

*I REMEMBER HEAVEN:
JIM HODGES AND ANDY WARHOL*

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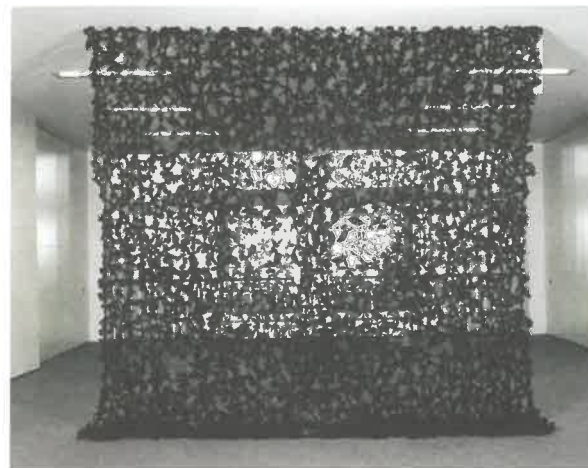
I Remember Heaven: Jim Hodges and Andy Warhol

Countless artists could be paired with Andy Warhol to interesting effect since he was undoubtedly one of the most influential artists of the late twentieth century. Warhol's use of found images spawned a generation of "appropriation artists." His fascination with fame and glamour resonates in today's art to an even greater degree than it did during his own lifetime. His unabashed embrace of entrepreneurship is now commonplace, as is his diaristic, "reality-based" approach to art and filmmaking. The reverberations of his work are so immense that it's difficult to think of an artist who hasn't been inspired by Andy Warhol. So why mount an exhibition of work by Warhol and Jim Hodges?

On the surface it may seem that Warhol and Hodges are polar opposites. Warhol is popularly portrayed as the ultimate cynic, a charlatan or hustler, who "played" the art world for fame and fortune. His most celebrated works from the 1960s have been described as "superficial" and "detached," though art historians differ over whether this superficiality was intended as a critique of commodity culture, an act of complicity, or—in a stroke of modern marketing genius—both. By contrast, in an era when lots of good art is harsh, offensive, or difficult to decipher, Hodges's work can seem almost too likeable, openly tender and emotionally charged. *I Remember Heaven: Jim Hodges and Andy Warhol* reconsiders these characterizations of both artists through a series of carefully choreographed installations that juxtapose their works. One aim of this exhibition is to evoke the side of Warhol that loved beauty and found it everywhere, in the bodies of beautiful boys and the silvery surfaces of the Factory's space-age décor; who made art that embodied empathy and emotion, particularly in his portraits of Jackie Kennedy made immediately following John F. Kennedy's assassination; and who exposed himself in the self-portraits he made throughout his life, despite the fact that he did not think of himself as particularly attractive. In essence, this exhibition presents Warhol as an artist who revealed his vulnerabilities and subjectivity in his work.

At the same time, the show seeks to amplify interpretations of Jim Hodges's work beyond that of personal expressions of longing and loss. Much of the writing about Hodges's work focuses on his transformation of ordinary materials into objects of melancholy and reverential beauty. The pieces that first brought Hodges critical acclaim in the early 1990s—flowers drawn with ballpoint ink on paper napkins, delicate curtains made of silk flowers sewn together one petal at a time, ephemeral spider webs made of thin metal chains—are indeed beautiful. But beauty and loss are not the only strains that run through Hodges's work. He also embraces cheap means of adornment. The petals in his curtain pieces come from disassembled fake flowers. Ironically, art collectors who would never be caught dead decorating their homes with such arrangements proudly display their treasured Hodges flower curtains. His art is sexy. How else to describe the work of an artist who renders a knot in a piece of wood as if it were a corporeal site of erotic pleasure? His works are visceral. Sometimes he licks the paper on which he draws, as if it were a surrogate lover or he were a mother licking her baby cub. His works can also be clumsy, harsh, and gritty. His art is beautiful and insolent, melancholy and humorous, seductive in its form, but often "hands off" in technique. Hodges is part of a generation of artists who matured in the 1980s and were indelibly affected by the unrelenting AIDS crisis, the ascendance of identity politics, and the Culture Wars. Certainly his works are poignant and beautiful, the expressions of an unapologetic romantic. But his art is also the product of a disciplined practice that mobilizes images and forms that come full of intrinsic meanings and are dense in historical and cultural references.

The dialogue between Hodges's and Warhol's works shows many shared motifs and materials—flowers, camouflage patterns, silvery surfaces, references to death. These resemblances are only part of the picture. On a deeper level this cross-generational study looks at the artists' works within a continuum of art production that finds history in everyday artifacts and uses aesthetic representation as a means to understand visibility/invisibility, sexuality, selfhood, love, and death. This exhibition aims to create a context in which Warhol's work may be read retrospectively through the work of Hodges, and Hodges's through the work of Warhol. The title of the exhibition, *I Remember Heaven*, is borrowed from a work by Jim Hodges and is used in this context to evoke



Jim Hodges, *The End From Where You Are*, 1998, silk, cotton, polyester, and thread, 192 x 192 inches. Collection Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, Restricted gift in memory of John S. Baran with additional restricted support from the Meta S. Ronald Berger Family Foundation.



Andy Warhol, *Jackie*, 1964, acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, 20 x 16 inches. The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding Collection, Contribution The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. © 2006 Andy Warhol Foundation for the Arts/ ARS, New York.

the importance of both memory and imagination. The phrase embodies nostalgia and conviction; past, present, and future.

Two-person exhibitions typically chronicle the relationship between artists who lived and worked contemporaneously, or who influenced or rivaled each other. No such relationship existed between Warhol and Hodges. Hodges finished graduate school in 1986 and his start as a professional artist overlapped with the last year of Warhol's life. At the time Warhol died, on February 22, 1987, Hodges had recently completed his MFA at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, New York, moved to Manhattan, and set up a studio at the Dannheisser Foundation in Tribeca. The artists never crossed paths, but they once came close. Hodges's studio was next door to Warhol's printer. One day Hodges spotted a printer's proof of a camouflage silkscreen print in the garbage. He fished it out, brought it to his studio, and used it to create a work of his own.

I take this story of finding an artwork and placing it in a new context as a guiding principle of this exhibition. Two factors give me confidence in this undertaking. The first is the sheer quantity and breadth of interpretations of Warhol's work. With each passing season more Warhol books, exhibitions, and articles reinterpret his art to the point that one wonders if there is anything left to say. Such a condition is ideal for curatorial creativity. To their credit, the official guardians of Warhol's legacy, particularly the Andy Warhol Museum, which has lent works for this exhibition, have encouraged reinterpretations of Warhol's work, rather than attempting to ossify it. The second thing that emboldens me is Jim Hodges's openness to expansive readings of his work. Hodges's willingness to allow me to see his work through the lens of Warhol's art is a testimony to the sincerity of his claim that, ultimately, the subject of his work is the viewer. Both artists embrace creative play, experimentation, and collaboration. I invite you to join us in this spirit of playful experimentation.

Susan E. Cahan
Guest Curator

Jim Hodges was born in 1957 and raised in Spokane, Washington. While growing up in the Pacific Northwest, Hodges developed an abiding love of landscape and natural forms, which subsequently emerged in his art as metaphors for important aspects of human existence. Hodges moved to New York to attend Pratt Institute and received his MFA in 1986. Since the early 1990s, his work has appeared in solo and group exhibitions all over the world, including the Centro Galego de Arte Contemporánea in Santiago de Compostela, Spain (2005), the Hayward Gallery in London (2005), and the São Paulo Bienal (1997). His works are in the collections of The Art Institute of Chicago; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Pompidou Centre, Paris; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; and The Whitney Museum of American Art.

Andy Warhol, who first made the claim, "In the future, everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes," is a household name, his own fame enduring for more than 40 years. Warhol was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1928 and graduated from Carnegie Institute of Technology in 1949. He immediately moved to New York City where he lived for the rest of his life. Throughout the 1950s he was a highly successful illustrator. In the early 1960s he made his first Pop paintings and sculptures, including the Campbell's Soup series, Flowers series, Brillo Boxes, Celebrity portraits, and Jackie series. One of the most prolific artists of the twentieth century, he was also a filmmaker, impresario, publisher, and socialite. He died in 1987 due to complications following surgery.

I Remember Heaven: Jim Hodges and Andy Warhol is organized by the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis and guest curated by Susan E. Cahan.

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cover image: Jim Hodges, *Movements (Stage I)*, 2005, Mirror on canvas, 96 x 66 inches.
Collection of Danielle and David Ganek.

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