

9.4 The Meeting between Warhol and Pasolini at the 1975 “Ladies and Gentlemen” Exhibition

Emanuele Stochino¹

× ~~Abstract~~

This abstract sets out to underline the importance of the 1975 *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen* exhibition held at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara, Italy and the writings of Pier Paolo Pasolini concerning the exhibition theme: transvestitism. Warhol was invited by Luciano Anselmino, the Italian gallery owner, to create a series of portraits of lesser-known people rather than of *Factory* stars. This *Ladies and Gentlemen* series was highly successful and put a hitherto neglected theme under the spotlight. Although the first exhibition provoked scandal, with some variants, it has seen many re-editions since its theme is ever more common in Western society. In his writings regarding the 1975 exhibition, Pasolini portrayed an American society of equivalence; a society characterized by mass consumerism. He depicted a society in which everybody consumed the same things, attended the same cultural events and frequented the same areas; no-one was distinctive, everyone was equivalent. Pasolini interpreted the ten portraits as *isocephalic* figures, replicated until their identity was cancelled. No portrait bore the name of its subject and each subject merged with the next to create one single individual: an *Archetype*. In his writings, Pasolini foresaw a mass society founded upon hedonism which would annul every typology of cultural and sexual difference based on the belief that the only accepted difference between individuals is linked to the amount one consumes. This leads to the assumption that: “political choices of conscience no longer correspond to existential choices” (Pasolini, 2019: 73).

Keywords: *Ladies and Gentlemen” Exhibition, mass consumerism, Pier Paolo Pasolini, transvestitism.*

1. Introduction

To understand Pasolini’s writing on Warhol’s *Ladies and Gentlemen* series it is necessary both to contextualize the birth of Warhol’s series and to describe the knowledge that Pasolini had acquired during his two trips to New York in 1966 and 1969.

The article will be structured in three parts:

- × The genesis of the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series: to understand how and why Luciano Anselmino, director of the Turin Faun Gallery, convinced Warhol to produce the series. The reference sources will be the writings of: Bob Coacello, Janus and Maria Luisa Pacelli.
- × Pasolini’s trips to New York: to analyze his first-hand knowledge of American society. The

1. University of Brescia, Italy. E-mail: socialarte@tim.it

reference sources will be the interviews: “A Marxist in New York” (1966) by Oriana Fallaci, “he interview by Giuseppe Cardillo, 1969, Pasolini’s personal notes and the writings of Enzo Siciliano.

* Pasolini’s writing on the Warhol series. Pasolini’s vision of Warhol’s works will be analyzed from both an artistic and social point of view. The reference source will be Pasolini’s own notes as well as the manuscript of the presentation of the *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen* exhibition, which was held at the Anselmino Gallery in Via Manzoni, Milan, in 1976.

2. The Genesis of the Ladies and Gentlemen Portrait Series

The idea for the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series came from the renowned art dealer Luciano Anselmino. The sources which will be cited below include extracts from Maria Luisa Pacelli’s interview with Franco Farina and some passages from the book “Holy Terror. Andy Warhol Close Up” by Bob Coacello who was Warhol’s assistant. These sources reveal some discrepancies concerning the way in which Anselmino’s idea was communicated to Warhol.

In the interview carried out by Maria Luisa Pacelli (MPL) with Franco Farina (FF) the former director of the Civic Gallery of Modern Art at Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara, one reads:

MPL

When I asked Janus who had the idea to create a series on transvestites and how it came about, he told me that one day Anselmino had come into the gallery [NA il Fauno], excited, and had told him about an idea that had come to him that night. Then, after a brief conversation between the two, Anselmino called Warhol on the phone and told him about his idea with infectious enthusiasm.

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FF

The fact that Anselmino found a buyer [Carlo Monzino] for all the paintings before they were even completed certainly carried some weight, and soon after, he also found an exhibition venue in a public space, in Ferrara.”

(Pacelli, 2015: 43-44)

Bob Coacello in “Holy Terror. Andy Warhol Close Up” stated that in August 1974 he and Warhol, who were returning from Switzerland, drove to Turin to sign one hundred portraits by Man Ray, commissioned by Luciano Anselmino, owner of the Fauno Gallery.

In the chapter “Ladies and Gentlemen, Etc.” Coacello wrote: “I [Coacello] was driven [...] to Turin, to see a protégè of Iolas², Luciano Anselmino whom we called Anselmino da Torino, because he looked more like a hairdresser than an art dealer.”

In the morning, after having signed the Man Ray portraits, Warhol saw Anselmino. The latter proposed him a large, commissioned work, including both screen prints and paintings, for an amount of \$ 900,000³, a third of which was to be paid in advance. Anselmino insisted that the theme of the works was to be *transvestitism*.

At first, Warhol declined. However, after a few hours, an ever-adamant Anselmino, reproposed the idea to Warhol with one modification:

*“They shouldn’t be beautiful transvestites who could pass for women, but funny-looking ones, with heavy beards, who were obviously men trying to pass as women.” (Coacello, 2014, p. 297)

Eventually, Warhol accepted the commission and himself suggested where the right people to sit for the portraits could be found: the Gilded Grape in New York⁴.

Once back in New York, together with Robert Curtone, Coacello went to:

*“The Gilded Grape, a seedy drag bar in the Hell’s Kitchen section of New York. For \$ 50 each, these performers agreed to come back to the studio to pose for an anonymous friend (Warhol). These Polaroids served as the source images for the prints and paintings [N/A for the exhibition Ladies and Gentlemen].” (Coacello, 2014, p. 221)

Fourteen people were chosen as models and five hundred Polaroids were taken. In the end, ten subjects were selected for the ten screen prints intended for the exhibition. The sitters’ names were not mentioned in the serigraphs. Warhol decided that the models should remain “impersonal” and “anonymous” (Craig, 2021).

In the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series, Warhol used Polaroid images taken by himself to create his prints and his paintings for the first time. Hitherto, Warhol had generally called upon other photographers to do this.

The new technique consisted of photographing the subjects in the studio with the Polaroid, silk-screen transfer on canvas of the Polaroids, pictorial intervention with paints based on synthetic polymers. (Del Puppo, 2019).

3. Pasolini’s Two Trips to New York

In October 1963, Pasolini embarked on his first journey to New York (Siciliano, 1989). He undertook this trip to present his film *Accattone* at the New York Film Festival.

Presented at the festival, this film represented Pasolini’s Gramscian idea of society. The latter was intended as a dialectical contrast between two cultures, the *bourgeois* and the *proletarian*. Pasolini’s commitment, as a militant Marxist intellectual, was to spread a culture which was neither bourgeois nor hegemonic. Therefore, Pasolini’s Marxist counterculture aimed to provide the proletarian masses with the tools to connect their aspirations and needs in a way which was organic. Through the full realization of its class consciousness, the proletariat would later have the motivation and the instruments sufficient for the renewal of society (Gramsci, 1975).

2. In 1944, Alexander Iolas had Warhol hold his first personal exhibition at the Hugo Gallery in New York and in 1987, he organized his last exhibition in Milan. Warhol’s career took off thanks to Iolas’ acquaintances. Warhol and Anselmino were both friends of Iolas who knew many artists both those who were well-established and those who were up-and-coming. At his gallery, Iolas promoted both exhibition organization and the sale of works by various artists amongst whom: Max Ernest, Magrit and Victor Brauner. For further information regarding Alexander Iolas see veda Fremont V. et al. (1999), Alexander the Great the Iolas Gallery,1955-1987,Paul Kasmin Gallery Press.

3. For Warhol, this was the most lucrative commission which he had hitherto received. (Coacello, 2014)

4. The club was located at the corner of Eight Avenue and 45th Street East.

*“Creating a new culture does not only mean making “original” discoveries individually, it also and especially means critically disseminating already discovered truths. or “socializing” them [...] and therefore making them become the basis of vital actions, an element of coordination and of an intellectual and moral order”. (Gramsci, 1975, p. 1377)

While in New York, Pasolini was interviewed by Oriana Fallaci who entitled her interview “A Marxist in New York”⁵.

Pasolini told Fallaci that he saw New York as:

*“A firework of races assimilated and made similar by the establishment itself [...]. I admire the American revolutionary world, of course my heart is for the poor black man and the poor Calabrian, and at the same time I respect the American establishment [...]. I must go back and further things. “ (Pasolini, 1999a, p. 1602).

Besides institutional meetings, Pasolini met the exponents of the Afro-American minority. He met representatives of the SNNC (Student Nonviolent Committee Coordinate) who presented him with a non-Marxist vision, to dialectically oppose the establishment

*“Communist collectivization does not necessarily (historically) lead the worker to complete participation in power, that is, to the participation of his own destiny [...]. The opposite is true, that is, the creation of an “anti-community” in which the worker comes from the exasperated democratic consciousness of the duty and right of complete participation in power. [the creation of anti-community], can consequently lead to the collectivization of goods. For Jimmy Garret the Communists were “empty men” as they have the same stale ideas and the same bureaucracy “ (Pasolini, 1991, p. 149)

Pasolini was highly impressed by this non-Marxist democratic revolutionary vision based on the anti-community to create community. Pasolini defined the SNNC's approach as being almost “mystical”.

As the then President J.F. Kennedy, Pasolini saw in the civil rights struggle the epiphany of American social union. Kennedy trusted that the principal way for union of the American people would only materialize should every American win recognition for their fundamental human rights from their co-nationals. (See Kennedy's Address on Civil Rights of 11 June, 1963).

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In 1969, Pasolini made his second trip to New York for the presentation of his film *Porcile*. On this occasion he gave an interview to Giuseppe Cardillo, director of the Italian Cultural Institute.

Towards the end of the interview Pasolini highlighted “the recent anthropological change of Italian society” (Pasolini, 2005, p. 62).

Owing to this swift social transformation, Pasolini underlined that the audience he had idealized during the first few years of the 1960's no longer existed and so, wishing to go beyond Gramsci's *National-Popular*, he set out to produce works for an elite in contraposition to *the masses* who he looked upon as being “anti-democratic, alienated and alienating” by definition (La Porta, 2012).

To defend his works from standardization, Pasolini told Cardillo:

*“In a world where ideally my public has changed, in a world where there is no longer the working class to which I am addressing [...] and that the transformation of the idea of bourgeoisie and people is spreading in the most unexpected ways [...] objectively, my works will become more difficult and therefore I will turn to an elite.” (Pasolini, 2005, p. 63)

4. The Two Italian Exhibitions *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen*

The *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen* exhibition took place twice in Italy, the exhibitions being just a few months apart. The first was held in Ferrara and the second in Milan.

In 1974, Anselmino contacted Carlo Farina, the then director of the Civic Gallery of Modern Art at the Palazzo dei Diamanti in Ferrara, to propose his exhibiting the new series *Ladies and Gentlemen* by Andy Warhol as a world premiere. Farina accepted the offer and made the Civic Gallery of Modern Art available as a venue.

For the organization of the exhibition Farina himself maintained regular correspondence with Warhol. The exhibition catalogue had already been commissioned by Anselmino from the Marzotta Foundation. The designated curator of the Ferrara catalogue was the art critic Janus (Scardino, 2008). The exhibition ran between October and December 1975, and given the great success it enjoyed, was extended by twenty days.

In 1975, Anselmino asked Pasolini to write an introduction to his catalogue of the *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen* exhibition, which was to be held at the Anselmino Gallery in January, 1976. The exhibition featured 250 screen prints size 65 cm by 95 cm (Del Puppo, 2019).

Towards the end of September 1975, Anselmino provided Pasolini with some photographic copies of the portraits to be exhibited and a cover letter in which he described the new technique which Warhol had used to create his works. The technique was based on the use of Polaroid photographs and acrylic colours.

Pasolini noticed that the photographs of the paintings did not bear the sitters' names and contacted Anselmino to obtain them. Pasolini's request was the first sign of an approach towards the subjects portrayed different from that of Warhol. That is, it was Warhol's belief that sitters "should remain impersonal and anonymous"; stripped of their individuality. Regarding this, Pasolini stated: "The impression is of being in front of a Ravenna fresco representing isocephalic figures all [...] frontal. Iterated to the point of losing their identity and being recognizable, like twins by the color of their dress." (Pasolini, 1999a, p. 2711)

⁴⁵² In 1966, Pasolini looked upon New York as "a firework of races assimilated and made analogous by the establishment itself", a belief which remained with him into the 1970's.

In his introduction, Pasolini gave weight to the disparity in perception of messages coming from the United States to Europe and vice versa.

Pasolini said: "A message from America to Europe implied unity, homogeneity, compactness: it comes from an entropy". (Pasolini, 1999 a, p. 2711)

On the contrary, a message from Europe to America implies: "All those divisions, splits, oppositions of reality." (Pasolini, 1999 a, p. 2711)

Pasolini sees a metaphysical representation of the average American or an ontological expression.

**"The Model is stronger than the countless people who can pass through 42nd Street at seven o'clock on a summer evening." (Pasolini, 1999 a, p. 2711)*

With reference to transvestites, the model becomes more and more stringent. The model will allow the transvestite to move undisturbed or even proudly exhibiting his "diversity" while remaining in his ghetto (Pasolini, 1999b, p. 2713). It should be remembered that Warhol's idea was to portray transvestites who were not beautiful, that is, to create a grotesque representation of the already restricted model of the transvestite.

The paintings of the series *Ladies and Gentlemen* represent the Gilded Grape transvestites revealing neither emotion nor personality.

Pasolini said:

**"Warhol's message for a European intellectual is a sclerotic unity of the universe, in which the only freedom is that of the artist, who essentially plays with it in contempt." (Pasolini, 1999a, p. 2714)*

5. Conclusion

The *Ladies and Gentlemen* series arose from an idea of Luciano Anselmino who, due to the funding of the art collector Carlo Monziona, was able to offer Warhol a considerable for a series of works based upon transvestitism.

In the first paragraph, “The Genesis of the Ladies and Gentlemen Portrait Series”, two discrepancies emerge: the way in which Anselmino communicated the idea for the series on transvestites to Warhol, by telephone and face-to-face, and the way in which Warhol reacted to creating a series with such a controversial theme.

The paragraph, “The Two Italian Exhibitions Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen”, highlights the singularity of the decision to repeat the exhibition under the identical title *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen*, so soon after the first. The venue for the first exhibition was the Palazzo dei Diamanti and the second was held at Anselmino's gallery in Milan.

The final two chapters concern the contextual and ideological elements which allowed Pasolini to write the introduction to Anselmino's catalogue for the *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentlemen* exhibition. With it being his last work, Pasolini's writing has strong emotional value in the Italian cultural world. On the night between 1st and 2nd December 1975 Pasolini was brutally killed at the seaplane base in Ostia, Italy.

In the introduction to the *Ladies and Gentlemen* series, Pasolini remarked how, in the New World, the model of the individual is stronger than the single person. This means that the individual has lost his or her distinctive peculiarity. Pasolini speaks of an ontological model of the average American. This ontological vision leads to the consequent sclerotization, today one would say *prejudice*, in social relations. Warhol's transvestite portraits express this concept of the seriality of society members. That is, by depriving the subject of his individuality, it follows that individuals are what they produce and consume. As Warhol's portraits are isocephalic and all appear at the same “height”, differing in no way whatsoever, Pasolini uses the metaphor of the Byzantine fresco to express the metaphysical representation of the average American.

In the introduction to the catalogue, Pasolini muses on how Warhol conceived history:

“For Warhol, can history be divided? [...] specifically in the ideological terrain [of Man] of [Human] consciences” (Pasolini, 1999a, p. 2710)

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The cultural difference between Pasolini, a European Marxist and Warhol, an American, is marked. Warhol represents the ontological model of the American who has no class consciousness but one which is individualistic. This does not imply a judgment of value, but one of a cultural nature.

For instance, during an interview with the journalist Rasy, Warhol stated that he had used transvestites as subjects: “Because I believe in comedy and I wanted to do something funny” (Warhol, 1975). For Warhol, the theme of the *Andy Warhol Ladies and Gentleman* exhibition had no political connotation; it was simply an amusing way of creating art and making money.

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