

Art OF OUR TIME

SELECTIONS FROM THE | ULRICH MUSEUM OF ART
| WICHITA STATE UNIVERSITY

Patricia McDonnell AND *Emily Stamey*

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY

Toby Kamps, Laura Moriarty,

Antonya Nelson, Timothy R. Rodgers,

AND *Robert Silberman*

PHOTO-ESSAY BY *Larry Schwarm*

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NO ARTIST REPRESENTS AMERICAN POP ART SO SINGULARLY AS ANDY WARHOL, and no set of works calls this artist to mind so insistently as his Campbell's soup-can images. He incessantly represented this common commercial product: in drawings, paintings, and prints; whole, crushed, and torn; using its traditional color scheme and garish combinations; individually and in multiples. First appropriated in the early 1960s, the Campbell's imagery remained a motif until his death.

Warhol's soup-can debut came in his first solo exhibition, at Los Angeles's Ferus Gallery in 1962: thirty-two painted canvases, each depicting a different flavor, sat on thin ledges like so many cans stocked on a supermarket shelf. A year later, the critic Gene R. Swenson asked Warhol why he had started painting the mundane grocery item. Warhol answered: "Because I used to drink it. I used to have the same lunch every day, for twenty years, I guess, the same thing over and over again."¹

Such a seemingly simple response captures the themes of familiarity and repetition that are key to understanding pop art generally and Warhol's work specifically. Not guided by any collective agenda or manifesto, pop artists drew imagery from common, abundantly produced sources such as comic books and magazines. Then they created their own artworks by employing many of the same reproduction technologies used to make the source materials. Throughout his career, Warhol took instantly recognizable images – such as Coca-Cola bottles and celebrities' faces – and reproduced them in ways that mimicked and underscored their seemingly infinite circulation in popular visual culture. Using mass-produced images of mass-produced items, he in turn mass-produced his prints and paintings of these commodities.

Warhol's repetition of the soup can was so ubiquitous that artist and image became almost synonymous. This link was aptly caricatured on the cover of the May 1969 issue of *Esquire* magazine, which bore a manipulated photograph of Warhol drowning in a can of Campbell's soup. And in 1977, a depiction of the iconic soup can appeared on the paperback cover of the artist's book of observations, *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*. The artist had essentially rebranded Campbell's, making its graphic identity a sign not only for the company and its food products but also for his aesthetic approach and for himself.

36 *Chicken 'n Dumplings*

1969

From the series *Campbell's Soup II*, 1969

Color screenprint on paper, 35 x 23 in.

Museum Purchase with Student Government Association funds, 1971.0014.005

Emily Stamey

1. Warhol quoted in Gene R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?: Answers from Eight Painters, Part I," *Art News* 62 (November 1963): 26.



About the Contributors

Toby Kamps is senior curator at the Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston. He has organized exhibitions on the work of Vanessa Beecroft, Ellsworth Kelly, and Claes Oldenburg as well as such themed exhibitions as *Small World: Dioramas in Contemporary Art* (2000), *Lateral Thinking: The Art of the 1990s* (2002), and *The Old, Weird America* (2008).

Patricia McDonnell is director of the Ulrich Museum of Art. Her scholarly focus is upon European and American modernism, and she is a leading specialist on the painter Marsden Hartley. Her publications include *Marsden Hartley: American Modern* (1997), *On the Edge of Your Seat: Popular Theater and Film in Early Twentieth-Century American Art* (2002), and *Painting Berlin Stories* (2003).

Laura Moriarty is the author of three novels and the recipient of several literary awards. Before becoming a full-time writer, she was a social worker. Moriarty lives in Lawrence, Kansas, where she teaches creative writing at the University of Kansas.

Antonya Nelson has written three novels and published six short-story collections. She contributes often to the *New Yorker* and the *New York Times Book Review*. Nelson holds the Cullen Chair in Creative Writing at the University of Houston. Her award-winning novel, *Living to Tell* (2000), takes place in her hometown of Wichita, and her forthcoming novel, *Bound*, is set there as well.

Timothy R. Rodgers is director of the Scottsdale (Arizona) Museum of Contemporary Art. Formerly chief curator at the New Mexico Museum of Art, Santa Fe, he is involved in a range of writing and curatorial projects. His scholarly concentration is on American early modernism.

Robert Silberman is an associate professor of art history at the University of Minnesota's Twin Cities campus. His chief scholarly interests have been photography, film, and contemporary art. Silberman collaborated with former *New York Times* photography critic Vicki Goldberg on the companion volume for the 1999 PBS series *American Photography: A Century of Images*.

Larry Schwarm is a professor of art at Emporia State University, Emporia, Kansas, and a nationally regarded photographer whose work has been shown at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. His 2003 book, *On Fire: Larry Schwarm*, won the Honickman Book Award and Prize.

Emily Stamey, the Ulrich Museum's curator of modern and contemporary art, is the author of *Jolan Gross-Bettelheim: The American Prints* (2001) and *The Prints of Roger Shimomura: A Catalogue Raisonné, 1968–2005* (2006). Her scholarship centers on ethnic identities and social themes in American art.

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