the sea in deference to the director’s reluctance to fly. One of his associates takes you the roundabout way to the English countryside in St. Albans, and the Kubrick estate in Childwick Bury. Four electric gates open, and you stroll around the grounds to rooms, more rooms, and portable cabins full of boxes, whose contents Kubrick devoted his life to organizing. Sliding—not lifting—off a specially designed top, you start to rifle through the secrets of the auteur.

Or, in a less mythical adventure, you buy this 411 x 300mm book: this glossy volume of 544 pages and twelve pounds, succulent and cumbersome as a Thanksgiving turkey, a portfolio of an archive in its own box, with a handle for portability. Leafing through it, with different colored tabs marking each film, is easier

than going to an archival trove. You’ve no appointment, dust, or fear of fingertip oil. Two hundred dollars arranges your personal Kubrick tour, if you have not been invited to the estate, or have not seen the exhibit that has already traveled more than the director, running through July 2004 in Frankfurt, April 2005 in Berlin, January 2006 in Melbourne, and January 2007 in Ghent, and is scheduled to open later in 2007 in Rome, before being housed in the archive’s new repository in the University of the Arts, London.

You could body surf on *The Stanley Kubrick Archives*. You can also pore over its gorgeously mounted contents, considering the fittest ways to present Kubrick’s, or other film directors’, trove of moviemaking materials.

Part One of the book consists of beautifully reproduced stills. In its publicity, the publisher Taschen claims that this design creates a completely “nonverbal experience,” echoing Kubrick’s intention for *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The approach seems appropriate because Kubrick began his career as a photographer, and the frame enlargements show he retained an exemplary eye. The images evoke the flow of the films and their striking sequences, such as Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1962) taking a celebratory drink in his bath, and Alex undergoing the “Ludovico Treatment,” with his eyelids pinned open in *A Clockwork Orange* (1971). However, stills alone fail fully to reveal the artist by imitating his intentions. The method cannot convey the original music choices or emblematic camera movements, which are also nonverbal elements that make Kubrick’s movies powerful cinema. To excise words also handicaps the images. One longs to hear, or at least to be reminded of, the way the nymphet Lolita, the Teutonic Dr. Strangelove, the computer Hal, the young punk Alex, the narrator of *Barry Lyndon*, the crazed Jack Torrance, and Gunnery Sergeant Hartman speak. Their idiomatic voices prove what the writer Michael Herr called Kubrick’s “faith” in literary mise-en-scène (526).

While unfolding a wonderful wealth of materials, *The Stanley Kubrick Archives* is also not a critical study. As Part One demonstrates, the book takes an honorary approach to a keen and irreverent creator. Part Two, titled “The Creative Process . . .,” consists of summary essays,