

THE ETERNAL NOW: WARHOL AND FILM '63-'68

IKON EASTSIDE, 4 SEPTEMBER – 19 OCTOBER 2008

Art just wasn't fun for me anymore; it was people who were fascinating and I wanted to spend all of my time around them, listening to them and making movies of them.

Andy Warhol

The Eternal Now, developed in collaboration with The Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo and the Lewis Glucksman Gallery, Cork, is organised with support from The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh. The exhibition celebrates the work of Warhol and those involved in his expansive studio, the 'Silver Factory', renamed thus from 1963 to 1968. Part studio, part venue and part cultural laboratory, this incarnation provided a physical and conceptual framework for a broad range of activity that pushed the boundaries of what we understand art production to be. It shaped today's contemporary definition of the role of artist and generated some of the most iconic and significant imagery and music of the twentieth-century.

Having decided to stop painting, Warhol bought his first 16mm film camera in 1963 and embarked on an intensive period of film-making, some of the results of which can be seen here. The selection focuses on the earliest innovative films, experimental in nature, and complemented by the context provided by Ikon Eastside, a former warehouse in which the exhibition is sited. The refurbishment is minimal, retaining the original character and flavour of the building, surrounded still by a mix of clubs, light industrial manufacturing and bars – a scene reminiscent in its diversity, energy and eclecticism of other cultural quarters during the period when the films were made. The exhibition also provides an immediate historical reference for younger international artists whose work has been presented at Ikon Eastside in 2008, many of whom operate collaboratively, exploring participation, opening up spaces for the consideration of issues of time, document, reproduction, process and authorship as Warhol and his collaborators did at the 'Silver Factory'.

Warhol's early films ignored the accepted conventions of film-making such as narrative, plot and sophisticated cinematography and were instead often unedited and filmed in real time, allowing a subject or event to dictate the length and form of the film. The running time of each work corresponded to its subject; for example, literally eight hours with *Sleep* (1963). Shot over several nights, the sense of time passing is created through the repetition of particular sections. In this and other black and white silent films, the notions of how and what could be made continue to be challenged. The camerawork is static; the action

unfolds in front of the lens. Lasting eight hours and five minutes, the single shot *Empire* (1964) was filmed with Jonas Mekas, an underground film-maker, from the Time-Life Building from 8pm until 2.30am. The resulting footage was then projected at a slower speed in order to extend the film to eight hours; the only 'drama', the changing light on the iconic structure, literally demonstrating the passing of time.

Ideas of process and the act of looking, with the implied voyeurism of both the act and its depiction, can be seen in films such as *Eat* (1964). A portrait of artist Robert Indiana, who himself had made a series of 'Eat' paintings and sculptures, the film depicts the devouring of a mushroom in slow motion. Slowed even further by manipulation of the projection speed and rendered more confusing by Warhol's decision to assemble individual reels out of sequence, *Eat* engenders a looping, fragmented sense of unending consumption.

Between 1964 and 1966, Warhol worked on one of his most ambitious film projects, the *Screen Tests*, a selection of which are presented here. A series of 472 black and white, silent films of his friends, colleagues and acquaintances, they were shot as four-minute single portraits, subsequently slowed to 16 frames per second thereby echoing silent films of the 1920s. The 189 people who appear in the complete series make up a 'who's who' of the 1960's avant-garde, including art world figures such as Salvador Dali and Marcel Duchamp, musicians John Cale, Lou Reed and Bob Dylan, film makers Marie Menken and Jonas Mekas and an array of performance artists, drag queens and other counter-cultural figures – the 'superstars' of Warhol's alternative film world. The films are compelling and insightful vignettes, a summation of this period that provokes contemplation of issues such as society's preoccupation with celebrity, resonating today with the advent of contemporary reality TV or YouTube presentations. Indeed, curator Klaus Biesenbach recently commented:

The Factory was a workshop, an office, a club: it was a stage and a film set. It was a venue for those who were lonely or easily bored or insecure or arrogant, and provided access to a larger framework of ideals and goals, distraction and participation. In short, it made every day into a movie.