THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

FACULTY OF FINE ART

DEPARTMENT OF PAINTING

The Real Thing

Posing for the 1980's

Catherine Harty

Submitted to the Faculty of Art and Complementary Studies in Candidacy for the Degree of Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) 1993.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Duchamp as Rrose Selavy, photographed by Man Ray in New York. 1920-21.

2. Jeff Koons 'Stacked' 1988.

3. Untitled Barbara Kruger 1987.

4. Andy Warhol Photograph by Christopher Makos 1981.

5. Sherrie Levine 'Untitled' (After Walker Evans) 1981.

6. Giorgio de Chirico 'The Disquieting Muse' 1960.

7. Andy Warhol 'Disquieting Muses' 1982.

8. Barbara Kruger 'Untitled' 1982.

9. Richard Prince 'Untitled' (Cowboys) 1986.

10. Richard Prince 'Untitled' (Cowboy) 1980-84.

11. Richard Prince 'Untitled' (Cowboy) 1980-84.

12. Richard Prince 'Untitled' (Richard Prince and Cindy Sherman).

13. Cindy Sherman Untitled Film Still, 1979.

14. Cindy Sherman Untitled Film Still, 1978.

15. Cindy Sherman Untitled 1990.

16. Richard Prince 'The Velvet Well'.

17.   Richard Prince 'The Perfect Tense'.

18.   Richard Prince 'I Changed My Name' 1988.

INTRODUCTION

"To an ever greater extent our experience is governed by pictures, pictures in newspapers, and magazines, on television and in the cinema. Next to these pictures firsthand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial. While it once seemed that pictures had the function of interpreting reality, it now seems that they have a usurped it. It therefore becomes imperative to understand the picture itself, not in order to understand the picture itself, not in order to uncover a lost reality, but to determine how a picture becomes a signifying structure of its own accord". (1)

Andy Warhol was generally assumed to have moved progressively further away from what was considered the cutting edge of contemporary art from 1968 onwards. This was the year in which Warhol was almost killed by Valerie Solanas in a shooting incident. It can in retrospect be seen that Warhol was occupying a position as an artist which was to become much more widespread in the 1980's. Warhol anticipated the transformation of fine art into a branch of the cultural industry. Warhol in 1965 announced his decision to retire from painting and concentrate on the production of films. Since 1963 Warhol had been predominantly engaged in the making of low budget films in his New York studio, 'the factory'. Ironically his direct involvement with the making of these films decreased post 1965 as he allowed Paul Morrissey increasing control over their direction. His 'retirement' from painting can be seen as an expression of his affinity with Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp withdrew from the production of art works from about 1912 onwards. From 1906 to 1912 Duchamp as a painter had experimented with different styles. He briefly worked in an

'impressionist style' then under the influence of fauvism and finally cubism. He had become increasingly exasperated by what he termed the 'retinal' quality of painting. Two other factors contributed to his disillusionment with painting, one was his meeting with the artist Picibia, who he met for the first time in October 1911. Duchamp at the time was rather sceptical about 'the artists life' but Picibia positively detested what was even then a cliche.

"It's only one occupation and it hasn't been my whole life, far from it. You see I've decided that art is a habit forming drug. That's all it is, for the artist, for the collector, for everybody connected with it". (2)

Another contributing factor to Duchamps increasing disillusionment with art was the rejection in 1912 by the 'Indépendants' group in Paris of Duchamps painting 'Nude descending a staircase'. Duchamp's two brothers who were also artists were asked to withdraw the painting as it was not felt to adhere to the ideas they held for the development of cubism. It was also felt that the painting had too much in common with the Italian movement 'futurism' with its attempt to depict movement. This dogma by artists who were considered radical and who Duchamp respected intellectually so disgusted him that he became a librarian in the Geniève library in Paris. This he felt was a way to free himself from the imposed creativity of 'the artist'.

This decision has in hindsight been one of the most influential art moves of the 20th century. In fact Duchamp continued to work on some form of art production

up until his death in 1968. Duchamp expanded the notions of what art could be, Warhol worked in this expanded arena of art, and he in turn further expanded the perimeters of art. In this thesis I shall discuss how particular examples of Warhol's work in the 1980's relate to work produced in this decade by a younger generation of artists. I shall be discussing the book 'Popism' which was published in 1980. It was Warhol's account of his life in the sixties. This is relevant as it describes a lifestyle and an attitude to work and life which was a complete break from the notion of what should concern an artist. The decade it describes is when high and low culture began to blend in a way in which they never had before. It is a decade which has been described as containing the seeds of Post-Modernism. I shall be showing how the areas Warhol chose to concentrate on in 'Popism' are not ones of an artist attempting to obtain validation from the Fine Art establishment. Warhol is an artist with whom people can identify, who would be alienated by the modernist notions of the heroic artist. Immersion in and enjoyment of a media dominated world is shown to be viable behaviour for an artist.

The other particular example of Warhol's work I shall be discussing are his paintings after de Chirico. Warhol was using similar strategies to younger artists who used 'appropriation' in their work. The artists I shall be discussing - Richard Prince, Cindy Sherman and Sherrie Levine grew up in the 1950's and 1960's. They

were the first generation of artists to grow up with television as an integral element in every household. They all use media representations as the primary source material in their work.

Footnotes

(1) Douglas Crimp, "Pictures"
     Quoted in 'A Forest of Signs', page 151

(2) Marcel Duchamp
     'The Bride and her bachelors'. 5 masters of the
     Avantgarde, page 17/18

CHAPTER ONE

Warhol's announcement of his retirement from painting can also be seen as an attempt to manipulate the art market and increase the price of his paintings. Warhol in his book 'Popism' a chronicle of his years in the sixties published in 1980 acknowledges this as a contributing factor to his 'retirement'. He felt his paintings were not selling for enough in relation to both the prices being paid for the work of other pop artists and to the level of publicity Warhol was generating at the time. Warhol felt this media attention should have translated into higher prices. Warhol also had been making more money as a highly successful commercial artist during the fifties than he was making as a fine artist in the sixties. The relationship between the artist and money is an area of major difference between Warhol and Duchamp. Robert Hughes in his essay on Art and money sees the changed relationship between art and money and the confidence that has been generated in art as an investment, as being the major cultural artifact of the second half of this century. He cites 1960 as being a particularly important date in this development. Potential investors in art by the 1980's had been more than convinced that art works, although not baring interest, offer dramatic and consistent capital gains. Along of course with the pleasure of ownership.

lovingly
Rrose Sélavy,
alias Marcel Duchamp

"I think the whole relationship between art and money shifted so greatly after World War II - really after 1960 - that our way of perceiving art in it's social relations (what we expect from it, how we approach it, what we think it is good for, how we use it) has been deeply, if not always consciously, changed. (1)

An art object is always going to be a commodity. Whether it is ever sold is not relevant as it always has the potential to be sold. Duchamp withdrew from the consumerism of the art world by ceasing to make paintings. He started to make things which at the time could not have been considered art, such as the 'readymades'. These he stated in his 1968 interview with Pierre Cabanne were not intended to be art. They were distractions to amuse himself. Of course they are now unquestioningly thought of as art. Duchamp repeatedly asserted that the viewer was as important to the creation of an art work as the artist. The word 'readymade' was given by Duchamp when he arrived in America in 1915 to manufactured objects which through the artists choice were designated art. Duchamp's most famous readymade, the urinal, was submitted to an exhibition by the Société des Indépendants in 1916 (of which he was a founding member). It was called fountain and signed R. Mutt, and was rejected by the organisers. Context is vital in the recognition of a readymade as an art object. A urinal in a gallery is art because it is in an art gallery. If Duchamp's urinal or to be more precise, the replica of Duchamps urinal, (as the original has long ago been lost track of) was removed from the gallery and placed in a public toilet it would no longer be recognisable as art. Still ironically Duchamp created a whole new type of

object to be bought and sold as art.

"Why should you follow it? You can't make money with it".

This is Duchamp's response to a question by Pierre Cabanne as to why when he was considered to be by many people an exemplary artist no-one at the time (1969) was adopting a similar position as an artist.

Duchamp after his death was discovered to have been working on a large environmental piece for the final 20 years of his life. He was assisted by his wife Teeny. It was called Given 1 The Waterfall 2, illuminating gas. It is now installed in the Philadelphia museum of modern art which houses the major collection of Duchamp's work.

Warhol was not so coy about the work he produced after his 'retirement'. He began to tentatively paint again while still recuperating from his attempted assassination. Commissioned portraits were to be Warhol's main source of income up until his death.

"Become a legend with Andy Warhol.... You'll meet the premier pop artist in his studio for a private sitting. Mr Warhol will create an acrylic on canvas portrait of you in the tradition of his museum quality pieces".

The above was an advertisement in the 1986 Christmas book of the Neiman Marcus stores. The portrait would cost $35,000. The method of production of these commissioned portraits had been perfected by this time. Warhol would take anything up to a hundred polaroid photographs of the sitter. The subject would be wearing heavy make up and the photographs would be taken using a flash. This minimised mid-tones and flattered the image. A photograph would be selected and then re-photographed

using 35mm film. At this point remaining mid-tones could be bleached out. This image was transferred onto acetate and silkscreened onto painted canvas. The painting of the canvas could take as little as a half hour. Sometimes Warhol dragged one colour into the other using his hands. This strategy was used for practical reasons as being precise and tidy was a slower procedure. Buyers also preferred some indication or sign of the hands - an intervention of the artist. This manual intervention seemed to make the portrait more unique. Agitated brushwork is generally felt to imply deep feeling on the part of an artist. The appeal of these portraits to the subjects is easily understood. Warhol's paintings of stars such as Marilyn Monroe, Elvis and Elizabeth Taylor were in museums of modern art. By having your portrait rendered in the same style, by the same artist the subject seemed to be achieving both celebrity and validation from the art world. It is ironic that Warhol helped to such a degree to demystify the creative process and still continued to make his money through being a 'name' artist. Warhol said anybody could make his work, he even asserted that somebody else actually did make a great deal of his paintings during the sixties. This statement had to be retracted following a great deal of anxious phone calls from buyers wanting re-assurance that they had bought Warhols and not Polks. Brigid Polk, a good friend of Warhol's was the person he credited with making his work. These buyers obviously had not understood the more radical implications of Warhol's
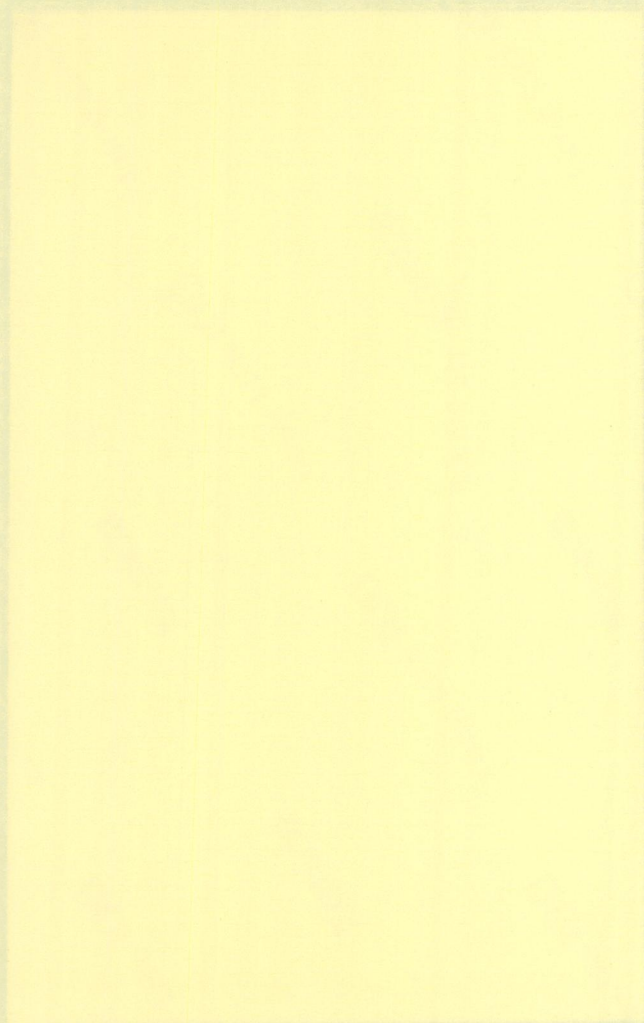
work! The fact that anybody could technically make an artists work makes people very willing to distrust the intentions of the artist. They somehow feel that if they could make an object themselves it must be not worth making. This distrust of modern art is widespread. Even people who could actually enjoy the object presented will repress this willingness to embrace it, because of a fear of being somehow ripped off. How can an artist perpetrate a fraud by presenting something to be looked at and experienced? This somewhat paranoid response was the reaction of certain people to these artists of the 1980's for whom Warhol was an obvious precursor. Jeff Koons is the most visible of these artists and I think his discussion of this issue in the Jeff Koons handbook is most succinct and pleasing.

"I've tried to make work that any viewer, no matter where they came from, would have to respond to, would have to say that on some level, 'Yes, I like it'. If I couldn't do that, it would only be because they had been told they were not supposed to like it. Eventually they will be able to strip all that down and say, 'You know, it's silly, but I like that piece. It's great." (2)

Warhol's determined and honest pursuit of money led many people to dismiss him as 'an artist'. During a time (the seventies) when many artists were trying to minimise the influence of the art market and gallery system Warhol's tactics must have seemed perverse. These artists who found the art gallery system increasingly commercialized and corrupting began to work in areas which produced no art object which could be bought and sold. These areas were performance art, body art, process art, environmental or earth works.

"Business art is the step that comes after Art. I started as a business artist. After I did the thing called "art" or whatever it's called, I went into business art. I wanted to be an Art Business man or a Business Artist. Being good in business is the most fascinating kink of art." (3)

Warhol was seen by many detractors as being a major contributor to what they saw as the progressive deterioration of art since the late 1950's when Pop art replaced abstract expressionism as the dominant art movement in America.

"It is Duchamp's celebrated silence, his abandonment of art which has here in Pop Art - been invaded, colonized and exploited... Pop Art does not tell us what it feels like to be living through the present moment of civilization - it's part of the present moment of that civilization. Its social effect is simply to reconcile us to a world of commodities, banalities and vulgarities - which is to say an effect indistinguishable from advertising art. This is a reconciliation that must - now more than ever - be refused, if art - and life itself is to be defended against the dishonesties of contrived public symbols and pretention." (4)

The above is an extract from an article on Andy Warhol's work from the critic Hilton Kramer in 1962.

In 1980 the book 'Popism' was published. It is a chronicle of Warhol's life in the 1960's written by Andy Warhol and Pat Hacket. The pages concerning the first 3 years of the decade deal predominantly with the fine art world. At the beginning of the sixties Andy Warhol was one of the most successful commercial artists in New York, but he wanted to be accepted into the arena of fine art. The American art world at the time was still dominated by the Abstract expressionist movement. This was the world of the Cedar Tavern where affiliates could demonstrate their manhood by drinking huge quantities of beer, fight over girls and talk art. Jackson Pollock was

the personification of the Myth of the existential artist, a myth to a large extent created by Clement Greenberg. There was a great deal of hostility between the elder abstract expressionist artists and the younger pop artists. The older generation felt that just when they had been accepted by the art establishment and their work was being bought these younger artists were deflecting this hard won attention away from them. The re-introduction of recognisable imagery into painting and its derivation from the area of popular culture was seen as being a triumph of Kitsch. It was felt that artists should resist the media-generated images which were beginning to saturate reality. Culture as opposed to nature was becoming the most obvious and also honest source material for some artists. Passive acceptance, was not felt to be an acceptable response from artists to what was perceived to be the threat of low culture. Warhol being a very successful commercial artist, who was openly gay was the most visible manifestation of a new sensibility.

"I was never embarrassed about asking someone, literally, 'what should I paint?' because Pop comes from the outside and how is asking someone for ideas any different from looking for them in a magazine? Henry understood that, but some people had contempt for you when you asked their advice - they didn't want to know anything about how you worked, they wanted you to keep your mystique so they could adore you without being embarrassed" (5)

Warhol, disarmingly honest in 'Popism', discusses asking his friends already involved in the art world ie. Henry Geldzahler and Emile de Antonio as to what to paint and how to paint it. Warhol feels his problems being

accepted by the fine art community were exasperated by the clear link between his earlier commercial work and his fine art work. Pop artists such as Jim Dine, Roy Lichenstein and Tom Wesselmaan were emerging from a more traditional fine art background. If they had made money through commercial art work it would have been kept very low key. Robert Rauchenberg and Jasper Johns designed window displays for the department shop Bonwit Teller, they did work like this using pseudonyms. Warhol for a week in April 1961 displayed five of his early pop paintings in a window there behind mannequins in spring fashions. Warhol did not feel he had to hide the connection between his fine art and commercial work. The differences between those two areas were not seen by Warhol as being as clear cut as the prevailing art world opinion of the time suggested. In the book 'Popism' Warhol quotes Emile de Antonio as to why Rauchenberg and Johns did not wish to be associated with him in the early sixties.

"You're too swish, and that upsets them... You are a commercial artist which really bugs them because when they do commercial art - windows and other jobs I find them - they do it just 'to survive'. They won't even use their real names. Whereas you've won prizes! You're famous for it". (6)

During the sixties Warhol became famous for his silk screen paintings but in the book 'Popism' he gives much more attention to the film-making activities which pre-occupied him from 1963 until 1968. The reasons one deduces from 'Popism' for Warhol's concentration on film-making was that it allowed him to be surrounded by people he found interesting. Warhol filmed people he found
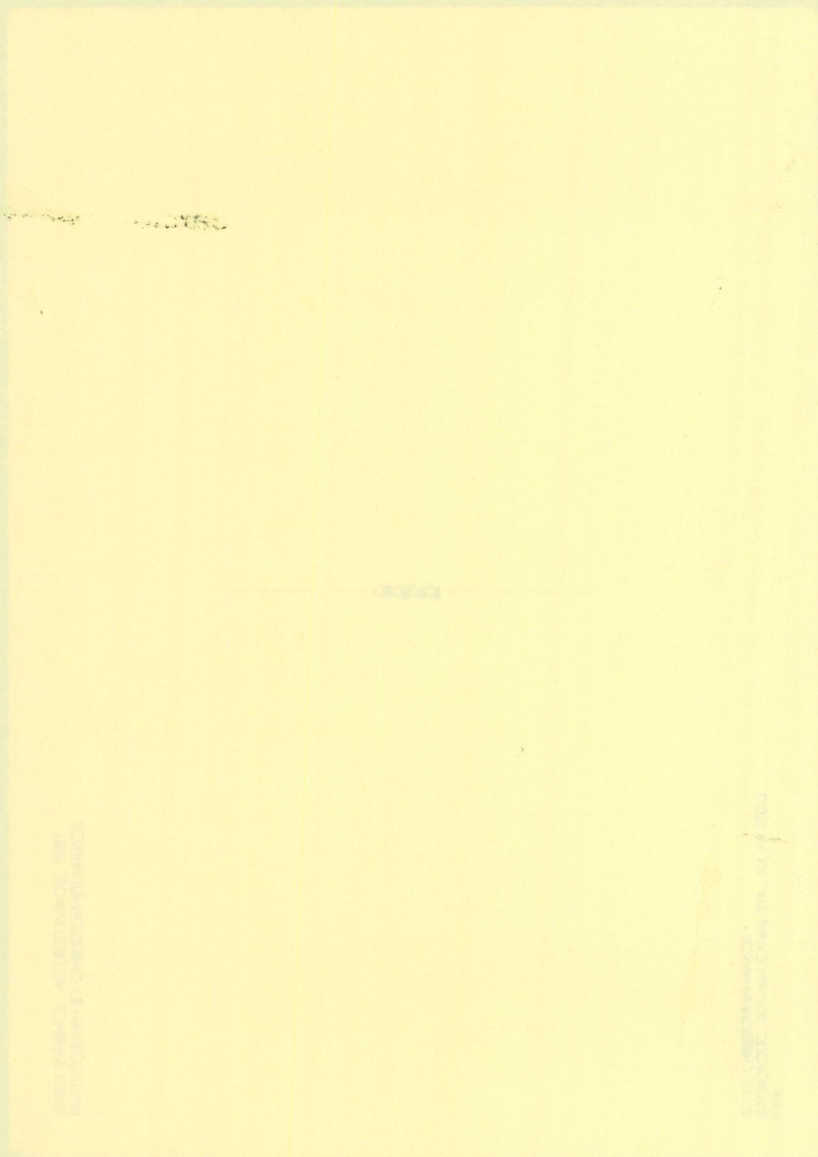
attractive, either intelligent, funny and beautiful doing things, like eating, sleeping, getting haircuts, having sex, so he could be in their company. He writes about who was having sex with whom. What music was popular, (pop songs are listed throughout 'Popism'), who wore what and what drugs were taken. It becomes rather tedious after a while as it's just different names doing the same things as in the previous years.

"The person who intervenes cannot record, the person who records cannot intervene." (7)

Popism recounts what happened but rarely reflects or assumes a definite opinion. Warhol makes it clear that during the 1960's his main occupation and prime concern was partying. This being the area he chose to emphasise shows Warhol in 1980 still playing around with the role of what an artist is and what he should concern himself with.

Footnotes

(1)   Robert Hughes
      'Nothing if not critical', page 395

(2)   Jeff Koons
      'The Jeff Koons Handbook', page 88

(3)   Andy Warhol
      'From A to B and back again', page 88

(4)   Hilton Kramer
      Quoted in 'The Work of Andy Warhol', page 57

(5)   Andy Warhol
      'Popism', page 16

(6)   Emile de Antonio
      'Popism', page 11

(7)   Susan Sontag
      'On Photography', page 12

CHAPTER TWO

"Should we despair?   I don't know - maybe art ends
up as a kind of game, an eclectic game playing activity?
We have this notion of the history of art, with certain
stages and so on - and we have to ask ourselves now -
have we got to the end of the line? What is still
possible? And we can't answer that question. We've come
to a dead end.   This might seem like a despairing
position.   But maybe this whole game will become a
ritual, where we'll carry on making images, but it won't
be a question of fakes or originals any more, it will
just be that all images will be possible at the same
time.   Everything will have the same value - the
original, the copy, the fake. Everything will be on the
market at the same time". (1)

Warhol's position as an artist which during the

seventies was considered for the most part as being a

corruption of his work of the sixties was again being

seen as vital in the 80's. The extent of the critical

change of climate was illustrated by the re-evaluation of

an essay which appeared in a book of collected writings

on conceptual art in the early 1970's.   'The fake is

more' appeared in a book called 'Idea Art' edited by

Gregory Battock in 1973.   It was an essay much cited

during the 80's as being prophetic in relation to

contemporary artists of the time who were being discussed

by critics under the term 'appropriation'. Appropriation

means literally to set something apart for some special

use, to take for oneself, to take possession and use as

ones own.   The essay written under the name 'Cheryl

Bernstein' described the first one man show of an artist

called Hank Herron who's work consisted entirely of

copies of Frank Stella paintings. Herron was praised as

being superior to Stella as his work recognised how

hollow the concept of originality was in late modernism.

The artist Hank Herron was fictitious. The article was written by two people using the 'Cheryl Bernstein' pseudonym and was intended to be a parody of the philosophical claims associated with late modernist painting. This essay was referred to in the 80's by people who both realized it was a spoof ie. Thomas Crow in his essay 'The return of Hank Herron' and those who did not. The citing of an essay that was intended as a spoof was enough for certain critics to dismiss those artists discussed in relation to it. In his article 'Between neo and post' the critic Calvin Tomkins discusses the work of Sherrie Levine. Levine first came to the art publics attention with an exhibition at Metro Pictures gallery, New York in 1981. This exhibition consisted of photographs of photographs by Edward Weston and Walter Evans. To be more accurate Calvin Tomkins dismisses the work of Sherrie Levine.

"These appropriations were received with considerable awe, by certain critics as conceptual works that questioned and commented on the issue of originality in art." (2)

Levine has continued to produce work largely derived from existing art works. In 1983 she displayed watercolours copied from art book reproductions of Kasmir Malevich and Egon Schiele paintings in an exhibition called '1917'. Those watercolours were the same size as the reproductions they were copied from. They were named 'After Egon Schiele' or 'After Kasmir Malevich'. Critics of Levine's work and the work of artists working in a similar area as her perceived it as being extremely negative and cynical work which illustrated what they saw

as the cultural poverty of the 1980's. The importance critics play in how art work is interpreted is particularly visible in relation to Sherrie Levine. Levine's work was interpreted as being a denial of originality. She asserts it was an attempt to broaden the parameters of what originality could be. It was asserted by critics that Levine's work was a critique of the commodification of the art object, and the inherent danger in Levine's work was that when it was bought it would no longer function critically but instead become parasitical upon the original works it copied. Levine has said it was never other than her intention to try to sell the works she made! Warhol had a somewhat different relationship with critics. Warhol never asserted what his work was about or what it was trying to do. If he was forced to make statements, they were as ambiguous as possible. He allowed the critics to designate what was the meaning of his work for him. He presented a blank onto which people could project their interpretations. This brings to mind Duchamp's notion of the viewer making the works. This area illustrates the difficulty of imposing one particular interpretation onto an artist's work. The artists referred to in his thesis work consciously with this idea and this thesis illustrates this difficulty in interpretation and depiction.

"The world is filled to suffocating... Every work, every image, is leased and mortgaged. We know that a picture is but a space in which a variety of images, none of them original, blend and clash. A picture is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture.... We can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. Succeeding the painter, the plagiarist no longer bears with him passions, humours,

feelings, impressions, but rather this immense encyclopedia from which he draws. The viewer is the tablet on which all the quotations that make up a painting are inscribed without any of them being lost. A painting's meaning lies not in its origin, but in its destination. The birth of the viewer must be at the cost of the painter." (3)

On the 20th of November 1982 a show opened in Rome of work by Warhol based on paintings by the artist Giorgio de Chirico. Earlier that year there had been a large exhibition of de Chirico's paintings in the Museum of Modern Art, New York. All the paintings in this exhibition were from the first two decades of this century even though de Chirico had continued to work for almost fifty years after this. An Italian critic in reaction to the exclusion of de Chirico's later work from the New York exhibition invited Warhol to exhibit twelve paintings in an exhibition with six of de Chirico's later paintings. The de Chirico paintings were versions of his earlier respected 'metaphysical' paintings. Warhol's paintings were in turn based on these later de Chirico's. Following 1919 de Chirico began to paint in a neoclassical style. He painted still lifes, portraits including self portraits in period costume, landscapes and mythical scenes. Many of these paintings seem to border on the outrageously kitsch to our eyes. De Chirico's early work is familiar to anyone with an interest in Western Art of the 20th century. It was very influential on artists especially the Surrealist artists Targuay, Magritte, Dali and Ernst. The Surrealist were to repudiate de Chirico because they found his neo classical paintings unacceptably regressive. Similarly
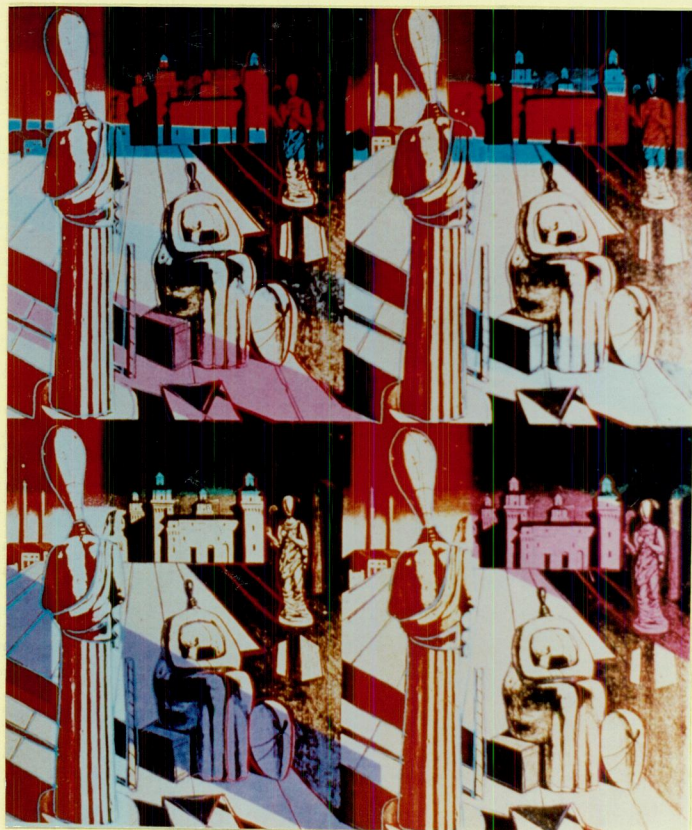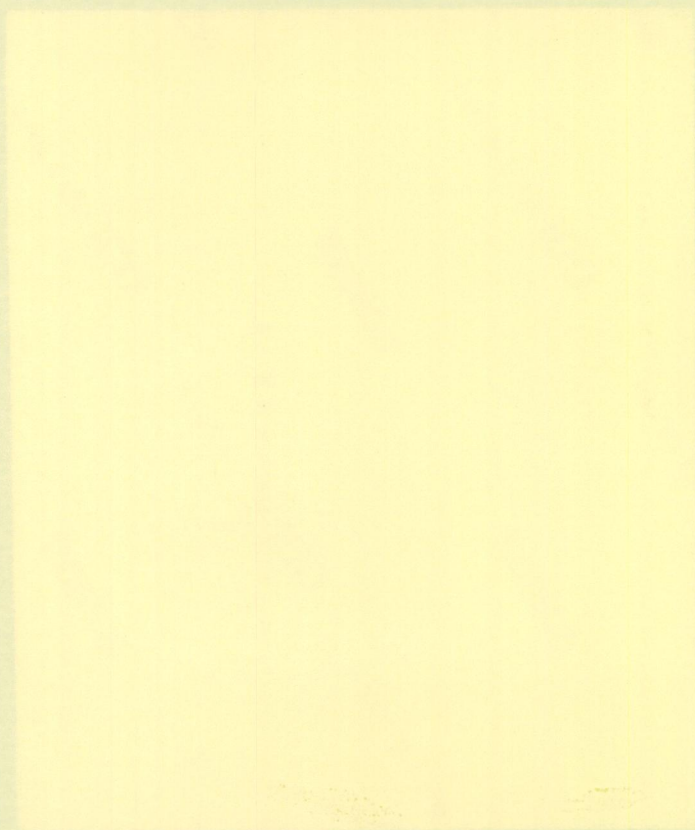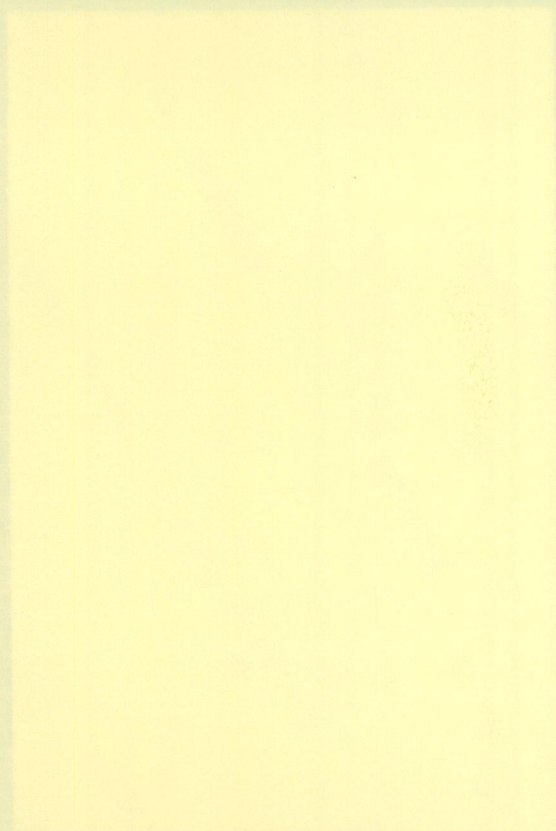
these paintings have been edited out of art history by the critics. Very few of these later works can be seen by the public as they were popular with private collectors and not modern art galleries. William Rubin the organiser of the 1982 museum of Modern Art exhibition in his essay from the accompanying catalogue puts forward the argument that the deterioration of de Chirico's work was caused by the improvement of his mental condition! He asserts that de Chirico was in a state of mental crisis preceding 1920 which added an extra vitality to his work. Obviously to secure his position in art history de Chirico should have cut off his ear and shot himself! As well as painting in a neoclassical style following 1919 de Chirico intermittently would copy paintings he had done in his immensely respected phase. He sometimes repeatedly copied the same painting over a number of years. The paintings were given false dates and sold to collectors who spurned his later 'neo classical' paintings. This was another factor in the dismissal of de Chirico's later work by critics. One Italian art critic commented that de Chirico's bed would have to be six feet off the ground to account for the amount of 'early' paintings he 'found' there. Not only did de Chirico back date later versions of his metaphysical paintings he also often asserted that paintings housed in galleries were 'later' copies and not in fact the original metaphysical paintings they were exhibited as being! In 1946 for example he insisted in 'Time' magazine that 'The double dream of Spring' in the

Museum of Modern Art, New York was a fake, though later he admitted it wasn't! It seems strange to think that the Surrealists who 'excommunicated' de Chirico from their ranks (as they did Dali) failed to recognise the extremely provocative nature of de Chirico's behaviour. He was bringing into question the notion of originality in art and also the area of ownership. His manoeuvring within the art market brings attention to the area of art as a commodity. De Chirico was fulfilling a desire in the market for his metaphysical paintings by producing more of them! This is an immensely funny solution when viewed from an art history perspective with its dependence on chronological development and artistic innovations. It is easy to see why de Chirico interested Warhol.

"He repeated the same paintings over and over again. I like the idea a lot, so I thought it would be great to do it. I believe he viewed repetition as a way of expressing himself. This is probably what we have in common. The difference, what he repeated regularly, year after year, I repeat the same day in the same painting." (4)

De Chirico's tactics question the notion of artistic innovation even if they were possibly adopted for economic reasons as opposed to ones of deconstruction. This is something which can also be said of Warhol. Warhol by choosing to do this work based on later work of de Chirico was acknowledging this affinity he felt with him. He also must have sympathized with de Chirico's fate at the hands of critics. Warhol's later work was like de Chirico's also generally given a hostile reception. Warhol with this work was engaging with work

being produced by a younger generation of artists. In the early 80's de Chirico was being looked at again by younger artists. It was recognised that the issues that led to his dismissal by modernist critics were those which were being undermined by post modernists. His use of different historical styles of paintings was adopted by the Neo Expressionist artists. The issues of originality, uniqueness, artistic inspiration and the relationship between art and money were those at the centre of a great deal of artists' work during the 1980's.

Footnotes

(1) Jean Baudrillard

(2) Calvin Tomkins
     'From Post to Neo", page 237

(3) Sherrie Levine

(4) Andy Warhol
     'A retrospective', page 456

CHAPTER THREE

'Even better than the real thing'

Richard Prince is an artist who is often discussed
with Sherrie Levine. They both began to use the method
of re-photography in their work around the same time,
though Prince is credited as using it somewhat before
Levine. Prince is an artist who is an obvious descendant
of Warhol's. Robert Hughes in the introduction of his
book 'Nothing if not critical' gives the name Andy's
children to a generation of American artists who,

"could not imagine a fine-arts tradition that was
not overshadowed by television". (1)

For Hughes the combination of mass-media sources for art
and the emphasis currently based on theory in art
colleges has produced a fine arts culture given over to
information and not experience. This echoes the general
drain of concrete experience from modern existence.

"The reign of mere unassimilated data instead of
events that gain meaning by being absorbed into the
fabric of imaginative life". (2)

Hughes is criticising artists for reflecting what is
going on in everyday existence. Hughes in discussing
this 'drain of concreteness' and 'reign of unassimilated
data' is in the area of what the French post
structuralist theoretician Jean Baudrillard has called
the simulacrum. The simulacrum is a sign detached from
any concrete reality, a sign of a sign. Baudrillard is
often cited in relation to the work of artists such as
Levine and Prince. Another theory of Baudrillards is
that any resistance of rebellion in the modern world will

not be forcefully overcome, but instead will be assimilated into the dominant culture. An example of this is how at the moment 'grunge' fashion is being extensively covered in everything from the Sunday Times colour supplement to French Vogue. Designers are producing ripped jumpers and checked shirts which sell for hundreds of pounds. 'Grunge' was an antifashion statement based on very cheap army surplus and second hand clothes. This is also why there is no longer an avantgarde in the art world, everything is accepted now after a little initial resistance by the buyers in the market.

Richard Prince while working for Time-life began around 1977 to re-photograph advertisements from magazines. He used a 35mm camera and initially chose the advertisements which exactly fitted the frame of the camera. His choices were not provoked by attraction or interest or any kind of feeling response. They were picked because they were the right size. This recalls Duchamp's 1968 explanation for his choice of 'readymades'.

"You have to approach something with an indifference, as if you had no aesthetic emotion. The choice of readymade is always based on visual indifference and, at the same time, on the total absence of good or bad taste." (3)

Prince has stated how he had begun to see advertisements as being film stills. He had at times been looking at a lot of movie stills. This suggests that Prince by re-photographing these images was trying to determine what exactly this movie was and what it was

about. Prince's work seems primarily an investigation. Prince himself does not know the outcome. He is a private eye, a private I. This is a quality which immediately attracts about Richard Prince's work. It is not unyielding, it engages the viewer and invites the viewer to conduct their own investigation. Their case being who is Richard Prince. The viewer tries to locate him in the choice of images and texts he reproduces. He does not assert his presence of individuality, he allows other people to do this for him. This is a similar tactic to Warhol allowing critics to assert what his work was about. Richard Prince at times uses strategies which are very similar to Warhol's. Then again this is a statement that can be made about almost any artist working in what can be termed the field of post-modernism. Why so have I chosen to emphasise Richard Prince over other artists when I could have as easily discussed Jeff Koons or Barbra Kruger. The type of definite statements required in a thesis are not compatible with a discussion of post modernism. For every similarity I could assert between the work of Prince and Warhol I could also show a dissimilarity. Sherrie Levine in response to a question by Jeanne Siegel about the work of the artists using 'appropriation' lack of conviction, the way it does not feel compelled to convince asserts how she sees doubt as a virtue. Post-modernism is not an art movement in the sense of modernist movements such as Cubism or Surrealism which had a recognisable style and artists working with similar

We have received orders
not to move

Stampato

ideas and aims. Post-modernism locates itself after modernism and announces the death of many concepts beloved to the modernist idea of `Art` The notions of innovation, originality and individuality are not held in the same regard. They are seen as being both cultural and political constructions. Constructions which were used to alienate and exclude a lot of people from the very idea of being creative. Or post-modernism seen from another perspective, that of Clement Greenberg staunch upholder of modernist values and soldier in the fight against Kitsch is,

"A way above all, to justify oneself in preferring less demanding art without being called reactionary or retarded." (4)

Prince is associated with a particular group of artists who used photography as their predominant medium. These artists include Cindy Sherman, Barbra Kruger and Sherrie Levine. All these artists used photography as a tool. They were not particularly concerned with composing a `good` picture, they were more interested in conveying ideas. This is not to say that conveying ideas was their only concern. They were also interested in creating visually stimulating material.

"Virtually every critical and theoretical issue with which post-modernist art may be said to engage in one sense or another can be located within photography. Issues having to do with authorship, subjectivity, and uniqueness, are built into the very nature of the photo-graphic process itself: issues devolving on the simulacrum, the stereotype, and the social and sexual positioning of the viewing subject are central to the production and functioning of advertising and other mass-media forms of photography." (5)

These artists amongst others who first came to the notice of the art world through the New York `Metro`

gallery which opened in 1980, were picked up on by critics as being the progressive wing of post-modernism.

The prevailing art trend of the early eighties neo-expressionism was felt by these critics to be regressive with its reliance on the notion of individual expression and outmoded concepts of inspiration. These post-structuralist critics among them Hal Foster, Craig Owens and Rosalind Drauss were very much influenced by the writings of Michael Farcautt, Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes and Jacques Lacan, and by Baudrillard's concept of the seduction and alienation of spectacular society. Prince's work was primarily read as being a critique of,

"the conditions of commodification and fetishization that inform art production". (6)

The extreme intellectualization that Richard Prince's work was subjected to was something which he was not always pleased with. He feared it could alienate some people who would have enjoyed the visually appealing and seductive aspects of this work. After all a great deal of Prince's work is derived from advertising images whose purpose is to arouse desire in the viewer. Hal Foster gives a very accurate description of this aspect of Prince's work.

"He wants to catch seduction in the act, to savor his fascination with such images even as they manipulate him via insinuated desire". (7)

The particular examples of Prince's work I shall discuss in this chapter are from the 1992 book which was published by the Whitney Museum of American Art to coincide with a retrospective exhibition of his work. It may seem somewhat perverse to discuss an artist's work

with reference to reproduction and not the real things themselves. I acknowledge that my appreciation of Prince's work is based on books and not gallery visits. Prince's work, both the images, and much of the text is predominantly derived from magazines. In this catalogue and in other books he has produced these images and reintegrated into the format from which they originated. Prince put his 'appropriated' images through a certain amount of manipulation.

The angled copy

The cropped copy

The focused copy

The out-of-focus copy

The colour copy

He presented his images in series which invited narrative speculation, highlighting similarities which re-occurred and made certain invisible codes in advertising visible. This work was seen as a deconstruction of media images which it obviously was, but not exclusively and not from the position of detachment and superiority that such a statement suggests. Prince's position was not one of objective investigation even though the cool and formal nature of the work could prompt such a reading.

Since (say) 1949 there has been a whole generation of artists who have grown up with the idea that they can actually have a relationship with an image, as if it had an ego and were alive". (8)

Prince's writings are populated by people who feel they can have a relationship with an image as it would be easier than having one with a real person. They have

been shown how to act and feel by the media for so long that they can't react 'naturally' to events. They desire images.

"We look to images for what we know we want, and they tell us we want them again." (9)

The desire these images arouse is real desire, but the reality they refer to is illusionary. There are no cowboys riding the range dressed in designer work-wear and inhaling Marlboro.

In 1980 Prince collaborated with Cindy Sherman on a photographic work. It is a portrait of each artist placed side by side. I recall being surprised when first seeing reproduced in a magazine that it was credited not to Sherman but to Prince. Both artists are pictured wearing identical clothes, and adopting similar poses. They both raise their right hands towards their mouths, Sherman touches her lips while Prince conceals his mouth. The clothes they wear are the traditional uniform of conservative masculinity, a jacket (suggesting a suit) a tie, and a white shirt. Sherman adopts a masculine role and in doing so encourages the viewer to see 'feminine' characteristics in Prince. Sherman in her work explores media derived representations of 'femininity'. She does this by acting out roles in front of a camera. Her earliest use of this device used film stills as their model. The photographs were the same dimensions 8 x 10 as actual film stills. The use of this format in conjunction with the stereotypical image of the woman made these photographs appear very familiar to the viewer. Sherman and Prince's work share the suggestion

of films that have never been made. Prince can be seen as being engaged in a similar exploration of media derived roles as Sherman. He is exploring images of masculinity, instead of restaging these images as does Sherman he simply groups together these images. A lot of Prince's work can be viewed as surrogate self-portraits in which Prince does not state, "this is me", but instead asks "is this me?" or "how much of this is me?". With Prince the personal is seen to be constructed from the public realm of advertising images and culture in general. Through manipulating these images the personal may emerge. Prince acknowledges the problem of self representation.

"I think this particular voice, the one I like to think of as my own does in fact entertain the notion that it sometimes finds itself in a movie, and I think to some extent this voice carries on a relationship with the scene in front of him as if what he's looking at can be either produced directed, acted in or even written about." (10)

In 1984 Prince began to copy in pencil or paper existing cartoons. He described how he became engaged in this activity on the January edition of 'Artscribe' in 1989. He first of all began looking at the ways advertisements used drawing in some cases instead of photography. Redrawing cartoons was the most literal way to copy drawings as photography had been the most literal way to copy photographs. It was also a way for Prince to introduce drawing into his work without it being out of context. Prince had engaged in drawing, while he had been involved in his 're-photography' work, but it was a private concern, an activity which was not intended for

The Velvet Well

The first time he saw her, he saw her in a photograph. He had seen her before, at her job, but there, she didn't come across or measure up anywhere near as well as she did in her picture. Behind her desk she was too real to look at, and what she did in daily life could never guarantee the effect of what usually came to be received from an objective resemblance. He had to have her on paper, a material with a flat and seamless surface...a physical location which could represent her resemblance all in one place...a place that had the chances of looking real, but a place that didn't have any specific chances of being real.

His fantasies, and right now, the one of her, needed satisfaction. And satisfaction, at least in part, seemed to come about by ingesting, perhaps "perceiving," the fiction her photograph imagined.

She had to be condensed and inscribed in a way that his expectations of what he wanted her to be, (and what he wanted to be too) could at least be possibly, even remotely, realized. Overdetermination was part of his plan and in a strange way, the same kind of psychological after-life was what he loved, sometimes double loved about her picture.

It wasn't that he wanted to worship her. And it wasn't that he wanted to be taxed and organized by a kind of uncritical devotion. But her image did seem to have a concrete and actual form...an incarnate power...a power that he could willingly and easily contribute to. And what he seemed to be able to do, either in front or away from it. was pass time in a particular bodily state, an alternating balance which turned him in and out and made him see something about a life after death.

public exhibition.   It is very difficult to find information on Prince prior to his 're-photography' work so it cannot be said whether drawing relates back to work Prince produced before the body of work for which he is known.   There are two exhibitions listed in the Whitney catalogue which predate 1977 the year of the New York 'Pictures' exhibition.   There is one line in all the information available which describes him as having been a figurative artist? There is no biographical material available either except for the year 1949 as his year of birth and the 1967 interview with J.G. Ballard called 'extra-ordinary' where he says he's from the Panama canal zone and his father's a psychopath who at the time was engaged in the development of chemical weapons. This interview is fictional, even though it has never been printed as being anything other than true.   It even states that it was originally published in Punch magazine in 1967.   Even the name Richard Prince sounds suspiciously like a manufactured name.   Prince has very carefully manipulated his books and the media attention and publicity which he has generated.   The tactics he uses in his work are those which he uses in his life as well.   The blurring between fact and fiction, and public and private life.

"People writing about appropriation at the time were not being honest. They were making a life situation into an art situation. My position was a personal one like everybody else's. So at the time I was trying to move away and say maybe the reasons I used other peoples pictures was that I didn't like my own. Maybe it was that simple. I was saying to certain critics, look, I appreciate your attention but you're all wrong". (11)

The Perfect Tense

Magazines, movies, T.V., and records. It wasn't everybody's condition but to him it sometimes seemed like it was, and if it really wasn't, that was alright, but it was going to be hard for him to connect with someone who passed himself off as an example or a version of a life put together from unmediated matters.

He had already accepted all these conditions and built out of their givens, and to him what was given was anything public and what was public was always real. He transported these givens to a reality more real than the condition he first accepted. He was never too clever, too assertive, too intellectual...essentially too decorative. He had a spirit that made it easier to receive than to censor.

His own desires had very little to do with what came from himself because what he put out (at least in part) had already been out. His way to make it new was *make it again,* and making it again was enough for him certainly, personally speaking, *almost* him.

He liked to think of himself as an audience and located himself on the other side of what he and others did...looking back at it, either by himself or with a group, hoping to exchange an emotion that was once experienced only as an author...an exchange he willingly initiated for reasons he felt necessary... necessary because he knew if he didn't make the switch, from author to audience, he knew he could never say, "I second that emotion."

Being the audience, or part of one, was for him a way to identify himself physically and a way to perceive rather than affect...a way to share with others in what might be described as a kind of impossible or promissory nonfiction. A way to see or realize what essentially was a surface with public image, a surface that was once speculative and ambitious, as something now referential and ordinary. Referential because the image's authority existed outside his own touch and ordinary because their frequency of appearance could be corroborated by persons other than himself.

"You don't have to take my word for them," he would say, as if defending against a cross-examination..."These pictures are more than available, and unless you've been living in an alley, inside an ash-can, wrapped up in trash liner (with the cover closed), chances are better than even, you've seen them too."

Prince progressed from redrawing the cartoon and punchline and calling them jokes to copying the punchline on its own, as he realized the term 'joke' was an inaccurate description of the cartoon and punchline. Prince had never before signed work, but he began to sign and date to the second the pieces of paper he wrote the jokes on. This exaggerated manner of signing drew attention to the area of 'signature'. Prince offered these 'jokes' for sale at $10. There were few takers, one dealer asked for a 10% reduction because he was buying two. A lot of people must have asked the question, 'is this guy for real, is this serious or is it a joke?'.

Prince at the time known exclusively for his re-photography has said the reaction of people to the jokes was complete disbelief, which had also been the reaction seven years previously when he had begun to exhibit his photographs of already existing photographs.

"I'm not associated with the hand... Beginning the jokes was like starting over". (12)

Prince next began to make drawings of combined cartoons where the text did not relate to the image. This work became progressively more complex and densely layered. Mixing different punchlines and images created confused scenarios. In 1987 this led Prince to actually want to make and exhibit paintings, an activity he had long felt to be alien and far removed from him. He made large paintings of one colour, monochromes with a joke silkscreened across the middle in a different colour. Is this a joke on large monochromatic paintings with even

larger philosophical claims? Well it is, literally.

"In this generation a few people have been thinking
about authorship, and obviously it has been on my mind
that the artist is not as special as he or she was made
out to be because of Modernism . When I went to look at
my jokes hanging in a gallery I saw people laugh out
loud. They weren't thinking about colour or form or
content. For a second that was all there was there."
(13)

Prince has recently been working on canvases called

'the white paintings'.   They repeat the formula of the

drawings with the combination of cartoons and text. They

contain   juxtapositions   of   cartoons,   silkscreened

photographs, hand written jokes, found text, invented

text and silkscreened jokes.   They   look like real

paintings and Prince has   been photographed   looking

suitably moody in paint spattered jeans and workboots.

"They were always impressed by the photographs of
Jackson Pollock, but didn't particularly think much about
his   paintings, since   painting   was   something they
associated with a way to put things together that seemed
pretty much taken care of." (14)

Prince has related how his work was not taken

seriously until it began to look like 'Art', until his

photographs were put in frames and exhibited in series,

until his jokes were incorporated into large canvas.

These 'white paintings' are images of what real painting

is supposed to look like. This element of fiction is

highlighted by the fact that 1967 is given as the year of

creation of many of these paintings. Prince is exploring

the modernist myth of 'The Artist'.   He is again role-

playing with established masculine stereotypes.

I never had a penny to my name, so I changed my name.

Footnotes

(1) Robert Hughes
     'Nothing if Not critical'

(2) Robert Hughes
     'Nothing if Not critical'

(3) Marcel Duchamp
     'Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp', page 48

(4) Clement Greenberg
     Quoted in 'A Forest of Signs', Anne Rorimer, page
     129

(5) Abigail Solomon-Godeau
     'Richard Prince', page 30

(6) Lisa Phillips
     'Richard Prince', page 31

(7) Hal Foster
     'Richard Prince', page 31

(8) Richard Prince
     Artscribe International, Jan/Feb 1989

(9) Richard Prince
     'Richard Prince'

(10) Richard Prince
     'Richard Prince', page 35

(11) Richard Prince
     Artscribe International, Jan/Feb 1989

(12) Richard Prince
     Artscribe International, Jan/Feb 1989

(13) Richard Prince
     Artscribe International, Jan/Feb 1989

(14) Richard Prince
     'Spiritual America', page 128

CONCLUSION

"What he has done is to replace the monolithic, heroic, subject-author with an elusive ambiguous unstable and de-centered, anti-heroic presence." (1)

This is a statement made by Lisa Phillips about Richard Prince. It is a statement equally applicable to Andy Warhol, and concerns the areas which I feel the previous pages have discussed. Andy Warhol rejected the heroic myth of the artist. He created an image of the artist with which certain people alienated by this heroic myth could identify with. The three artists Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman and Richard Prince have all replaced the still widely existing notion of the artist as an inspired individual unquestionably masculine, with something else. For them 'the artist' occupies a much less easily defined role. Their work and the way they themselves have chosen to discuss it challenges easily accepted stereotypes.

Footnote

(1) Lisa Phillips
     'Richard Prince', page 34

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bockris, Victor
'Warhol', Penguin Books 1990

Cabanne, Pierre
'Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp', The documents of 20th
Century Art.
Thames and Hudson 1971

Foster, Hal
'Discussions in Contemporary Culture'
Dia Art Foundation 1987

Garrels, Gary
'The Work of Andy Warhol'
Dia Art Foundation 1989

Godbold, David
'An intimate relationship', Douglas Hyde Gallery,
Oriel Mostyn and The Orchard Gallery

Hackett, Pat and Warhol, Andy
'Popism. The Warhol 60's'
Harcourt Bruce Jonvanovich 1980

Hughes, Robert
'Nothing if not critical'
Collins Harvill 1990

Joselit, David and Sussman, Elisabeth
'Endgame Reference and Simulation in recent painting and
sculpture'
The Mit Press 1986

Koons, Jeff
'The Jeff Koons Handbook'
Thames and Hudson 1992

Livingstone, Marco
'Pop Art. A continuing history'
Thames and Hudson 1990

Owens, Craig
'The heroic figure', Contemporary Arts Museum.
Houston Texas 1984

Phillips, Lisa
'Richard Prince'.
Library of Congress cataloguing in Publication data 1992

Prince, Richard
'Spiritual America', 1989

Prince, Richard
'Richard Prince', Barbara Gladson Gallery, New York. 1988

Prince, Richard
'Inside World', Kent Fine Art, New York and Thea
Westreich. New York 1989

Prince, Richard
'Jokes, Gangs, Hoods',
Eastern Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 1990

Siegel, Jeanne
'Art Talk. The Early 80's'
Da Capo Press 1988

Stoor, Robert
'The devil on the stairs',
Institute of contemporary art, Philadelphia 1991

Tomkins, Calvin
'From Post to Neo',
Henry Holt and Company Inc. 1988

Warhol, Andy
'A retrospective'
Museum of Modern Art. New York 1989

Warhol, Andy
'From A to B and back again'.
The Philosophy of Andy Warhol.
Picador 1976

'American Art in the 80's'
Electa Nilano 1991

'A Forest of signs'
Art in the crisis of representation.
The Mit Press 1989

'Utopia Post Utopia'
Configurations of nature and culture in recent Sculpture
and Photography.
The Mitt Press 1988