

CHEIM & READ

PRESS RELEASE

ANDY WARHOL: THE LATE MALE NUDES

October 25 - December 17, 2005

Opening Reception: Tuesday, October 25,
6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Cheim & Read, in cooperation with Anthony d'Offay, is pleased to announce an exhibition of Andy Warhol's photographs of the male nude from the years 1982 to 1987. In addition, Warhol's 1964 film, "Blow Job" will be shown in the gallery's side exhibition space. The exhibition is accompanied by a catalogue, with an essay by Simon Goldhill.

Andy Warhol, well known for his silkscreen paintings of, among other cultural icons, Campbell's soup cans, Marilyn Monroe and Elvis, was inarguably the most famous American figurehead of "Pop Art" (the term coined in 1962). Warhol made bold commentary on commercialism and post-war capitalism through the manipulated representation and recurrent repetition of his subject. By exploiting the plethora of images and advertisements associated with consumer society and the media, Warhol exposed the inevitable triviality of images or events through their constant repetition and circulation. Born in Pittsburgh in 1928, Warhol moved to New York City in 1949. He began his career as a successful commercial artist and graphic illustrator, known for his elegant and fanciful drawings of shoes. In the late 50's he began exhibiting his drawings, and by 1962 had started the series of pop imagery most associated with him today.

Rarely shown in the United States, the black and white photographs exhibited here are directly linked to Warhol's aesthetic and conceptual concerns. The imagery reflects an obsession with cultural and historical ideals of representation (whether in the pursued perfection of a celebrity or in the voyeuristic desire spawned by pornography), and demonstrates Warhol's brilliant use of repetition. In his insightful essay for the exhibition catalogue, Simon Goldhill reviews art historical precedents for the idealized male nude, beginning with Michelangelo's celebrated David. Goldhill notes that David too is a product of idealization from several centuries before, influenced by classical Greek sculptures of heroic male athletes. In this way, Goldhill shows that the idealized male nude has itself been repeated through time, all the way to Warhol: "To imagine the male nude is to engage with the classical tradition, for Warhol as for generations before him." Goldhill also references more recent art history, linking Warhol's inspiration to the late 19th century male nude

photographs of Wilhelm von Gloeden and to the abstract, and sexually abstracted, photography of Man Ray. Consciously posed, starkly lit, and blatantly sexualized, Warhol's nudes play with art historical precedents while mixing them with deliberate pornographic associations, forcing the viewer to question prevailing cultural and historical representations constructed from the classical canon.

Silkscreen offered Warhol the ability to produce repetitive imagery at a fairly rapid pace (the idea of the "factory" is easily referred to here), and allowed him to manipulate the image within that repetition: paint could be blurry and thickly laid or clear and thin, often both on the same canvas. With photography, Warhol's repetition is more precise, his reproductions without variation. In his collaged photographs, sewn together, the pattern produced is machine-like, the repeated imagery more abstract. In an oft-quoted 1962 interview with Gene Swenson, Warhol stated: "I want to be a machine." In many ways, the camera allowed him this: repetition is inherent to a machine, and Warhol used the camera as a means to repeat, both in the photographs' obviously posed compositions (shadows reiterate bodies, angles echo joints), and by the simple strategy of producing more than one. As Goldhill notes, taking photographs of sexualized bodies was "part of [Warhol's] daily activity for years." With this imagery the repetition becomes charged, the questions implied potent. Goldhill asks: "What role is there for repetition in the imagery of desire?" and "How many times do you need to look at the image of the sexualized body?" The photographs question the "function of such repetition within our imaging of beauty and our feelings of desire" and finally ask the viewer to ask themselves how much of their response is culturally ingrained, and how much is unique or individual: "what do you see when you desire?"

Warhol's 1964 legendary film "Blow Job" is rarely screened in New York. The black and white film, an unedited 41 minutes long, focuses only on the face of Warhol's handsome subject, who, as the title suggests, receives fellatio off screen. Unlike the photographs, which embrace the male nude, the film conceals the body; the implied pornography is unseen. The subject matter, highly taboo and illegal at the time it was filmed (and further charged by its homosexual implications), is revealed only by the transformations of the subject's face. The film constructs the image, or action, with the least amount of viewable information, and thus relies on the viewer's response: the viewer's own idealization of the activity (again derived from cultural precedent) ultimately creates the film's content, and the tension within.

Monique Prieto: New Paintings & Lynda Benglis: The Graces, are on view through October 19.

For additional information please contact us by calling 212/242-7727, faxing 212/242-7737, or emailing gallery@cheimread.com.