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## Warhol's more disturbing works to go on view

Artist had fascination with death and destruction, museum director says

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. - There was a dark side to Andy Warhol, whose colorful images of famous people and everyday objects made him one of the most celebrated artists of the 20th century.

Even before a woman shot and nearly killed him at his studio in 1968, Warhol was fascinated by violent death. It motivated him to create some of his most disturbing works, a number of which will be presented in a three-month exhibition of more than 100 of his prints and paintings at the Grand Rapids Art Museum.

"People think of Warhol as the great Pop artist — Campbell's soup, Marilyn Monroe and all of the excitement of fame — but Warhol also, even from his very earliest years, did have a fascination with death and destruction, and the show will also reflect some of that," said Celeste Adams, the museum's director.

The exhibition "Rapid Exposure: Warhol in Series" opens March 14 and is expected to draw many first-time visitors to the museum's striking, new \$75 million home in the heart of Michigan's second-largest city. The concrete-and-glass structure opened in October.

### Ominous-sounding works

Warhol, who died in 1987 at age 58 following complications from gall bladder surgery, became a successful commercial artist in New York City during the 1950s before achieving worldwide fame in the 1960s. His platinum wigs and ever-present sunglasses made him an instantly recognizable figure.

His subjects generally came from photographs found in newspapers or other mass media. He often repeated the same images in variations of color and changes in form, then silkscreened them onto paper or canvas before completing the prints with additional color inks.

Most of the works will be borrowed from The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, including some it has not lent out before. Others are on loan from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. The Grand Rapids museum also has some recently acquired Warhols of its own that will be displayed.

Visitors will see two or more prints or paintings of each subject grouped together. These portfolios will include famous images of Monroe, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Chinese leader Mao Zedong and the soup cans.

There also will be other, more ominous-sounding works on display, including "Electric Chair," "Skulls" and "Flash — November 22, 1963," a portfolio of prints recalling the assassination of President Kennedy.

These and other similarly themed Warhol works have received increased attention in recent years, Adams said.

Warhol's dabbling in death appears to be in direct contrast with the vivid, lively works for which he is best known, said David Lubin, an art professor at Wake Forest University.

"Despite the stereotype of Andy Warhol as an art-world butterfly who reveled in pop imagery, bold colors and the ubiquitous landscape of American commercial culture, he harbored deep fears and insecurities that led him to an abiding fascination with the dark, violent underbelly of modern life — car wrecks, plane crashes, drug addicts, the electric chair, suicidal movie stars and the beautiful widow of a murdered president," Lubin said.

Noah Simblist, an assistant art professor at Southern Methodist University, said Warhol was ahead of his time in the way he viewed death as an interesting part of life.

In a telephone interview from Regina, Saskatchewan, where he was preparing to speak during a Warhol show at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, Thomas Sokolowski, director of the Warhol museum, said people attach different meanings to the macabre works.

One person looking at "Electric Chair," which shows an unoccupied electric chair in Sing Sing Correctional Facility in New York, could say it makes a statement in favor of capital punishment, he said. "Then the next

people would say, 'No, see, Warhol's showing you how horrible that thing is, that even a child molester should not be put through the indignity of that,'" Sokolowski said.

He also said the artist is "100 times more" relevant today than he was in his own time, as new generations discover and embrace Warhol's work.

"His star paintings define celebrity as part of the cultural world we live in and — for better or worse — relate to more than the "Mona Lisa,"" said Elayne Rapping, a pop culture expert and professor of American studies at the University at Buffalo.

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