

THE POLITICS OF ANTIHERO AESTHETICS: ANDY WARHOL'S THIRTEEN MOST WANTED MEN AT THE 1964 WORLD'S FAIR

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ABSTRACT

The current paper examines a series of portraits called *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* that the famous American Pop artist Andy Warhol created on the occasion of his participation in the World's Fair that took place in New York in 1964. The paper explores the economic-political context of the 1964 World's Fair and explains how and why Warhol's work got it to the façade of the New York State Pavilion designed by the prominent American architect Philip Johnson. The paper reveals the ambiguous nature of the antihero representation of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* and studies the contribution of one of Warhol's art dealers Ileana Sonnabend to the international circulation of these paintings in the aftermath of the 1964 World's Fair.

Keywords: mugshot, antihero, Pop Art, Andy Warhol, Leo Catelli, Ileana Sonnabend.

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1. THE PLACE OF A MUGSHOT IN AMERICAN CULTURAL POLITICS

On April 4, 2023, the day of non-stop news alerts offering minute-by-minute coverage of the former US President Donald Trump's arraignment, subscribers to Trump's mailing list received one more breaking alert: "NEW ITEM, MUGSHOT." The email sent to Trump's supporters advertised a plain white T-shirt featuring a white-and-black photo of the former president getting booked, with a fake chart behind him giving his height as 6 feet and 5 inches. Underneath this photo were the words "NOT GUILTY" and the trial date (styled as "04-04-23"). The Trump store promised to send fans the mugshot T-shirt for free, in return for a \$47 donation to his 2024 re-election campaign. In the end, the Manhattan criminal court decided not to photograph Trump at his arraignment as "there's no need for theatrics", so Trump's supporters went with a mock photo for sales, seeking to transform the spectacle of his arraignment "into a media circus" (Suebsaeng and Dickinson 2023, n.p.).

In fact, US police departments began taking photographs of suspects they arrested in the 1850s. They framed the white-and-black prints and hung them in rogues' galleries to entertain the public and inform about shady characters. In the 1880s, Alphonse

Bertillon, a French anthropologist who served as chief of France's Judicial Identification Services, developed what we know today as a standardized mugshot. He created the now familiar format of two tight shots of the suspect's head and upper body, one *en face* and the other in profile, accompanying it with additional information about the suspect's hair and eye color, scars, profession, family, address, arm span, foot length, and ear size. Bertillon called his mugshot a *portrait parlé*, or a speaking image that allowed the police to recognize a repeat offender even if he disguised his identity (Wexler 2023).

While being an official document, mugshots can also be considered as a work of art. They reflect "the power of the state to dictate and enforce the narrative of the criminal by deploying the tools of photographic representation against certain populations, largely the poor, dispossessed, migrant, indigenous, and racialized others" (Fleetwood 2020, 87). From the art theoretical perspective, mugshots are an intrinsic part of the so-called "carceral aesthetics" which stands for all "production of art under conditions of unfreedom" (Fleetwood 2020, 25). In this respect, mugshots can be considered as representations of carceral visibility whose primary function is to "maintain the category of the prisoner as a subject removed from civil society and one deserving of state-sanctioned punishment, confinement, and incapacitation" (Fleetwood 2020, 87–88). Indeed, photographs of imprisoned people largely shape society's perception of criminalized subjects and turn into visual stigmas that incarcerated people cannot escape. In addition, these images reflect "the punitive framings of the carceral state" (Fleetwood 2020, 88) and have a huge impact on how criminals get represented in mass media, scholarship, political discourse, and cultural productions.

Interestingly enough, mugshots entered the American art historical canon in the early twentieth century (Brilliant 1991). In 1923, Marcel Duchamp created his famous two-dimensional readymade *Wanted* that now belongs to the Louise Hellstrom Collection. Most recently, the silkscreen *Wanted* of a contemporary American artist Ester Hernandez entered the permanent collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. The current paper examines a series of portraits called *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* that the famous American Pop artist Andy Warhol created on the occasion of his participation in the World's Fair that took place in New York in 1964. The paper explores the economic-political context of the 1964 World's Fair and explains how and why Warhol's work got onto the façade of the New York State Pavilion designed by the prominent American architect Philip Johnson. The paper reveals the ambiguous nature of the antihero representation of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* and examines the subsequent international circulation of these paintings in the aftermath of the 1964 World's Fair.

2. THE ECONOMIC-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE 1964 WORLD'S FAIR

The 1964 World's Fair took place from April 22 to 18 October 28, 1964 and from April 21 to October 17, 1965 in Flushing Meadows Park in Queens, New York City. The Fair, whose

motto was “Peace through Understanding”, included over 140 pavilions for 25 nations, 24 US states, and over 45 corporations. It was classified by the BIE (Bureau International des Expositions), the intergovernmental organization responsible for overseeing and regulating World’s Fairs, as an unrecognized exposition. Actually, the Fair did not receive the status of an international exposition because of its non-compliance with BIE’s three regulations: it run for a period of more than six months, it charged rental fees from the exhibitors, and it was the second fair to be held in the US after the 1962 World’s Fair in Seattle within a ten-year period. Due to the non-recognition of the 1964 World’s Fair by the BIE, many BIE’s countries-members, including Canada, Australia, the majority of European countries, China, and the Soviet Union, withdrew their participation.¹ It is worth pointing out that despite its unofficial status, the 1964 World’s Fair still enjoyed high attendance numbers, with 24,148,000 visitors in 1964 and 24,459,000 visitors in 1965 (Kretschmer 1999, 302). One particular measure that stimulated the Fair’s high attendance was the advance sale of tickets. By 4 March 1964, the number of tickets sold had tripled the goals the organizers “had aimed at”, which per se was a “particularly remarkable achievement.”²

From an economic perspective, the 1964 New York World’s Fair was a unique moment in the history of World’s Fairs due to its huge private funding. In fact, as the BIE did not recognize the Fair, the U.S. government refused to finance the event from the federal budget. Instead, the main fundraiser for the Fair was the New York World’s Fair Corporation, a private entity financed by prominent American businessmen such as, among others, David Rockefeller from Chase Manhattan Corporation, George Moore from Citigroup, Frederic Brandt from American South African Gold Trust, and John Schiff from Kuhn, Loeb and Co. The responsibility of organizing the Fair lay in the hands of the Corporation’s president Robert Moses. The choice of Moses as the designer of the Fair was not fortuitous. In fact, he had a reputation as a person who had transformed the economy of New York City. His name was associated with the city reforms “remarkable by every measure: the number of public works completed; the speed of their execution; their geographical scope across five boroughs; their exceptional quality; and, most especially, their range” (Ballon and Jackson 2007, 65).

We can judge about Moses’s excellent organizational skills by reading the correspondence between him and Nathan Ostroff, Assistant General Counsel at the

¹ Kathy (Not Identified), Letter to Mr. Tupper, Undated, Record Group 40: General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1898–2000, Series: General Correspondence Relating to the New York World’s Fair, 1963–1965, The National Archives, College Park.

² Robert Hickok, Memorandum, 4 March 1964, Record Group 40: General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1898–2000, Series: General Correspondence Relating to the New York World’s Fair, 1963–1965, The National Archives, College Park.

Department of Commerce. On November 23, 1960, Ostroff wrote to Moses that he and his colleagues were highly impressed by the “state of readiness insofar as organization, construction plans, and site and other preparations are concerned.”³ Nevertheless, in the same letter, Ostroff raised concerns about Moses’s attitude to the BIE that did not agree to “change or waive certain of its substantive requirements in regard to Governmental guarantees and the spacing and scheduling of fair enterprises.”⁴ Ostroff was concerned that the New York World’s Fair Corporation did not respect many of BIE’s rules, which could potentially result in low foreign country participation rates in the Fair. In the response letter of 29 November 1960, Moses assured Ostroff that despite the conflict with the BIE and lack of federal support from the U.S. government, the Fair would be “a memorable international event.”⁵ He proudly claimed that “the scale of the proposed Federal Exhibit should be in proportion to that of the Fair and that its content be commensurate in the importance of with the industrial exhibits now in prospect”⁶.

Ostroff’s concerns about Moses’s disrespect of BIE’s regulations were not unjustified. Foreign participation in the 1964 World’s Fair was, indeed, much lower than originally expected. On July 6, 1961, the New York World’s Fair Corporation issued a list of 47 countries that “signified their intention” to participate in the Fair.⁷ The majority of European countries were not present on the list, which means that they were opposed to this fair from the very beginning under the influence of the BIE. The Soviet Union and China, on the contrary, had initial plans to participate in the Fair despite BIE’s disapproval. However, both countries canceled their participation for the sake of keeping good relations with the BIE. As a result, the 1964 World’s Fair attracted only limited foreign country participation. According to the official detailed map of the Fair, there were 35 nations coming to New York City⁸. By contrast, the 1962 World’s Fair in Seattle, attracted 50 countries,

³ Nathan Ostroff, Letter to Robert Moses, 23 Nov 1960, Record Group 40: General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1898–2000, Series: General Correspondence Relating to the New York World’s Fair, 1963–1965, The National Archives, College Park.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Robert Moses, Letter to Nathan Ostroff, 29 Nov 1960, Record Group 40: General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1898–2000, Series: General Correspondence Relating to the New York World’s Fair, 1963–1965, The National Archives, College Park.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Charles Poletti, List of Countries Which Have Signified Their Intention of Participating in the New York World’s Fair, 6 Jul 1961, Record Group 40: General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1898–2000, Series: General Correspondence Relating to the New York World’s Fair, 1963–1965, The National Archives, College Park.

⁸ The International Area of the Fair included the pavilions of: Africa, Austria, Belgium, Berlin, Caribbean, Central America, Denmark, Paris and French Industry, Greece, Guinea, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia,

whereas the 1939–1940 Fair in New York City attracted 55 countries (Kretschmer 1999, 300–301).

Although the U.S. government institutions were not directly involved in the organization of the 1964 New York World’s Fair, they still played a crucial role in its planning. The supervisory function was divided between three agencies—the Department of Commerce which ensured the participation of businesses in the Fair, the Department of State which was responsible for settling down the issue with foreign representation in the Fair, and the USIA (United States Information Agency) which was concerned with mediatizing the event at home and abroad.⁹ As Ostroff noticed in his report to the Secretary of Commerce on February 6, 1961, “Commerce, State, and USIA are the major agencies concerned because there are involved mainly economic, political, and propaganda considerations.”¹⁰

3. PHILIP JOHNSON AND THE QUEST TO BRING AMERICAN POP ART TO THE 1964 WORLD’S FAIR

Amid its dense economic-political context, the 1964 New York World’s Fair presented a rich palette of US and foreign art exhibits. Thus, the most popular non-U.S. artistic attraction at the Fair was the Vatican Pavilion, which displayed the original *Pieta* sculpture by Michelangelo for the first time in New York City. The U.S. National Pavilion, in turn, was entitled “Challenge to Greatness” and exhibited the artworks that echoed President Lyndon Johnson’s proposals for “The Great Society” program. In particular, the US exhibit featured a 15-minute ride through a filmed presentation of American history and paid tribute to the late President John F. Kennedy, who had broken ground for the pavilion in December 1962 but had been assassinated a year later in November 1963 before the fair’s opening.

Whereas the US National Pavilion attracted greater public attention as it represented the artistic achievements of the American nation hosting the event, the most novel, avant-garde trends of the 1960s American modern art were on display in the smaller New York State Pavilion of regional importance designed by the famous

Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Israel, Korea, Lebanon, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Philippines, Polynesia, Republic of China, Sierra Leone, Spain, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, United Arab Republic, Vatican City, Venezuela. For more information, see: New York World’s Fair Official Detailed Map, 1964–1965, Donald G. Larson Collection on International Expositions and Fairs, Special Collections Research Center, Henry Madden Library, California State University, Fresno.

⁹ To be more precise, USIA’s involvement in the Fair focused on three public diplomacy issues: harmonization of the activities of the New York World’s Fair Corporation, coverage of the Fair in the USIA-controlled media, and approval of the contents of the US National Pavilion.

¹⁰ Nathan Ostroff, Report to the Secretary of Commerce, 6 Feb 1961, Record Group 40: General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1898–2000, Series: General Correspondence Relating to the New York World’s Fair, 1963–1965, The National Archives, College Park.

American architect Philip Johnson. Although it was Governor Nelson Rockefeller who commissioned the Pavilion design from Johnson, the real person who suggested Johnson's participation in the Fair was Mrs. Wrightsman, wife of the oil magnate Charles Wrightsman. It was her "who, in the culture whirl of Manhattan, discovered Philip, succumbed to his charms, and commended him to her husband" (Schulze 1994, 303). Johnson's Pavilion, a rounded piece of the modernist architecture, consisted of three separate elements, each with its own purpose: the "Tent of Tomorrow" intended for the display of the Texaco highway map of the New York State made up of 567 mosaic terrazzo panels; three Observation Towers installed with the observation platforms, and Theaterama, a circular theater, now home to the Queens Theater. This third part of the Pavilion became the location where Johnson placed the exhibition of 1960s American modern painters. Johnson selected all artworks for his pavilion on his own. By imposing the role of a curator on himself, Johnson wanted to emphasize the link between architecture and fine arts and to demonstrate his personal artistic taste.

It is interesting that Johnson decided to display paintings not inside the pavilion, but on its outer "public" side. The official documents called Johnson's engagement with the art not an exhibition but an "exterior decoration" whose aim was to fill the space "on the exterior of the Circarama Building at the New York State Exhibit at the World's Fair."¹¹ Johnson's unconventional decision to place the fine arts exhibit beyond the walls raises the issue of an uneasy relationship between fine arts, architecture, and the public sphere in general (Johnson 1979, 143–49). The very notion of the public sphere is contradictory. It consists of two quite different Latin words: "populous" (the people) and "pubes" (adult men). According to cultural theorist W.J.T. Mitchell, the term "public sphere" should be written with the "l" in parentheses "to remind us that for much of human history political and social authority has derived from a 'pubic' sphere, not a public one" (Mitchell 1992, 36). By placing the fine arts exhibit on the outer side of the New York State Pavilion, Johnson showcased that displaying art in public spaces could be considered as one of the contemporary forms of socio-cultural outreach. For him, public spaces seemed to be essential to the construction of socio-cultural identity, whereas art embedded into such public spaces played the vital role of an interface capable of "overcoming boundaries between outdoor and indoor exhibition space" (Lorente 2019, 188).

In total, Johnson selected eleven American artists to be displayed in his pavilion, namely, Peter Agostini, John Chamberlain, Robert Indiana, Ellsworth Kelly, Roy Lichtenstein, Alexander Liberman, Robert Mallery, Claes Oldenburg, Robert Rauschenberg,

¹¹ New York State Exhibit, New York World's Fair 1964–1965, Amendments to State Architect's Standard Specifications, Section 41: Exterior Decoration, 26 Dec 1962, Record Group 40: General Records of the Department of Commerce, 1898–2000, Series: General Correspondence Relating to the New York World's Fair, 1963–1965, The National Archives, College Park.

James Rosenquist, and Andy Warhol. The architect selected the young American Pop artists of the 1960s because he liked the idea of their conscious rejection of the artistic values of the well-established Abstract Expressionist painting that over the courses of the 1950s became associated with a “style with postwar themes such as existentialism, alienation, individuality, freedom, and universality” (Polcari 1991, xviii). Indeed, American Pop Art was rather radical in its nature because it challenged the aesthetics of ‘highbrow’ art in terms of “connotations of rarity and hierarchical excellence” (Crow 2014, viii). It was originally associated with the vernacular connoisseurship typical of folkloric genealogy. Under the influence of art critic Lawrence Alloway, who actually coined the term “Pop Art” in his famous article “The Arts and Mass Media” published in *Architectural Record* in February 1958, Pop Art became associated with “the mass-produced artifacts of daily life, no matter what their intrinsic aesthetic significance, might be transfigured on canvas and celebrated in galleries” (Crow 2014, viii).

The 1964 World’s Fair was the only time when Johnson used “the works of the Pop School in planned association with his architecture” (Russell-Hitchcock 1966, 24). In this respect, the New York Fair was a unique case when Johnson’s architectural genius came along with the achievements of American Pop artists. We tend to think that Johnson’s fine arts taste was shaped under the influence of his lifetime partner David Whitney who was a New York art critic, dealer, collector, and curator. In terms of art preferences, Whitney was a great proponent of American Pop Art. He understood Pop artists’ creative minds and appreciated their artistic expression, which contrasted a lot with the ideals of Abstract Expressionist painters (Guilbaut 1983). According to Whitney, through his professional engagements at the Green Gallery and later the Leo Castelli Gallery, he “became close to these people who are now all gods. But they weren’t then” (The Glass House, n.d.). As Johnson would later recognize, it was through Whitney that he became acquainted with artists. He once noticed in an interview with another famous American architect Robert Stern: “... I never talked much to artists. They don’t talk much. The better the artist, the less they are able to verbalize. So I prefer critics” (Johnson 2008, 171).

4. THE AMBIGUITY OF ANTIHERO REPRESENTATION: ANDY WARHOL’S *THIRTEEN MOST WANTED MEN* ON THE FAÇADE OF THE NEW YORK STATE PAVILION

Andy Warhol was among ten¹² American artists exhibited in the New York State Pavilion at the 1964 World’s Fair¹³. Johnson approached Andy Warhol about his potential participation in the Fair in early 1962. The architect asked the artist to create some pieces of public art, especially for this event. Warhol agreed but was not sure about the topic of his

¹² Claes Oldenburg withdrew his participation from the Fair.

¹³ The photos of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* are available for consultation on *Warholstars.org* website. Web: <https://www.warholstars.org/most-wanted-men-andy-warhol.html> (Accessed March 22, 2023).

mural until the end of April 1963. According to poet John Giorno, it was painter Wynn Chamberlain who suggested the subject of the most wanted men to Warhol (Giorno 1994, 127–28). In the article published in the *Journal-American* on 15 April 1964, Warhol described his creating the mural for the 1964 World’s Fair in the following terms:

I was first contacted by Mr. Johnson about six months ago. The whole thing cost about 4000. That’s all they gave me to do it. It took one day. I got the pictures from a book the police put out. It’s called ‘The 13 Most Wanted Men.’ It just had something to do with New York, and I was paid to have it silkscreened. I didn’t make any money on it. (Frei and Printz 2004, 25)

This quote suggests that Warhol was not passionate about Johnson’s commission. It was not his first-hand priority at that moment. Indeed, at the time of working on the mural, the artist was simultaneously producing an enormous quantity of box sculptures (*Brillo Boxes* being the most famous of them) for his second one-man show in the New York-based Stable Gallery, which opened on April 21, 1964, just one day before the opening of the Fair. Lacking time and feeling pressure from several projects running in parallel, Warhol reproduced 22 images of thirteen criminals¹⁴ exactly as they appeared in the New York Police Department Bulletin of February 1, 1962 given to him by Chamberlain. The overall size of the mural *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* silkscreened with ink on Masonite reached 20x20 feet. Opposing Warhol’s serial reproduction technique, Johnson decided to put together the 22 images of thirteen criminals in a different order and arrangement. In particular, he suggested moving the full-face views of the criminals to the left and their profiles to the right (with the exception of the 13th criminal), leaving three panels at the bottom right of the mural completely blank. Warhol did not like Johnson’s modification of his artwork, that’s why the final images placement was partially ordered and partially random. On 18 April 1964, the *Journal-American* wrote that the artist “did not feel his work achieved the effect he had in mind, and asked that it be removed so he could replace it with another painting” (Frei and Printz 2004, 25).

Despite Warhol’s objections, Johnson placed *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* on the façade of the New York State pavilion. The subject matter of Warhol’s artwork was quite a radical artistic choice for such a high-profile international event as the World’s Fair. With his mugshots, Warhol reconsidered the aesthetics of crime and the place of the outlaw in contemporary art. Officially, the Fair’s main theme was the Space Age, the celebration of technological innovation and a man’s achievements “on a shrinking globe in an expanding universe, his inventions, discoveries, art, skills, and aspirations” (Rosenblum 1989,

¹⁴ John M. (most wanted man no. 1), John Victor G. (most wanted man no. 2), Ellis Ruiz B. (most wanted man no. 3), Redmond C. (most wanted man no. 4), Arthur Alvin M. (most wanted man no. 5), Tomas Francis C. (most wanted man no. 6), Salvatore V. (most wanted man no. 7), Andrew F. (most wanted man no. 8), John S. (most wanted man no. 9), Louis Joseph M. (most wanted man no. 10), John Joseph H., Jr. (most wanted man no. 11), Frank B. (most wanted man no. 12), Joseph F (most wanted man no. 13).

57). In such a context devoted to the achievements of tomorrow, the figures of the most wanted men, far from celebrating the promise of America's future, stood as "a darkly sardonic commentary on its past" (Meyer 2002, 136).

On the most fundamental levels of the form (grainy black-and-white photographs) and content (criminal faces), Warhol's mural "offered a harsh counterpoint to the full-color displays and 'futuramas' on offer throughout the Fair" (Meyer 2002, 134). It implied that even a deviant form of American achievement could be embedded into the realm of beauty and taste and consequently become an aesthetic object. In art historian Sidra Stich's words, "America had long exalted the fictional heroism of the gun-toting cowboy, the golden-hearted outlaw, and the avenging superman, but during the post-war period crime and violence became a pervasive component of everyday urban life" (1987, 176). Indeed, in 1955 one crime was committed every fifteen seconds, whereas by 1966 the crime rate rose five times faster than the US population rate (Stich 1987, 176). By portraying criminals (the most wanted men as defined by the police) as iconic antiheroes (the least wanted men as defined by society), Warhol enunciated America's position as an international seat of crime and violence and established a particular link in the criminal-celebrity bond. For Warhol, criminals on the most-wanted list represented a "perverse fulfillment of the American dream": successful at their chosen "profession," often rich and sometimes famous, they took "full advantage of America's opportunities and resources", while enjoying secret admiration on the part of the U.S. media that effectively rewarded criminal masterminds by "paying so much attention to them" in news coverage, crime novels and films (Stich 1987, 177).

Furthermore, *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* encoded a hidden message of gay identity (Silver 1992) and "infamously blurred the line between erotic and juridical enthusiasm" (Grudin 2022, 83). It is not a coincidence that Warhol shot a silent film *Thirteen Most Beautiful Boys* a few months after completing the mural. For him, while Pop Art "was, among other things, a tactic for surviving in a homophobic world" (Flatley 1996, 102), the selected thirteen criminals revealed the second homoerotic sense: they conveyed the idea that "the prohibition of homosexuality may imbue same-sex desire with all the gritty allure of a mug shot" (Meyer 2002, 140). Indeed, the subtle link between criminality and homoeroticism implied the double entendre (Sichel 2020) of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*: it was not only that these men were sought after by the police but that the very act of wanting men may constitute a form of criminality if the "wanter" was also male, let's say Warhol himself (Hermann 2020).

Besides depicting men "as objects of both official surveillance and illicit desire" (Meyer 2002, 137), *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* also raised the issue of crime in the art world broadly speaking. Since World War II, art crime has evolved from being an almost unknown type of criminal activity into one of the world's biggest illicit industries (Tompkins 2016). Today, art crime potentially takes four forms: vandalism, forgery, theft, and

antiquities looting. The art trade is the largest victim of art crime. If in the past, art crime was associated with “a crime of passion”, today it is seen as “a cold business” (Charney 2009, 107). Moreover, art crime sponsors and gets sponsored by other criminal enterprises that range from drugs and arms trade to terrorism. Warhol’s *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* remind us of the fact that art, like all other domains of social activity, is not free from crime. According to recent statistics, around 10% of works in museums are fakes (Charney 2017), whereas more than 52,000 works are declared as stolen in Interpol’s Stolen Works of Art Database.

It is curious that *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* were covered with aluminum house paint within a few days of its installation on the exterior façade of the Pavilion’s Theaterama one week before the grand opening of the Fair, thereby hiding it behind a monochrome layer of silver. Warhol recalled:

The World’s Fair was out in Flushing Meadow that summer with my mural of the Ten [*sic*] Most Wanted Men on the outside of the building that Philip Johnson designed. Philip gave me the assignment, but because of some political thing I never understood, the officials had it whitewashed out. A bunch of us went out to Flushing Meadow to have a look at it, but by the time we got there, you could only see the images faintly coming through the paint they’d just put over them. In one way I was glad the mural was gone: now I wouldn’t have to feel responsible if one of the criminals ever got turned in to the FBI because someone had recognized him from my pictures. So then I did a picture of Robert Moses instead, who was running the fair—a few dozen four-foot squares of Masonite panels—but that got rejected, too. But since I had the Ten [*sic*] Most Wanted screens already made up, I decided to go ahead and do paintings of them anyway. [...] The thing I most of all remember about the World’s Fair was sitting in a car with the sound coming from speakers behind me. As I sat there hearing the words rush past me from behind, I got the same sensation I always got when I gave an interview—that the words weren’t coming out of me, that they were coming from someplace else, someplace behind me. (Warhol and Hackett 1980)

Indeed, it was Governor Nelson Rockefeller who insisted on the mural’s temporary removal due to legalistic difficulties. Whereas some criminals depicted had already received a fair trial and their mugshots from the search warrant could no longer be publicly displayed anymore, seven of the thirteen criminals depicted were of Italian origin and Governor Rockefeller needed the Italian vote for his electoral campaign (Harris 2014, 14). Forced to change the subject matter of his mural composition, Warhol suggested covering the mugshot depictions with twenty-five identical silkscreen portraits of Robert Moses, the president of the 1964 World’s Fair. However, as the above-presented quote suggests, “the subversive humor of Warhol’s reversal of representational hierarchies” (Buchloh 2001, 29) was not given momentum either. Commenting on his decision to reject Warhol’s portraits of Robert Moses for display on the façade of his pavilion, Philip Johnson admitted:

And then he proposed to show a portrait of Robert Moses instead of the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*? Yes, that's right... since he was the boss of the World Fair, but I prohibited that... Andy and I had a quarrel at that time, even though he is one of my favorite artists. (Crone 1970, 30)

Warhol's work was restored only several months after the start of the Fair. For the opening ceremony, however, the mural was silenced into "abstract monochromy" (Buchloh 2001, 29), thus evoking the ambiguous nature of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* as a "mass subject" represented through a compromise between "iconic celebrity and abstract anonymity", or through the "figure of *notoriety*" (Foster 2001, 80). Indeed, each of the most wanted men pictured in the mural "was a kind of low-level star, one whose image was reproduced across the nation, albeit in post offices and police stations rather than films and fan magazines" (Meyer 2002, 136). Moreover, the notoriety of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* was "not so different from the notoriety of Warhol", as the artist "not only incarnated the mass subject as witness", but also "instantiated the mass object as icon" (Foster 2001, 80). Such a double pictorial status allowed both the artist and his work to keep an in-between position "between the iconicity of celebrity and the abstraction of anonymity" (Foster 2001, 80).

5. THE AFTERLIFE OF *THIRTEEN MOST WANTED MEN*

Contrary to the generally positive reception of the Fair, *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* got rather negative coverage in the local New York press without getting significant attention from the foreign mass media. As Warhol noticed in the interview given to the *Journal-American* on April 15, 1965, his mural was something that dissented from the "programmatic display of cultural progress and social perfectibility offered by the World's Fair" (Frei and Printz 2004, 26). To mitigate the nationwide embarrassment of Warhol's mural, the New York media outlets tried to avoid mentioning Warhol's contribution to the Fair. Those few who touched upon *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* were very concise in their reporting and restrained in their opinions. Instead of talking about the significance of the subject matter of Warhol's mural for the Fair, the press, in turn, concentrated exclusively on the problem of the mural's provisional suppression.

Summarizing the media coverage of the temporary demolition of Warhol's mural at the beginning of the Fair, art historian Richard Meyer noticed that "apart from a brief mention of the voided mural in the *New York Times* some three months later, there was no other press coverage of this episode" (Meyer 2002, 130). Such modest public reception of Warhol's mural demonstrates, on the one hand, the absence of a censored subject of the most wanted men back in the 1960s public discourse and, on the other hand, the reluctance of the American press to freely talk about this subject and pass judgments about it. As Philip Johnson would later admit in the interview given to the German art historian Reiner Crone: "Most of these 'Thirteen Wanted' were Mafiosi. And the other thing was that they'd already been exonerated—it was an old list, and a lot of them had been proven

not guilty. And to label them, we would have been subject to lawsuits from here to the end of the world” (Crone 1970, 30). Johnson’s testimony explains very well why Warhol’s mural was not well covered in the press and was destroyed right after the end of the Fair.

Despite the mural’s demolition after the Fair, Warhol decided to create separate portraits of each of the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*. As the artist admitted himself, “since I had the Ten [*sic*] Most Wanted screen already made up, I decided to go ahead and do paintings of them anyway” (Warhol and Hackett 1980). Actually, portraits, as an artistic genre, represented an ideal opportunity for Warhol to “find yet another way to satisfy his compulsion to document the world around him (and get paid for it too!)” (Geldzahler and Rosenblum 1993, 33) In total, in April–July 1964 Warhol created twenty-two portraits of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, all of which entered the Leo Castelli Gallery registry in late September 1964 upon the artist’s joining the gallery. For Warhol, Castelli’s endorsement was of paramount importance. He admitted: “No matter how good you are, if you’re not promoted right, you won’t be one of those remembered names. But there was more than that involved in why I wanted Castelli to take me on; it wasn’t only the business side of it. I was like a college kid wanting to get into a certain fraternity or a musician wanting to get on the same record label as his idol” (Warhol and Hackett 1980, n.p.).

Whereas Warhol’s joining the Leo Castelli Gallery was a life-changing moment in Warhol’s artistic career, a crucial role in the further dissemination of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* should be attributed to Warhol’s other art dealer Ileana Sonnabend, who exhibited a whole series of twenty-two *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* in her Parisian gallery at 12 rue Mazarine in 1967.¹⁵ The catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition reproduced the original New York City police department bulletin on which the series was based, with the texts printed in English with translation into French. Interestingly, the last names of all most wanted men were blacked out and the crimes committed by the infamous cast of thirteen were cited only in French. In addition, the catalogue opened with the extraordinarily eloquent introduction written by French critic Otto Hahn. Wittingly starting with Robert Delaunay’s incisive phrase “Photography is a criminal art,” Hahn’s text credited Warhol with “making silence and solitude concrete in his compelling black-and-white masks” (Richardson and Richardson 2009, 32). Speaking about the uneasy subject matter of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men*, Hahn wrote:

Warhol simply decides to be clear. He selects the lens of the microscope and the most appropriate process to distort the weft of reality Truth cannot escape. Everything is there, in front of you; nothing but stains, holes, the void: the debris of reality. ... Far from simply being portraits of bad boys and criminals, the “Thirteen Most Wanted Men” speak of usury, of degradation, and of the funny way we have of playing with illusion. With the utmost coldness

¹⁵ The catalogue of the exhibition is undated, but contemporary art critics tend to place it between February and May 1967.

and austerity, and without comment, Andy Warhol speaks of the beauty of the world, and of its failure in black and white. (Richardson and Richardson 2009).

In Sonnabend's words, "*The Most Wanted Men* was a tough exhibit and not a single piece was sold. The sales are beginning to come in now however, and I'm in the process of selling two in Belgium and six more in Germany but have not yet been paid. This should come to \$7200."¹⁶ The French press likewise expressed mixed feelings about the 1967 *Andy Warhol* show at La Galerie Sonnabend. For instance, François Pluchart called Warhol in the May 22, 1967 issue of *Combat: Le Journal de Paris* "the revolutionary who instigated the plot against spontaneous emotion, soul reaching, and all the already academized alibis of gestural painting" (Richardson and Richardson 2009). In contrast, Henry Chapier, another journalist of *Combat: Le Journal de Paris*, wrote on May 20, 1967 that the separation of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* from the context of the New York World's Fair explained "the bemusement of the Galerie Sonnabend visitors, who were taken by surprise" (Richardson and Richardson 2009, n.p.). For Chapier, the 1967 *Andy Warhol* show was "a new source of misunderstandings and embarrassment" for the French public and "a new episode in the cold war" that "seethed between New York and Paris since Rauschenberg's consecration at the Venice Biennale" (Richardson and Richardson 2009, n.p.).

Despite mediocre financial success and ambiguous public reception in France, the *Andy Warhol: The Thirteen Most Wanted* show traveled to Galerie Rudolf Zwirner in Cologne, where it was on view in September–October 1967, and to Rowan Gallery in London, in March 1968. Europeans were curious about the "democratic aesthetics" (Sim 2023, 51) of Warhol's artwork because, contrary to the "introspective, abstract modes that dominated the art of the 1950s", Pop Art was "expansive, inclusive, and outward-looking" (Weitman 1999, 9). In addition, Europeans' interest in Warhol's artwork coincided with the dissemination of Pop Art "from founding hubs in New York and London to other parts of the world" (Morgan 2015, 15). In fact, from its inception, Pop Art was "transient, transferable from one location to another, and accessible to a new class of viewers" (Alexander 2015, 78). During the 1960s, many regional Pop movements emerged simultaneously, and "often imbued with an ambivalence, of not outright hostility, to the notion of American economic (and implicitly artistic) dominance" (Morgan 2015, 15). Developing in parallel with American Pop Art, European Pop Art was by itself "no art-immanent, formal and linear evolution" representing "the reaction of a young European generation of artists to the altered pictorial ecosystem of European life and culture, rather than a reaction to an American Pop Art whose influence became apparent from 1964 onwards" (Bezzola 2018, 112). While both employing commonplace mediated imagery, American and European Pop artists reflected upon different socio-cultural subject matters. Whereas burgeoning consumer culture "elicited a more ardent response from American Pop artists", "the

¹⁶ Ileana Sonnabend, Letter to Andy Warhol, 15 Nov 1967, The Andy Warhol Museum Archives, Pittsburgh.

turbulent politics of the period” was more often mirrored in the work of their European counterparts (Weitman 1999, 9).

All in all, first exhibited on the occasion of the 1964 New York World’s Fair, *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* are currently “scattered around the world, in collections and museums” (Scherman and Dalton 2009, 223). In the context of the 1964 World’s Fair, the participation in which “was conditional on the political and commercial concerns of the organizers” and whose “real business” was the “economic status of the white middle class” and not the “racial and class conflicts” that were “coming to the surface in the America of the early ‘60s” (Berger 1989), *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* can be regarded as Warhol’s response to the then-contemporary sociocultural and political discourses forming “an integral part of the rebellion of the 1960s counterculture” (Simmons 2008, 147). In the words of art historian Reva Wolf, “the mug shots of wanted men operated as stand-ins for the national heroes that we would expect to find in such a venue. Thus, they served to subvert—and to invert—the idea of the hero” (Wolf 1997, 114). In this respect, the “potent symbolic power” (Simmons 2008, 18) of *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* as antihero characters showcased both Warhol’s critical reaction to the U.S. established national heroic ideas and Warhol’s support of societal upheaval and changing cultural status quos of the era.

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