

Andy Warhol

In 1979 Andy Warhol presented *Shadows* at the New York City gallery of Dia Art Foundation cofounder Heiner Friedrich. The installation featured the environmentally scaled painting in multiple parts, which the artist created between 1978 and 1979. As “one painting,” *Shadows* consists of 102 equally sized canvases hung edge to edge and low to the ground (but not too low to be kicked, as Warhol noted in his review of his 1979 show for *New York* magazine). While fixed by these physical terms, *Shadows* is nonetheless contingent in its presentation. Since the number of panels shown and the order of their arrangement varies according to the size of the exhibition space, the work in total contracts, expands, and recalibrates each time that it is installed.

The all-encompassing (if modular) scale of *Shadows* simultaneously recalls Warhol's use of wallpaper to enhance the sensorial enclosure of an installation and his interest in the techniques of photography and serigraphy, which have the potential for serial repetition. In *Shadows* the rote silkscreens are offset and inflected by the loose, gestural mopping of paint in a range of colors onto each canvas. In the late 1970s he increasingly explored the notion of abstraction. Shifting his focus away from recognizable imagery and traditional painterly materials, Warhol began to work with found subjects of abstraction, as evident in his series of Oxidation paintings (produced by the interaction of urine and metallic pigment) and Camouflage paintings, respectively. *Shadows* builds on these series, privileging the application of colored pigment to canvas support.

As his interest in abstraction grew, Warhol began to explore the concept of a shadow and its tonal variations in a set of studio photographs. These images would serve as the basis for *Shadows*, a group of monochromatic canvases, each displaying an abstract image that references a picture of a shadow in Warhol's office. The silhouette was transferred to silkscreens and applied as either a positive or negative value onto the right side of each canvas.

Shadows features a wide variety of colors and hues, such as acra violet, cadmium yellow, cobalt blue, phthalo green, and the artist's signature silver. The colors were applied to each canvas using a sponge mop or brush. Warhol is known for his luminous palettes, as evident in the psychedelic sequencing of acid greens and fluorescent pinks applied to self-portraits and images of Mao Zedong, Marilyn Monroe, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, and other international notables. In these works, found photographs culled from popular sources are isolated and altered through the abstraction of the silkscreen stencil and the application of color to reconfigure context and meaning. The replication of a seemingly abstract gesture (a jagged peak and horizontal extension) across the panels of *Shadows* further minimizes the potential to ascribe any narrative logic to Warhol's work. Rather, as he dryly explained, the paintings are mostly the same except for their colors: that is, in *Shadows* color assumes the position of the work's subject. Despite Warhol's self-effacing dismissal of the works as “disco décor” (the opening party, he wrote, “had disco”), these paintings substantiate a genuine interest in composition, method, and style, indeed the practice of painting itself.

Commissioned by Dia Art Foundation, *Shadows* is exemplary of the relationships that the burgeoning foundation (founded by Friedrich, Philippa de Menil, and Helen Winkler in 1974) fostered with artists. In addition to commissioning these canvases, Dia worked with Warhol to amass an unrivaled collection of his paintings and works on paper. Dia's mission has always been to support artists through both the commission and long-term presentation of works of art. In fulfillment of this goal, Dia donated the vast majority of its Warhol holdings to the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, where they became part of the museum's founding collection and permanent display when it opened to the public in 1994.

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Andy Warhol was born in Pittsburgh in 1928. He studied pictorial design at the city's Carnegie Institute of Technology, then moved to New York City upon graduation. Relinquishing a successful and acclaimed career as a commercial illustrator in New York in the 1950s, he began exhibiting paintings with silkscreened Pop imagery in 1962. In 1963 he started producing films and other projects, including *Interview* magazine, which was first published in 1969. Retrospectives of his work have been organized by the Pasadena Art Museum (1970), Museum of Modern Art in New York (1989), and Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin (2002). Dia exhibited the artist's work in New York from the late 1970s through the 1990s, and donated its entire collection of his works, except for *Shadows*, to the newly opened Andy Warhol Museum in 1994. In 2005–06 *Shadows* formed the centerpiece of the exhibition *Dia's Andy: Through the Lens of Patronage* at Dia:Beacon, a celebration of the institution's history with the artist. After its long-term display at Dia:Beacon, the work traveled to institutions across the United States and at venues in Bilbao, Paris, and Shanghai.

Shadows, 1978–79
Acrylic on canvas
Dia Art Foundation

