

Andy Warhol arrives with a bang this summer in San Antonio

By **Deborah Martin** | June 26, 2018 | Updated: June 26, 2018 7:29pm



Photo: Courtesy Of Jack And Valerie Guenther @2017 The Andy Warhol Foundation For The Visual Arts

IMAGE 1 OF 6

Andy Warhol's screenprint "John Wayne," from his 10-image "Cowboys and Indians" series, is on display at the Briscoe Western Art Museum.

A fondness for cowboy boots aside, there's not much about über-New Yorker Andy Warhol that suggests "Texas." But works in two San Antonio exhibits show there's more connecting him to the Lone Star State — and the Alamo City in particular — than some might think.

The McNay Art Museum has included

"Sunset," an unfinished short film

commissioned from Warhol by Houston-based art patrons John and Dominique de Menil for HemisFair '68 — but never shown there — as part of the big-buzz show "Immersed: Local to Global Art Sensations." The exhibit marks the first time the film has been shown in San Antonio.

Given its fondness for large-scale cowboy bronzes and traditional Western art, the buttoned-up Briscoe Western Art Museum might be the last place one would expect to find the mop-topped

pop art icon's work. But it is displaying "Cowboys and Indians," a suite of 10 Western-themed screen prints that Warhol completed shortly before he died in 1987. And sharp-eyed visitors can find two of his screenprints — one depicting a bald eagle and the other a ram — in the stairwell leading to the second floor galleries.

The fact that "Sunset" and "Cowboys and Indians" aren't as well known as Warhol's other images doesn't mean they aren't significant.

Seth Hopkins, executive director of the Booth Western Art Museum in Georgia, has written about Warhol and the West and says the suite at the Briscoe is "the least-known part of his oeuvre and yet is fairly important in the history of Western American art — the fact that Warhol did a major project on the American West and the impact that it's had on contemporary artists dealing with the West today."

"Sunset," too, digs into aspects of Warhol's work that haven't been explored as deeply as others.

"I think what it does is give a different side to Andy Warhol, and it's a side that clearly the de Menils saw in a visionary way," said Michelle White, senior curator of the Menil Collection in Houston.

'Sunset'

The film is a static shot of a sunset taking place in real time, just over 30 minutes. Warhol eventually added an audio track on which Velvet Underground vocalist Nico, who appeared in some of his other work, recites a poem in her distinctive, haunting voice.

MORE INFORMATION

Warhol in San Antonio

"Immersed: Local to Global Art Sensations:"

Through Sept. 2, McNay Art Museum, 6000 N. New Braunfels Ave..

Reservations can be made at mcnayart.org. A total of 100 reservations will be available hourly.

Admission for nonmembers costs \$10 plus \$10 museum admission. Members will be admitted free once and charged \$10 for subsequent visits.

Reservations at mcnayart.org; call 210-805-1783 for groups of 10 or more.

"Andy Warhol: 'Cowboys and Indians'" and "Billy Schenck: Myth of the West:" Through Sept. 3, Briscoe Western Art Museum, 210 W. Market St.

Admission \$8-\$10, free for kids 12 and under, active duty military and their families and Briscoe members.

Call 210-299-4499 or visit briscoemuseum.org for more information.

The de Menils were tapped by the Vatican to curate a pavilion slated for HemisFair '68. The couple talked to a number of artists about creating works for the space, White said. "Sunset" was to be Warhol's contribution.

The de Menils were "intent on bringing together a group of contemporary artists to establish a spiritual type of exhibition of their work," White said. "You don't typically associate Andy Warhol with meditation or spirituality, but, certainly, this film reveals a different side of Warhol."

Ultimately, the Vatican pavilion never came to fruition, and "Sunset" never was completed.

The film was only released as a part of the Andy Warhol Film Project in 2000 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It rarely has been seen since. But fittingly, one of the few places it has popped up is at the Menil Collection.

Warhol seems to have invested a lot of time on the piece, shooting sunsets on both coasts. None of the footage worked for him, and, since the Vatican pavilion never happened, the project was dropped.

In the 1980 book "POPism: The Warhol Sixties," written by the artist and Pat Hackett, Warhol said: "I filmed so many sunsets for that project, but I never got one that satisfied me."

At the McNay, the film is being shown on video on a loop in a dimly lit screening room at the rear of the gallery. There isn't much of an expectation that visitors will plant themselves and watch the film run from start to finish.

"With a lot of Warhol movies, you can kind of meander in and out," said René Paul Barilleaux, the museum's head of curatorial affairs, who organized the exhibition.

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Patient souls who do watch “Sunset” in its entirety can expect a distinctive experience, said artist Chris Sauter, whose installation “Pleasure Principle” also is part of “Immersed.”

“When you watch a Warhol film, because they are shot in real time, it’s an experience we don’t normally have in an art context, because artists normally filter real experience through something else — artists either speed up or condense real time,” Sauter said. “Warhol hasn’t done that. You’re sitting in the gallery and experience the sunset. You could be outside, and so you become really aware of yourself, become aware of watching.”

‘Cowboys and Indians’

The surprise of seeing any Warhol, much less a whole exhibit, at the Briscoe is very much the point.

By pairing the “Cowboys and Indians” suite with the retrospective “Billy Schenck: Myth of the West,” the museum drives home the impact that Warhol had on some Western artists. Schenck, who began his career in New York when Warhol was at the height of his powers, also drew on pop imagery for his work, depicting Blondie vocalist Debbie Harry as a pistol-toting cowgirl in one of the works in the show and using pop art techniques to depict cowboys on horseback and other standard Western scenes.

The side-by-side exhibits make clear the direct line between the aesthetic of Warhol and other pop artists and Western artists like Schenck.

“One of the key ideas behind the show was to ... demonstrate that not all Western art is history-bound, that it can break through those barriers,” said Michael Duchemin, president and CEO of the museum.

The 10-piece suite was the last significant project Warhol completed before he died in 1987 following gallbladder surgery.

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“The world doesn’t need another Warhol exhibit, necessarily,” Hopkins said. “The interesting thing about the suite, in and of itself, is that it’s the last major thing Andy did before he died.”

The “Cowboys and Indians” suite isn’t the only place in Warhol’s work that Western iconography pops up. In the 1970s, he created his “American Indian Series,” 18 silk screens depicting Russell Means, the activist and actor who was part of the Oglala Sioux tribe. Hopkins noted that Warhol’s 1963 piece “Triple Elvis” drew on an image from the king’s 1960 western flick “Flaming Star” rather than from other parts of his career.

“It’s not Elvis as a matinee idol, not Elvis as a pop singer that got the ladies to throw their (hotel) room keys on the stage,” Hopkins said. “It’s Elvis as a teenage matinee idol in a cowboy movie.”

Warhol’s personal interest in Western imagery extended beyond those he created. He also had a vast collection of traditional Western art, Hopkins said, and often wore cowboy boots.

The Briscoe exhibit includes depictions of Geronimo, Annie Oakley and Gen. George Armstrong Custer, as well as four images that Warhol considered for the series but ultimately rejected. There also are pieces illustrating American Indian objects, Hopi kachina dolls and a Crow war shield.

“What they say about Warhol is that he was America’s mirror. He showed America who we are and what we’re about. What he’s really saying is America is about the surface,” Hopkins said. “Custer, Geronimo, they were real figures, real people who were part of the Western drama. But when he includes Annie Oakley and John Wayne ... to have these real Western people who did important things, glorious and tragic things, on equal footing with these entertainers brings us the myth of the West repackaged.”

The exhibits at the Briscoe and the McNay do a little repackaging themselves by offering a look at Warhol through different lenses. And there’s some good news for those who walk out of the exhibits wanting more: The McNay is slated to open “Andy Warhol: Portraits,” an exhibit including film, video, paintings and photographs, next summer.

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