

# Andy Warhol's Production Kitchen



FEW ARTISTS HAVE DARTED so effortlessly among different forms of image making as Andy Warhol. At first a commercial artist, he later made his name in the realm of fine art through his replication of mass-manufactured and mass-marketed items, before switching his art production to mass forms of media, such as film and television. Much of his work played with the distinction between commercial and fine art—or “Art”—which was, and often still is,

defined according to modernist principles of uniqueness, indexicality (an art object’s direct physical relation to the artist), and personal association. At the start of his fine-art career, Warhol revealed a susceptibility to this definition, even while challenging it, but he relinquished it quickly. “Business art is the step that comes after Art,” he later maintained. “I started as a commercial artist, and I want to finish as a business artist.”<sup>1</sup>

ANDY WARHOL, CAMPBELL'S SOUP CAN (CHICKEN WITH RICE, BEANS AND BACON), DETAIL, 1962. © 2009 THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS/ART RESOURCE/ARTIST'S RIGHTS SOCIETY, NEW YORK. TRADEMARKS, CAMPBELL SOUP COMPANY. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.



In Warhol's oeuvre, two works in particular bookend his transformation from fine artist to business artist: his series of paintings of Campbell's soup cans from about 1961–1962, and his sixty-second television spot for the Manhattan-based Schraff's restaurant chain, created around 1968. Both notably take food as their ostensible subjects, deliberately indicating the idea of consumption so central to commercialism; yet the way in which Warhol treated these gustatory themes reveals an important shift. The Campbell's soup paintings successfully invert the relationship of consumable product and its commercial representation, but its food imagery reinforces Warhol's link to modernist notions of the authentic art object. The Schraff's commercial, on the other hand, fully erodes them, signaling Warhol's early steps in melding art and business.

Above: *Henri Dauman, American Supermarket exhibition at the Bianchini Gallery, New York. From "You Think This is a Supermarket?" Life magazine, November 20, 1964.*

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### Campbell's Soup Paintings, ca. 1961–1962

Spurred, Warhol claimed, by his daily habit of eating a bowl of Campbell's soup and a sandwich for lunch,<sup>2</sup> he began producing multiple, portrait-style paintings of the product's different flavors in early 1961 (see illustration p.45). To create the paintings, Warhol projected an image of the can, taken from an ad in a magazine, onto a prestretched canvas; lightly traced the outline; and methodically painted in the areas of color, attempting to avoid any suggestion of artistic manipulation.<sup>3</sup> The painted cans' hard edges, planes

of pure color, and sharp, stylized reflections look as if they were produced mechanically, not unlike the printing process used to create the magazine advertisement.

At first the Campbell's paintings seem hardly removed from Warhol's earlier work as a commercial artist; indeed, they look perhaps less artistic, in the modernist sense—less indicative of creativity, skill, and individual genius—than his early shoe advertisements, which possess a delicate, handcrafted quality. In their pseudomechanical appearance, the Campbell's paintings appear to be simply an extension or reiteration of the print ad, especially in light of the artist's method of projecting and tracing the source image. And yet, despite their flatness and minimized brushwork, they still bear indications of the artist's hand, such as the simplification of the detailed Campbell's seal to a smooth, gold disk (see illustration p.45).<sup>4</sup> Equally apparent is the weave of the canvas, which disrupts the smooth flatness of the paintings' planes of color and dimples the otherwise crisp, black lines that separate the can from the white expanse of the background (or foreground, as there is no indication of spatial recession). That the canvas's texture is discernible reflects another choice on Warhol's part; had he so chosen, he could have primed the painting surface to conceal its warp and weft. The visibility of the material points out that the images, though reproductions of advertisements, are still paintings. And as paintings, they retain at least two key characteristics of fine art: status as a unique object and indexicality. While the Campbell's series' mimicking of commercial imagery makes the paintings seem to be merely hyped-up illustrations—representations of representations—they are, in the modernist sense, authentic, unique artworks. Despite Warhol's constant repetition of the Campbell's theme, each painting is an individual object, created by the hand of the artist. They exist in a specific place and time; the artist purportedly stretched the canvas, mixed the paints, and applied them in the pattern in which they exist on the surface of the picture.<sup>5</sup> The objects' individuality and physical link to the artist remain.

Though he was loath to acknowledge it, the modernist notion of high art or the authentic artwork resonated deeply with Warhol during the early part of his career. He often asserted that his assistants created the paintings, yet he never referred to the pictures as other than his own. With the Campbell's series especially, Warhol even intensified the profound connection between artist and artwork on which artistic authenticity depends: the soup, he stated, was his daily lunch. His relationship to Campbell's soup was real, corporeal. In illustrating his insatiable taste for it, Warhol introduces an emotional charge to the object he continually

depicts, paralleling the romantic notion of artists painting their mistresses. Warhol, however, cast Campbell's soup in the role of paramour.

That the Campbell's paintings are both knockoffs of advertisements and authentic art objects highlights Warhol's ability to transform commercial imagery into fine art. Although the interplay is evident in the paintings, it is cast in higher relief when the works are considered in the context of *American Supermarket*, an exhibition mounted by the Bianchini Gallery in 1964. For this exhibition the gallery was configured to resemble a supermarket, with signs denoting aisles for eggs, fresh fruit, and bread, as well as freezer sections and stacks of canned goods. Within this setting, art objects, including Warhol's Campbell soup series, were placed on display. Photographs taken of the exhibition reveal the dizzying blur of art and advertising the atmosphere conveyed. In one image, for example, a gallery visitor stands beneath a Warhol painting while examining a can of soup (see illustration p.46). The photograph suggests that the patrons could be so distracted by the environment that they believed they were in a supermarket rather than an art gallery.<sup>6</sup> Yet, unlike a grocery, it is not the comestibles that are the products for sale, but their likenesses. Such an inversion fully upends the chain of representation: while Warhol's Campbell's soup series seem, like an advertisement, to refer to a specific food item, it is the cans of soup, in fact, that refer to his paintings. Although this inversion was highlighted in the Bianchini Gallery's simulated atmosphere of a supermarket, it ultimately continued beyond the gallery walls. As Warhol's soup can works were disseminated in the culture at large, Campbell's soup came also to represent Warhol; Warhol no longer simply represented Campbell's soup.

### *Underground Sundae, ca. 1968*

Only four years after Bianchini's *American Supermarket* exhibition Warhol created *Underground Sundae*, a sixty-second television ad of an ice cream sundae for the Schraff's chain of diners (see illustration p.48).<sup>7</sup> In the years between the introduction of his Campbell's soup paintings and the production of the Schraff's spot, Warhol had expanded his use of media to include silkscreen, film, and, finally, television. Instead of mimicking modes of technical reproduction, he adopted them. The Schraff's advertisement was commissioned by F. William Free & Co., the agency then in charge of the chain's "campaign to rejuvenate the Schraff's image,"<sup>8</sup> which had been identified primarily as a family-friendly, plain-food, ice cream parlor. According to

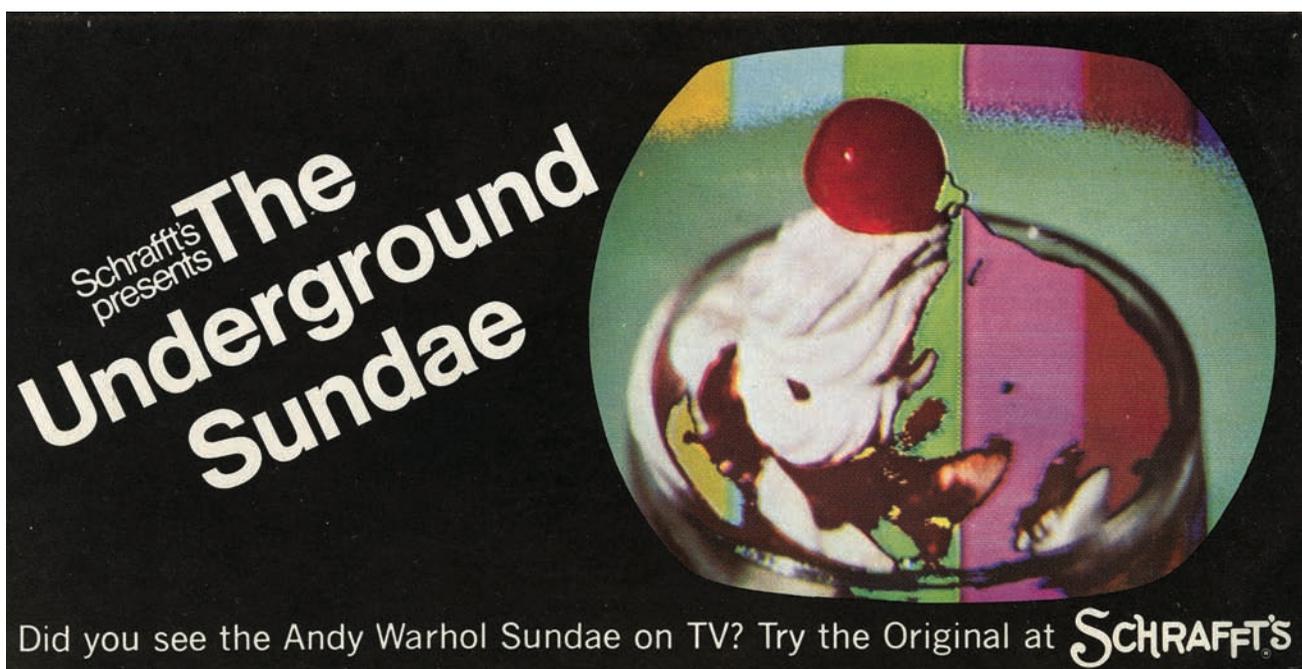
an article that appeared in *Time* magazine in October 1968, the strategies Schrafft's used to establish an edgier image included ads featuring girls in miniskirts, as well as renovations of several individual restaurants that emphasized the bar instead of the soda fountain.<sup>9</sup>

The Warhol spot, as a commissioned part of the campaign strategy, was produced in a mode strikingly different from the Campbell's soup series of 1961–1962. Rather than being generated for personal reasons—“I just do it because I like it,” as Warhol said of the Campbell's cans<sup>10</sup>—the TV ad was initiated by an outside source. And unlike the deeply personal, almost romantic, relationship he had with Campbell's soup, Warhol evinced no particular preference for the foodstuff depicted in the Schrafft's ad. Indeed, he was driven by his desire to inject his art “into the stream of commerce, out into the real world,” rather than leave it in the rarefied air of the art gallery.<sup>11</sup> For its part, Schrafft's hoped to cast the commercial not as business but as art. When interviewed for the *Time* article, Frank Shattuck II, owner of the Schrafft's chain, stated: “We haven't got just a commercial. We've acquired a work of art.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet television, as the medium for the advertisement, undermined the modernist conception of fine art that Shattuck and F. William Free & Co. appear to have held. Unlike a painting, in which one can imagine the hand of the artist preparing a canvas or executing a brushstroke, television bears little physical relation to the artist and can hardly be considered a unique object. A commercial does not exist in a specific time and place but instead replaces the exclusivity of a moment of aesthetic encounter, which

can be achieved through painting, with a continual stream of moments.<sup>13</sup> In an attempt to counteract the new medium's erosion of artistic authenticity, F. William Free & Co. placed print ads—on which it purportedly spent as much as the television spot—that cited the date, time, and channels at which one could view the commercial (see illustration p.49).<sup>14</sup> Despite the company's attempt to ground the work in a specific time and place, the advertisement's very medium challenged such an anchoring.

If the commercial's status as fine art cannot be established by dint of its uniqueness (because its very medium undermines that status) or by its indexical or emotional association to the artist (because there is none), can it function as a work of art? Surely not in the same sense as Warhol's Campbell's series. According to one description, the television spot is a minute-long examination of a psychedelically hued chocolate sundae that attempts to mimic the distorted colors of a mistuned television set. Across this single image a banner running diagonally reads, “The chocolate sundae was photographed for Schrafft's by Andy Warhol.”<sup>15</sup> The scrolling banner distinguishes the advertisement as art by virtue of its association with a well-known artist, and it identifies the object represented as the relationship between Warhol and Schrafft's—not, as one might assume, the sundae depicted. As opposed to the Campbell's soup cans, which inverted the roles of advertisement and product, the Schrafft's spot collapses them, fully and completely merging its artistic identity with the commercial endeavor. The advertisement with its scrolling banner attributing authorship to Warhol not



only signifies the artist's affiliation with Schrafft's; the advertisement itself is that affiliation.

A mere six years separates the Campbell's soup paintings and the Schrafft's television commercial, but that brief span marked a shift in Warhol's production from an art that was indicative, on some level, of individual expression to the art of business. While Warhol's paintings toyed with the divisions between fine and commercial art, they continued to cling to key elements that defined the art of high modernism. Although minimized, such characteristics undoubtedly existed in his Campbell's soup series, primarily in the form of uniqueness, indexicality, and personal association. Conversely, the Schrafft's television spot is a study in impersonality, providing no indexical mark, no anchoring of the object in time and place, no hint of personal association aside from a business partnership.

Although commissioning Warhol to create a commercial was a way for Schrafft's to "get with it," to update the mental image of pensioners or sticky-faced children associated with the chain, it appears that the company was not quite ready for the vision of pure, slick-colored surface that Warhol orchestrated. In addition to placing print ads for the commercial, the restaurant—unprepared for the television ad's condensation of art and advertising, depiction and depicted—responded with an "underground sundae" promotion that promised "yummy Schrafft's

*Below: Print advertisement for Schrafft's ice cream, featuring Warhol's Underground Sundae. Published in the New York Times, November 21, 1968. Left: Andy Warhol, Schrafft's Underground Sundae restaurant tent card, 1968. Created from the original video.*

LEFT: COLLECTION OF THE ANDY WARHOL MUSEUM, PITTSBURGH. © 2009 THE ANDY WARHOL FOUNDATION FOR THE VISUAL ARTS / ARS, NEW YORK.

# Tonight, we interrupt the Wasteland with Andy Warhol's first underground commercial.

Between 11:00 and 11:30 tonight, there'll be something really new on Channels 2, 4, 5, 7, 9 and 11.

You'll know it, because suddenly your set will seem to go bloeey. Strange and wonderful shapes will start to cross the screen. Don't panic. It's "The Chocolate Sundae," photographed for Schrafft's by Andy Warhol.

We never thought our super-sundae would be a Super-Star. But a little change is good for everybody, isn't it?



FRANK G. SHASTUCK COMPANY

vanilla ice cream in two groovy heaps with three ounces of mind-blowing chocolate sauce undulating with a mountain of pure whipped cream topped with a pulsating maraschino cherry served in a bowl as big as a boat, \$1.10.”<sup>16</sup> In the seeming absence of a distinct, authentic object, Schrafft’s attempted to concoct one. Yet, like the inverted relationship of the Campbell’s soup can to its painted counterpart in the *American Supermarket* exhibition of 1964, Schrafft’s ice cream dessert was merely a representation of Warhol’s *Underground Sundae*. ◉

NOTES

1. See Andy Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (New York: Harcourt, 1975), 39.
2. Glenn O’Brien, “Interview: Andy Warhol,” *High Times*, 24 August 1977, reprinted in *I’ll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews, 1962–1982*, Kenneth Goldsmith, ed. (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2004), 242. Although I use O’Brien’s interview with Warhol for purposes of citation, the artist frequently mentioned his fondness for Campbell’s soup in numerous articles and interviews, stretching from the early 1960s onward.
3. Georg Frei and Neil Printz, eds., *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*, 3 vols. (London: Phaidon, 2002), 1:62.
4. Cécile Whiting, *A Taste for Pop: Pop, Art, Gender, and Consumer Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 45.
5. Walter Benjamin identifies these characteristics—particularly the conjunction of space and time that an object inhabits—as “aura.” See “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations*, Hannah Arendt, ed. and intro., Harry Zorn, trans. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968; reprint, Schocken Books, 1976), 217–251.

6. Whiting, *A Taste for Pop*, 38–42.
7. For recent scholarship on the commercial see David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 7–14.
8. John Margolies, “tv—the Next Medium,” *Art in America* 57, no. 5 (September–October 1969): 48.
9. “Schrafft’s Gets with It,” *Time*, 25 October 1968, 98. F. William Free was commissioned to update many corporate images, usually inciting protest as a result. Among his better-known, and more controversial, ad campaigns were those for National Airlines, which featured a female flight attendant who gushes, “I’m Cheryl—fly me”; and for Silva Thins, which offered the tagline, “Cigarettes are like girls, the best ones are thin and rich.”
10. “Slice-of-Cake School,” *Time*, 11 May 1962, 52.
11. Warhol, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, 39.
12. “Schrafft’s Gets with It.”
13. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 67–66.
14. Philip Dougherty, “Advertising: New Look in Broadcast Buying,” *New York Times*, 21 November 1968, 76.
15. “Schrafft’s Gets with It.” This, along with Margolies’s article, are the only two descriptions of the commercial that I have been able to find and are, unfortunately, the only information on which I can base my analysis of the television spot. Inquiries to The Warhol, Pittsburgh; Museum of Television and Radio, New York City; ARCS at the University of California, Los Angeles; the Hartmann Center at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina; and Gotham, Inc., New York City (the latest incarnation of the F. William Free & Co. after its sale to Laurence & Charles in 1981) have been unsuccessful in locating a copy of the commercial.
16. Margolies, “tv—the Next Medium,” 48.

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