

Number 2204

ISSN: 2163-839X (online)

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“We Are All Warhol’s Children”:
Andy and the Rusyns



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In memory of Donna Roberts Rusinko

Abstract

Andy Warhol is the world's most famous American of Carpatho-Rusyn ancestry, and the icons of the Ruthenian Byzantine Catholic Church were his first exposure to art. His unexpected death in 1987 was followed by the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and the rise of the Rusyn movement for identity, which embraced the flamboyant pop artist, filmmaker, and jet setter as their iconic figurehead. From their own idiosyncratic perspective, the traditional, religious, provincial Rusyns have reconstructed the image of Andy Warhol, pointing up aspects of the artist that have gone largely unnoticed. In a reciprocal process, Andy has had a significant impact on the Rusyn movement and on the recognition of Rusyns worldwide. This study establishes Warhol's Carpatho-Rusyn ethnicity and explores its possible influence on his persona and his art. It also analyzes the Rusyns' reception of Warhol, with a focus on the history of the Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art in Slovakia. The author concludes that recognition of the Rusyn Andy contributes to a distinctive perspective on the American Warhol.

Who Are the Rusyns? Who Was Andy Warhol?

Carpatho-Rusyns, also known as Rusyns, Rusnaks, Carpatho-Russians, and Ruthenians, are a stateless people, whose homeland today straddles the borders of five countries in east-central Europe—Ukraine, Slovakia, Romania, Hungary, and Poland (where they are known as Lemkos).¹ Rusyns have never had their own state. Although their mountainous homeland was inhospitable for agriculture and economic development, it was strategically located, and as the national borders of Eastern Europe extended and receded, the Rusyns were repeatedly absorbed and repressed by the major geopolitical powers in the area. As a result, they were always among the poorest peoples of east-central Europe, with an uncertain national identity. At the turn of the twentieth century, about two hundred fifty thousand “Ruthenians” emigrated to America, where they found work in the coal mines and steel mills of the northeast. But their identity, always uncertain, became even more muddled. They spoke East Slavic dialects that used the Cyrillic alphabet, but because they came from a borderland region, their language included admixtures of Slovak, Hungarian, and Polish. They most often identified with their religion, Byzantine or Eastern Rite Catholicism, which, like their language and culture, contained elements of both East and West. The Byzantine Catholic Church had a married clergy who observed the liturgy in Old Slavonic and followed the Julian calendar, but they were in union with Rome and recognized the pope as head of their church.

In Europe, Rusyns were officially deprived of their identity after World War II, when Stalin annexed part of their strategically located homeland to Ukraine and declared that all Carpatho-Rusyns, not only in Ukraine, but in all Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe, were Ukrainians. Only after the fall of the Soviet Union did a movement emerge that asserted a distinct Rusyn identity. Today Rusyns are recognized as a national minority in all the countries of Europe where they live—except for Ukraine. The main thrust of the Rusyn movement is cultural in nature, although some activists, particularly in Ukraine, seek to obtain some sort of political autonomy. As best as can be determined, there are approximately one million Rusyns in Europe today and about six hundred thousand Americans of Carpatho-Rusyn background.²

Given that context, imagine you represent this small, obscure Slavic nationality with a convoluted history and a weak sense of identity. Your people are known for their religiosity, traditionalism, and provincialism. To advance your cause, what you need is a favorite son, an internationally recognized and celebrated figure, whose roots can be unerringly traced back to your national milieu, who can serve as a model of ethnic virtue, and around whom your little-known people can come together to

derive a sense of unity, distinction, and stature. If you are the Carpatho-Rusyns, what you get is not Pope John Paul II, but Andy Warhol, the notorious King of Pop Art, who inhabited the 1960s underground of drugs and rock music and 1980s elite jet-set circles, all the while wearing a silver fright wig. This may seem to be the latest trick played by fate on a people already accustomed to multiple historical pranks and political jokes. However, as incongruous as the match may seem, artists and activists of the Rusyn movement have embraced Andy as their own and made the most of their link to world celebrity. In a process of subjective projection, they have reconstructed the image of Andy Warhol to suit local tastes, enhancing congenial attributes and altering or diminishing embarrassing features. In a reciprocal process, as a Rusyn icon, Andy has had a significant impact on the Rusyn movement and on the recognition of Rusyns worldwide. Warhol, the enigmatic artist, filmmaker, author, and collector, who said of himself “I am from nowhere,” has become a symbol of the people who can equally be said to be “from nowhere”—or at least from no easily identifiable cultural space (fig. 1).³

Scholars consider Andy Warhol indispensable to an understanding of the post-modern age. He is without question the most famous American artist of the twentieth century and has been called “the most influential artist the world has known since Picasso” (Plagens). His hometown of Pittsburgh boasts the Andy Warhol Museum, the country’s largest museum devoted to a single artist. His 1963 silkscreen *Eight Elvises* sold in 2009 for \$100 million and is currently ranked thirteenth in Wikipedia’s list of the most expensive paintings of all time (“The Pop Master’s Highs and Lows”), and three other Warhols are also on the list of forty-six paintings. The Andy Warhol brand extends to candies, clothing, perfume, luxury luggage, watches, rugs, jewelry, home furnishings, skateboards, and condoms (Kinsella, 90). His often quoted 1968 aphorism, “In the future, everybody will be world-famous for fifteen minutes,” is more accurate than ever in today’s media-saturated, reality-show world.⁴ In 2002, the image of the artist who raised everyday objects to the status of fine art was itself depicted on a thirty-seven-cent commemorative postage stamp, honored for his evocation of “the free and creative spirit” of America (“Pop Art Icon Honored”).⁵ And on March 30, 2011, a seven-foot-tall chrome-finished statue of Andy Warhol (fig. 2) was unveiled on the northwest corner of Union Square in New York City, the site of the artist’s former Factory studio (Pruitt). Nonetheless, despite his celebrity, Warhol is one of the most elusive figures of his time. He frequently responded to questions as he did to Gretchen Berg in 1966: “The interviewer should just tell me the words he wants me to say and I’ll repeat them after him. I think that would be so great because I’m so empty I just can’t think of anything to say” (Berg, 96). His refusal to account



Fig. 1. The People from Nowhere by P. R. Magocsi. Photo courtesy of V. Padiak Publishers.



Fig. 2. Statue of Andy Warhol, Union Square, New York City. Photo: Brian Pozun.

for himself in personal, biographical terms is matched by his refusal to elucidate his enigmatic pop images, as, for example in this interview: “QUESTION: What is Pop Art trying to say? ANSWER: I don’t know” (“Pop Art? Is It Art?” 5). Is the famous Campbell’s soup can a celebration or a criticism of American consumer culture? A parody of iconography or an icon for the postmodern age? Issues of authorship and ambiguous identity were not only central to Warhol’s personality, they were also at the heart of the pop art movement.⁶

The vacancy surrounding Warhol’s person and his art has been filled by post-modern theorists who provide positive meaning for signs, which, like the artist himself, resist signification. But the effort to penetrate Warhol’s impassivity has been frustrated on all sides. The art critic Hal Foster notes that, posing as a blank screen, Warhol turned himself into the perfect object of projected identifications (39). Similarly, Florian Keller comments on Warhol’s “evacuation” of self. By persistently emptying himself of any signifiers of identity, says Keller, “Warhol invited his ‘audience’ to become the interpreters, or performers, of his own self. With Warhol, it is always the others who project possible identities onto him, the perfectly blank screen, the simulacrum, the ultimate phantom of what we call the subject” (106–07). In his memoir of the 1960s, Warhol himself seemed to endorse this view: “Who wants the truth? That’s what show business is for—to prove that it’s not what you are that counts, it’s what they *think* you are” (Warhol and Hackett, 313).

Thus, there are as many images of Andy as there are interpreters. In addition to the figure of Andy as the leader of the Pop Art movement,⁷ there is the “postmodern Andy,” developed by theorists such as Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault,⁸ and the “gay Andy,” elaborated by queer theorists such as Simon Watney, Jonathan Flatley, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.⁹ To this list can be added the “Carpatho-Rusyn Andy.”¹⁰ Warhol was often called the mirror of his time. In the same way, these diverse images of Warhol reflect his various observers and interpreters. The idiosyncratic image of Warhol projected by the Rusyns illuminates certain aspects of the artist’s persona and work, but it ultimately tells us as much about the Rusyn movement as it does about Andy. At a time when Rusyn identity was contested by outside forces and riven by internal discord, the director of the Warhol Museum in Slovakia urged unity under the banner of Warhol, proclaiming, “We are all Warhol’s children” (Zozuliak, 34). I will examine the Rusyn Warhol and the Rusyns’ relationship with Warhol, as I hold the Warhol mirror up to the contemporary Rusyn movement.

Was Warhol a Rusyn? The Struggle for Andy

The fall of communism in east-central Europe in 1989 followed shortly upon the unexpected death of Andy Warhol at age fifty-eight in 1987 after routine gallbladder surgery. Under communism, which viewed avant-garde Western art as decadent rubbish, Warhol was largely unknown in Eastern Europe. Given the limited access to information and restrictions on communication across borders, the existence of an international superstar who had connections to a small village in northeastern Slovakia easily went unnoticed. Therefore, it was only after Andy's death that he was discovered by the Rusyns of Slovakia, who were then just embarking on their own quest for identity and self-determination. First, however, the Rusyns had to wrest Warhol from the Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, Ukrainians, and Hungarians who initially laid claim to Andy and his family. Even the catalog of the New York Museum of Modern Art's 1989 retrospective Warhol exhibit identifies Warhol as "born of immigrant, Roman Catholic Czech parents" (McShine, 13), a description that is often repeated to this day. In fact, Warhol was neither Roman Catholic nor Czech.

To be sure, Warhol's deliberate evasion left an opening for such claims. When asked about his background by a journalist, he responded, "Why don't you make it up?" (Wolf, "Looking Glass," 12). In another interview, he says, "I'd prefer to remain a mystery. I never like to give my background and, anyway, I make it all up different every time I'm asked" (Berg, 87). At various times he claimed to be from Hawaii (Bockris, 106; Watson, 5) and to have Cherokee blood (Bourdon, 274; Scherman and Dalton, 408). He even told Charles Lisanby, with whom he traveled the world in 1956, that he was from another planet (Bockris, 115; *Andy Warhol: Documentary*). Nonetheless, by the time the Andy Warhol Museum opened in Pittsburgh in 1994, Warhol's Carpatho-Rusyn ancestry was not only noted in the museum's inaugural publication (Francis, 118), but also emblazoned on the gallery wall. Since the opening of the Pittsburgh museum and the 1991 opening of the Warhol Family Museum in Medzilaborce, Slovakia, Warhol's Carpatho-Rusyn identity has largely been established and it is reported in recent biographies and studies, although not without errors.

This has not, however, prevented the continued usurpation of Warhol's ethnicity by other ethnic groups. In 2002, the Ukrainian rock group Plach Ieremii (Jeremiah's Lament) released a popular recording based on a poem by Petro Midianka, a Ukrainian-language poet from the Rusyn-populated region of Transcarpathia. Midianka asks the question: "Andrii Varkhola—Rusyn or *khokhol*?"¹¹ Many Ukrainian sources lay claim to Warhol more directly. As recently as June 2010, the Kiev newspaper

Den’ disputed the Rusyn claims to Warhol. Through a course of tortuous logic, based on the existence of Orthodox churches in the Warholas’ Slovak homeland, the author determined that “one can reasonably speak about the Ukrainian origins of the king of pop art” (Kraliuk). A video promoting tourism claims that Warhol “came from Ukraine” and was “inspired by Ukrainian culture” (“Ukraine Facts”). In an unpublished essay, Professor Alexander J. Motyl, a Ukrainian-American, also asks, “Was Andy Warhol Ukrainian?” Although he calls Warhol a “Rusyn ghetto boy,” Motyl is not willing to lose Andy for the Ukrainian community. He argues that since *Rusyn* was the name used by most of today’s inhabitants of Western Ukraine who later opted for the designation *Ukrainian*, and since most of those who today identify as Greek Catholic *Ukrainians* initially identified as Greek Catholic *Rusyns*, “Andy Warhol can legitimately be said to be part of both nations’ cultural legacy.” In his novel, *Who Killed Andrei Warhol*, Motyl is more direct, depicting Andy as “the son of a Ukrainian worker” (75). Warhol’s mother is “as Ukrainian in her features as one can possibly imagine” (77), singing Ukrainian folksongs (204), and eating Ukrainian *varenyky* (108), rather than Rusyn *pyrohý*. To be sure, in this work of fiction, Motyl’s characters are seen through the eyes of a Soviet Ukrainian communist, who interprets Warhol within a Ukrainian ethnic and a Soviet political paradigm. Nonetheless, Motyl’s novel and his public lectures have added fuel to the myth that Warhol was Ukrainian.

Since the Warholas’ village is located in present-day Slovakia, Warhol’s Rusyn ethnicity is often confused with Slovak nationality. In 1998, a Warhol exhibit opened to enormous crowds in Krakow. The exhibit was introduced by the Slovak ambassador to Poland, who noted in his speech that the Warhola family’s home village is located in Slovakia. He failed to mention, however, that Miková is a Rusyn, not a Slovak, village. The Lemko-Rusyn activist Olena Duts’-Faifer insisted that such claims are not due to ignorance of the facts: “The Rusyn-ness of Miková is well known to the Slovak ambassador” (Duts’-Faifer, 9). In a private conversation, the ambassador admitted her point, but publicly he presented Warhol as the son of Slovak emigrants. Finally, Duts’-Faifer found vindication when a Krakow television station aired an accurate treatment of Warhol’s ethnic background. Still, a decade later in 2007, the president of Slovakia, Ivan Gašparovič, opened an exhibit of Warhol’s works in Dublin, Ireland, under the ambiguous title “Andy Warhol—His Slovak Roots” (Rusynkova). The same year, the Slovak National Theater in Bratislava staged a ballet inspired by Warhol’s life and work, promoting “Slovak cultural heritage” (Skyring). Advertisements and reviews of the ballet referred to Warhol’s “Slovak origins” and “Slovak grandparents.” More recently, an accurate account of Warhol’s

Rusyn roots in the Slovakian context was presented by the 2011 exhibit “Warhol and Czechoslovakia” at the Dvorac Sec Contemporary gallery in Prague. The exhibit included Warhola family artifacts and opened with Rusyn folk entertainment (Willoughby; Jesenský, “Škandál”).

Carpatho-Rusyns around the world, who have never exercised control over the cultural center of any country where they lived, find it necessary to struggle persistently to reclaim their famous kinsman from surrounding ethnic groups. On April 19, 2010, an attack of what might be called “ethnovandalism” on Wikipedia’s Andy Warhol entry removed all references to his Rusyn ethnicity and changed the spelling of his father’s and brother’s first names from Rusyn and English to Slovak.¹² Warhol’s name currently appears on Wikipedia’s lists of “Slovak Americans,” “Rusyn Americans,” and “Ukrainian Americans,” and the argument continues on numerous Internet discussion boards. Such disputes, both on official and grass-roots levels, indicate the intensity of covetousness when it comes to Warhol, as well as the intensity of some groups’ denial of Rusyn identity in general. The Rusyns’ struggle for “ownership” of Warhol is ultimately a struggle for their own recognition.

The facts demonstrate that Warhol unquestionably had Rusyn roots. Born Andrew Warhola in Pittsburgh in 1928, Andy was the third son of Andrii Warhola (1888–1942) and Julia Zavacka Warhola (1892–1972). The Warholas emigrated to America from the small village of Miková, located in northeastern Slovakia, not far from the Polish border. Andrii left Miková in 1912 to escape being drafted into the army of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which he was then a citizen. Detained by World War I, Julia joined her husband in Pittsburgh nine years later, by which time Miková was part of the newly formed state of Czechoslovakia. During Andy’s lifetime, his parents’ homeland was part of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. By the early 1990s, when Warhol was finally recognized as having roots in the area, Miková belonged to the Czecho-Slovak Federative Republic, and finally in 1993, to the independent Slovak Republic. Given this history, it may just be easier to say you come from nowhere. In fact, however, Miková was first mentioned in historical records in 1390, and it has been the site of a Greek Catholic church since 1752 (“Miková”). Its people, their language, and their culture have always been unmistakably and indisputably Rusyn.

The Warholas brought their Rusyn language, their Byzantine Catholic religion, and their old-world traditions with them to Pittsburgh, where Andy grew up in a brick row house in the South Oakland section (fig. 3). Today the house at 3252 Dawson Street is the first stop on the Carpatho-Rusyn Society’s bus tour of Rusyn Pittsburgh. Although Andy began to drop the *a* from his name even during his college days in

Pittsburgh (Perlman, 147), the story goes that when he began working as a commercial artist in New York in 1949, an art editor or typesetter inadvertently left the *a* off his last name, and Andrew Warhola embraced a new identity as Andy Warhol.

Given Andy’s evasiveness about his background and the general public unawareness of Carpatho-Rusyns, it was up to the Rusyns themselves to establish Warhol’s identity. The first published statement to this effect seems to be Paul Robert Magocsi’s short biographical article in the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* from 1980 (“Andy Warhol”). At a time when conflicting false information proliferated even in respected reference books, Magocsi established the facts by speaking with the Warhola family. According to Magocsi, he tried to contact Warhol personally, but a



Fig. 3. Andy Warhol, “Living Room,” 1946. Courtesy of the Warhola family.

1977 letter went unanswered (telephone interview, May 2009). Unfortunately, it is unknown whether the letter or the *C-RA* article ever reached Andy himself. Perhaps it will eventually be discovered in one of the 612 boxes that Andy called “time capsules,” where he deposited most of his mail, along with canceled stamps, receipts, invitations, and the detritus of daily life (“Andy Warhol Museum Archives”; Hannon).

The *C-RA* article, however, did reach a young Rusyn high-school art teacher in the Prešov region of Slovakia. Michal Bycko had heard about Warhol in the 1970s from an art professor who suggested that Warhol had Slovak roots. Unofficially and covertly, he began to gather information (“Kurátor múzea Bycko”). Eventually, Bycko set out to Miková, where he found Eva Bezekova, the youngest sister of Andy’s mother Julia. Bycko could hardly believe his eyes when Andy’s relatives brought out a box full of letters and cards from Julia, family photos, sketches, and an official document by which Andy and his brothers relinquished the rights to his father’s property in Miková. Eva told Bycko, “Take it home and look through it . . . we don’t know what’s there . . . Ul’a died a long time ago [1972] and we’re not interested in it” (*Nočné dialógy*, 13). It would later become known that over the years Andy’s relatives in Miková had often been recipients of care packages from Julia, which contained pictures signed by Andy Warhol (fig. 4). “We didn’t think much of them,” says Andy’s cousin in the film *Absolut Warhola*. “We put some in the attic and used the rest to make paper trumpets for the kids. . . . After a flood, we cleaned out the attic and threw them all away. Nobody knew they were so valuable.” In the same film, Andy’s cousin Ján Závacký explains that while they were aware that Julia’s son was a painter, they didn’t know whether he painted pictures or houses. Even after Julia’s sister Eva visited New York in 1967, saw with her own eyes Andriiko’s “door-sized pictures,” and met some of his Factory friends, none of his relatives back home knew of his fame.

Bycko’s discovery was the beginning of the European recognition of Warhol’s Rusyn roots. In spring 1989, the leading monthly illustrated magazine in Czechoslovakia, *Svět v obrazech* (The World in Pictures) carried a major article on Warhol, which clarified the confusion of his origins: “When in 1987 Warhol died from complications following a gall-bladder operation, our art critics began to say that he was a Czechoslovak, that is, a Czech. A few months passed and that view was further clarified—they discovered that he was a Slovak from eastern Slovakia. The real truth, however, is something else—both of Warhol’s parents came from a little village named Miková, not far from Medzilaborce, and they never were Slovak but of Rusyn nationality” (qtd. in Magocsi, “Czechoslovakia Discovers Andy,” 4).



Fig. 4. A letter from Julia Warhola to her sister in Miková. Photo courtesy of Jozef Keselica.

In 1990 Bycko established the Andy Warhol Society (Spoločnosť Andyho Warhola), and soon after the recognition of the Rusyn Warhol came the official emergence of the Rusyn movement in Slovakia, with the establishment the same year of the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusynska obroda). Bycko, a founding member of the society, also published the first two issues of the journal *Rusyn* (Prešov, 1990–present).¹³ The cover of the zero issue of *Rusyn* bore the ghostly image of a purple Andy Warhol in his fright wig, a self-portrait created just a year before his death (fig. 5), and the term “Rusyn” became indissolubly linked with “Warhol.”

Did Andy Know He Was Rusyn?

Having established Warhol’s Carpatho-Rusyn roots, it is nonetheless necessary to ask whether Andy *knew* he was Rusyn. The answer, actually, is no. But then almost no one in that generation of Rusyn-Americans could put a name on their ethnic background, referring to themselves as “our people” or identifying with their religion or the country from which their parents emigrated. So when Andy was

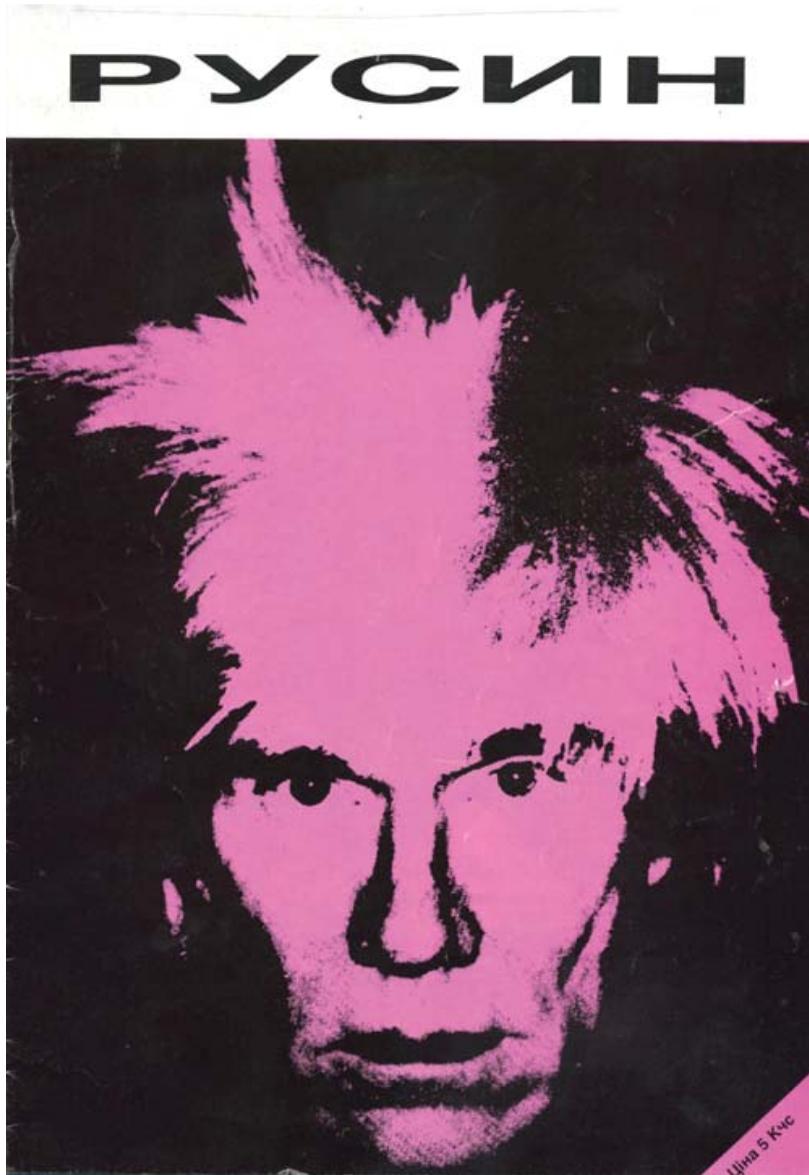


Fig. 5. Cover of the initial issue of Rusyn, 1990. Courtesy of Aleksander Zozuliak.

asked about his name or ethnicity—and if he could be prodded to answer—he said he was Czechoslovakian or Czech. I have seen no evidence of his ever using the term Slovak. He resisted the efforts of a certain Dr. Warchol to convince him that he was Polish (Warhol, *Diaries*, 178–79), and he was never known to call himself Ukrainian. His publisher, William Jovanovich, an ethnic Serb, recalls asking Andy where his mother was born. Jovanovich recounts the conversation: “‘Czechoslovakia,’ he said. Then I asked, ‘Bohemia? Moravia?’ ‘No, Slovakia, I think.’ ‘Was she born near mountains?’ It appeared so. ‘Then she’s from Ruthenia,’ I said finally. Some weeks later Andy was being interviewed on television. He said, ‘I know the most amazing man! He asks you a few questions and tells you where someone was born’” (75). Warhol’s brothers insist that Andy knew all about Miková: “All during our childhood, mother told us about it and the people there. Andy knew well what his roots were” (Bycko, *Nočné dialógy*, 80). It is reasonable to conclude that he simply did not have a name for them.

Similarly, there was no name for the language they spoke. The first language in the Warhola home was Rusyn, and when Andy’s brother Paul later visited Miková, he would tell Michal Bycko, “Mother taught us to talk just as they talk here” (Bycko, *Nočné dialógy*, 80). But like all Rusyns of that time, the Warholas would have said that they spoke *po-nashomu* (in our way), without, perhaps, even recognizing their speech as a distinct language. The Rusyn language was codified in Slovakia only as recently as 1995. In the early twentieth century the vernacular of Miková would have had admixtures of the Šariš and Zemplén dialects of Slovak, and because the area was part of the Hungarian kingdom, Warhol’s parents were educated in schools that used the Latin alphabet in Hungarian transcription. For many Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants in America, their peculiar mixed language was a source of embarrassment and inferiority, just as it had been in the homeland, where the prestige language was first Hungarian, then Slovak. Family members claim that until her death, Andy spoke with his mother in Rusyn (Prekop and Cihlář, 17). Andy claimed to speak no language other than English (Crandall, 366; Warhol, *Philosophy*, 148), but acquaintances remember him communicating with his mother in her language, which they called “Czech” (Bockris, 114; Bourdon 17, 25; Scherman and Dalton, 179; P. Smith, 262; Ultra Violet, 45). Henry Geldzahler says Andy conversed with his mother “in a kind of pidgin Czech-English” (McShine, 427). In *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol* (21–22), Andy refers to his mother’s “thick Czechoslovakian accent” and the “Czech ghetto” where he lived.¹⁴ However, at the end of his life, when he came face to face with the real Czech language, Warhol came to question his life-long identification as Czech. In 1986, Andy met the Czech model Paulina Porizkova (Pavlína Pořízková)

and her mother. He commented in his diary, “I guess maybe I’m not really Czech, because I didn’t understand it when they were talking” (744).¹⁵

This confusion over his ethnicity was not unique to Warhol. For the first part of the twentieth century, American Rusyns tended to identify themselves by their religion, rather than by ethnicity or nationality. According to Andy’s nephew James Warhola: “If people asked who we were we would say we were Byzantine” (qtd. in “Warhol/Icon”). And Andy’s brother John Warhola observed, “We just said we were Slovak because no one had ever heard of the Carpatho-Rusyns” (Steinmetz). This ethnic confusion began to clear up only when the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center was established in 1978 by a small group of scholars to share information about Rusyn history and culture with Americans of Carpatho-Rusyn descent (fig. 6). If they were aware of the scholarly works published by the C-RRC, Americans who had called themselves Ruthenians, Rusnaks, Carpatho-Russians, Lemkos, Byzantines, “Slavish,” or simply “our people,” found out for the first time that they had a name, a language, and a history. The major grass-roots Rusyn-American organization, the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, was established in Pittsburgh only in 1994. C-RS has succeeded in educating American Rusyns about their identity, including Warhol’s brothers and nephews, who today are ardent propagandists for Andy’s Rusyn roots. On July 30, 2007, in a lecture presented at the Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Warhol’s nephew James insisted, “[My uncle] was 100% Carpatho-Rusyn” (“Who’s Andy Warhol?”).

Despite his nonchalant attitude to his own origins, there is no question that Warhol was highly attuned to ethnicity. Throughout his *Diaries* he regularly comments or speculates on the ethnicity of people he meets. Here are just a few examples: “I think he’s half Russian and half Ukrainian” (165); “I asked if he was Italian and he said no, that he was French and Irish” (240); “The girl was Irish marrying a guy from South America” (383); “The mother is, I think, Polish” (417); “She has a Polish last name” (500); “I couldn’t tell if they were Italian or Jewish” (482); “She was Jewish” (555); “He was Indian” (745); “The groom was a good-looking Czechoslovakian boy” (578). But Andy is from a time when diversity was not in fashion, information on his own ethnicity was scarce, and second-generation Americans were eager to relinquish their old-world background for a more prestigious classification as American. For Warhol, it was natural to be embarrassed and ashamed of his “bohunk” background, where Rusyns occupied the lowest rung of immigrant society, even among Slavs. At least the Poles and Slovaks knew who they were; Rusyns had no name and no country.

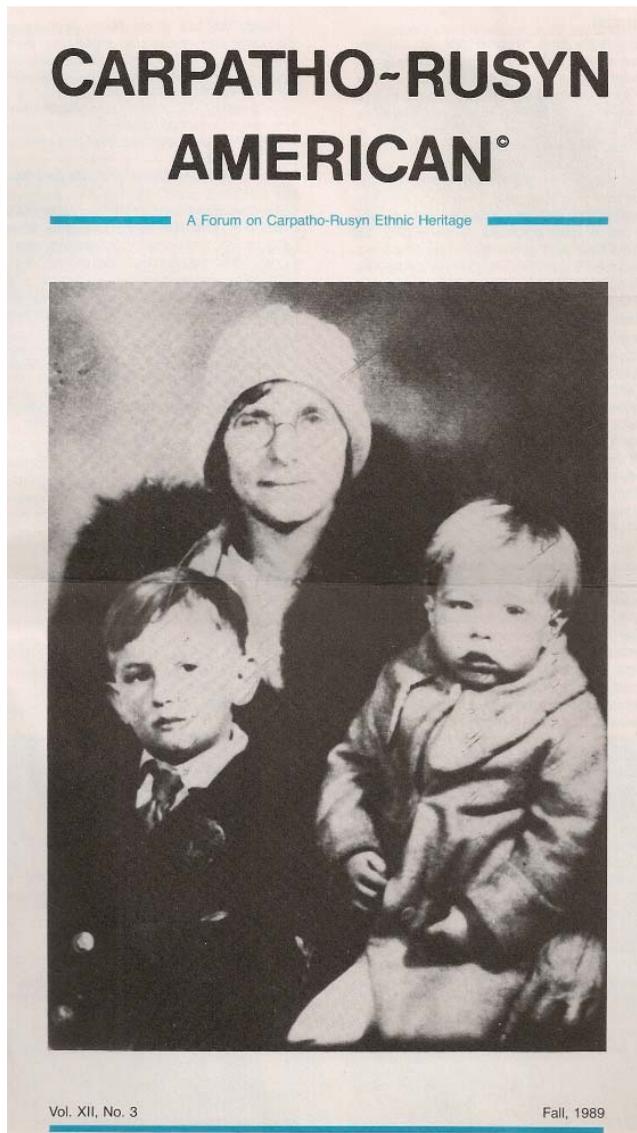


Fig. 6. Julia Warhola with sons John and Andy on cover of C-RRC publication. Courtesy of P.R. Magocsi and the Warhola family.

Even their Byzantine Catholic religious identification, situated as it was between Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy, could be cause for embarrassment. In his diary entry for Easter 1984, which he spent with friends, Warhol says, “Oh, and on Easter services, they got up at 4:30 to go, but I couldn’t go. I didn’t want to go because I would feel too peculiar in a church where they might see me praying and kneeling and crossing myself because I cross the wrong way. I cross the Orthodox way. And they would be looking” (568). Warhol’s description of the right-to-left Eastern Christian sign of the cross as “the wrong way” speaks volumes about a sense of inferiority that stemmed from his ethno-cultural background. Brought up in a devout, church-going family, Andy later attended St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church in Manhattan with his mother (Wrbican and Huxley, 12). In the last decades of his life, he attended St. Vincent Ferrer Roman Catholic Church daily. In the documentary film, *Vies et Morts d’Andy Warhol*, Father Damian McCarthy points out the pew in the back of the church where Warhol would sit, “very modest” and “out of the way,” where he likely felt free to cross himself “the wrong way.”

This confusion and denial, however, do not preclude Warhol’s having a Rusyn consciousness and even a muted sense of pride in his ethnic background. He notes in his diary, “You know, I still get things from the Czechoslovakian church because I guess they don’t know that my mother’s gone to heaven, and I look down this list of names and they’re so simple and so great, I don’t know if they’ve shortened them or what. Like Coll. Or Kiss. I don’t know what they made them from. And then there’s the Warholas and the Varcholas and the Varhols” (704). While some of the names he notes may in fact be ethnically Hungarian, Warhol seems to place his own name, which he elsewhere disparaged (*Diaries* 605, 752), among the “simple and great” names of the Rusyn parishioners of St. Mary’s. There is another positive, though indirect, identification with Rusyns in a diary entry for November 29, 1978, where Warhol recalls attending a screening of *The Deer Hunter*, Michael Cimino’s film about three Pennsylvania boys who are physically and psychologically ravaged by the Vietnam War.

The Deer Hunter was the new kind of movie—three hours of watching torture. [The opening scene] took place in Clairton, Pennsylvania, where all my cousins are from, and in the movie they said it was Russian-Polish, but that was just to make it more something, because it was really Czechoslovakian. . . . For a whole hour it’s the Polish wedding, and they could have cut it, but it was fun—so real and beautiful. It shows a new kind of people in the movies that haven’t been shown before, so it’s really good. (185)

In fact, Andy recognized his own people. The wedding scene of *The Deer Hunter* was filmed at St. Theodosius Russian Orthodox Cathedral in Cleveland. Established by a group of Rusyn Byzantine Catholics in 1896, the church became russianized in language and culture after accepting Orthodoxy and, as was the case in many originally Rusyn churches, its Rusyn character was diluted and overlaid with features of Russian culture. The extras in the *The Deer Hunter* wedding scene are Rusyn locals, who are heard to speak Rusyn during the wedding reception, which is held in “Lemko Hall.” Warhol undoubtedly identified with this peculiar difficult-to-identify mixed culture, and his sense of a vague, nameless “people from nowhere” is apparent in his comment that the filmmaker presented them as Russian-Polish “just to make it more something.” Thus, Andy’s Rusyn identity can be said to be blurry and imprecise, but not totally lacking. As Alexander Motyl puts it, “Warhol’s ‘Rusynism’ appears to have been of the pre-conscious kind that drives nationalists and nation builders crazy” (“Was Andy Warhol Ukrainian?”).

Today’s Rusyn nation builders, however, are not constrained by the vagaries of Warhol’s sense of identity, and as a result, their writings are not always objective and are often unreliable. Whereas Andy refers to his mother’s accent as “Czechoslovakian,” in Rusyn commentary it is corrected to “Rusyn,” and St. Vincent Ferrer Roman Catholic Church is mischaracterized as Greek Catholic (Bycko, *Nočné dialógy*, 75–76). In an extreme case of wishful thinking, the Rusyns of Transcarpathia in Ukraine, where Rusyn identity is still denied by the state and the desire for recognition is therefore more acute, “quote” Warhol as saying “My soul is Rusyn!” (Bedzir). This comes in the introduction not to an article on Warhol, about whom the author seems to have only a hazy comprehension, but to a piece on the Rusyn movement in general and Ukraine’s uncompromising stand against it. The allusion to Warhol and the assertion of his imaginary Rusyn pride function politically as a lure to entice readers to reflect on the Rusyn problem.

The refusal of Ukraine to recognize Rusyns as a distinct minority has provoked extremism among a rogue Rusyn group in Transcarpathia, which in 2008 declared independence from Ukraine and set up a paper republic with its own ministries and plans for a security service, court system, and currency. None of these materialized, but the new “republic” of some fifty individuals did issue its first “passport,” which posthumously granted honorary citizenship in the Republic of Subcarpathian Rus’ to Pittsburgh-born Andy Warhol, and on which his “nationality” is proudly stated as Rusyn (fig. 7). The photograph used for the ID card is Richard Avedon’s 1969 portrait of a young, leather-jacketed Warhol—presumably the image of a model citizen of the fantasy Rusyn republic, although Warhol’s puzzled expression may



Fig. 7. Andy Warhol’s Rusyn “passport.” Courtesy of Aleksander Zozuliak.

be seen as questioning the entire scheme. This radical movement of fringe elements has been denounced by mainstream Rusyn groups and has become something of a joke. The Andy Warhol Society immediately distanced itself from the movement and condemned the extremist organization’s efforts to “usurp Warhol for its own political goals” (Bycko, “Megaloman’skyi blud”).

Andy Returns to the Homeland of His Parents

Andy Warhol never visited his parents’ homeland during his lifetime, and his posthumous return was not easy.¹⁶ As the Rusyn poet Štefan Suchý imagines it, “More than once Andy wanted / to take a train to Miková . . . / But he got on another train, / The train to eternity” (68). In fact, while Warhol traveled frequently around Europe, he expressed no interest in visiting his parents’ homeland: “QUESTION: Have you ever been to Czechoslovakia? ANSWER: No. QUESTION: Would you like to go to Czechoslovakia? ANSWER: No, I don’t like to travel” (O’Brien, 253). But according to Andy’s brother John Warhola, as reported by Michal Bycko, Andy always asked whether there had been any news from the “old country” and encouraged him to visit and “take money to their relatives” (*Nočné dialógy*, 95). Just before his death in 1987, Andy learned that his brother was planning a trip to Miková. Reportedly, Andy was pleased and told John to take “lots of photos” (Bycko, “Stále veľka neznáma”).

Six months after Andy’s death, his brother John visited Slovakia for the first time, where he made contact with relatives in Miková and with Michal Bycko, the

art teacher who discovered Warhol’s Rusyn roots. Warhola was then vice-president of the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, which was established in accordance with Andy’s will as an educational and philanthropic organization dedicated to the advancement of the arts. Bycko asked Warhola if it might be possible to acquire some of Warhol’s works for a gallery in Slovakia, and Warhola requested that Bycko arrange with a local gallery to enter into negotiations with the foundation for the donation of a painting or two by Warhol. But in those days of communist rule, this was not the gift it might seem to be. Of the invited institutions, not a single one had any interest in what they described as the “bourgeois pseudo-artist Warhol and that dull pop art” (Keselica, “Warhol Story,” 8). Bycko recounts a 1987 phone conversation with a gallery director who told him, “Let them send the paintings and we’ll decide if they’re worth anything” (*Nočné dialógy*, 96). One official commented, “An American is offering the pictures of his dead brother, a certain Andy Warhol, a bourgeois artist. The devil knows what consequences there might be?!” Another cultural official added, “Do you really know who this Warhol was?! What if he was a spy?” (Prekop and Cihlár, 173). Bycko recalls concerns that a Warhol museum in the area would be a CIA effort to obtain an outpost in the strategic location (Von Smoltczyk). However, Bycko persisted until he received support from the municipal authorities of Medzilaborce, a district town about twenty miles from Miková, for the establishment of a museum that would carry the name of Andy Warhol. Not only would the Warhol legacy be preserved in a town near the village where his parents had lived, the proposed museum would be the only institution in all of Czechoslovakia devoted specifically to contemporary art.

The story of the establishment of the museum is replete with absurdities that Andy Warhol would have probably enjoyed. In Michal Bycko’s imaginary dialogue with Warhol, included in his book *Nočné dialógy s Andym* (Nocturnal Dialogues with Andy), Andy says, “If it were told to the world, no one would believe it” (63).¹⁷ Bycko dates the idea of bringing Warhol’s work to Slovakia to September 12, 1987, when he met John Warhola, who favored displaying his brother’s work close to his parents’ village in Medzilaborce, rather than in other cities in Slovakia that already had established galleries and museums. The Andy Warhol Foundation expressed willingness to lend the artwork on the condition that a space could be devoted specifically to Warhol. The local population and cultural authorities showed little interest in the project until a journalist traveling through eastern Slovakia stumbled upon the story and wrote an article for the Christmas 1988 issue of *Literárny týždenník* (Literary Weekly), the organ of the Slovak writers’ union (Andrejčaková, “Nazvrat”). This got the attention of the deputy minister of culture, Vladimír Čerevka,

who organized several meetings with the Medzilaborce town council and figures in cultural and diplomatic circles, and finally directly approached John Warhola and the Warhol Foundation (Andrejčaková, “Warhol na dobrej ceste”). After more than a year of frustrating discussions, a plan was worked out with Medzilaborce town authorities in January 1989 to renovate the building of the former post office on the main town square for the museum, with a deadline for completion of August 1989. The deadline was not met. Frustrated by the lack of progress and the town’s procrastination, Prague painters Michal Cihlár and Aleš Najbrt organized a petition, which was signed by 3500 leading figures in art and politics, including the soon-to-be president of Czechoslovakia, Václav Havel. In November 1989, coincident with the Velvet Revolution, the local art school in Medzilaborce was the site of an exhibit of documents and other materials that presented the facts of Andy Warhol’s origin to the local public for the first time.

In contrast to the reluctance of socialist functionaries and gallery directors, the new Czechoslovak government supported the museum project. In December 1989, an agreement was drawn up for the establishment of a Warhol museum in Medzilaborce, setting forth its conceptual foundation and mission. It was signed by leaders of the art world and the Rusyn movement in Slovakia. The following year, the Ministry of Finance allotted the substantial sum of 10 million crowns to renovate the post office building by September 1, 1990.¹⁸ In April, invited by the American organization, the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, and financed by the C-RRC, the Slovak Ministry of Culture, and the Byzantine Catholic Church hierarchy, a three-person delegation traveled from Medzilaborce to New York and Pittsburgh to seek help for the establishment of a museum dedicated to Warhol. For reasons which remain unclear, Michal Bycko (fig. 8), the driving force behind the museum, was not included in the delegation (although he broadly hints at motivations of envy, intrigue, and personal ambition throughout the development of the project). The group met with the president of the Andy Warhol Foundation, Archibald Gillies, but since they had no concrete plans for organizing or financing the museum and, according to Bycko, little knowledge of Warhol in general (one of the delegates reportedly could not remember the name of Marilyn Monroe), no progress was made.

When other cities in Czechoslovakia began to compete for the Warhol museum, Bycko took action to ensure the project for Medzilaborce. He sent a concrete proposal to the Warhol Foundation in New York, which included plans for exhibits, symposia, a school for the creative arts, scholarships, and international art exchanges. At the same time, however, he had to deal with a legal challenge from the village council of Miková, headed by Warhol’s cousin, Ján Zavacký. The town council



Fig. 8. Michal Bycko, 2012.
Courtesy of M. Bycko.

claimed that the museum should be located in Miková, based on a dubious story that when Warhol’s now-deceased aunt returned from her trip to New York in 1967, she reported that Andy had promised a monumental gift for Miková (Andrejčaková, “Warhol nezablúdi”). Evidently feeling left out of the negotiations, Zavacký charged Bycko with usurping Miková’s favorite son and circumventing the village in his dealings with the Warhol Foundation, thereby insulting an official government organ and impugning the council’s authority. In a letter from February 5, 1990, Zavacký insisted, “We believe that Andy Warhol belonged, still belongs, and will belong to Miková, not to Medzilaborce!” (Bycko, *Nočné dialógy*, 66). In September 1990, having failed to commandeer the museum, the Miková village council unsuccessfully

requested 19 million crowns from the Ministry of Culture to reconstruct the Warhola family house as a museum, with a parking lot to accommodate six buses (Sedlák). Throughout this period, Bycko also had to contend with complaints directed at him, anonymous letters charging that he was neglecting his teaching duties, and the mysterious disappearance of documents of recommendation and support. However, negotiations proceeded with John Warhola, who visited again in September 1990. Soon after his visit, he notified Bycko that the Warhol Foundation had approved plans for the museum in Medzilaborce, consented to fund the art school for five or more years, and agreed to give the museum up to ten paintings—on the condition that the building be completed by June 1991.

Corruption and construction delays continued, while the town authorities dawdled and seventeen hundred Medzilaborce residents submitted a petition to “keep American homosexuals out” (Connolly, Lubbock). By spring, it became clear that despite the allotment of sufficient time and funding, the renovation of the post office would not be completed even by the third deadline. The construction firm collapsed, the investment was lost, and the mayor of Medzilaborce announced an alternate resolution. The city council would make the cultural center, recently completed after twenty years of construction, available for the museum. The plaza in front of

the cultural center would be designed in an “Andy Warhol style,” and the name of the street on which it was located would be changed from “Lenin Street” to “Andy Warhol Street.” The interior of the museum was designed by Michal Cihlár and Rudo Prekop, who endeavored to transform “the inflated socialist house of culture into an American museum” (Prekop and Cihlár, 183).

In late March 1991, the Andy Warhol Foundation sent a Czech-American photographer, Helena Fierlinger, to Medzilaborce to check on the preparations.¹⁹ She informed the foundation that the cultural center building would serve the purpose and announced the foundation’s intention to lend the museum ten Warhol paintings. The mayor and city council pledged to do whatever was necessary to ensure a June opening date, and finally, on June 30, 1991, the Warhol Family Museum of Modern Art officially opened in the former Palace of Culture.²⁰ Socialist town planners had deliberately situated the massive building, constructed in what has been called the style of “socialist megalomania,” opposite the Orthodox church as a sign of the victory of communism over religion and the past. In a twist that no one could have predicted, it became instead the showcase for Warhol’s avant-garde celebration of western capitalism.

The grand opening of the museum took place on October 5, 1991, with an exhibit entitled Andy Warhol in the Land of His Parents, which included thirteen original Warhol works donated for an indefinite period by the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts. Bycko and his colleagues chose works to represent various stages of Warhol’s career, with an eye toward “themes that are in one way or another connected with our land” (Bycko, “Niekol’ko slov”). In addition to the inevitable Campbell’s soup can, screenprints of *Lenin*, *Hammer and Sickle*, and *Absolut Vodka* may have placated the artistically uninformed socialist functionaries who opposed the museum. Instead of Marilyn, Bycko chose a prayerful Ingrid Bergman portrayed as nun. Warhol’s famous *Cow* and *Butterfly* suggested to local visitors that Andy was not totally out of touch with his parents’ native land, and his *Flowers* series turned the entry lobby into a meadow of blossoms. According to Bycko, the foundation almost fully respected his choice; only the request for a portrait of Kafka and a Warhol self-portrait were denied (“Niekol’ko slov”). The exhibit included drawings by Andy’s mother, paintings by Andy’s brother Paul, who took up painting when he retired from the scrap metal business, and his nephew James, a professional illustrator and graphic artist.

The opening of the museum received broad press coverage and was televised on Czechoslovak national television, giving Rusyn Slovakia its moment in the sun. Present were John Warhola, Czechoslovak Minister of Culture Ladislav Snopko, and

other dignitaries. A special railroad train made the fourteen-hour trip from Prague to Medzilaborce for the opening of the exhibit. Three bands and four bars entertained hundreds of passengers. An American reporter observed: “The Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture chartered a train to cart Prague’s best, brightest and hippest to the town—not unlike taking New York’s downtown art scene, squeezing it into a tube and transporting it to Nebraska or Nevada for the occasion” (Rocks). Before two thousand visitors and three hundred journalists, traditional Rusyn folk ensembles performed alongside punk rock groups. Performance artists danced atop the two six-foot-high Campbell’s soup cans at the museum’s entrance. Thanks to a \$30,000 grant from the Warhol Foundation sponsored by John Warhola, Slaviane, a Rusyn dance troupe composed of young people from Pittsburgh, performed for the homeland crowd.²¹ Warhol look-alikes and a “Marilyn Monroe” figure circulated among the visitors. One observer commented: “This is the biggest shock to Medzilaborce since World War II!” (Keselica, “Warhol Story,” 10). For Bycko, the arrival of Warhol symbolized freedom coming to Medzilaborce on the wind of change that was bringing societal and cultural transformation to Eastern Europe (Otriová). And Keselica observed, “The spirit of Andy Warhol could be felt throughout the daylong event. Andy was almost physically with us. One could feel his presence at every step” (Keselica, *AWA*, 7).

From 1991 to 2011, the museum increased its holdings to as many as two hundred forty original prints and drawings (fig. 9), most of which were donated or lent by the Warhola family, the Warhol Foundation, private collectors, and corporations such as U.S. Steel, which has a factory in eastern Slovakia. New acquisitions were announced and welcomed in the local Rusyn and Slovak press. For Rusyn visitors, the most popular exhibits are Warhol family photographs and artifacts, such as the christening gown in which Andy and his brothers were baptized, Rusyn-language letters written by Julia to her Miková relatives, and Julia’s housekeeping account book. There are also relics such as Andy’s snakeskin jacket, green-tinted sunglasses, and his first camera. Especially valued is a recording that Andy made of his mother singing Rusyn folk songs. Julia sent the 78-rpm record to her sister in Miková sometime during the 1960s, but since no one in the village had a record player, it gathered dust until Bycko rescued it for the museum.²² There is an especially poignant moment in the 2002 documentary *I Am from Nowhere* when a tour group of women from Miková sing along with Julia, with tears in their eyes.



Fig. 9. Interior of the Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art. Photo Jozef Keselica.

The shot of elderly Rusyn women in babushkas standing before Campbell’s-soup-can wallpaper and Warhol prints expresses better than words the incongruity that has attracted journalists, film directors, diplomats, and tourists to Medzilaborce, a city of about sixty-five hundred. Rusyns, who have never had their own country, now have a place in almost every travel guide to Slovakia and Eastern Europe, where they are often highlighted in a sidebar as a point of cultural and historical interest.²³ Travel writers from around the world explain Rusyns (usually as “Ruthenians”) to their readers under such droll headlines as “Warhol Pops Up in Carpathia,” “Andy Warhol in the Middle of Nowhere,” and “Modern Art in a Desolate Town” (Gruber, Rigney, Togneri). The references to Rusyns in these articles are not insignificant. International newspapers and magazines from Amsterdam and Berlin to Rome and London have used Warhol and the museum as a hook for articles on Rusyn history and contemporary politics (Carr, Hunin, Lucas, Reid, Scabello), bringing the “people from nowhere” to the attention of a world audience. In 2009, a report on RT, the Russian digital network that broadcasts throughout the world by satellite and cable, covered political events in Transcarpathian Ukraine under the title “Will Andy Warhol’s People Survive in Ukraine?” Such media reports are then translated into Rusyn and shared with local readers to demonstrate the increase in the international recognition of the Rusyn brand.

The Tortuous Road to Warhol City

Michal Bycko is proud to say that he founded the first museum in the world dedicated to Andy Warhol, the second largest collection worldwide after Pittsburgh’s Warhol Museum, established three years later, which Keselica calls “the younger, bigger brother of our museum” (Keselica, “Dekada,” 18). But the difficulties endured by the founders engendered long-lasting bitterness, as Bycko hinted even in the museum’s opening catalog: “[Andy’s] journey home was literally painful. He was despised and rejected, even though those who despised him did not even know him. Instead of ‘Welcome, Andy!’ he was greeted by humiliation and insults. As were those who struggled for his museum” (“Stále vel’ka neznáma”).

The story of the establishment of the Pittsburgh museum is almost as complex as that of the museum in Medzilaborce and awash with the same kinds of problems—internecine bickering, difficulty acquiring space and public funding, unmet deadlines (Berman, 33). The arguments for and against both museums were remarkably similar. Like the Medzilaborce museum, the Pittsburgh institution, one of four Carnegie museums, was not promoted on the basis of Warhol’s artistic merit. “Fearing the criticisms of Warhol’s lifestyle and personality that might arise from too much exposure to his work,” activists sold the museum “on the strength of its economic drawing power as a tourist attraction” (Berman, 27). Still, the disparity between the two museums highlights the difficulties faced by the Rusyn Warhol devotees and underlines the magnitude of their success. In contrast to Medzilaborce’s initial 13 originals, the Pittsburgh museum opened with 900 paintings, 77 sculptures, 1500 drawings, 500-plus prints, and 400 photographs, as well as an archive that includes Warhol’s “time capsules” (Adams). While the Medzilaborce museum attracts 14,000 to 17,000 visitors a year, in 2010 the number of visitors to the Pittsburgh museum topped 106,000 (Loeffler). Then again, Bycko points out that the Medzilaborce museum annually attracts almost three times as many visitors as there are town residents, and therefore, “If you relate the number of visitors to the town’s population we’re more successful than our colleagues in Pittsburgh” (Misch, “Family Museum”). The Andy Warhol Foundation has provided \$10,000 to \$20,000 annually to the Medzilaborce museum, and in addition, it contributed \$5000 for the historic preservation of the church in Miková (Andy Warhol Foundation). But until recently there has been no connection or contact between the two museums. Tom Sokolowski, director of the Carnegie’s Warhol Museum from 1996 to 2010, who never visited Medzilaborce, told a reporter, “I admire them for trying to put something together that is part of Warhol. For a really small, folkloric town to have some things about

American mass production, that is not a bad thing” (Conte). Sokolowski’s comment does nothing to dispel the “folkloric” image that the founders of the Medzilaborce museum were seeking to change.

While both museums honor Warhol the artist, the Medzilaborce museum has always had a larger mission. Bycko says, “We did not want to ‘prove’ to the Americans that we can do something American-like here, in this region of the republic. All we wanted was to render homage to people who gave birth to the man who has influenced the world of the twentieth century. Those people were Julia and Andrej Warhola from Miková” (Gruber). A former curator of the museum, Nataša Hrisenkova, said, “It’s not the art that’s important—I don’t like it personally—but the fact that he became famous ‘out there’ and he’s one of us” (Connolly). She elaborated, “The name of Andy Warhol cries to the world that the Ruthenian nation exists” (Scabello). Andy’s cousin Lubov Protivniak hoped that the museum would draw positive attention to an often disparaged people: “They say that we are backward. Andy proved we are clever” (Tong). Ultimately, according to Bycko, the museum is a way of keeping Rusyn culture alive: “An identification with Warhol boosts people’s self-confidence. They no longer need to be ashamed of being Rusyn.” And he advises foreign tourists, “If you want to know Andy Warhol the superstar, go to Pittsburgh. But if you want to know him as a person and what he was like before he became famous, you need to come to Medzilaborce” (Geary and Stojaspal).

Coming to Medzilaborce, however, is not easy. Located 350 miles east of Prague in the northeastern corner of Slovakia bordering Ukraine and Poland, it is a ten-hour train trip from Slovakia’s capital Bratislava. “I call it the K2 of museums,” says Tomas Pospiszyl, a Prague film teacher, referring to the Himalayan peak K2, the second highest in the world. “You have to really be sure you want to go there” (Gomez and Tomek). Alexander Franko, the first director of the museum, put a positive spin on the location: “People say we’re at the end of the world. But I say we’re at the beginning of the world, so why not have great art here?” (Rocks). And Bycko points out the obvious truth that largely explains the museum’s existence: “It’s intriguing that such western art should be in such an eastern place. . . . It’s true that our museum is isolated, but it needs to be here, because this was Andy Warhol’s home region” (LeBor). In spite of the museum’s isolation, 70 percent of visitors are from outside the region, with most coming from Poland, the Czech Republic and other neighboring countries, plus a substantial number of westerners. On the other hand, the staff of the museum has been frustrated by the lack of interest from local residents, who still don’t “get” Warhol’s art. To encourage turnout, directors offered an incentive in line with Warhol’s interest in consumer culture—an admission

ticket brought with it a discount at the local supermarket (“Slovak Town”). Still, the museum’s guestbook displays positive comments from local teachers and student groups, alongside those of visitors from Estonia, France, London, and Miami.

The establishment of the Warhol Family Museum inspired the provincial, dreary, Soviet-style city of Medzilaborce with big dreams. In 1991 before the museum’s opening, Henrieta Blumenfeldová, speaking for the Andy Warhol Society, proposed an ambitious plan that included construction of a hotel and a house of culture with a movie theater, casino, nightclub, Rusyn restaurant, and sauna. To attract tourists, she proposed a golf course, a baseball team, tourist access to hunting reserves, and organized excursions from the United States. All this would require 50 million crowns from the Slovak or Czechoslovak federal government or from private sponsors (Keselica, “Warhol Story,” 10), and in the economic dislocation that followed the fall of communism, it was an impossible dream. After Slovakia joined the European Union in May 2004, there seemed to be some hope for change. The town, where the unemployment rate hovers around 25 percent, immediately applied for funds to transform Medzilaborce into “Warhol City,” and more than a million euros went into the project. The first stage, which was completed in 2005, began to create the desired image. Three bus shelters were designed in the form of Campbell’s soup cans, six building facades were embellished in the style of pop art, and the town’s Web page received a new banner. A pop-style collage featured the museum with its welcoming soup cans, the plaza statue designed by Bycko depicting Andy under a spindly umbrella from which (in good economic times) water flows into a fountain, and the Orthodox church looking down from the opposite hill.

The second stage projected improvements to roads, pavements, and parking lots, the renovation of an amphitheater and the construction of an open-air museum called Warhol Village, which contains minireplicas of folk architecture typical of the region. Finally, the third stage would add more Warhol fixtures (fig. 10), boost advertising efforts, and tackle the renovation of the museum itself. Mayor Mirko Kalinak said, “We want to bring a little bit of pop art into the town’s soul” (Gomez and Tomek). Pop art entered the town’s educational system when in 2009 the Vocational High School in Medzilaborce added “Andy Warhol” to its name. The school’s Facebook page proudly asserts that it is the only school in the world to carry the name of the King of Pop Art. For better or worse, it is difficult to imagine a school board in the United States eager to make the same claim.

The local population is largely unimpressed. “People were complaining, ‘What is the purpose of the bus stop?’” said Andrea Lutášová, who works at the town’s information center. “Our people don’t see him as a personality that’s famous all



Fig. 10. Street signs in Medzilaborce inspired by Warhol's "Dance Steps." Photo: Jozef Keselica.

over the world. But he is the one attracting the tourists, and when tourists are here, money is here” (MacLellan). The Warhola family and the Warhol Foundation in New York endorse the redevelopment of Medzilaborce, although certain aspects of its Warholization have not passed international muster: the foundation vetoed a plan to put Warhol’s face on public urinals. K. C. Maurer, the foundation’s chief financial officer, is quoted as saying, “The town certainly does spread the gospel of Andy, but we thought the public-toilet idea is not what we wanted to do” (Gomez and Tomek). Even less impressed with the Warhol City project is Michal Bycko, who complains, “The project has not a bit of Warholian spirit” (Rival), and as a marketing genius, Andy “must be turning over in his grave” (Sedlak). The plainspoken Bycko pulls no punches: “[Medzilaborce’s] a hole, and it would be a much greater hole without Andy Warhol. What else is there? Nothing” (MacLellan).

Shortly after the grand opening in 1991, the museum’s roof began to leak. Although it was patched several times, until 2010 there was never enough money to repair it. In 1992, the Czech newspaper *Rudé Právo* (Red Right) reported that twelve silkscreen works by Warhol were damaged because of moisture and poor heating. According to this report, an official of the New York Foundation visited the museum and found that the temperature was only thirty-nine degrees (Blowen). Always a temporary solution, the building of the former communist Palace of Culture that now houses Warhol’s museum has been called a “mausoleum” (Sedlak) and “one of the most harrowing architectural crimes in the history of European communism” (Reynolds). “This communist monolith just isn’t functional as a museum,” was Bycko’s assessment in 2001. “We finally fixed the electricity, but now the roof’s leaking again.” In that year of the museum’s tenth anniversary, Bycko expressed conflicted emotions: “The beginning was a sort of utopia, just that we did it, that we got the museum up-and-running. But now I would just like to get it to a state where things are stabilized—where we can do our jobs without having to worry about fixing holes in the roof” (Reynolds). Plans for cooperative projects with museums in New York and Oslo were aborted due to lack of funds, as was a fanciful project that would ship bottles of Miková water to America along the path followed by Andy’s mother in her emigration, with concerts, lectures, and other “happenings” along the way (Plishkova).

As difficult as its beginnings were, the second decade of the museum’s life has brought even more problems. In 2001, the Slovak Ministry of Culture announced a reorganization of the region’s cultural institutions, which brought most theaters, orchestras, and museums under the administration of local governments. Exempted were five institutions that were deemed to have national significance beyond regional

borders and therefore would remain under the direct patronage of the Ministry of Culture. The Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art was not judged to belong to that select group, and the administration of the museum was transferred to the provincial government of the Prešov Autonomous Region. As a result, even fewer funds would be available. Bycko called the move “a blow below the belt to a world-renowned artist and to all those who worked for the establishment of the museum and who kept it functioning for ten years” (Jesenský, “Július Klein”). Adding insult to injury, one of the five “institutions of statewide significance” was the Museum of Ukrainian-Rus’ Culture in Svidník. Originally established in 1956, it promotes the view that Rusyns are a branch of the Ukrainian nationality, and it was one of the museums that initially rejected the opportunity to display Warhol’s work. Whatever the politics involved, and perhaps partly as a reaction to Bycko’s outspoken style, the chances of significant government investment in the museum decreased even further.

For Andy Warhol’s eightieth birthday in 2008, the Medzilaborce museum planned what would have been the largest exhibition of the artist’s works anywhere in the world outside of Pittsburgh. The event was to have included a lecture and a gala opening party, attended by a Warhol nephew and a number of private collectors. But due to heavy rain that damaged the air-conditioning system, the exhibit had to be canceled (Kadlecová; Liptáková; Swains). Around the same time, “No Parking” signs suddenly appeared in front of the museum. Bycko explained them as revenge for a failed self-interested ploy on the part of then-mayor Ladislav Demko that might have compromised the relationship between the museum and the Warhol Foundation (Kadlecová; Swains). A cold war had been waging for some time between the Andy Warhol Society and the mayor’s office, and Bycko suggested that the air-conditioning problems that halted the exhibit may have had their source in “the paralyzed communication” between town and museum. “There are technical, financial and legal problems but the biggest problem is that nobody realizes that Warhol is not just some regional scribbler but a well-known art icon” (“Hole in the Roof”). Bycko’s exasperation is palpable. Asked in a 2008 interview to assess the visitor traffic to the museum, he judged it (in a back-handed compliment) “excellent, given the location, the mentality of the population, the intellectual deficit of ‘our own people’, and thanks to the interest from abroad.” Apparently not aiming to please his allies or a broad local audience, he identified his greatest obstacles as “human stupidity, envy, malice and cultural illiteracy.” And evidently having given up on cooperation from the government, he charged, “The state doesn’t give a damn about Andy Warhol” (“Kurátor múzea Bycko”).

Since 2008, there have been problems of a different kind. For years, Bycko had warned that the museum was like the emperor with no clothes. Dependent on loans from the Warhol foundation and private owners, the state owned only thirty-one of the more than two hundred works exhibited. With Warhol’s art selling at the top of the market, the local government refused to fund more acquisitions. As a means to increase the museum’s holdings at no extra expense, Bycko’s Andy Warhol Society acted as an intermediary with local private collectors, using the society’s contacts in the United States to find them works at better prices than what was available at auction. In return, the owners agreed to lend their pieces to the museum for at least five years (“Slovak Town”). This agreement worked well. New works that belonged to well-off Slovaks were exhibited, including some complete series of prints. But at the end of 2009, Bycko’s fears were realized. Twenty-five works of art were removed by one owner, and another announced his intention to reclaim thirty more pieces (Sindlerova). The reasons given were the local government’s lack of care and the dilapidated condition of the museum building (fig. 11).

Miroslav Mihal is a businessman and a longtime patron of the arts from a city about forty miles southwest of Medzilaborce. Dismayed at what he said was damage done to his canvases by moisture, he withdrew his twenty-five paintings, including a 1967 portrait of Marilyn Monroe, and moved them to a private gallery at the Hotel



Fig. 11. The Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art, Medzilaborce, 2009. Photo: Elaine Rusinko.

Muza in Košice. According to Mihal, Košice, the second largest city in Slovakia, is “a city of a higher standard, more cosmopolitan” (Ogurčáková). Similarly, a Košice lawyer, Eugen Gališín, owns thirty-nine Warhol works, including the portfolio *Ten Famous Jews*. Gališín, who bought his works through his acquaintance with John Warhola, promised that he would make them available to the public in the land of Warhol’s ancestors. He considered lending the collection to world museums, but, he asks, who would come to Medzilaborce if they can see Warhol in Vienna? An initial supporter of the Medzilaborce museum, he had become disillusioned due to unsatisfactory relations with the museum’s administration. “In nine years, no one from the administration has thanked me, no one has even once a year invited me for coffee. What am I to think? Other exhibitors are literally fighting over my pictures, and here they are ungratefully silent, or at best, they complain about the financial crisis” (Lichak, 9). Mihal agrees: “Few people know that our state doesn’t own the Andy Warhol trademark. An endowment trust based in New York only lent it to us. Every normal country would try to maximize the benefit of it, but here, someone was satisfied that a few owners lent their art to the museum. The state, in the past few years represented by the Prešov Region, invested very little in the art collections. In the meantime, a work of art that sold 10 or 15 years ago for \$1000 has now climbed to \$50,000” (Sindlerova). Bycko, who takes credit for persuading rich Slovaks to make profitable investments in Warhol’s art, says that the state became used to the idea of boasting a good exhibition at little cost (Havranová). Only when they heard of the new gallery opening in Košice did the administrators become alarmed, and in October 2010, the parliament approved capital expenditures of €200,000 for the purchase of paintings for the museum for the years 2011 to 2013.

In 2010 Gališín began thinking of selling half of his collection and was reportedly offered one million euros for the *Ten Famous Jews*. In 2011, he offered to sell the series to the Prešov Regional Government for the same price, but in February, the parliament failed by a single vote to approve the deal. When the issue came up again in April, right-wing parliamentarians argued that the price was too high, and a debate ensued among politicians and bureaucrats as to the relative value of Warhol prints. The governor of the Prešov Region, Peter Chudík, promoted the deal, arguing that it would improve the museum’s reputation. In the end, the agreement, which also included a provision that Gališín would lend an additional twenty-seven works to the museum, was approved (Vilikovská). However, the losing side immediately charged fraud and threatened legal action. In view of the political power struggle and media circus, in June the owner indicated his intent to withdraw the sale offer, agreeing to leave the *Ten Famous Jews* in the museum with no compensation through

the twentieth anniversary celebration in October 2011 and through the end of the year. He had already withdrawn his *Cowboys and Indians* collection and camouflage paintings. The government will now make an effort to purchase Gališín’s *Hans Christian Anderson* portfolio to preserve it for the museum.

In March 2011, Bycko put the situation in simple terms: Do we want Andy Warhol and the museum or not? “It is expensive, and it will only become more expensive. Either we accept it and are cognizant of what awaits us, or we give it up and instead set up a house of folk art” (Frank; “Majitel’ odniesol”). Governor Chudík indicated that the entire affair was having a negative influence on museum traffic, which fell by a third during the dispute. Perhaps seeking middle ground between Bycko’s alternative of Warhol and folk art, he proposes that the museum change its focus to concentrate on Warhol’s early work in which, according to Chudík, his Rusyn roots can be felt. Bycko agrees that Warhol’s pre-pop work, which shows the influence of his mother, corresponds better to the museum’s mission (Frank, “Prešovská župa”), and in autumn 2011, the museum acquired twenty-seven color drawings from Warhol’s early period (Bycko, e-mail correspondence, 17 Aug. 2011). To reflect the potential change of focus, Chudík proposed modifying the museum’s name. It has been proposed that the Andy Warhol Museum of Art might eventually become the Andy Warhol Rusyn Museum, perhaps in a merger with the Rusyn Museum of Prešov, which was founded in 2007 as a branch of the Slovak National Museum and is dedicated to documenting the material and spiritual culture of Rusyns in the Slovak Republic. This might shine Warhol’s limelight even more brightly on the Rusyns.

Another recent blow to the museum was the death of John Warhola on December 24, 2010. Bycko issued a statement saying, “We are losing our own father, our founder. With the sudden departure of John Warhola, our museum is losing its soul” (Roddy). He told a Slovakian newspaper, “This sad event will certainly affect the museum.” He added that much will depend on the attitude taken toward the museum by John’s son Donald, who took his father’s place as vice-president of the foundation (“Epitaf”; “Zomrel Warholov brat”). For many months after John Warhola’s death, Bycko had no communication with the foundation (e-mail correspondence 1 Aug. 2011). But in June 2012, Donald Warhola visited Medzilaborce, conducted a workshop at the museum, and proposed cooperation between Pittsburgh and Medzilaborce (“Synovec A. Warhola,” “Synovec Warhola”).

Thus, at the twentieth anniversary of the museum, it is in a state of flux. One can’t help but wonder what Andy would have thought about his fans and kinsmen in Slovakia and all that they have gone through to bring him home. Even Michal

Bycko has wondered “whether Warhol would accept being a god to the Rusyns” (*Warhol Nation*). Although it is certainly not what he might have anticipated, it seems that Andy Warhol has definitely set down new roots in the homeland of his parents.

Fifteen Minutes of Fame for Miková

When Warhol said that in the future everyone would be world famous for fifteen minutes, even he could not have believed that his statement would apply to the people from his mother’s native village of Miková, who have now enjoyed, or perhaps endured, much more than their fifteen minutes worth. After the death of Warhol and the opening of national borders, television crews and journalists descended on the village of one hundred fifty. Ján Závacký, Warhol’s cousin and one-time mayor of Miková, says, “If I had known in 1969, when I started to build this house, that so much filming will take place here, I would have made the rooms much bigger, so that all the lights and cameras and the whole film crew would fit in” (*I Am from Nowhere*). As Georg Misch says, “A strange Warhol-fever took hold. . . . In a rather strange fashion his art became integrated into quotidian life. . . . Handcrafted items of bizarre appearance integrated the Warholian touch or his image, be it on clay tiles picturing soup cans or pillowcases embroidered with his motifs” (“History”). The previously isolated villagers now referred to themselves as “actors,” and Warhol doppelgängers appeared on the streets.

Jozef Keselica (fig. 12), at the time a young teacher whose mother came from Miková, discovered Warhol in 1987 and since then he has led a one-man campaign to market the Rusyn Andy in Slovakia. His small apartment in Svidník is a shrine to Warhol, jammed to the rafters with Warhol books and memorabilia. An amateur musician, he has written and recorded a song about Warhol in a style he calls “Rusyn Rock,” which is dedicated “To Andrii Warhol and to all the Rusyns of the world.” He proudly notes that in the first seven months of 2009, it was downloaded more than a thousand times. He is author of a ninety-seven-minute multimedia program called “Andy Warhol is Andrii Varkhola—Pop Art and Pop Music,” which includes 250 slides, film clips, and continuous video on a second screen with Keselica’s own live commentary (e-mail correspondence 17 Aug. 2009). On a visit to the United States, Keselica sampled all varieties of Campbell’s soup, steamed off the labels, and collected them in an album. He initiated an annual Warhol Festival in Miková, in which folk ensembles and European pop-artists perform before a background of a huge silver-haired portrait of Andy, and which concludes with a requiem service for the soul of the artist in the village church where his parents were married. De-

scribed as a professional and pathological Warhol fan, he has recently completed a graduate-level thesis entitled “Fulfillment of the American Dream in the Life and Work of Andy Warhol.” He explains the motivation for his mania: “Sometimes I tell people he’s my uncle. Sometimes I say I am Andy Warhol. He’s a way for us to achieve self-realization as a community and as individuals. After all, this place has not got much else going for it” (Connolly).

In 1993 Keselica made a video film called *15 minút slávy Andy Warhola* (15 Minutes of Andy Warhol’s Fame), which was awarded a bronze medal at the International Union of Cinemas. But he is better known for the starring role he plays in two other films about Warhol. The Danish ethnographer Tom Trier made *The Warhol Nation* (1997), a documentary film, in which he interviews numerous Rusyns about Warhol’s significance for the Rusyn people. In the film’s conclusion, Joe Keselica lifts a Campbell’s soup can and says, “I believe Andy Warhol still

lives. He is the Rusyn god, and this is his blood”—and he puts the can to his lips in imitation of the sacrament. Keselica is also the “star” of a documentary by the Austrian director Georg Misch, *I Am from Nowhere* (2002). The film focuses on the people of Miková, 35 percent of whom now claim to be related to Warhol, and the camera follows Keselica in the feckless pursuit of his American dream via his connection to Warhol. Misch says of his film, “It is the archetypal tale of a ‘rich American uncle.’ For the people of Miková Warhol has assumed almost messianic proportions in that he delivers them from provincial obscurity, spreading hope among them all” (“Director statements”).



Fig. 12. Jozef Keselica, 2012. Courtesy of J. Keselica.

Keselica is conspicuous by his absence in *Absolut Warhola* (2001) by the Polish-born director Stanislaw Mucha, which is the best known of the Miková documentaries.²⁴ Mucha's camera crew visits the museum in Medzilaborce, where amid buckets catching the leaking rain, Bycko solemnly displays the museum's holdings and makes an earnest plea for international aid. A hint of ridicule is felt in the director's treatment of the museum workers' naïve presentation, which includes information about the bank account to which viewers should send donations. When Bycko blocks a group of Roma from entering the museum, the director allows the Roma to voice their grievances about being barred from museums and bars, but he provides no context. The bulk of the film concentrates on interviews—most often over a glass of vodka—with Andy's relatives, who reveal a skewed image of the artist that is more myth than fact.

Mucha's intention is clearly to depict the incongruity between the ultramodern pop artist Andy Warhol and the residents of Miková, who are portrayed as backward, ignorant, clueless, and drunk. Keselica's multimedia Warhol program presented to an audience of savvy young people was also shot for the film, as was the Warhol star Ultra Violet, who has exhibited her own work in Slovakia. But that footage ended up on the cutting room floor. I suggested to Keselica that this exposed a predisposition to present a one-sided view of the Rusyn reaction to Warhol. But Joe objected: it is better for the film to be more controversial, more extreme, more black and white (e-mail correspondence, 17 Aug. 2009). It certainly makes a good story, and Rusyns are happy to be included in any narrative that will draw attention to them, no matter what angle the director may take.

On the basis of these films, some recent Warhol biographers have characterized Miková as “a warren of bigotry, provincial ignorance, dim-witted literalism, grinding poverty, alcoholism, and homophobia” (Scherman and Dalton, 2), which, they say, explains why Andy wanted as much distance as possible from his origins. However, such interpretations reveal considerable ignorance of the social context of the 1990s in northeastern Slovakia, which was just emerging from forty years of cultural isolation and totalitarian rule into a baffling atmosphere of freedom and modernization. Even in America, documentaries highlight the unsophistication of Warhol's Rusyn background. In Chuck Workman's film, *Superstar: The Life and Times of Andy Warhol*, his Pittsburgh cousins bear some resemblance to his relatives in Miková. Direct and ingenuous (“Ray, I'm on television”), they display a delightful simplicity that throws into relief Warhol's own pursuit of

and discomfiture with stardom. One of his cousins comments, “When we read his philosophy, we laughed out loud because we didn’t know we were so much like him.” Similarly, in the Mikováns’ naïve, uninformed, and at times intolerant comments, one sees traces of a less known side of Andy, an image that was put forth first by the art historian John Richardson at Warhol’s 1987 memorial service (“Eulogy”). Richardson sees Warhol as a *yurodivyi* or holy fool, a phenomenon of Slavic spirituality that, according to Richardson, explains much about Andy’s seemingly simplistic approach to art, his passive power over people, and his ability to remain untainted by what was going on around him. A more sympathetic analysis of the “holy fools” of these films reveals that foreign filmmakers are sometimes manipulated by the wily Mikováns, who in fact steal the show. As one critic noted, “the townspeople are happily playing a bit for the camera” (Koehler).

While on one level, the films display the villagers’ boorish awkwardness, on another level, they are stars. Their gnarled faces reveal sad and impish folk wisdom, and one reviewer writes, “[Andy’s] . . . relatives back in Slovakia, with their peasant spryness and cockeyed wit, provide clues about the kind of humor he had” (Cresap, 150). One can imagine Andy enjoying his cousin Ján Závacký’s brassy trumpet solos and his earthy complaints that after 1989 “everything went down the drain in this shit-hole of a country” (*I Am from Nowhere*). And every show is stolen by Andy’s ingenuous and adorable aunt Eva Prekstova, ninety-three-years old in 2002, who is angry at Andy because he failed to marry and leave a family to visit her in Miková. At the conclusion of *I Am from Nowhere*, the Mikováns gather around the sign at the entrance to the village (fig. 13), which will soon display the image of their famous son, and poignantly they sing “Vichnaja pamjat” (Eternal Memory), the traditional Rusyn requiem, for their American superstar-countryman. As the credits roll, however, Eva Prekstova shoos the cameraman away—“Enough of Andy Warhol already,” she tells him. Apparently her fifteen minutes of fame were more than sufficient. In *Warhol Nation*, Ján Závacký expresses another grievance: “With Andy Warhol we have become known. We are on the world map. But we haven’t benefitted from it.”

Saint Andy

It was only with John Richardson’s eulogy at Warhol’s memorial service that Andy’s religious sensibilities became publicly known. Although he did not hide his beliefs, he revealed them in his usual evasive manner, obscuring the truth behind



Fig. 13. Sign at the entrance to Miková. Photo: Elaine Rusinko.

a screen of irony and comic quips. A 1977 interview with Glenn O’Brien went as follows:

GO: Do you believe in God?

AW: I guess I do. I like church. It’s empty when I go. I walk around. There are so many beautiful Catholic churches in New York. I used to go to some Episcopal churches, too.

GO: Do you ever think about God?

AW: No.

GO: Do you believe in the devil?

AW: No.

GO: Do you believe in the end of the world?

AW: No. I believe in As the World Turns. (O’Brien, 258)

Ronnie Cutrone, Warhol’s assistant during the 1970s, tells a story about another interview that unexpectedly elicited Andy’s religious feelings:

What impressed me most about Andy was his belief in God. . . I remember one time, Andy and I were doing an interview with a French journalist. . . She said to him, “You were once quoted as saying you don’t believe in anything. Is that true? Do you not believe in anything?” Andy was the coolest man on earth, at least during interviews; he would never, ever lose his temper. But he took this as a threat. . . And he turned totally red in the face. I was shocked. Andy said, “I never said that.” The journalist was taken aback because nobody expected Warhol to have such strong emotions. She said, “Well what do you mean?” And he said, “I never said I don’t believe in anything. What I did say was look at the surface of my paintings and there you’ll find what I’m saying. But I certainly do believe in things.” And then she asked, “Well, what do you believe in?” He knew he was hemmed in. But he just straightforwardly said, “I believe in God.” And then he realized what he had said, and it was almost like, “Man he just shattered the whole image.” So he added, “And I also believe in Ronnie.” (O’Connor and Liu, 69–70)

As always with Warhol, it is difficult to differentiate between assertions made seriously and facts stated ironically, but in this case, objective evidence substantiates his statement.

Although it may surprise those who know Warhol only through his flamboyant public lifestyle and his sexually explicit and homoerotic films, the religious Andy was no surprise to the Rusyns. Not only was he religious, but his religious practices were firmly grounded in Rusyn tradition. The Warhola family worshipped regularly at St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church in Pittsburgh, and their home was arrayed with icons, crosses, and holy cards of the saints. The boys were brought up wearing medals of the Virgin Mary and praying with their mother. John Warhola: “Our mother taught us that when there is trouble, we have to turn to God. We

understood in such moments we can only be helped by prayer” (Bycko, “Ulin sŷn,” 17). In fact, his brothers say, “When Andy was a boy, we thought he was going to be a priest. Even under pressure, he never swore” (Jumba, “In Memorium”). When Andy’s aunt from Miková visited in 1967, she was unimpressed with absolutely everything about New York, and the only positive thing she had to say about Andy was that he prayed together with her and his mother (Bycko, *Nočné dialogy*, 83). Andy’s nephews confirm that before going out for a night on the town, Andy would say a prayer in Slavonic with his mother and receive her blessing (P. Warhola). Andy financed the education of his nephew Paul at a Byzantine Rite Catholic seminary, and when Warhol was shot in 1968 by the radical feminist Valerie Solanas, Father Paul was there to support his uncle in the hospital. He also arranged for him to confess, take communion, and receive the last sacraments from a Greek Catholic priest (P. Warhola). Later, when Paul was leaving the priesthood, Andy met with him to discuss his decision and the commotion it had caused in the family (*Diaries*, 108). Warhol’s library included books on religious and spiritual topics, including several versions of the Bible and a Qur’an, and a cross hung in the bathroom of the Union Square Factory studio (Wrbican and Huxley, 12). During a trip to Rome in 1980, Warhol received Pope John Paul II’s blessing, and the picture of him with the pope is one that is most often reproduced in Rusyn newspapers.

While his mother lived with him in New York, Warhol often attended St. Mary’s Catholic Church of the Byzantine Rite, first on East Thirteenth Street and after 1964 in a newly constructed church building on Fifteenth Street and Second Avenue. Only after his death did it become known that Andy was exceedingly devout, a regular attendee at Mass at St. Vincent Ferrar Roman Catholic Church, and a volunteer at the holiday soup kitchen at the Church of the Heavenly Rest, facts which are confirmed in his posthumously published *Diaries*. Raymond M. Herbenick, author of *Andy Warhol’s Religious and Ethnic Roots*, has calculated that Warhol’s diary entries from 1976 to 1987 refer to prayer sixty-three times and church attendance thirty-four times (68). After Warhol’s death, it became known that on his bedside table stood a crucifix, a santo carving, a statuette of the risen Christ, and a Byzantine Catholic prayer book, *Heavenly Manna: A Practical Prayer Book of Devotion for Greek Catholics* (Dillenberger, 33; Richardson, “Warhol at Home,” 249.)²⁵ Andy was given a traditional Greek Catholic funeral, with a liturgy that included Rusyn Church Slavonic plainchant, and he was buried next to his parents in St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cemetery. His simple gravestone bears an Eastern cross, “a symbol of faith just like that on the graves of his forefathers in Miková” (Bycko,

“Andy Warhol ako Andrej Warchola,” 20), a fact that is noted in almost every Rusyn account of his life. (fig. 14).

The thought of Andy praying “Otče naš” (“Our Father”) in Slavonic is the most potent feature that connects him to the Rusyns. It also allows them to locate the roots of Andy’s art in his Rusyn religious heritage, and their claims are not unjustified. After Warhol’s death and Richardson’s eulogy, several writers turned to the topic of the relationship between his art and religion, and since then, as Reva Wolf has said, “Warhol and Catholicism has . . . become a subject of intellectual inquiry” (Wolf, “Radio and Crucifix,” 14).²⁶ Beyond Warhol’s explicitly religious art (the *Last Supper* series, the *Cross* series, *Details of Renaissance Paintings*, and others), these writers find Warhol’s spiritual sense expressed also in the *momento mori* theme of his *Skull* and *Death and Disaster* paintings. Dillenberger summarizes: “Between 1962 and 1967 Warhol did silkscreen paintings of suicides, car crashes, the atomic bomb, the electric chair, race riots, and death by poisoning and by earthquake” (66). According to Daab, “In Warhol’s work, the persistent reminder of death functions



Fig. 14. Gravestone in *St. John the Baptist Cemetery, Bethel Park, Pennsylvania*.
Photo Elaine Rusinko.

as a religious allegory, motivated by his Catholic belief in heaven and hell, and his fear of the final judgment” (15). Giles (281) and Herbenick (17) relate the production model of Warhol’s Factory studio to the impersonal and communal organizational model provided by Eastern Christian iconography schools. Bennet-Carpenter applies Baudrillard’s ideas about producing pure simulacra to demonstrate that “Warhol’s entire *oeuvre* has ‘religious’ qualities, producing an art that ‘is, but isn’t’ religious.” Similarly, Arthur Danto notes that in a process of transfiguration, Warhol’s art gave ordinary objects an almost transcendental air” (*After the End*, 130).

The Rusyns do not adopt the simulacral interpretation of Warhol put forth by poststructuralists, but their referential reading based on direct historical and cultural evidence reaches the same essential conclusions. Bycko suggests that the theme of death in Warhol’s works comes from his mother’s stories about a place and time where death was commonplace. In conversation with Bycko, John Warhola remembered her describing her experiences during wartime: “Dead bodies were scattered in the forest and on meadows. Skulls of soldiers shined like large white mushrooms long after the war was over” (“Andy Warhol”). The soup cans and Coke bottle subjects are explained as emerging from Warhol’s outsider’s perspective, which took everything in, transformed and reworked it, and returned it to the world “cleaned, smoothed, flattened, distinctly outlined and reinforced” in the manner of spiritual art (Keselica, “Endi Varhol,” 25; Chechot, 75). And while there are many explanations for Warhol’s use of repetitive structure and serial imagery, the Rusyns understand it as having been conditioned by his first exposure to art in the church. In Eastern Christian churches, a wall of icons, called the iconostasis, separates the sanctuary from the nave. It depicts tiers of saints and religious figures presented in hierarchical order, distinct in color and detail but united in pose, gesture, and spirit (fig. 15). In a fictional reconstruction, Michal Bycko’s imaginary Andy looks at his mother’s icons and wonders why they are so similar. His mother answers, “Son, they are alike in faith, but each is different.” Andy is inspired: “What if my pictures were like that? The same, but different. What if I painted them and hung them on the wall one after the other, like icons on the iconostasis in church? People would see pictures of flowers, portraits; the images would be the same but colored differently. What if I made such a secular iconostasis?” (Bycko, “Bila tvar,” 19).

Whether or not he intended it as such, the “secular iconostasis” became a distinctively Warholian feature. Moreover, individual prints present obvious parallels with religious icons, a fact that was recognized by Warhol’s circle and by numerous art critics and scholars. Warhol’s assistant Ronnie Cutrone says, “Andy’s work has a lot to do with icons” (O’Connor and Liu, 93). Indeed, the stark frontality and simplic-



*Fig. 15. Iconostasis in St. John Chrysostom Byzantine Catholic Church, Pittsburgh.
Photo Elaine Rusinko.*

ity of design in Warhol’s portraits is the rule for sacred icons, as is the full-facial or three-quarter profile of the subjects. As in icons, his subjects, whether movie stars or soup cans, are situated in empty space, static, independent of any contextualizing background, any spatial or temporal location. The surface flatness of his images, with no distinction between background and image, recalls the two-dimensionality of icon saints.²⁷ A lack of depth and perspective reminds the viewer of the inverse perspective of icons, which seems to impel the figure out into the viewer’s space, as opposed to western linear perspective, which draws the viewer into a vanishing point within the image. Icons always include text labels to identify the saintly personage. Warhol superimposes advertising logos such as “Dove,” “GE,” and price tags on his *Last Supper*. Brilliant colors, simple designs, and the familiarity of the subject matter make Warhol’s Coke bottles, dollar bills, and movie stars secular substitutes for angels and saints. In Eastern liturgy and iconography, the value is not variety,

but familiarity; and as in Warhol's work, while the basic design is repeated, no two images are the same.²⁸

In sacred icons, these techniques sharpen the unreality of the image, giving the viewer a glimpse into a spiritual world, one that is distant and immaterial. Warhol, star-struck from childhood, presented his subjects similarly, emphasizing the distance between them and the viewer. Robert Pincus-Witten writes, "Warhol's icons are kin to sacred relic. Jacqueline Kennedy and Presley become objects of transubstantiation, oscillating between human and quasi-divine status" (58). Or as Bennett-Carpenter says, applying Baudrillard's concept of art as fetish, "His images transfigure art beyond distinctions of the religious and the profane, and beyond normal categories of judgement." Of course, Warhol's icons depicted not Christian saints but the celebrities and commodities of late-modern, capitalist, consumer culture. In this respect, the Rusyns see him as an American artist, but they attribute his originality and creativity to his Rusyn roots.

The Rusyn reading of Warhol's piety is based almost wholly on accounts of his aunt and brothers, but it is not out of line with the interpretations that arose shortly after the artist's premature death. In the catalog of the Museum of Modern Art's Warhol Retrospective, the same encomium was offered in similar terms by American friends, colleagues, and scholars. Robert Rosenblum: "On the popular level alone, the evidence for his secular sainthood is everywhere" (McShine, 25). William Burroughs: "Andy was himself a portentous, perhaps a saintly figure" (McShine, 427). Predictably, other post-mortem evaluations of Warhol stressed his kindness, generosity, simplicity, and humility. But some, such as Gary Indiana's comments, mocked the posthumous adulation and ascriptions of sainthood: "Years ago [Warhol associate] Taylor Mead told me that Andy's problem was that he wasn't content with being a genius, he wanted to be a saint too" (182). Indeed, there is also a vast literature that portrays Andy as cruel, manipulative, and malevolent.²⁹ This side of Andy gets little or no attention from the Rusyns, but it is highlighted in Ukrainian accounts, which take incidents that are already sufficiently incriminatory and exaggerate them to the point of malicious fantasy. In one fanciful and erroneous treatment signed by Aleks Brut, Andy is not a passive observer who failed to intervene in Edie Sedgwick's descent into drugs, but the evil genius who got her hooked on heroin and coldly refused to finance her rehabilitation. Brut's invented story includes the erroneous information that Edie lived with Andy for several years until she realized that he was incapable of a serious relationship. He turns Taylor Mead's angry but facetious comment—that if Valerie had not shot Warhol, he might have done it himself—into an actual threat, the supposed motivation for which is not Mead's actual allegations

of Warhol’s financial exploitation of his actors, but his alleged prurient abuse of Mead, who was in fact shameless, in Warhol’s films. And Andy’s cold response to the suicide of Factory regular Danny Williams, reported in Bockris (257), becomes truly macabre, when Brut describes Warhol using Williams’s suicide note as toilet paper.³⁰ Even more moderate Ukrainian authors, who are opposed to the Rusyn movement and to Slovakia which recognizes it, make political points through snide comments directed at “the scandalous artist” (Kraliuk, Havryliuk). Not surprisingly, his sexuality becomes part of the argument.

Andy’s Sexuality

Given the Rusyns’ emphasis on Andy’s religiosity, where do the more irreverent aspects of his art fit into the Rusyn picture? The oxidation paintings, for example, in which the abstract image is created by a mixed medium of copper paint and urine. While the *Torsos* series followed the high art style of classical nudes, the *Sex Parts* prints associated with it blurred the line between art and pornography. This side of Warhol’s work does not seem to have been exhibited widely in Eastern Europe and these prints are known primarily to fans and specialists. Not surprisingly, Bycko did not choose any of them for the Medzilaborce museum. Bycko suggests that Warhol did his *Sex Parts* prints simply because “they might appeal to someone” (*Nočné dialógy*, 37), though apparently not to the Rusyns. In addition, almost nowhere in the Rusyn literature on Andy is there any mention of his sexually explicit and homoerotic films. In his book about Warhol, Józef Keselica devotes just one short paragraph to Andy’s avant-garde films, indicating that they featured homosexuals and transsexuals, but he rationalizes that Warhol simply filmed everything that was going on around him (*AWA*, 32). In newspaper summaries of Warhol’s work for the broad public, Bycko mentions that Warhol temporarily left painting for films, but dismisses them with the comment that “it is difficult to say whether they were successful” (“Endi Varhol [Andrii Varkhola],” 2). Other accounts argue that the films are essentially ethnographic documents of the American sociocultural context, provocations to film theory, or records of events made for private purposes. Responsibility for the films is frequently passed on to Warhol’s assistant and successor as director, Paul Morrissey (“Andy Warhol”).

Was Andy homosexual? To be sure, Warhol was just as frustratingly inscrutable about his sexuality as he was about his art and his ethnicity, dropping enigmatic statements about “fantasy love,” “not doing it,” and the possibility of marriage (Warhol,

Philosophy, 41–46). Most of his associates agree with Bob Colacello’s comment: “If one topic was taboo at the Factory, it was Andy’s sex life. He wanted—demanded—to know every detail of ours, but his was strictly off limits” (344). So this area of his life also is open to speculation and projection, and it is a point of interest in all the Warhol biographies. Although there are accounts of relationships with several boyfriends, he is most often described as a voyeur, and those who knew him often doubted that there was anything physical about Warhol’s sexuality.

Not surprisingly, the Rusyns have a hard time with this subject. Andy’s brothers adamantly reject the idea: “Was he homosexual? That’s nonsense . . . are all bachelors homosexual? . . . He just didn’t have time for women” (*Nočné dialógy*, 80, 88). In *Absolut Warhola*, the director uses the issue to mock some of the elderly residents of Miková, who insist that “no homosexuals have ever come from Miková. . . . If he lived here in Miková, we would have forced him to get married”—and the director cuts to an image of Warhol in drag. His cousins explain Andy’s bachelor status as devotion to his mother, and Helena Bošničová is certain that Valerie Solanas shot Andy because he refused to marry her. Even younger and more urbane Rusyn “Warholics” feel constrained to minimize this aspect of their national hero. Bycko does not consider Warhol a homosexual, supposing instead that “he more likely suffered neurotic impotence” (Trir, 36). But significantly, in his imaginary nocturnal dialog with Andy, this is one question Bycko does not ask, nor does the subject come up in the interviews that Prekop and Chihlár conducted with family and acquaintances. Keselica insists that “no one has proven conclusively that Warhol was a homosexual, although certain facts may lead us to that conclusion” (*AWA*, 33). He admits the possibility, but at least in print, he finds it more likely that Warhol had an Oedipal complex or that he was a passive voyeur. The only admission of Warhol’s homosexuality I have found in Rusyn publications comes from an American commentator, who takes advantage of an article on the introduction of the Warhol postage stamp to educate the European Rusyns on tolerance. Jerry Jumba writes, “It’s a fact that can be stated openly. Andy was gay, and that’s okay in the United States, where diversity is respected” (Dzhumba). He refers to the honor given Warhol and the presence of the mayor of Pittsburgh at the celebration to indicate that Americans accept a gay Warhol, implying that the Rusyns of Europe should do the same.

Even in the United States, among ethnically conscious Rusyns there is discomfort with a homosexual idol. Peter Oresick, a Pittsburgh poet of Rusyn background, published a book of poems entitled *Warhol-O-Rama*, a panorama of transmutations of the Warhol story in a clever modernist style. He captures the reaction of Rusyns in a poem entitled “Andy Warhol for Carpatho-Rusyns: A Polka.” (An epigraph

indicates that the text is to be sung to the tune of Weird Al Yankovic’s polka “She’s Too Fat for Me,” well known to American Rusyns.)

Yedin, dva, tri
Oh, I don’t want him, you can have him,
He’s too swish for me, hey! . . .
He’s too swish, he’s too swish, he’s too swish for me! (69)

Actually, the chorus to Oresick’s poem comes from the well-known response to Warhol from the closeted homosexual artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg, who found Warhol’s art too commercial and his demeanor “too swish” (Warhol and Hackett, 14).

If the Rusyn movement at times seems desperate in its effort to “prove” and “demonstrate” Warhol’s Rusynism, it is matched by another community that is equally insistent in claiming Andy as one of their own—that is, the gay community. Queer theorists are just as frustrated by Andy’s resistance to definite and demonstrable categorization as are the Rusyns. As the editors of the anthology *Pop Out: Queer Warhol* explain, “Warhol was never entirely ‘out’ nor ‘in’ the closet. In turns, he was both and neither, depending on context, exigency, and survival” (4). Kelly M. Cresap describes Warhol as a trickster, who, in his book *The Philosophy of Andy Warhol*, manages almost simultaneously both to posit and retract a gay identity (91). “Warhol, shuffling laconically between mutually opposed impressions, generates a more disturbingly indeterminate presence. The reader, presented with a series of artful dodges, is left to hash out a kind of multiple double negation: Don’t mistake me for someone who isn’t gay, but don’t abandon the idea that I might not be gay” (89). Cresap insists on the essential significance of homosexuality to Warhol: “His queerness is not separable from any of the symbols associated with him, either of stigma or of prestige; they are part and parcel of his class coordinates, his art, his public manner, his social life, his business ventures, and his outlook on the world” (51). Wayne Koestenbaum admits that Warhol’s work was deemed irrelevant to the “queer” movement, that he alienated activists by showing no interest in gay identity politics, and that he was entirely indifferent to gay liberation, “which many now credit him as helping . . . to invent.” Still, he concludes, “How gay was Warhol? As gay as you can get” (8). According to Marc Siegel, “Andy Warhol’s life and work . . . play a major role in just about any significant account of twentieth-century queer history” (7), and Watney asserts, “Warhol is second to none in the pantheon of twentieth-century American queer heroes” (22).

Just as the Rusyns decry the neglect of Warhol's ethnicity, the essays in *Pop Out* share a concern about what the editors call the "degaying" of Warhol in standard scholarship: "With few exceptions, most considerations of Warhol . . . have usually aggressively elided issues around sexuality . . . to usher in his *oeuvre* to the world of high art" (1). By contrast, queer scholarship insists that "to ignore Warhol's queerness is to miss what is most valuable, interesting, sexy, and political about his work" (2). Most gay theorists take an entirely antithetical stance to an interpretation based on ethnicity or religion. In a review of a 2001 Warhol retrospective exhibit curated by Heiner Bastian, Marc Siegel expresses dismay at the tenor of the show: "Bastian's refusal to engage with the queerness in and around Warhol's work is made more insulting by the fact that he proposes a very different theme indeed, not as a subordinate motif, but as the defining feature of Warhol's work: Catholicism!" (8). Wayne Koestenbaum's biography of Warhol is set entirely in the context of the artist's gay sexuality and is extravagantly overdetermined by his perspective. While the Rusyns see the motivation for Warhol's soup can as an outsider's longing for American consumer goods, Koestenbaum sees it as a sign of his erotic hunger (44). If Rusyn writers stress Warhol's ethnicity, Koestenbaum interprets his signature "blotted line" technique as "Andy's model for successful Americanization" (48). While Michal Bycko attributes Warhol's serial and repeated imagery to the iconostasis, Koestenbaum sees its source in "the gay taste . . . toward multiplication and archiving" (50). And if religiously oriented critics see in his images the transfiguration of art beyond distinctions between the religious and the profane, for Koestenbaum, religious and profane meanings collide in Warhol's film *Blow Job*. He comments archly, "We see a physiognomic record of the 'blows' that Job received" (85). Still, Koestenbaum concludes his analysis of the films with a statement with which the Rusyns could not disagree. "Warhol was no saint. But he oddly maintained an even keel amid the havoc, not himself taking too much speed, but turning on the camera and the tape recorder while others did." And he quotes one of Warhol's actresses: "Andy was a moral man. He never did anything *not nice*" (128).

As antithetical as the gay and the Rusyn approaches to Warhol may seem, there may perhaps be room for accommodation. The scholarship that sees Warhol as queer takes a broader view than that which focuses on his gayness. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, whose writings helped create the field of queer studies, looks to childhood for the formation of "the shame-delineated place of identity," which is associated with homosexuality. But she clarifies: "*Queer* . . . might usefully be thought of as referring in the first place to . . . those whose sense of identity is for some reason tuned most to the note of shame" (137). While this group overlaps with gays, she

adds: “I’d remark here on how frequently queer kids are *queer* before they’re gay—if indeed they turn out gay at all” (137). That is, queerness may or may not manifest itself as homosexuality. Its origin may be in other race, gender, class, and sexual differences, as well as disparities in appearance or ability, and queer theorists often refer to “minority subjects” to cover all these kinds of diversity. Sedgwick analyzes Warhol in terms of the aspects of his personality that are associated with homosexuality, and her analysis is convincing. However, the same interpretation might emerge from a reading that focuses on his ethnic, class, linguistic, and religious insecurities. In fact, there is much common ground between the “queer Andy” and the “Rusyn Andy” and the discourses they generate.

While Rusyn activists may be reluctant to follow the path of queer theory, they would probably approve John Richardson’s attempt to reconcile Andy’s gay tendencies with his spiritual character:

Andy was born with an innocence and humility that was impregnable—his Slavic spirituality again—and in this respect was a throwback to that Russian phenomenon the *yurodivyi* (the holy fool): the simpleton whose quasi-divine naiveté supposedly protects him against an inimical world. . . . Thanks to [Warhol’s] inner strength . . . he gave full reign to his swishiness. It was this guilelessness that enabled him to shine out from the rest of the trashy throng. (“Warhol at Home” 257)

Colacello refers to Warhol’s “Ruthenian social awkwardness” (283), and even Kelly Cresap admits that “Andy was audaciously swish by the standards of the time, and yet certain traits suggest that naiveté was perhaps a more favored ‘orientation’ for him than homosexuality” (65).

While the Rusyns minimize it, Warhol’s sexuality is a target for attacks on the Rusyn movement. “Rusyns do not need this kind of idol,” shouts a headline from the anti-Rusyn Ukrainian newspaper *Tribuna*. “For what services do Rusyns honor this person? Has he made any contribution to Rusyn culture? Not one iota. He contributed to the development of a degenerate cosmopolitan culture in which there is nothing bright, healthy, noble, or patriotic” (Rusynko). The tenor of the article is on the level of low tabloid journalism, and it is clear that Warhol is hardly the only target of the author’s animosity. Other radical Ukrainian nationalist groups discredit the Rusyn movement by reference to their choice of the “ideologically vacuous and nationally unconscious postmodern artist” as a symbol (Vseukrains’ka Orhanizatsiia). Among American Rusyns, the reluctance to accept Warhol’s sexuality seems to be a generational matter. While Warhol’s brothers, in their mid- to late eighties,

rejected the idea, Andy's nephew James Warhola, at a 2009 Smithsonian Institution lecture, stated candidly that his uncle was gay.

Even leaving aside the question of sexuality, one might ask how Andy could reconcile his incongruent modes of existence—on the one hand, the devout, charitable, loving son of a doting mother and on the other, the celebrity-crazed party-goer and underground filmmaker. The answer might lie partially in the Slavic spirituality referenced by Richardson. Numerous observers have commented on the predominance of Catholics in Warhol's circle: "It certainly seems more than coincidence that the overwhelming majority of the Superstars were from Catholic backgrounds" (Colacello, 70). What they had in common, according to superstar Viva, was guilt and the need to purge themselves of 1950s "Catholic repression" (Stein, 226). The photographer Christopher Makos observed that Andy "may have related better to us Catholics because we all had the same background: mass, priests, nuns, Catholic school, a sense of guilt" (Makos, 53). However, this stereotypical vision of 1950s Roman Catholic life may well have been foreign to a Rusyn raised in a Byzantine Catholic environment, where religious education came from peasant-like parents and a church that was headed by a married priest, where ritual often overshadowed doctrine. Alexander Motyl suggests that the kind of Greek Rite Catholicism practiced by many Rusyns, especially among first-generation Americans, allowed for an existential religious meaning, rather than one based on dogmatic beliefs and strict moral codes: "The Vatican—together with its dogmas, pomp, and circumstance—is as far from the Carpathian Mountains as it is from Pittsburgh's Slavic slums. . . . And the Rusyn . . . peasants who lived and worshipped in the Carpathians and in Pittsburgh knew that, despite Catholicism's moral strictures, the parish priest would also be ready to forgive their many lapses if the appropriate prayers were said and the appropriate sacraments were performed" ("Was Andy Warhol Ukrainian?"). In this sense, Bob Colacello seems to have come closest to Andy's understanding of Catholicism. For a film class, Colacello wrote a review of the Warhol film *Trash*, which was published in the *Village Voice*. He tells an interviewer:

I wrote that it was a great Roman Catholic masterpiece in the tradition of Mary Magdalene—you know, everybody can be redeemed, we Catholics believe, including prostitutes and hustlers and junkies. And that's what I thought *Trash* was about—redemption. My introduction to Andy was the result of that review. I got a call from Paul Morrissey [Warhol's film director], who said, 'I work for Andy Warhol. We loved your review. No one ever got that Catholic thing before.' (O'Connor and Liu, 80)

Whether or not he practiced it regularly, Warhol apparently believed in forgiveness

and expected redemption. In his diary, he talks about trying to show kindness to someone he doesn’t like “because God forgives so so should I” (559).

While he trusted in God’s forgiveness, he also anticipated a kind of karmic justice to play out in his everyday life in a style reminiscent of folkways. There was traditionally a strong streak of down-to-earth practicality and peasant superstition among first-generation-American Eastern Catholics, which could not fail to affect their children. In his *Diaries*, we see Andy sprinkling his house with holy water and hanging a cross for protection from fire (120, 109), getting sick as a result of being unkind (559), and being punished for skipping church on Easter by getting a pimple (568). He thanks God for his safe return from a trip (343) and for positive medical news (52), and he advises a friend “to go to church and pray to God” in her struggle to lose weight (215). At the same time, he expressed belief in folk cures (558), ate garlic (640), and used crystals for energy, protection, and in a futile attempt to repel roaches. In a kind of *dvoeverie* (double faith) that is not uncommon among Slavic Christians, Warhol also speculates about the existence of “walk-in” souls, ghosts, and evil spirits (654, 678, 692), and near the end of his life, he sought healing through treatment with crystals. Although he doubted their efficacy, he feels a kind of Slavic fatalism, “I’ve got to believe in *something*, so I’ll continue with the crystals. Because things could always be worse” (697). But he tried to rationalize and reconcile his belief systems. At one point, he changed from a Jewish to an Episcopalian “crystal doctor,” because, said Andy, “knowing he believes in Christ I don’t have to worry that crystals might be somehow against Christ” (643). This matter-of-fact, peasant-like approach to life and spirituality, with its roots in Rusyn folklore and Andy’s Rusyn religious upbringing, may have allowed him to reconcile and compartmentalize the seemingly incompatible aspects of his life—his family, his friends, his work, his sexuality, and his faith. And from the point of view of the Rusyns, it, and his mother, preserved him from being tainted by the world in which he lived.

УЛИН СЫН, АНДРИЙКО (Julia’s Son, Andy)

While Andy is a hero to the Rusyns, his mother is a veritable Rusyn saint. In fact, the Rusyn adulation of Andy often seems to be but a pretext for the exaltation of his mother, “a simple Rusyn woman,” who had no education, but “the wonderful, common-sense philosophy of a simple village person” (Bycko, “Pohliad,” 29). She is given credit for inspiring his art, and most importantly, preserving his soul. Andy left Pittsburgh for New York in 1949. It is uncertain whether he invited her or whether she just showed up on his doorstep (Warhol and Hackett, 5), but two years

later, his mother came to live with him and stayed for another twenty-two years. In Warhol's first years in New York, they shared a bedroom in a sparsely furnished East Seventy-fifth Street apartment, which they cohabited with dozens of cats (Carey in P. Smith, 252; Giallo in O'Connor and Liu, 20; Wood in P. Smith, 43). Later, Julia had her own garden apartment in Andy's Lexington Avenue brownstone.³¹

Among Andy's friends, followers, critics, and commentators, there was a major fascination with Julia (fig. 16), who was different and therefore mysterious. As a result, a mythology has arisen around her, and it is difficult to distinguish fact from fancy. Depending on the disposition of the commentator, she is described as "the strangest creature I've ever seen. . . . like a domestic, but nice" (David Mann, qtd. in Bourdon, 32); "a genuine eccentric" (Bockris, 108); "narrow and uneducated . . . but humorous, mischievous, and shrewd" (Richardson, "Eulogy"); complex, manipulative, and powerful (Bockris, 98); childlike, with a wonderful sense of humor (Ted Carey in P. Smith, 94); weird and ill-kempt (Suzi Frankfurt, qtd. in Bockris, 130); "childlike and a great joy" (Fritzie Wood in P. Smith, 43); "a very naïve woman" (Nathan Gluck in P. Smith, 76); or someone who made Andy feel insignificant and ugly (Joseph Giordano in P. Smith, 129); and at the most extreme, a heavy drinker who liked her scotch, whom Andy kept hidden in the basement (Bourdon, 68; Emile de Antonio in P. Smith, 188).

Comments on the relationship between mother and son are equally disparate. Julia is said to have stayed up nights watching Andy sleep (Vitto Giallo in P. Smith, 53). But she is also said to have frequently "lambasted" him "in Czech" (Bourdon, qtd. in Wilcock, 43), given away his artwork to family (Bockris, 157), and listened in on phone calls (Bockris, 262). Julia liked to play matchmaker, picking out girls for Andy and men for her nieces back in Pittsburgh (Bourdon, 68; Scherman and Dalton, 179; Warhol and Hackett, 347). Andy is described as treating her respectfully (Bourdon, qtd. in Wilcock, 43) and formally (Mead in Wilcock, 137), or cringing in embarrassment and whining "Leave me alone, Ma!" (Bockris, 104). A telling fact is that he asked his friends not to swear in her presence (Bourdon, 38; Bockris, 118). Andy introduced some of his friends to Julia, and others were told that "she doesn't want to be bothered" (Scherman and Dalton, 72, 152). But her significance in Andy's life made a sufficient enough impression to be referenced in a song written by Lou Reed and John Cale, formerly of The Velvet Underground, a rock group managed by Warhol: "It's a Czechoslovakian custom my mother passed on to me / The way to make friends Andy is invite them up for tea" ("Open House").

Andy frequently commented on his mother in his books and interviews, thereby contributing to the mystique. According to his comments, she was interested in fly-



Fig. 16. Julia Warhola. Photo courtesy of the Warhola family.

ing saucers (O'Brien, 260), liked to "take to the bottle once in a while" (Gruskin, 207), played the numbers (Warhol, *Philosophy*, 53), and hid the groceries ("Andy and Sam Green"). However, one gets the feeling that with his humorous off-hand comments about her, Andy was actually protecting his mother from intrusive curiosity. For example, he deflected questions about her with a quip, "I don't talk to her much. I just make her take the pills" (Gruskin, 208). Indeed, the fascination with Mrs. Warhola was so great that David Bailey, a British documentary filmmaker, faked an interview with her in which an actress, trying unsuccessfully to approximate Rusyn speech patterns, played Andy's mother. This interview, in which "Mrs. Warhola" makes some insightful and some outrageous statements, is often taken at face value and her comments are quoted as fact, though often noted as "bizarre" (Bourdon, 310; Cresap, 106, n. 33). Some writers might wish that Mrs. Warhol had in fact hoped that Andy would marry "one of the boys" and have "all these little Andys . . . Andys, Andys, Andys, Andys, like the pictures you know, what he paints," but the language and the references in this interview are completely inconsistent with the real Mrs. Warhola. Another comment that is often quoted both in the West and by the Rusyns of Slovakia expresses an appealing idea, but one that is entirely unexpected from the unsophisticated Mrs. Warhola: "He represents the . . . American and the European . . . fuse[d] together, and he's very very keen and sensitive to everything that goes on every day and he registered it like . . . a photographic plate" (Bailey). In 1980, Warhol told his diary, "[An acquaintance] told me he saw 'my mother' on TV in England, that stupid David Bailey 'documentary' about me where Lil Piccard made believe she was my mother . . . and I just didn't have the heart to tell him that wasn't my mother" (313). Unfortunately, many others have also been fooled, doing a grave injustice to Mrs. Warhola.

There is one interview with Julia that is legitimate—a 1966 *Esquire* article that presents a series of short conversations with the mothers of public figures. In a discourse punctuated by tears, Julia tells the story of her courtship and wedding in the old country, her travails during World War I, and the death of her six-week-old first-born, a daughter. In her old-world accent, which is captured by the interviewer, she explains that she likes New York, where the air is better than in Pittsburgh and where she goes to a nice new church (St. Mary's). The language and context here are authentic, and although Warhol was said to be annoyed that the writer did not standardize her English, Mrs. Warhola's personality comes through effectively: "Andy very good for school. He keep school nice. He says, 'I like school.' He finished school in Pittsburgh and my neighbor say, 'Oh Andy, he's a good boy. He finish school.' Yes. Then Andy go to New York by himself. I prayed. God, oh God, help

my boy Andy. . . . Later I visit him. One time, two time, third time. I stay. I leave home. I like New York. You never lonesome. People nice” (Weintraub, 101). There are no witty or discerning comments here about Warhol’s art, but Mrs. Warhola’s devotion to her son is clear. The photograph accompanying the interview shows a stolid elderly woman in what must be her Sunday-best hat and flowered dress, her large, veined, gnarled hand on her chin in the same pose as the portrait of her son that she holds in her lap.

Sympathetic American commentators agree that Julia was a source of tenacity, gentleness, resilience, devout faith, and peasant whimsicality, and that she was the “greatest passion of Andy’s life” (Richardson, “Secret Warhol,” 125). Rusyn commentators dissolve whatever doubts they may have about Warhol’s sexuality and lifestyle in a celebration of his bond with Julia. The tremendous influence she had on him, both personally and professionally, is undisputed. As a girl, she was known for her musical and artistic talent. Friends in Miková recall her creative painting of the walls of the family cottage, and when the local church was being reconstructed and the wall paintings restored, Julia watched the artists’ work closely and helped them mix paint (Khoma, 43). In depression-era Pittsburgh, she made flower sculptures out of paper and tin cans, which she would sell for a quarter (Bockris, 22; Bourdon, 17). Paul Warhola remembers: “We’d walk a mile and a half into the better sections of town, and while she sold door to door, I’d hide behind the tree, embarrassed” (Leiby). This was four-year-old Andy’s introduction to what he later called “business art.” Andy learned from Julia to decorate Easter eggs in the Rusyn style. In this technique, hot wax is applied to the egg in short strokes with a pin head attached to a wooden holder. After the egg is dyed, the wax is removed from its surface, leaving behind a negative image of the design, which, in principle, is similar to the silkscreen technique, which became Andy’s trademark. Following Rusyn tradition, Warhol gave decorated eggs as gifts to New York art directors and business contacts. When an interviewer asked if his mother understood art, he answered, “More than that. She did a lot for me. She was a really good artist, in the primitivist style” (Windmöller, 198). It has been said that Andy himself had the instinct of a folk artist expressed in contemporary terms (Gangewere, 50).

When Andy was working as a commercial artist, Julia became his collaborator, copying text and coloring pictures. In 1959, Warhol issued limited-edition portfolios that paralleled some of his own commercial work on shoes and cookbooks. The lettering in these books was done by Julia in her ornate, old-world calligraphy. Andy would write out the words and Julia would copy them letter for letter, without actually understanding much of what she was writing, which resulted in creative misspellings

that Andy relished. His close associate Gerard Malanga says that Andy even had his mother's script made into Letraset, sheets of dry transferable lettering, so he could reproduce it instantly (P. Smith, 172). In 1958, Reid Miles, a graphic designer, commissioned Mrs. Warhola to do a record jacket for "The Story of Moondog," for which she won an Art Directors Club award as "Andy Warhol's Mother." Her drawings of cats and angels (fig. 17) bear a distinct similarity to Warhol's early pre-pop work and some of her angels resemble the distinctive primitive style of Rusyn icons. Warhol published her drawings of cats under the title *Holy Cats by Andy Warhol's Mother*, a companion book to his own *25 Cats Name Sam and One Blue Pussy*.³² She even played roles in a few of his lesser known films from the 1960s. Finally, while the origin of the idea for Warhol's soup cans is still a matter of debate, recent evidence suggests that Julia may have been a factor. In July 2012, the Warhol museum in Pittsburgh exhibited for the first time an ink-on-paper sketch of a Campbell's soup can by Julia, with a handwritten message: "Campbell's Soup very gut." It is dated



Fig. 17. Julia Warhola's drawing. Courtesy of the Warhola family. Julia wrote to her sister in Miková, "Here I've drawn an angel for you . . . Dear sister, write and tell me if you received this Christmas greeting."

1952, ten years before Warhol’s ground-breaking show of thirty-two Campbell’s soup cans at the Ferus Gallery in Los Angeles (Kalson).

In a kind of mystical genetics, the Rusyns like to attribute all of Warhol’s talent to his mother, tracing her influence back to his childhood, when Julia kept him entertained in his sickbed with drawings and magazine cut-outs. Vasyl’ Khoma writes: “It is not a straight, direct influence of mother on son. Here we have something more delicate, a spiritual exchange of creative potential, grounded in maternal feelings and her own life experiences. The young, attentive Andy assimilated this spiritual process to his own inner world, which was forming in different circumstances from those in which his mother was raised and shaped” (42). That is, the American Andy Warhol was informed by Rusyn Miková. Keselica writes, “And so this American with European blood, with Rusyn genes from Slovakia combined with the New York world of hopes became the symbol of success, fame, wealth, and influence” (Keselica, “Endi Varhol—Genialnÿi rusyn,” 27).

The end of Julia’s life saw a difficult decline, and the family’s decisions about how best to care for her were painful and caused dissension. By 1971, she had become senile and suffered a series of strokes. She was eventually placed in a nursing home in Pittsburgh, where she returned in her mind to Miková. According to relatives, Andy called her every day from New York and from his travels, but never visited. She died at the age of eighty in 1972. Although Andy paid the expenses, he did not attend her funeral, telling his brothers that he wanted to remember her as she had been. Andy’s nephew George stayed with him in New York after her death and described it as a very bad time. “I remember my uncle used to always keep that handkerchief of hers. He didn’t want anybody to see him but he’d take off his wig and put the handkerchief on his head. . . . He was very unhappy, very unhappy” (Bockris, 362–63). Andy did not tell his friends or colleagues about his mother’s death, and for years he would deflect questions about her, saying, “Oh, she’s great. But she doesn’t get out of bed much” (Bourdon, 322). Thirteen years later, he commented to his diary that he still felt “so guilty” for sending her back to Pittsburgh (704). And when he helped to serve an Easter meal at the Church of the Heavenly Rest in 1986, he noted, “a lot of the ladies looked like my mother” (722).

In 1974, two years after her death, Andy did a series of nine portraits of his mother, which are among his most intimate works. Wearing glasses, Julia smiles kindly at the viewer out of a background of reds and blues, her face surrounded by a halo of brushstrokes and finger-painted flourishes that give the impression of lace. A print given by Warhol to his brother John presents a more faded, ghostly apparition, as if the subject is peering at the viewer from another world. One of Warhol’s

few uncommissioned portraits, the art critic Gilda Williams says it “stands out by contradicting almost every innovation which made the artist’s paintings revolutionary: the impersonal choice of subject matter, the machine-like handling of paint, the art-for-money ethos, the absolute focus on the present.” At Warhol’s “Portraits of the 70s” exhibit at the Whitney Museum in 1979, the “Julia Warhola” pictures were installed in a separate room. As Williams puts it, Warhol must have recognized that “Julia didn’t fit with the rich and powerful in death any better than she had in life.” In the exhibit’s catalog, Robert Rosenblum wrote that Warhol’s portrait of his mother breaks through the artist’s “aestheticism” to convincing emotion. “In the midst of this racy and ephemeral company of *Women’s Wear Daily* and *Interview*, her glamourless countenance is all the more heart-tugging, an enduring and poignant remembrance of family-things past” (qtd. in Ratcliff, 70).

Indeed, Andy seems to have been a different person when it came to “family-things.” He never lost touch with his Pittsburgh family during the years that he lived, worked, and partied in New York. From his early days as a commercial artist and for decades afterward, Andy regularly sent money to help his brothers raise their children, and later, he offered employment to various nephews. According to his brother, Andy accepted John’s collect calls every Sunday for thirty-eight years (Leiby). His nephew has told the story of family visits to Uncle Andy (J. Warhola, *Uncle Andy’s; Uncle Andy’s Cats*). In down-home fashion, they appeared without notice on the spur of the moment, and Andy settled his brother’s large family of children all around his house, put them to work stretching canvases, and bought them presents (Bockris, 124). He enjoyed telling his family about the famous people he had partied with the night before (Bockris, 147). Contrary to the blank, impersonal image he presented to the public, his nephews and nieces describe him as affectionate and engaging (fig. 18). “He was such fun to be with. He’d go out and buy a birthday cake when it wasn’t even my birthday. I asked him why, and he just said, ‘It’s a nice thing to do’” (Cornwell). And in spite of his expressed antipathy to his home town, Marty Warhola says his uncle always wanted to know what was going on in Pittsburgh. “I was telling him how bad it was here with the closed mills,” Warhola says, remembering a visit to New York in the early 1980s (Thomas). Warhol may have drawn on those stories when he spoke with the president of U.S. Steel in 1982 (*Diaries*, 460).

There is conflicting evidence about Andy’s relations with his family. His friend Jed Johnson and his business partner Vincent Fremont say that he never talked about them (Bockris, 362), but this is contradicted by others (Ultra Violet, 37; Mead, qtd. in Wilcock, 137). Suzi Frankfurt, a lifelong friend, remembers that “Andy was always



Fig. 18. Warhol with his niece Mary Lou Warhola and his nephew James Warhola, 1963. Photo courtesy of James Warhola.

very sweet to his family” and he felt guilty about his brothers, saying “I make more in two minutes than they make in a year. . . . He loved them, he was never ashamed of them at all” (Bockris, 132). The diaries from the last ten years of his life contain numerous references to meetings and talks with cousins, nephews, and nieces, some of whom he enjoys and others he dislikes, but it is clear that he is abreast of the latest developments in his large extended family—marriages, divorces, children, jobs. Interviews with family demonstrate his solicitude for family members who visited him in New York, many of whom were given tours of the Factory and money for meals (Prekop and Cihlář, 80–85). James Warhola sums it up: “We just saw him as our uncle, a bit eccentric, but a normal member of the family” (Prekop and Cihlář, 108). Of course, the one member of a lower-class family who “makes it big” inevitably finds himself in a difficult psychological space, and there is evidence of such ambivalence in some of Andy’s comments. He tells Hackett that he puts

off visits with family by saying he is out of town (393, 499, 500), and tells her, “I can’t face a family, I guess” (405).³³ In a story he tells to the president of U.S. Steel at a White House party, he uses an invention about his brother to spin a fanciful, but revealing, proposal to use the shuttered plant buildings as a kind of theme park “and charge people \$10 to get a little coal on their faces and see the hot lava being poured.” He admits, “I was lying like crazy” (460). But he resents efforts of writers and biographers to use his family (253, 717) and is angry when journalists distort the facts about his life to create their own Warhol image (388–89).

In sum, his remarks about family seem just as unreliable as his comments on art, and even more defensive. Like the statements that he let slip about his religious beliefs and then undercut with humor or sarcasm, his feelings for family seem a point of vulnerability that he needs to screen. He recalls childhood memories of his aunts in Pittsburgh, one of whom “just drove me crazy,” but another, whom he liked. “You know, I was thinking lately about my nice aunt, my mother’s sister, and something that happened to me at her house once—she always gave me pennies for candy and so I used to like to visit her, she was good to me, she lived in a house on the North Side.” And then he undercuts his nostalgia: “And one day I remember she had a lady over who had no teeth and the lady was eating a bowl of soup and she didn’t finish it, and my aunt gave it to me and made me finish it, I guess because she had no money and didn’t want to waste food” (496). He offered housing and a job setting up the computer system for his magazine *Interview* to his nephew Donald, whom he describes as “serious.” When Donald decides to return to Pittsburgh to take care of his parents, Warhol seems disappointed but dismisses his explanation with “Sure, who’re you kidding,” and wonders, “He just doesn’t like New York, I guess. I never took him out to anything. I don’t know if that would have made a difference. I don’t think so, but I don’t know” (772). According to his brother John, Andy felt bad that Donald didn’t want to stay in New York. “Four Sundays in a row he says, ‘Didya ask Don why he went back home?’ He says, ‘Maybe he thinks I didn’t give him enough money. Gee, if Don hadda stayed there I was going to put the *Interview* business over in his name’” (Bockris, 477–78). Warhol’s nephew George explains that the family was protective of Andy and uncomfortable around the people who worked for him: “They didn’t take Andy for himself, they always wanted something from him. . . . Andy has a lot of money, that was their attitude” (Bockris, 473).

Warhol’s relationship with his family is one that any successful child of immigrants can appreciate, and it clearly contributed to the complexity of his character. After a visit from his brother John and his wife, Warhol commented on the contradictions of family, where people so closely related can also be so distant: “And it’s

so odd, it’s two people you don’t really know who look so different from you and their ideas are so weird and it’s one more thing to make you think what is this life all about” (*Diaries*, 729). Biographers who write of the Warhol family’s insensitivity and disdain for Andy’s life and art (Bockris, 97) seem to lack an appreciation for the inherent complexities in such a relationship. When Michal Bycko asked John Warhola why the brothers never attended Warhol’s exhibits, John responded with an explanation that sophisticated commentators may reject, but Rusyns find completely convincing: “There were famous celebrities there, and we are modest, simple people” (*Nočné dialógy*, 87). For the man and the artist, straddling the worlds of Andrew Warhola and Andy Warhol was a lifelong project that informed his life and his work. As his collaborator Paul Morrissey said, he was “a primitive in a sophisticated world. That’s why people were attracted to him” (Colacello, 500).

The Myth of the Rusyn Andy

The image of the “two Andys” is at the core of the Rusyn Warhol myth. Bycko writes, “For me there are two Warhols. The famous Andy Warhol—the king of pop art, and Andy Varkhola—son of poor Ruthenians from the small village Miková in eastern Slovakia. . . . Which of them is the true Andy Warhol?” (“Andy Warhol”). Friends and collaborators who knew him well saw the same duality. Bob Colacello exposed Andy’s “act”: “The Andy I saw that day was the real Andy: wistful, touching, unhappy, and smart. Another afternoon, a newspaper reporter came to interview Andy in the same hotel room and got the fake Andy: cool, coy, campy, and dumb” (118). According to Bockris, when an unidentified friend said that Debbie Harry broke up the rock group Blondie because she’s “too intelligent to remain in the role of a cartoon character,” Warhol snapped, “What do you think I’ve been doing for the last twenty-five years? . . . Sometimes it’s so great to get home and take off my Andy suit” (456). According to their myth, the Rusyn Andy is the hidden one under the Andy suit. Bycko asks Andy, “Many have called you fraud, fool, genius, even madman—what were you really?” Bycko’s Andy responds, “A person like you. Everything else is advertising” (*Nočné dialógy*, 14). This is not inconsistent with Andy’s self-perception. In reference to Truman Capote’s 1966 Masked Ball at the Plaza Hotel, he wrote: “It was so strange. I thought: you get to the point in life where you’ve actually been invited to the party of parties . . . and it still doesn’t guarantee that you won’t feel like a complete dud!” (*America*, 86).

Bycko and other Rusyn writers identify Rusynness in well-known features of Andy’s personality and behavior—his shyness (“I’m shy and yet I like to take up a

lot of personal space. Mom always said, ‘Don’t be pushy, but let everybody know you’re around,’” *Philosophy*, 147); his frequently expressed preference for simple pleasures (“My favorite restaurant atmosphere has always been the atmosphere of the good, plain, American lunchroom,” 159); his work ethic (“I like working better than relaxing,” 154); his lack of artistic pretension (“Why do people think artists are special? It’s just another job. . . . If you say that artists take ‘risks,’ it’s insulting to the men who landed on D-Day, to stunt men, . . . to coal miners, and to hitch-hikers, because they’re the ones who really know what ‘risks’ are,” 178–89); his self-deprecation (“I’m just a freak. I can’t change it. I’m too unusual,” *Diaries*, 481); and the innate democracy of his art, which is accessible to all. These traits have been elaborated by Warhol’s friends and colleagues and often attributed to his ethnic background. Chris Makos said, “His seven-days-a-week work ethic was part of his working-class Eastern European background, and it was contagious—everyone around him adapted to it. Andy used to paint from three in the afternoon until seven in the evening every day, even on Christmas Eve” (74). Pat Hackett describes a down-to-earth mindset that hints at past humiliation: “The worst thing Andy could think to say about someone was that he was ‘the kind of person who thinks he’s better than you’ or, simply, ‘He thinks he’s an ‘intellectual’” (*Diaries*, xii). The down-to-earth Rusyn devotees suffered the same experience in their struggles with bureaucrats and “intellectuals” to establish the Medzilaborce museum. Finally, Bycko asks why Warhol was not ruined by his fame, like Elvis and others. “Why did he not become a drug addict?” He finds the answer in Warhol’s religion, his upbringing, and “a mentality inherited from his ancestors” (“Pohliad,” 29).

Most of all, Rusyns identify with Warhol’s hoarding instinct. After his death, his house was found to be crammed with things he had purchased at antique stores and flea markets, ranging from furniture, fine art, and jewelry to more than two hundred cookie jars, plastic Fred Flintstone wristwatches, and wooden toilet seats (Hayes, 158). Much of it was unwrapped, still in shopping bags, indicating that his passion was for acquisition and possession, rather than the objects themselves. The evidence of more than thirty years of obsessive collecting shocked “even the most jaded Sotheby’s employees,” and the ten-day auction generated \$25.3 million (J. Smith, 14). Although Andy’s collecting was on a higher artistic level, Rusyns, who would never discard an extra nail or piece of string, can identify with Andy’s reported perpetual fear of poverty. John Richardson described another of Warhol’s contradictions: his last house had “the gleam, the hush, and the peace of a presbytery, and not a single Warhol on its walls. . . . There was a most un-pop collection of elegant Federal furniture—compensation for the inelegance of Andy’s childhood, it

would seem” (“Secret Warhol” 66–68). Bycko and Khoma approve of the fact that Warhol’s personal space was decorated not with pop art but with old-world antiques, which allegedly testifies to his “subtle taste” and makes up for the pop art that the Rusyn public might not accept (Khoma, 37; Bycko, “Endi Varhol—Imaginatsiia abo realita?” 19).

In order to stress his Rusynness, the Rusyns find it necessary to magnify Warhol’s attachment to the homeland and amplify his virtues. Therefore, in their creative reconstruction, Andy always intended to visit his family in Miková (Khoma, 44), and one of the reasons for dropping the *a* from his name was so “our people won’t know that I’m working here,” that is, in soulless and sinful New York City (Bycko, “Bila tvar,” 19). Facts are generalized, so that Warhol’s occasional holiday volunteering at the Church of the Heavenly Rest soup kitchen in New York becomes regular Sunday work at the Greek Catholic church in Pittsburgh (Khoma, 35), and his charity extends to unhesitating handouts of \$100 to beggars (Bycko, “Pohliad”). Hardships in America are exaggerated, so that Julia “spoke not a word of English” (*Nočné dialógy*, 74), and Andy, who was in fact one of the most successful commercial artists in New York, is envisioned in the early years as perennially struggling to survive (Bycko, “Výstava”).

The Rusyns relish the vision of a Rusnak peasant boy hobnobbing on a par with the rich and famous— Keselica mentions “presidents, counts, kings, princes, priests, and famous scientists” and ingenuously refers specifically to soccer star Pele, Sylvester Stallone, Bette Midler, Paloma Picasso, Madonna, Yoko Ono and John Lennon, Nancy and Ronald Reagan, and Arnold Schwarzenegger (*AWA*, 39; “Dekada”). But a certain anti-Americanism is also apparent. Khoma argues that in his art, Warhol makes fun of the superficiality and the spiritual emptiness of America (37, 47). In the imaginary dialogue with Bycko, Warhol tells him, “America is full of fearful and unhappy people. . . . Can you really be happy in that environment? . . . I often had to suppress my feelings and give preference to reason. . . . After all, it’s America, not Miková” (16–17). To demonstrate that Warhol was not really comfortable in his public and social roles, Bycko (“Endi Varhol—Imaginatsiia,” 19) quotes Eva Windmöller’s comment: “It is not fair to inflict this interview on Andy Warhol. He is suffering” (190).³⁴ And it is simply not possible that Warhol could have been happy in America, even with “the fame and money that his forefathers never had” (“Endi Varhol—Imaginatsiia,” 8). Bycko several times repeats a statement, allegedly from the Warhol *Diaries*, that Andy needed to take a Valium to endure a party (“Pohliad,” 29; “Endi Varhol—Imaginatsiia,” 11; “Výstava”), implying that a Rusyn can survive life as an American superstar only with help from prayer and

pharmaceuticals. There are eleven references to Valium in the *Diaries*, but none of them appears in this context. Warhol mostly uses Valium as a sleep aid and says, “Valium’s the perfect drug for me” (582). Bycko’s construction fails to take into consideration Warhol’s comments such as, “I have social disease. I have to go out every night,” and “I will go to the opening of anything, including a toilet seat” (*Andy Warhol’s Exposures*, 19). Although he insisted that his party-going was work, necessary for getting portrait commissions and part of “business art,” he clearly enjoyed his encounters with high society. One gets the sense that the Rusyn take on Warhol’s social life is more Bycko than Warhol, more Miková than New York.³⁵ However, Bycko is aware that “the real Andy Warhol, the real Andrew Warhola, the real Andrii Varkhola and Andriiko existed so covertly and paradoxically that everything about him, or nothing, can be, but does not have to be, true” (“Endi Varhol—Imaginatsiia, 22). Similarly, the queer theorist Kelly Cresap justifies his subjective interpretation of facts about Warhol’s life and motivations by claiming an “intuitive sense that it did happen, and a storyteller’s sense that it should have happened” (80).³⁶ Both the “Rusyn Andy” and the “queer Andy” project the sensibilities and fulfill the needs of their creators.

Kelly Cresap objects to the myth creation that was begun by John Richardson and Arthur Danto, and he anticipates the myth of the Rusyn Warhol:

Writing after Warhol’s death, the art critics John Richardson and Arthur Danto pursue metaphors that contribute mythic and quasi-religious overtones to the Warhol persona. . . . By recourse to folklore and fable, Richardson and Danto make bids for radically altering the contexts in which Warhol is traditionally seen. His native domain is moved from postindustrial America to preindustrial Europe, from postliterate image culture to preliterate oral culture, from fabulous wealth and fame to unassuming poverty and obscurity, from the ephemeral pop present to once upon a time, and from the metropolis in which the artist died to the peasant Carpatho-Rus village in which his parents were born. (133)

This is precisely what the Rusyn commentators do, as they posit a genetic connection between Warhol and Miková. However, while Richardson and Danto create a myth that may affect Warhol’s image and his place in art history, Rusyn scholars reconstruct Andy and present him as the moral and social exemplar of the Rusyns not for his own sake, but so that he can serve as an effective national symbol. He is living evidence that Rusyns, under impartial circumstances, are capable of taking their place in the world and making substantial contributions. In *The Warhol Nation*, Michal Bycko says, “If Warhol had been born and brought up in Miková, he would have been a simple peasant who achieved nothing in his life.” Instead, he became the Rusyn vision of the American Dream.

Andy Warhol and the American Dream

The idea that through his art Warhol was engaged in a subversive act of cultural criticism to document the typical manifestations of late-capitalist society, promoted first by the German critic Rainer Crone, has been largely discarded. However, during his lifetime, Warhol’s work was commonly taken as an ironic indictment of consumer culture and a satirical commentary on the vacuity of postwar society. For the most part, the Rusyns of Europe held no such illusions. And from what is perhaps a naïve but refreshing stance, they see Warhol as the fulfillment of the American Dream, the rags to riches fantasy, which they take at face value, without irony or cynicism. Keselica defines it as “a belief in freedom that allows all citizens and residents of the United States of America to achieve their goals in life through hard work. . . . The Dream is fundamentally that of the freedom to live out your wishes. In that respect, the Dream is universal. . . . The important difference between Americans and everyone else in regards to this is Americans have made far greater strides in respecting and protecting that freedom than other peoples” (“Fulfillment,” 11, 16).

Many American scholars and commentators, especially those who have connections to Warhol’s past, come to the same conclusion. Tom Sokolowski, the former director of the Andy Warhol Museum, has said, “Warhol is the consummate example of the success of the American dream. . . . Rather than see Warhol as a brittle, sarcastic, sardonic commentator, I think the thing that absolutely is the grounding of his work is the kid who is born in poverty. . . . He basically made work that is by and for the people. This is an immortalization of work that is made in factories that is nutritious and inexpensive and tasty—what is more the American dream than that?” (May). Peter Oresick writes that “Andy Warhol is more American Dream than historical figure” (40). Edward M. Hayes, the lawyer for Warhol’s estate, said, “If Andy Warhol is not the American Dream, then there is no American Dream” (McShine, 450).

In their 2009 study, Scherman and Dalton agree that Warhol was an enthusiastic believer in the American Dream, but they theorize that he coated it with a layer of icy camp (Dalton). “Camp” or popular culture, suggests Kenneth Silver, is the common ground on which the working class and the homosexual meet (198). Silver, who has studied the nexus linking Andy’s sexuality, his commercial art, and popular culture, suggests that when Warhol left commercial art for fine art, he began to see commercialism and consumerism not through the eyes of the *Vogue* readers for whom he had produced hundreds of advertisements for I. Taylor shoes and other pricey products, but through the eyes of his mother. “It was a blue-collar woman’s

world that Warhol offered New York's sophisticated art consumers. . . . [W]omen *and* men who never did their own shopping or cleaning were sent to the Stable Gallery and Leo Castelli's to buy Campbell's and Brillo, just like Mrs. Warhola and the vast majority of American women" (197).

Indeed, the Rusyn approach to Warhol impels us to look more closely at the influence of Julia, and more generally, at the influence of Warhol's ethnic and class background on his work. Art historians have noted that if pop artists did not explicitly endorse consumerism and materialism, they were not at all alienated by it, as were the Abstract Expressionists (Bourdon, 136). Warhol was the only pop artist to come from an authentically working-class background, (Scherman and Dalton, 51) and he was not at all ambivalent about consumer products but had "the working-class longing for, and kind of adoration of, the consumer products that were starting to pour out of factories and advertising agencies as he was growing up" (O'Driscoll). Was Warhol being ironic in his paintings of Campbell's Soup cans and meticulously constructed wood replicas of cardboard grocery boxes? Arthur Danto responds,

I don't think there was any irony involved. I think it was part of his feelings about the material side of life, and how crucial that is to our sense of well-being. He loved the idea of a supermarket with products stacked high and neatly arranged. I think that comes from his poverty when he was a child. He grew up on the edges, the son of immigrants. He felt that America was the place that provided these goods for people, and that this was America's great contribution to human happiness. (Qtd. in Seaman)

As early as 1964, the art dealer Ivan Karp observed that "the other pop artists depict common things . . . but Andy genuinely admires them" (Scherman and Dalton, 79). In fact, as Anthony E. Grudin has shown, "Rather than being ubiquitous and transparent, the national brand images that Warhol borrowed in his artworks of the early 1960s were designed and mobilized to target working-class customers." That is, Campbell's soup and Coca-Cola were specifically targeted to a working class audience based on the status of confidence they offered.³⁷ This is something that is easily understood by the Rusyns of Europe and informs their direct and ingenuous approach to Warhol. While in New York of the 1960s pop art specialized in the banality of the everyday, at the same time and for decades later in postwar socialist Medzilaborce, the banality of everyday was more than welcome (Bartz, 27).

One of the foremost art scholars to recognize the importance of Warhol's class background was Peter Schjeldahl, art critic for the *New York Times*. Looking back at Warhol criticism of the 1960s, he noted that "critics at the time drove themselves crazy trying to adduce an ironic attitude in Warhol's enterprise. They imposed veils

of cynical suspicion on works that, when you step right up and look at them, are nakedly beautiful, unstinting, and grand. The number of smart people who have outsmarted themselves while presuming to explain Warhol would overflow a stadium” (“Barbarians,” 104). As early as 1980, Schjeldahl challenged the “big-media reviewers” who received Warhol’s portraits “with vehement distaste.” He insisted that we should give attention to their social, as well as their aesthetic meaning, noting that the products and values of capitalist culture look different depending on one’s class vantage point:

Ambivalence about these things usually has been the province of a middle class able to take their availability for granted from birth. Warhol’s enthusiastic view of the commodity and celebrity culture, shaded by his vicarious intimacy with that culture’s social underside (its lower-class ways of death, by car crash or electric chair), gave him the edge in the race to valorize the commonplace. By comparison with his still galvanically powerful Marilyns and electric chairs of 1962–66, the work of the other pop artists seems distanced, even debilitated, by middle-class irony. What was for them “material” was for him subject matter, form, and content. The occasional imputation of naiveté (or cynicism, for that matter) to Warhol is itself a species of middle-class naiveté (or cynicism), the failure to imagine that our culture presents a radically different face when seen from its periphery. (“Warhol and Class Content,” 47–48)

And what could be more peripheral to American culture than Miková and the Carpatho-Rusyns? I agree with Kelly Cresap that “Warhol’s biography adamantly refuses to cohere around matters of artistic semantics, sexual politics or ethnic identity politics and the life of the mind. His ruses, guises, and about-faces inevitably create a smoke-and-mirrors game for someone trying to assess his career or legacy” (186). However, to paraphrase Hal Foster’s verdict regarding different readings of Warhol, each camp makes the Warhol they need, or gets the Warhol they deserve; “no doubt we all do” (“Death in America,” 39). This is certainly true of the Rusyn Warhol (fig. 19). Andy holds up a mirror to the Carpatho-Rusyn movement, demonstrating its aims, values, prejudices, and faults. Recognition of the Rusyn Andy may in turn contribute to a distinctive way of looking at the American Warhol.

RUSÍNI  **РУСИНЫ**

Pavol Peter Gagčí
griechokatolícky biskup

Michal Strank
výtah

Scott Stevens
hokejista

Andy Warhol
výtvarník

Janetta Hudzová
tenisistka

Thomas D. Jones
astronaut

Vasil Škurba - Lazarus
metropolitný ruský pravoslávny biskup

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6. Štátna príslušnosť: SR 20. Národnosť: RUSÍNSKA 21. Materinský jazyk: RUSÍNSKY

Fig. 19. Billboard featuring Warhol encouraged Rusyns to identify their nationality and language in the 2011 Slovak census. Courtesy of Aleksander Zozuliak.

Notes

1. The term *Rusyn* was historically applied also to Ukrainians and Belarusians. When used here, it refers specifically to Carpatho-Rusyns.
2. There is a substantial literature on Rusyn history and culture. See works by Magocsi in Works Cited, especially *Carpatho-Rusyn Studies: An Annotated Bibliography* and *Encyclopedia*.
3. Although this statement is quoted incessantly in the literature on Warhol, I have not been able to find a direct, primary source for it. It most likely stems from the inexplicit observation made by Warhol’s close associate Bob Colacello in his book *Holy Terror*: “‘I come from nowhere,’ Andy once said” (11). Paul Robert Magocsi used the phrase for the title of his 2006 illustrated history of Carpatho-Rusyns, *The People from Nowhere*, which has been published in Rusyn, Ukrainian, Romanian, and Slovak, in addition to English.
4. The line is from Warhol’s catalog for an exhibit at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in February–March 1968.
5. The stamp features a self-portrait of Warhol from 1964.
6. See the discussion of ambiguous identity and creative appropriation in the artistic practice of Warhol and his circle in Wolf, *Andy Warhol*, especially 81–123.
7. *The Critical Response to Andy Warhol* presents a chronological selection of the most important examples of Warhol criticism from the 1960s through the 1990s.
8. See Kelly Cresap, 19, for a summary of critiques by Jameson, Baudrillard, Barthes, and Foucault.
9. See the essays included in *Pop Out*.
10. The single western study to address this aspect of Warhol is Raymond Herbenick’s book *Andy Warhol’s Religious and Ethnic Roots*, which, on often dubious grounds, traces all aspects of Warhol’s life and work to Rusyn *pysanky* (Easter egg decoration) and the sacred art he observed in church. A new book by Rudo Prekop and Michal Cihlár, *Andy Warhol a Československo*, focuses on connections between the Warhola family and Czechoslovakia. It contains numerous photographs from the archive of the Medzilaborce museum, copies of correspondence between Julia and her sister, as well as interviews with family members and cultural figures from the Czech and Slovak republics.
11. A colloquial term for Ukrainian.
12. I owe the term “ethnovandalism” to Richard Custer.

13. Bycko broke with the Rusyn Renaissance shortly thereafter, and subsequent development of Warhol's legacy in Slovakia was undertaken independently of the Rusyn Renaissance Society.

14. In this account, Andy also inaccurately identifies his hometown as McKeesport. The authorship of all Warhol's books has been challenged. According to Bob Colacello, of the fifteen chapters comprising *Philosophy*, nine were written wholly by Warhol's assistant Pat Hackett and four were written mostly by Colacello himself (*Holy Terror*; 308). Hackett more circumspectly indicates that she wrote three chapters based on eight interviews with Andy and six other chapters based on taped conversations between Andy and his colleagues (Warhol, *Diaries*, xv.) Researchers must approach all of Warhol's interviews and published statements with caution.

15. From late 1976 until his death in early 1987, Warhol telephoned his personal assistant Pat Hackett every morning and related to her the events of the previous day. Hackett transcribed twenty thousand pages of these conversations and distilled from them eight hundred pages of material that she considered "most representative" of Andy, which were published as *The Andy Warhol Diaries*.

16. Warhol's cousin Helena Bošničová has insisted that Andy secretly visited her in the nearby city of Prešov during the 1980s, but her statement has little credence. See "Bol Andy Warhol v Prešove?" and Von Smoltczyk.

17. The account below is taken primarily from Keselica, "The Warhol Story in Czechoslovakia," Bycko, *Nočné dialógy s Andym, Andy Warhol v kraji svojich rodičov*, and Prekop and Cihláš.

18. The costs and funding amounts are reported differently in various sources. With no access to official data, I can provide only what are the most commonly stated figures, although they vary widely. The first director of the museum, Alexander Franko, told one American reporter that the total cost for the museum amounted to \$1.6 million (Rocks). Further research into official records and the correspondence between the museum and the Warhol Foundation is necessary to fill out the story.

19. Also in March 1991, the newly constructed cultural center in Medzilaborce was the venue for the First World Congress of Rusyns.

20. In view of plans for the 1994 opening of the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, the foundation insisted that the museum in Medzilaborce carry a different name. In 1993, it became the Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art.

21. This grant was somewhat controversial in view of the financial difficulties faced by the new Warhol Foundation, but Archibald Gillies, president of the foundation, stated, "The whole business with Medzilaborce has been very good for Warhol and is a very modest little effort" (Cowan).

22. A similar recording of Julia's songs, stories, prayers, and liturgical chants is available at the Andy Warhol Museum: Resources and Legends: <http://edu.warhol.org/podcasts/julia.html>.

23. E.g., Humphreys, 467. This guidebook presents a full page on Rusyns and their history, accurately differentiating them and their language from the surrounding Slovaks and Ukrainians.
24. It won the 2001 German Film Critics Prize for Best Documentary Film and the Audience Prize at the 2001 Mannheim-Heidelberg Film Festival.
25. Four worn editions of *Heavenly Manna* were found in Warhol’s possession after his death. One was buried with him (Collins, 72, n. 20).
26. See also Daab, Danto, Dillenberger, Giles, Herbenick, Pincus-Witten, Stuckey.
27. Due to western influence, the American Greek Catholic icons of the 1930s and 1940s with which Warhol grew up both in church and at home showed a decline in the traditional art of icon painting. But in their greater realism, they are even more predictive of Warhol’s portrait style. My thanks to Tim Cuprisin for drawing my attention to this feature.
28. The silkscreen technique, in which the artist forces varying thicknesses of paint through a screen onto canvas, produces a series of images that are slightly different from one another. In his study of the theological implicatons of Warhol’s work, Chechot compares his screen prints to the “variation of composition without a change in essence,” which is characteristic of icons (77).
29. Details can be found in most biographies and books that deal with Warhol and his Factory friends. See especially Bockris, Colacello, and Stein.
30. Brut’s article, which is filled with errors, exaggerations, and fabricated quotations, was then excerpted and published online in Russian by Ivan Letsovyeh. This kind of journalistic duplicity, which is not uncommon in Ukraine and online, ensures that the most scandalous (and often untrue) facts about Warhol are widely distributed.
31. James Warhola objects to the description of Julia’s basement dwelling by Bockris as dark and damp (Bockris, 146). See J. Warhola, “Warhol’s Nephew.” In fact, from personal experience, I can say that in March 2011, the English-style basement apartment was very light and pleasant.
32. Note the errant apostrophe and the misspelling of “named.” See Williams for an interesting comparison of the two books.
33. Some family members question the accuracy of the information in the *Diaries*, saying that comments do not sound like Andy or that they contradict his expressed thoughts (Prekop and Cihlář, 88).
34. Warhol’s reaction to this interview indicates that he “poured out his heart” to the interviewer, but was dissatisfied with her interpretation. *Diaries*, 388–89.

35. The Rusyn writing on Warhol is very slipshod in terms of scholarly apparatus. Citations are completely lacking, quotations often seem to be invented, and translation is sometimes suspect. As in his statement for the 2011 Warhol exhibit in Bratislava, Bycko frequently repeats Rauschenberg's comment, "A good Warhol may not be a Warhol. A bad one can't exist" (McShine, 429). But in Bycko's translation it comes out, "Not every Warhol is a good Warhol, but a bad one can't exist" ("Nie každý Warhol je dobrý Warhol, ale zlý neexistuje"). (Výstava.)

36. Cresap continues, "Even if it didn't happen that way to Andrew, it happened to countless other queer boys (and girls) who also needed to test social limits among peers. This itself supplies a rationale for the story to be told" (80). One suspects that Rusyn commentators take the same approach in their creative interpretations of Warhol's actions and motivations.

37. Although Warhol stated that he painted Campbell's soup because he drank it every day as a child and his brothers have endorsed that statement, from my personal experience in a similar Rusyn immigrant and lower-class household, it seems likely that there may have also been a motivation among the younger generation to move away from "mom's home-made, old-world recipes" and to share "what real Americans eat."

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