



Claims Department



The 1960s were defined by a series of contrasting concepts mashed together, forced to co-exist. Order and Chaos, Tradition and Innovation, Calm and Fury, Freedom and Oppression.

You know, like every other decade...

But to me, the 1960s are best represented by the images portrayed by the POP artists. Whether it's Warhol, Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, Hamilton, or Marisol, the imagery of the POP artists of the 1960s are always what comes to mind when I think of the decade before my birth. The imagery of POP is so perfect at evoking such a challenging time in American history.

And now, I write about it.

I've talked about POP, and Abstract Expressionism, before, and here I'll go into some depth. Why are the Women of Abstract Expressionism giving so much press these days and the not the Women of POP? Who are the artists we overlook by starring so long at Warhol and his crew? What do the images pulled from JJ popular culture mean when put into a gallery setting? Why is Warhol so expensive when Drexler is not? And what qualifies as theft of image? These are things I'll be talking about.

So much more going on. We're going to Dublin for WorldCon! Journey Planet is nominated, and if you haven't looked at the Retro-Hugos list, you should. It's amazing. I'll be doing something about Cabin in the Sky, which is an amazing flick!

WRESTLING still happens, and there's WrestleMania 35 this weekend. I'm not watching live, but will get to see it over the following few days. I really hope I can get to see another one live sometime.

The Boys? Potty training is hard, they're getting wicked smart (we've made little conscious effort to teach JP to read, but he can do some very strong reading on his own!) and they're learning how to properly push our buttons.

I'm doing a lot more oral histories for work, which is fun as most of them are music based. I love computer music and it's been an absolute blast documenting the history. If you haven't listened to my new for 2019 podcast Engineers & Enthusiasts, you really should. The first three episodes are pretty dang strong and it's me doing something new.

OK, Here we go!

[Comments—](#)

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The Art in this issue is mostly done using the DeepDream concept. I am 100% certain that if DeepDream had been around in the 1960s, the POP artists of the day would have been totally into using it. I could see Warhol, the one who learned to love computers at the end of his life, just creating hundreds and hundreds of DeepDream images. It would be glorious!



The Women of POP

There is a thought that goes something like this – the women in Abstract Expressionism only got their due because of their husbands, while the women in POP Art never got recognised because all the big names were gay. That's perfect if you think about it.

It's also not true.

The name Marisol means a lot less today than it did in 1965. She was, at the time, one of the biggest names in POP Art. I've read that she was considered alongside Warhol and Lichtenstein and Wesselman, but her name meant less and less as time went by. I remember hearing about her in my Art Post-1945 class in college, but it was really a sort of passing mention. The MoMA had two of her pieces in the main room of POP art, along with Warhol, Wesselman, Rosenquist, Lichtenstein, and the like. The work *Portrait of Sidney Janis Selling Portrait of Sidney Janis* by Marisol is probably the most reflexive work I've ever seen.

Her work was also the only thing by a woman in the entire gallery.

While POP artists often used women as their subjects, think of Warhol and Gold Marilyn or Lichtenstein's *Girl with Ball*, both of which were hanging in the same room. There were no other women in the POP art gallery, and I didn't see any in the other POP room either. This was concerning, and after a while, I started to look into who the women of POP art were.

And I found them.

And they are spectacular.

In particular, Marisol made an incredibly bold statement with a work called *Love*. It was



a mouth deep-throating a Coke bottle. It could be a man, or it could be a woman. How many layers does that work on? All of them, I recon. It's a wonderful piece of sculpture that uses an actual Coke bottle. It's lovely., it's slightly dirty, and it's everything that POP should be—dealing with the commercial zeitgeist, and bringing a sense of non-dignity to things.

Her entire catalog is amazing!

The stuff at MoMA is her best-known, but it's far from her only great work. Her sculptures and use of found materials at times makes her the Nevelson of POP to my eyes.

Let's look into some of the real stars of POP art who don't get nearly enough credit or attention.

Rosalyn Drexler

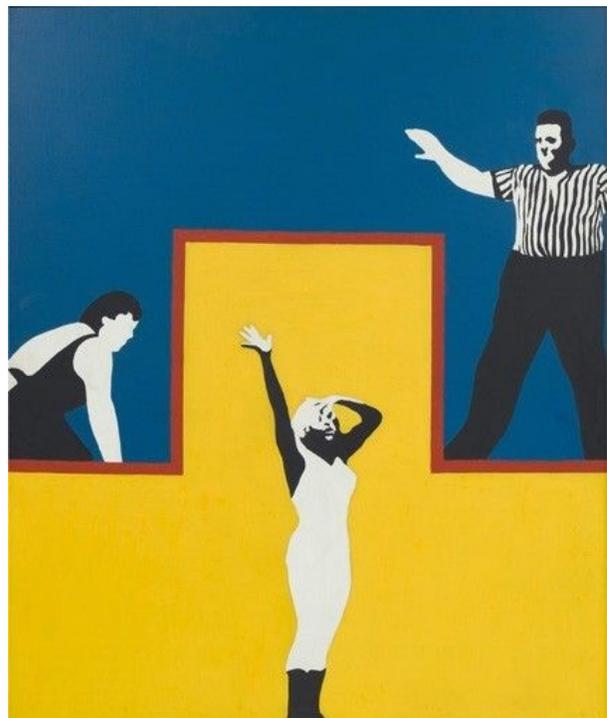
Yes, I am starting with her partly because she was a pro wrestler. There is nothing more POP art than wrestling. Warhol, Lichtenstein, Rauschenberg, all wrestling fans! Drexler was a wrestler who toured with The Fabulous Moolah's troop in the 50s.

Wrestling permeates her work, not only her paintings, but her novels and plays. She's one of the most widely varied art practitioners I know of.

The piece *The Winner* is amazing, as it depicts two women wrestlers, one of them with her hand being raised in victor, with a ref looking on. There's an amazing graphical sensation to the piece, and there's more than a little colorfield feel to it. There is no generalized context, and very little detail, but that plays so well. The strength of the piece may be in the overwhelming sensation of the color of the background as opposed to the simplicity of the characters in the tableau.

Her other work, even the ones that don't reference wrestling, play with many of the themes that Warhol and the like played with. Celebrity is a strong theme, and the amazing 1963 work *Marilyn Pursued by Death* is an incredible work that seems to call out the role of our participation in her death by refusing to give her a private life. *Lovers* is one work that feels as if she's playing with an infinite amount of space to give a pair of lovers the sort of open range needed for romance to land. *Me and My Shadow* is almost certainly one of the influences on the design of the opening sequence of *Mad Men*. Sparse, graphically-intense in black and white on an orange background.

Drexler was an incredible artist... well, IS an incredible artist! While her best known works were done in the 1960s, she is still alive, still writing, and still an American treasure.



Evelyne Axell

While the POP movement was largely a phenomena of the 1960s (after coming to note in the late 1950s), the POP works of the 1970s actually worked with more interesting concepts. Pop of the 1970s tended to incorporate more elements of Minimalism, and seemed to push work towards a less popular culture-driven form. One of the artists who led the charge into the 1970s was Evelyne Axell. Her work of the 1960s was fascinating because it was directly dealing with Female Sexuality. The 1966 work Valentine is a magnificent work that portrays so much vaginality that Georgia O'Keefe might have been jealous. Her 1969 work Kiss Me, a work of enamel on plexi that somehow calls to mind the work of Helen Frankenthaler and Morris Louis, shows two women in the split-second prior to the contact of a kiss. Ice Cream from 1964 is a wonderful double-take. It 100% looks like a stylized still of a blow-job scene from an 8mm loop, but it presents what should be the sexual target of her tongue as an incredibly phallic ice cream cone. It's striking work, and along with Marisol's Love, and perhaps the Popsicle Twins performance from the Gong Show, it explores the idea of sexuality being laid upon everyday activities.

BY the early 1970s, she was working in a mode that incorporated more natural themes. While working with female sexuality in POP was unheard of, I will claim because POP was a movement that was

driven by gay men, her works with nature themes were so strong, in part because the works are looking more deeply at the traditions of landscape and nature painting. The best example is La chute d'eau (The Water Fall) is one of the most thrilling works of cool blue I've ever seen. It works with shadows in various blues, and there are peeks of yellow, green, and orange.

Sadly, though her work seemed to be maturing into new directions that would re-define POP for the 1970s, but she died in 1972.



Idelle Weber

Remember when I said Rosalyn Drexler was an influence on the opening of Mad Men? Well, she's probably a secondary influence to Idelle Weber. If you look at her works from the early 1960s, you're looking at the black and white images of businessmen on various backgrounds. Sound familiar? The 1958 painting Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer is an early work of black-on-white imagery that absolutely looks like a still from the opening credits. The 1962 work Bubble gum Night is a spectacular form of stiffness that seems to call up IBM in 1962. She added stripes and checkerboard elements, such as in the work Blue Monday Man, and she's working with ideas of the business presentation of the 1960s, as well as the stiffness of 1960s graphic design. It's amazing work!

Her later work moves into slightly less impressive areas, but she sometimes works with pieces from the 60s and breaths new life into them by pulling them into a 2000s context.



Kiki Kogelnik

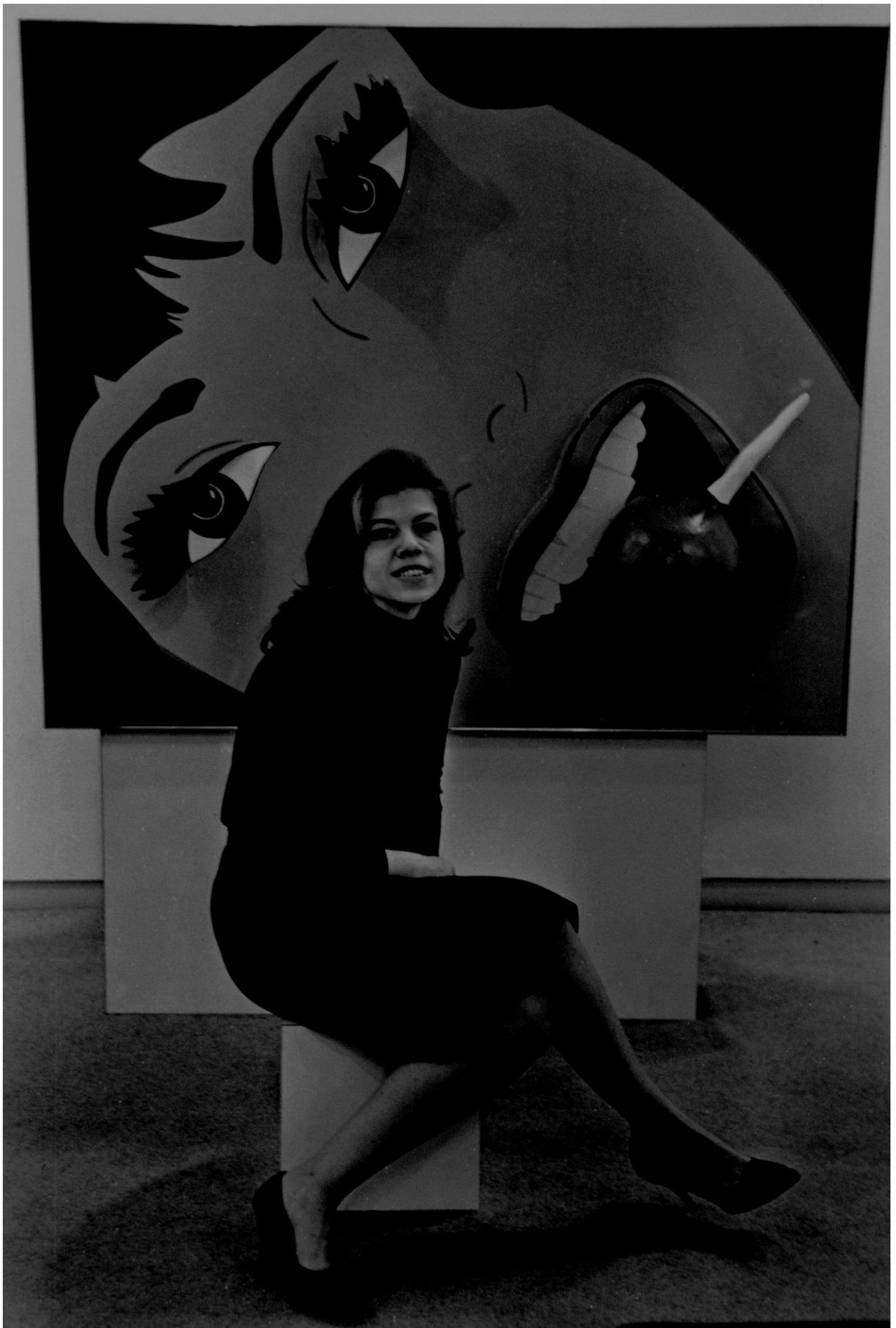
Austrian POP was so different, and seemed to flow through the work of Paul Klee, Picasso, and Brancusi. The beautiful works of the 1960s she delivered feel very Warhol in topicality while not engaging in the sort of mass-media presentation style. Her work of the late 1970s and early 80s are much more striking to me, with a sensation of POP art as the subject of her work. You can not look at *Windy* from 1980 and not see Warhol's portraits of Marilyn or even Debbie Harry. There's a sense of Nagle to works like *Prenez le Temps d'Aimer* and *Venetian Blinds*. She then shifted to sculpture in the 90s that were incredible, and you can see the influence they had on a lot of the 1990s and 2000s art from Japan.

Kogelnik's work is a long and beautiful treasure, and when she passed away in 1997, she had left behind an amazing body of work.



Marjorie Strider

Strider's work is in your face... and not just because they are 3d canvas paintings. She did for Men's magazines what Lichtenstein did for comics. She would put pin-up type images up, and she would have shaped canvases to make parts come out at the viewer. A woman sucking on a lollipop, a bikini-clad woman whose breasts are popping out of the canvas. Incredible triptychs that would find another life in their impact on the Superflat artists of the last two decades. Sadly, her work is little known these days, which is a shame as she was amazing, and I'd take her work over Wesselman's any time.



POP
before
POP



It all began with Marcel Duchamp. That's not entirely true, but really, the amount of love that Duchamp got from the POPists, and the fact that he played well with them, really makes him the Proto-POPstar. While his Cubist works, like *Nude Descending a Staircase* aren't exactly what you'd expect from a POP artist, it is his ready-mades that are seriously important to the POP idea. The legendary work *Fountain* is just about the most important thing to the birth of POP, and especially the works of Warhol and Rauschenberg. The way that his work was largely about the exploitation of the imagery and objects that are ever-present, and when removed from their original context, is certainly what led folks like Lichtenstein and Mel Ramos to look at unusual avenues for fine art subject matter.



Duchamp was far from the only pre-POP artist who was a massive impactor on the field. The 1920s saw the birth of modern Popular Culture, and not only that, but was the birth decade of many of the POP artists who rose to prominence in the late 1950s and 60s. Gerald Murphy is one that certainly worked in a mode that took aspects of both technical drawing and commercial illustration and brought them into the Fine Arts realm. One work that certainly looks as if it could have been made by one of the POPpers is *Razor* from 1924. It combines an image of a safety razor and a pen with the box, showing a representation of the graphic design. It's also super-flat. I mean there is no depth whatsoever.

Forget it, it's Flatland. *Watch* from 1925, in the collection of the deYoung Museum in San Francisco, also uses that flatness and looks like it should have been out of the studio of Robert Indiana or Jasper Johns.

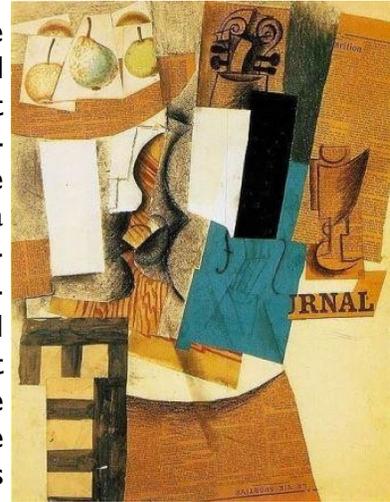
Speaking of Super-Flat, Patrick Henry Bruce (three first names. Weird.) was a Cubist who completely abandoned the third dimension. Looking at his works, there is nothing beyond the idealized form, only pressed flat. One of the lesser signs that a work is POP is the idea of conceptual dimensionality as opposed to representational dimensionality. The idea that you can show items that are arranged in three dimensional space as if they were merely jigsawed out of different materials to fit in a co-linear existence is a piece of POP that is evident in a lot of Warhol, Johns, Indiana, Rauschenberg, and especially Lichtenstein. It's an interesting way to go about things, and when I first saw Bruce's work, I could tell where it was coming from and was shocked to see how early it was!

One of my favorite works at the Met in New York is *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold* by Charles Demuth. As far as I'm concerned, it's a masterpiece, and one that I



instantly assumed was from one of the POP artists of the 1960s. The bold design of the number 5, which looked exactly like the kind of numbering you'd find on a supermarket poster, combined with the repetitive, nested form, makes this an amazingly pre-POP POP work, and one that I adore. Pretty amazing work from a guy who died in 1935! It probably should surprise anyone that Demuth would be an influence, as he was also well-known for his work as a poster artist.

I had not realized that it was Picasso and Braque that we have to thank for collage. I really thought that it had been around forever. It's my personal favorite form, and digital collage is what I've been doing as semi-art practice for ages. Picasso had a number of effects on POP, a movement that came about towards the end of his long life. The idea of anchoring a piece of reality into a work of cubist abstraction is appealing, and the technique became incredibly popular to the point where school kids were doing them. Heck, my wee-beasties are collage artists! And they still wear diapers... most of the time. Collage was hugely important to POP, and without it the ideas of Rauschenberg would have remained just ideas. More than anyone I can think of, he drove Collage into new directions and re-defined it conceptually. That's important.



Stuart Davis is another name that lasted through the POP era and had a huge effect on it from his earlier work. His art of the 40s and 50s had an immense impact, as they were the geometric version of what the Abstract Expressionists were doing, only with a deeper understanding of the importance of flatness of form. Whether or not Pollock was trying to make his works feel of a single dimension, the way the paints piled gave them an extreme form of three-dimensionality. Davis was, in his approach, a poster artist who happened to be an oil painter. He was the end result of an artist who had all the influences of the POP movement, but grew to maturity in the WPA. His work certainly impacted everyone from Lichtenstein to Warhol, and especially Drexler. The works *Odol*, *Lucky Strike*, and *Cigarette Papers* are right up there with the Demuth works as influential on POPist.



Of course, there's also the image that probably gave POP its name.

I Was a Rich Man's Plaything from 1947 is probably the image that was the source of the name, and well after the fact. Here's my thinking – Eduardo Paolozzi painted the image that combined the cover of a Pulp detective mag with a Coke ad, and a postcard image, and then went on his way. He kept making images that kinda fell in line with what was developing in POP, but wasn't really named as a movement. When Richard Hamilton came about

with the masterpiece *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?* and Paolozzi hopped on-board and started making his own Neo-DaDaist works, which meant that his own earlier works started getting looked at, and the 'POP' in the image sorta stuck, replacing the name Neo-DaDa with POP Art. Sounds legit, no?

The DaDaists were also a MASSIVE influence. The fact is, without the DaDa movement, you don't get the application of art practice to the mundane and still get to call it Art. Rauschenberg and Hamilton would certainly never have happened. The idea that context is useless in Art Practice was completely new to art. The work became the work because of DaDa, and really it wasn't until the AbExers that the concept really returned to any sort of prominence. The removal of context allowed first the rise of absurdist work, followed by the rise of the completely context-free works that Bobby R. specialized in.

The pre-history of POP is fascinating, and I can see folks who hate POP actually getting into these proto works because they don't get specifically into the weeds that POP often finds itself wading through.





Dreaming of POP

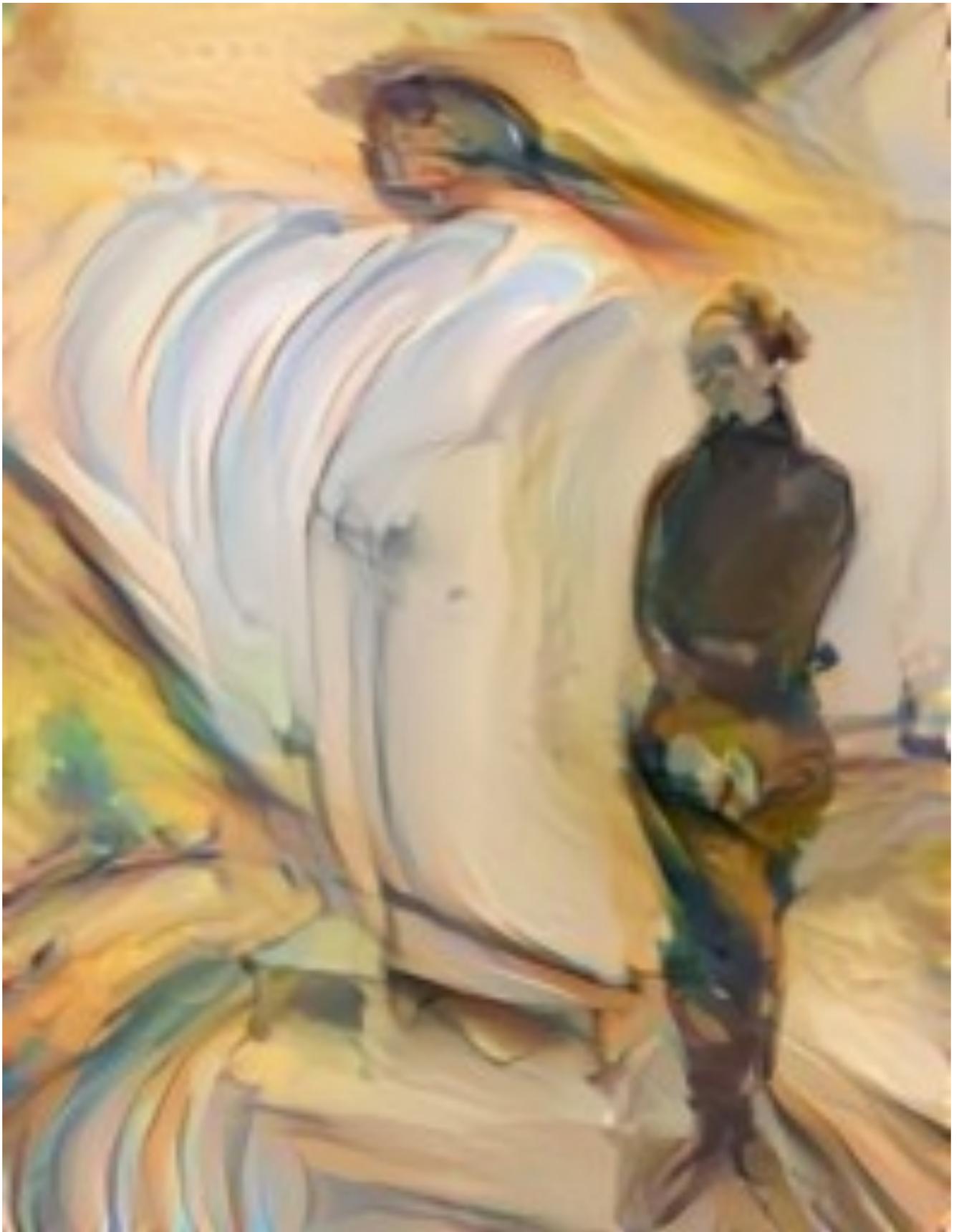


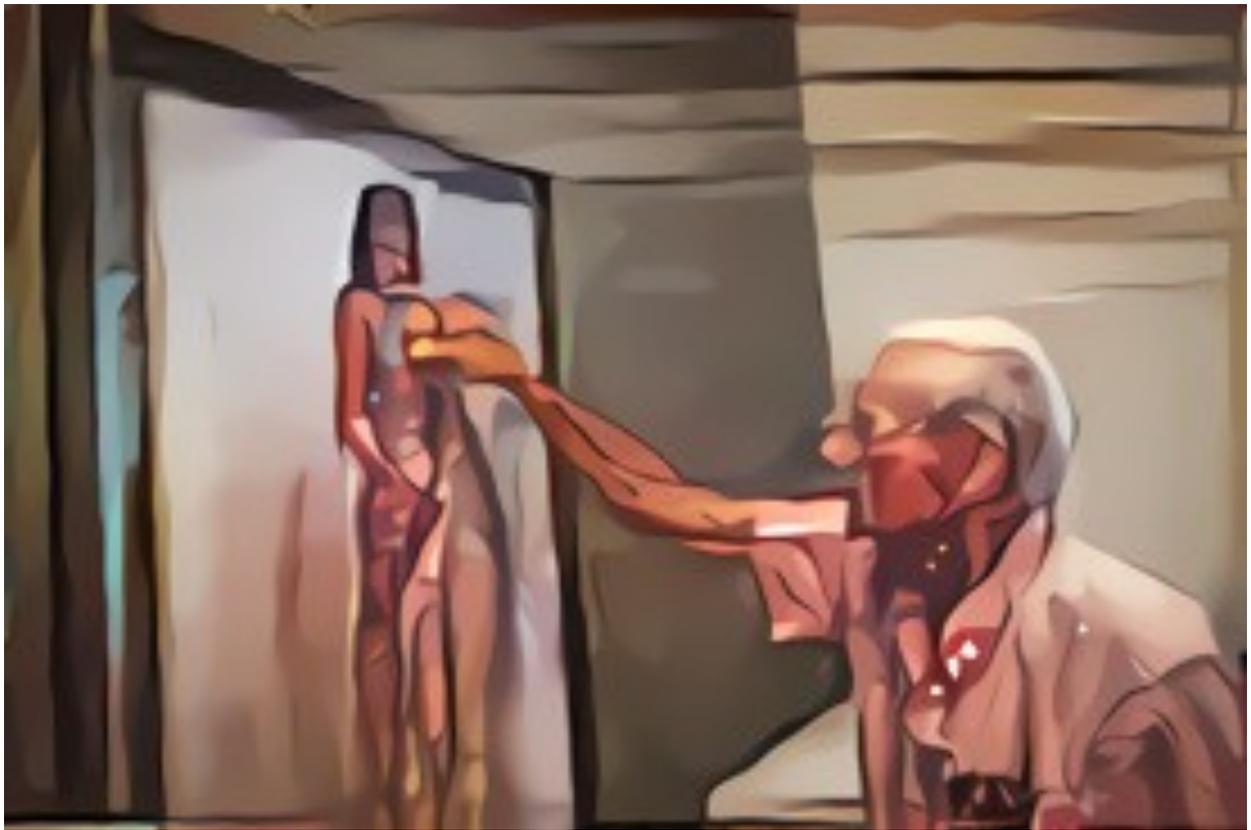
You may be aware that I've been playing with the DeepDream Neural Image Manipulation system. It is actually excellent at making POP Art-like works from photos. Thus, I had an idea—take pics of POP Artists and manipulate them with images created by other POP (or POP-adjacent) artists. Some of them worked, some didn't. I then kinda extended it out to works by POP Artists. You'll see.

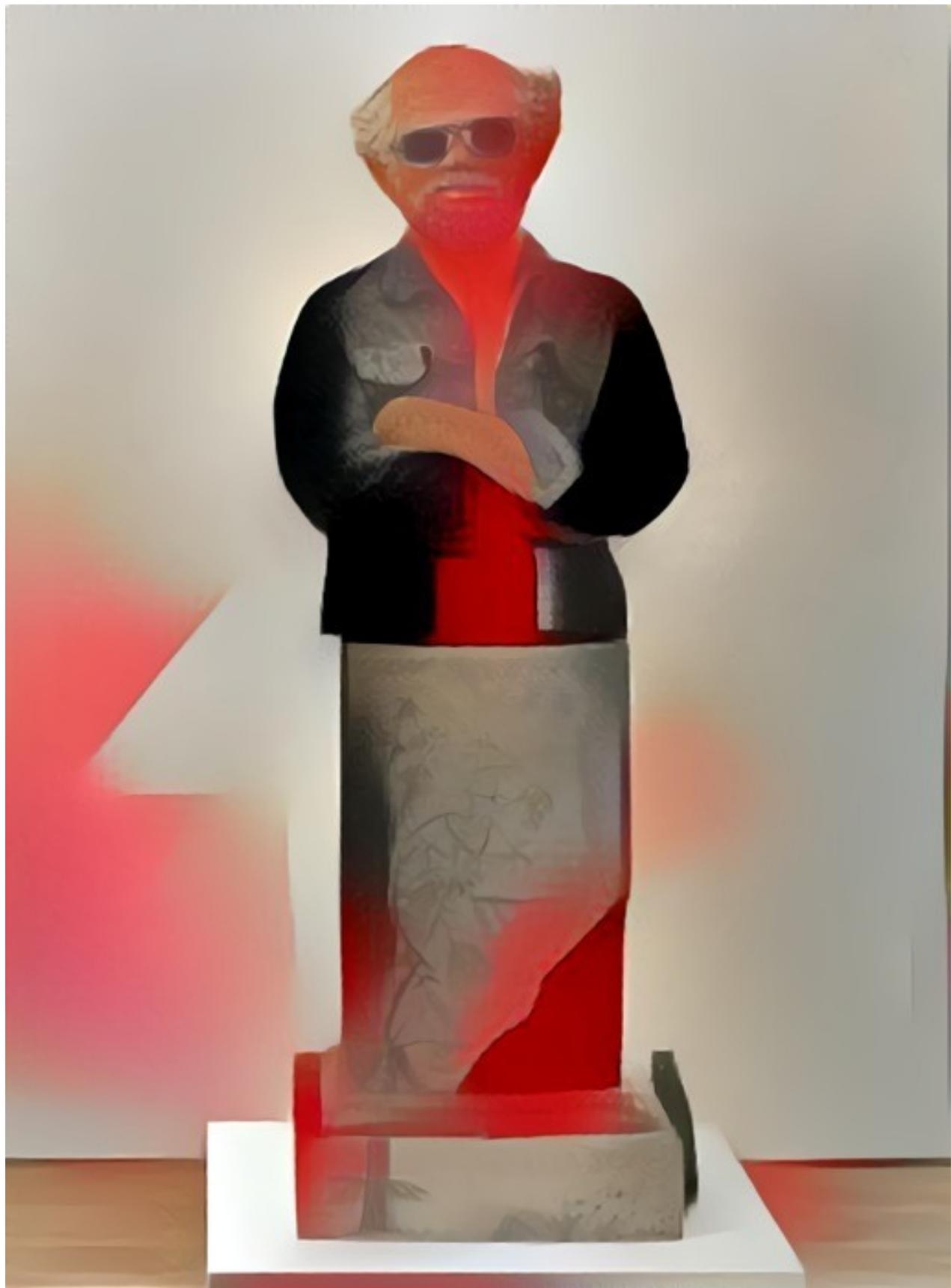
Andy Warhol with Rauschenberg, Robert Rauschenberg with Roy Lichtenstein, Marisol with Wayne Thibaud, Wayne Thibaud with Phil Guston, Idele Weber with Sigmar Polke, Robert Arneson with Robert Indiana.













Mel Ramos
1935 - 2018

Too often, it is Wikipedia that reveals the death of a person I admire. It was so recently with Mel Ramos. Mel was one of the last surviving POP artists who would have been known well during the Warhol generation, and one of the very few West Coast POP folks who were still alive.

Were.

West Coast POP was less about celebrity than that of New York, and far less about the absurdism of modern life than the London flavor. Mel Ramos was probably the best example, along with Thibaud, perhaps. The things that got him his first notice were his super-heroes, and that perfectly demonstrates the difference between West Coast and East Coast POP. Lichtenstein took images straight from the pages of the comics, re-painted them and made them into slicker versions that were simply blown-up and put on to the gallery wall. Ramos used the images of superheroes more as models, presenting them in a form that felt far more like formal portraiture than a comic panel. Mel's brushwork is not flat, but fluid, thick, almost feeling carved. In this, Ramos' work is like Thibaud's, but it also feels more restrained, and less about the idea of documenting the staged aspects of the real world.

His second major phase, and one that more or less lasted the rest of his life, was the pin-up phase. For the most part, the looser, thinker paint scheme he had employed was replaced by a near-photo realism. It's gorgeous work, and I never realized that a lot of what I think of as traditional pinup work is actually based on Mel's paintings. The nudes were brilliantly executed, and he was doing exactly the same thing as Lichtenstein had done with the comics, only for pin-ups. He was saying that there was no difference between pin-up art and fine art, and both had a place in the gallery, on the museum walls. The tradition of Nudes in fine art is no different than the tradition of nudes on posters, in magazines, on garage calendars, right?

Well, aside from one or two things, perhaps.

Ramos' work in the pin-up style evolved after a while to be much more POP flavored. He would combine the pin-up images with advertising or packaging images, such as a naked woman being peeled out of a candy bar wrapper. The statement being made is pretty obvious: sex sells, and sells well, and not only to the masses on TV or in mags, but in the art world as well. Haven't nudes always sold better than other kinds of portraits?

Mel Ramos was 83. A couple of years ago, he did an interview with me for Journey Planet. It was a short one, but he was very kind. He was creating art right up until the end, and that's the best any of us can hope for.





Jasper Johns appeared on an episode of *The Simpsons*. That alone speaks volumes to me. He's my second favorite of the POP Artists, after only Rauschenberg. He's really funny in this episode, too. The basic idea is pretty dang simple: Homer tries to build a grill, he can't, and he messes up so bad, that when he 'accidentally' sends it down a hill so that it hits a car that happens to be owned by an artist, voiced by Isabella Roselini, he becomes a famed outsider artist. He then goes deep into the art world, where he meets Jasper Johns and various other art types. Of course, his attempted follow-up fails, and he's forced to do what all failed sculptors do—becomes a conceptual environmental artist. Pretty clear story, no?

The episode is basically the story that most folks believe is true about the world of Modern and Contemporary Art—that people with no talent end up becoming stars while the people with talent toil without recognition. It was well established by that point in the series that Marge always wanted to be an artist, and here's Homer sliding into the prime slot as recognized contemporary artist. This is the nightmare that most of the non-contemporary art fans.

My all-time favorite Simpsons dream sequence is Homer taking a nap in the museum and it takes him through tons of paintings, most impressively, he gets attacked by Andy Warhol in his Soup Can phase.

This episode also gave the world the line “Everything's coming up Milhouse!”





The Films of Andy Warhol

Andy Warhol made a lot of films. Actually, Andy didn't make a ton of films himself, but he certainly participated in the making of a lot of films. I've probably seen fifty to sixty of them, and most of them are avant-garde tableaux that do what Warhol was doing with his paintings—capturing and exposing the imagery of the world around them and holding it up without context. Andy didn't start making movies until about 1963, but pretty much from the get, he had a style.

And that style was long.

His first film was *Sleep*. The first time I watched it, I sat intently watching it, studying it like it wasn't a film, projected at 2/3 the actual speed, of a man sleeping.

Now, the second, third, fourth, and fifth time I watched it, it was basically on in the background as I worked on other things.

The thing about *Sleep* is that it's actually meant to be boring, and by being boring, it's meant to test the audience's endurance. By testing the audience's endurance, we learn not only our limits, but discover the ways in which our theatre-going experience is effected by the setting, the other viewers, the projection. You can't watch *Sleep* and stay with it in a deep way for the entire duration. As much as I'd like to think I did the first time, even I know I watched and turned my attention away, to something else in the room, someone else near me. There's thirst and the need to pee, there's the sound of the room, the pressure of the seat. Much like

John Cage's 4'32, in that it is a piece that is more about the setting for the audience than the work. It is not only a test of endurance: it is a test of attention. In a way, it is Zen, but really, it is about what happens when your Zen fails.

Next, apparently, was his film *Andy Warhol Films Jack Smith Filming "Normal Love"*

The story goes that Smith never finished *Normal Love*, but three different filmmakers made movies of him filming it! You can find about two hours of *Normal Love* on-the-line. It's fucking weird. There's no other way to describe it. It's like watching the legendary British flick *Jubilee*, only without an attachment to anything you understand. Sadly, Andy's film about the film isn't out there, but I believe it's one of the films that MoMA is going to make available in the near.

He made so many films that it's impossible to list them all, largely because Andy was always filming, or at least always having people film. Another of the early highlights, and apparently one of the earliest films from The Factory, was *Kiss*. If you've ever seen the incredibly viral, and more than a little bit hot, video *First Kiss*, you'll know the concept. It's basically people kissing, in this case for 3.5 minutes each. It had to be an influence. It's not a hard film to find, but at 50 minutes, it's a bit of a tough film to watch. Why? Because each individual kiss goes longer than it needs to, longer than it should, but also just a bit longer than it needs to and longer than it should. This is obviously on-purpose. Andy understood human attention better than anyone without a degree in neuroscience. His *Fifteen Minutes of Fame* concept wasn't just him being glib, it was based on an understanding of how people react to sensationalism, and the way it feels to be recognized. This film is kinda hard to watch, but after you've seen it, it starts to make a lot of sense.

The films of 1963 and 1964 showed the beginning of Warhol's Factory players, more or less. Fred Herko, Billy Name, Taylor Mead, John Giorno. These were his first batch, and they made a ton of shorts, most of which are barely available. One film I'd really like to get is *Bill Klüver*, which is likely about the famed Bell Labs researcher, and co-founder of Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT). There's a lot to say about that dude!

The most famous films of 1964 were easily *Screen Tests*. These were close-up, tight shots of faces where the camera did not move, and in most cases, the subjects did not either. Warhol's fascination with filming stillness is key here. The subjects were not only Warhol regulars, but also famed folks like Dennis Hopper, Lou Reed (who drinks a Coke in his), Edie Sedgwick, Allen Ginsberg, Donovan, Salvador Dali, Marcel Duchamp, Bob Dylan, and many, many more. They're basically the filmic versions of his silkscreened portraits. A Polaroid would have done well-enough, but he went to film and that made all the difference.



If you want to understand what intensity is for an actor, watch Dennis Hopper's screentest. Doing nothing, he exudes the stuff all over the place. It's amazing

The others from around that time are interesting. *Blow Job* is exactly what you'd expect. *Eat* is Robert Indiana eating a mushroom. There's *Soap Opera*, which I've never seen, but I'm told features a lot of pre-existing footage. The legendary *Batman Dracula* was basically Warhol's love letter to Batman, who he adored. The snippets I've seen are campy fun, but not in the same way as the *Batman* series a few years later. *Taylor Mead's Ass* is exactly what you think it is. *Couch* is just a bunch of folks fucking on a couch, which I've also never seen.

And then, there's *Empire*.

It's an eight hour film that is a single shot of the Empire State Building, which is slowed down. Basically, it's the ultimate endurance film, because it's a single shot of a building. No camera movement at all, and we see the hours tick by.

To me, this is an environmental film. It is about permanence, about the limits of the human view. We are only on Earth for a limited time, and this is the sort of thing that is far more permanent than we could ever dream of being. It is another slow film, but it is interesting because you don't notice the differences between the shots UNTIL you look away for a while, walk out of the room and then come back. Within yourself, you're unable to see the changes, but when you are removed from the situation, you can tell, if you can remember.

This is the Warhol film that was added to the National Film Registry, and deservedly so. Films like *13 Lakes* took the concept and ran with it, and the endurance film was largely based on *Empire*, even if it came after *Sleep*.

The films of 1965 and 1966 were a bit repetitive, but then there's *Chelsea Girls*, which is a masterwork. It's a split-screen, cinema verite piece that feels as if the camera is intruding explicitly on the lives of these young women.

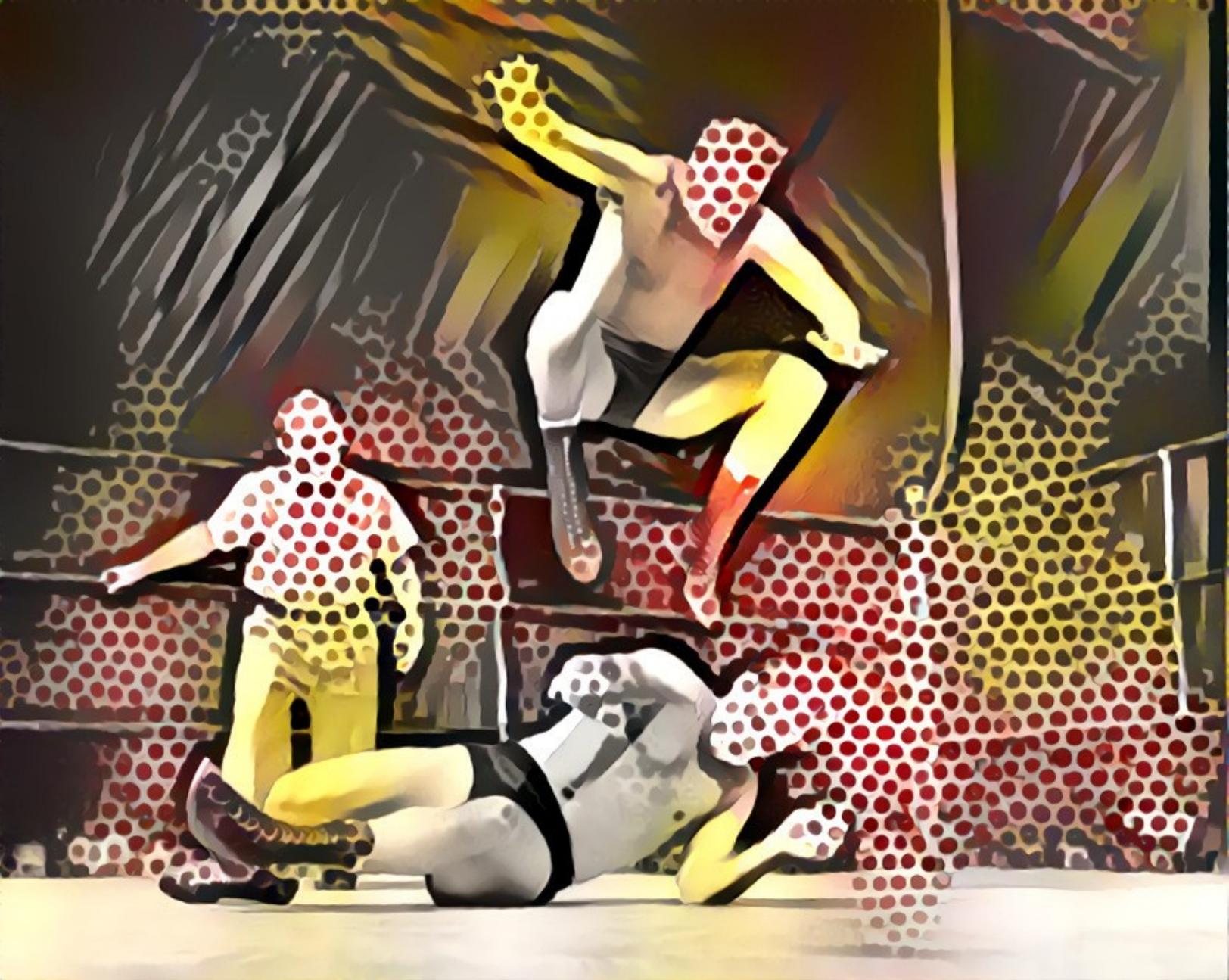
Also, it has one of the best movie posters of all-time.

There are some great films with The Velvet Underground and The Fugs around this time, but really Warhol's filmography becomes really interesting when the great Paul Morrissey becomes the driving force. His trilogy *Flesh*, *Heat*, and *Trash*. There's *Andy Warhol's Dracula* and *Flesh for Frankenstein*. These are less Warholian in approach, but they are not at all commercial. They are still Underground, and many of them are talking to the Avant Garde. I love Warhol's films, but largely because they are 100% in conversation with his other art works.





Deep Dreams of Wrestling



The POP Artists were all wrestling fans. Warhol was always at MSG for WWF shows. Rauschenberg was something of a fan, and I once heard him say "I love Hulk Hogan." The Neo-DaDaists, especially Hamilton, were loving World of Sport wrestling that was so popular on British TV, and I've heard about him doing a piece featuring Jacky Pollo.

And thus, more DeepDreams. I mixed 1960s wrestling photos with the work of Marisol, Lichtenstein, and Robert Rauschenberg. I don't know why I do these things, but I do.





