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Andy Warhol: Theme and Variation ***Unique Trial Proof Prints from the 1980s***

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Ronald Feldman Gallery is pleased to present *Andy Warhol: Theme and Variation*, an exhibition devoted to unique trial proof prints created during the final decade of the artist's career. Many of the works included are published by Ronald Feldman Gallery, have remained in private collections for decades, and are brought together here for the first time.

Beginning in the late 1970s, Ronald Feldman proposed a new approach to Warhol's print portfolios. Rather than producing multiple images of a single subject, each portfolio would consist of ten entirely different images united by a common theme. This concept became the foundation for some of Warhol's most ambitious late print projects, including *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century*, *Myths*, *Endangered Species*, *Ads* and others.

Silkscreen printing played a central role in Warhol's practice, and he used printmaking as another artist might use drawing: as a flexible medium for experimentation. The resulting trial proofs challenge the expectation of uniformity in the printmaking process and are characterized by remarkable variation of color, nuance, and complexity. More complete than state proofs, they reveal Warhol exploring color, registration, layering, and composition via continual adjustment and technique. The exhibition's title, *Theme and Variation*, reflects both the diversity of subjects within these portfolios and the distinctly beautiful combinations within each trial proof.

In addition to being a visual artist, Warhol was an author, filmmaker, magazine publisher, model, partygoer, and a cult phenomenon in the worlds of fashion and celebrity. Perhaps inevitably, his fame and lifestyle became intertwined with the popular understanding of his art. The years since his passing in 1987 have made it easier to appreciate Warhol's work on its own terms and to recognize the artistic strategy that he employed.

The exhibition is informed by decades of scholarship documenting Warhol's printmaking practice. Frayda Feldman, longtime Director of Ronald Feldman Gallery and coeditor of the indispensable *Andy Warhol Prints: A Catalogue Raisonné 1962–1987* with Jörg Schellmann, helped establish this definitive scholarly record of Warhol's prints, including the unique trial proofs featured here. Factory photographs, preparatory drawings, source material, and related works complement that scholarship, offering visitors a rare glimpse into the development of these celebrated print portfolios.

A complete trial proof portfolio of *Ten Portraits of Jews of the Twentieth Century* (1980) is featured. This project marks the first time Warhol portrayed figures from history rather than from contemporary celebrity, choosing individuals recognized for their accomplishments in science, politics, literature, music, philosophy, and the arts. Scaled to larger than life, these portraits are less ironic and more compositionally complex than earlier examples, conveying a distinct psychological gravitas.

A complete trial proof portfolio of *Myths* (1981) is presented. Warhol once stated that his favorite artist was Walt Disney, and Mickey Mouse became the first subject in the series. The portfolio brings together a cross section of postwar American icons and imaginary characters, including Superman, Greta Garbo as Mata Hari, Santa Claus, Uncle Sam, Dracula, and the Wicked Witch. Warhol understood these figures as embodiments of collective hopes, fears, and dreams that spoke to enduring questions of identity, community, and good versus evil. He included himself as The Shadow, the mysterious crime fighting

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character from the popular radio series. After considerable experimentation, the now iconic three-quarter profile emerged as the defining image of the project.

A complete trial proof set of *Ads* (1985) is prominently displayed. Although Warhol did more than any other artist of his era to revitalize portraiture, he began his career as a commercial artist, and that experience remained foundational to his work. As he famously observed, "Making money is art and working is art, and good business is the best art." The ten advertisements range from automobiles and candy to perfume, technology, clothing, film, and war bonds, demonstrating how commercial imagery had itself become a form of modern mythology.

Additional works include trial proofs of *Moonwalk*, *Brooklyn Bridge*, and *Neuschwanstein*, further illustrating the breadth of subjects of Warhol's late printmaking.

Together these unique trial proofs reveal an aspect of Warhol's practice rarely available to the public. Rather than simply documenting the finished image, they capture the artist's creative process as he explored color, composition, and visual possibility. They offer an exceptional opportunity to experience the making of some of Warhol's most celebrated print portfolios.

This exhibition would not have been possible without the generosity of the private collectors who lent works from their collections. Ronald Feldman Gallery gratefully acknowledges their support.

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