

Hendershot Gallery

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Art Knowledge News

March 2008

'WARHOL'S JEWS: TEN PORTRAITS RECONSIDERED' Opens At The JEWISH MUSEUM

New York, NY – *Warhol's Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered* will be on view at **The Jewish Museum on view from March 16 through August 3, 2008.** When it premiered in 1980, **Andy Warhol's *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century*** was met with both admiration and hostility. The series depicts such **luminaries of Jewish culture as Sarah Bernhardt, Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, the Marx Brothers, Golda Meir, and Franz Kafka, among others.**

On view in this exhibition are the photographs that Warhol used as source images, several preliminary sketches, a preparatory collage, an edition of the final silk-screen print portfolio (of which 200 were published), and one of the five complete sets of paintings that he made for the series. The drawings and source photographs have not previously been exhibited alongside the finished pictures. Additional materials related to the portraits, including the list of nearly 100 "famous Jews" prepared by Warhol's dealer, and television coverage of the artist's trip to Miami for the world premiere of the series, will shed light on their creation and display. Following its New York City showing, the exhibition will travel to the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco, CA (October 12, 2008 – January 25, 2009).

The Jewish Museum initially showed three sets of paintings and an edition of prints in the fall of 1980. While Jewish audiences tended to embrace Warhol's series, several leading art critics dismissed it as crass and exploitative. In the twenty-eight years since its debut, *Ten WARHOL'S JEWS: TEN PORTRAITS RECONSIDERED Portraits* has continued to confront viewers with these questions: Why did a Pop artist who otherwise displayed little interest in Jewish culture or causes create a series devoted to eminent Jews? How do we reconcile Warhol's commercial motives with the high-minded portrayal of cultural and historical icons? How has our view of *Ten Portraits* changed since its first showing?

Unlike many of Warhol's portraits, *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century* depicts subjects whom the artist never met. Warhol was evasive when asked to divulge his selection criteria for the series and once told a reporter that he chose these ten subjects "because I liked the faces." The idea for *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century* originated with Ronald Feldman, a New York gallerist, who commissioned it with Israeli art dealer Alexander Harari.

A sustained process of research and discussion resulted in the selection of a group of Jewish figures representing great achievement in the arts, sciences, philosophy, law, and politics: celebrated French actress Sarah Bernhardt (1844-1923); the first Jewish Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Louis Brandeis (1856-1941); renowned philosopher and educator Martin Buber (1878-1965); the great theoretical physicist, Albert Einstein (1897-1955); the hugely influential founder of the psychoanalytic school of psychology, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939); vaudeville, stage and film comedians, the Marx Brothers: Chico (1887-1961), Groucho (1890-1977), and Harpo (1888-1964); Israel's fourth Prime Minister and one of the founders of the State of Israel, Golda Meir (1898-1978); distinguished American composer George Gershwin (1898-1937); the eminent novelist, Franz Kafka (1883-1924); and avant-

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garde American writer, poet and playwright Gertrude Stein (1874-1946). The collective achievements of this group shaped the course of the 20th century and may be said to have influenced every aspect of human experience.

Andy Warhol, one of the preeminent figures in American Pop Art, transformed contemporary art by blurring traditional distinctions between fine art and pop culture. In the 1960s, when literal representation in the visual arts had fallen out of critical favor, he was instrumental in reviving the portrait genre, finding ways to blend the mass medium of photography with the “high art” of painting. Obsessed with fame and media hype, he appropriated images from popular culture and created unforgettable portraits of celebrities such as Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor.

Warhol’s portraits, typically produced in multiple, defy customary expectations for a unique or psychologically revealing view of the individual. By openly embracing commercialism and the trappings of fame, and by employing photography and silk-screening, he challenged modernist concepts of originality and self-expression.

In conjunction with the exhibition, The Jewish Museum, New York and the Contemporary Jewish Museum, San Francisco are co-publishing *Warhol’s Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered*, which is being distributed by Yale University Press. The 64-page book features 50 color and 20 black-and-white illustrations, and includes an essay by Richard Meyer, with contributions by Gabriel de Guzman. The hardcover book will sell for \$15.00 at The Jewish Museum’s Cooper Shop and at bookstores everywhere.

On view concurrently with *Warhol’s Jews: Ten Portraits Reconsidered* is the mini-exhibition, *Art, Image and Warhol Connections*. Works by seven artists who directly respond to Andy Warhol or employ techniques often associated with Warhol’s oeuvre are featured in the contemporary gallery of The Jewish Museum’s permanent exhibition, *Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey*. Warhol and themes central to his practice – such as current events, consumer culture and the superstar – are seen reflected through 26 works by a multi-generational group of artists, including Deborah Kass, Alex Katz, **Abshalom Jac Lahav**, Adam Rolston, Ben Shahn, Devorah Sperber and June Wayne. .

About The Jewish Museum

The Jewish Museum was established on January 20, 1904 when Judge Mayer Sulzberger donated 26 ceremonial art objects to The Jewish Theological Seminary of America as the core of a museum collection. Today, The Jewish Museum maintains an important collection of 26,000 objects – paintings, sculpture, works on paper, photographs, archaeological artifacts, ceremonial objects, and broadcast media. Widely admired for its exhibitions and educational programs that inspire people of all backgrounds, The Jewish Museum is the preeminent institution exploring the intersection of 4,000 years of art and Jewish culture.

General Information

Museum hours are Saturday through Wednesday, 11am to 5:45pm; and Thursday, 11am to 8pm. Museum admission is \$12.00 for adults, \$10.00 for senior citizens, \$7.50 for students, free for children under 12 and Jewish Museum members. Admission is free on Saturdays. For general information on The Jewish Museum, the public may visit the Museum’s Web site at <http://www.thejewishmuseum.org> or call 212.423.3200. The Jewish Museum is located at 1109 Fifth Avenue at 92nd Street, Manhattan.