GREETING

Hello, this is Jack Becker, Executive Director and CEO of Joslyn Art Museum, and it is my pleasure to welcome you to the exhibition: *In Living Color: Andy Warhol & Contemporary Printmaking*. We are delighted to be the opening venue for this exhibition of works from the Collections of Jordan D. Schnitzer and His Family Foundation. And of note, this is our second partnership with Jordan, a collector, who is passionate about art and generous in sharing his collection with audiences across the nation.

Organized by Karin Campbell, Phil Willson Curator of Contemporary Art, In Living Color examines how significant artists in contemporary art and printmaking have used color to shape how audiences understand and respond to images. Andy Warhol – a master colorist, pop icon and featured artist in this exhibition – depicted the world with “the volume turned up.” Employing a seemingly endless palette, he challenged how we comprehend the iconic imagery of popular culture, politics, and consumer society. Warhol’s prints are on display with notable printmakers, such as Helen Frankenthaler and Sam Francis, creating a colorful or color-filled dialogue.

Karin narrates this tour highlighting eight artists through ten stops in the exhibition and demonstrates how Warhol’s use of color impacts both the subject and viewer and established a model that influenced scores of fellow artists.

Thank you to our presenting sponsor, Omaha Steaks and our major sponsors, Douglas County, Carol Gendler, and Paul and Annette Smith for their generous support of this exhibition and tour. We thank Jordan for his generosity in sharing his remarkable collection with us again, and many thanks to you for visiting. To show your support, please consider becoming a Joslyn member. I hope you enjoy your time with us, and I encourage you to tell your friends and family about the exhibition. I look forward to seeing you in the galleries.
STOP #1 – Andy Warhol, Camouflage

Warhol and the Pop artists believed that art should directly respond to contemporary daily life. America’s involvement in foreign wars had great impact on the country’s psyche during the mid-twentieth century. Modern camouflage originated during the First World War, when aerial and trench combat necessitated better concealment for troops on the battlefield. During the Vietnam War, protestors appropriated camouflage, turning it into a symbol of the unbridled power of the military-industrial complex and the hubris of the American government. Warhol found camouflage ripe for experimentation because it was widely recognizable and had acquired new meaning over time.

This portfolio from 1987 is based on cloth Warhol purchased at a military supply store in New York City. Applying a range of inorganic colors to camouflage, the artist sought to nullify its function as a tool of disguise and deception. Warhol also hoped to distance the pattern from its associations with wartime, however just as his celebrity portraits cannot truly be divorced from their subject matter, these prints are laden with sociopolitical implications. Despite the artist’s radical color alterations, viewers are still reminded of the ideological chasm that camouflage signifies in the United States.
STOP #2 – Dorothea Rockburne

Like Warhol, Dorothea Rockburne is typically known for her energetic use of color. For her 1972 series Locus, she took a more restrained approach, highlighting process over palette. To create these monochromatic abstractions, Rockburne ran large sheets of folded paper through a printing press, resulting in embossed, or raised, lines on their surfaces. She then used aquatint to produce barely-discernible tonal variations on each print. Aquatint, an etching technique that yields subtle color gradation much in the same way watercolor does, enhances the sculpted quality of the creased paper. Removing color entirely from this series allowed Rockburne to emphasize the inherent malleability of paper, as well as her unique printmaking style.
STOP #3 – Louisiana Bendolph & Loretta Bennett

Louisiana Bendolph and Loretta Bennett are from Southern Alabama’s Gee’s Bend community, which is known for its rich quilting tradition. In 2005, Bendolph and Bennett were invited to Paulson Press in Berkeley, California to make their first prints. Bendolph’s quilts and prints are based on the standard “Housetop” pattern, a design consisting of concentric squares. She updates this motif by scrambling the squares into more chaotic arrangements and interjecting bright blocks of color into her otherwise subdued picture planes.

Bennett stands out among the Gee’s Bend quilters for her use of vibrant colors. She credits her travels throughout the United States and overseas for influencing her bold palette, saying she was struck by how color reflected the culture and character of each new place she visited. Chromatic contrast is an important element of Bennett’s work. Rather than allowing the viewer to focus on a single section of a composition, she encourages the eye to move continuously across the surface of the image by placing contrasting colors side-by-side.
STOP #4 – Andy Warhol, Electric Chair

Warhol first depicted the electric chair in 1963 in response to public debate surrounding the death penalty that emerged among grassroots social movements in the 1960s. Capital punishment had been banned in America for eight years by the time he completed this portfolio in 1971. Bringing together neon yellow and pink, colors often associated with joy, with more sinister hues, such as crimson, these prints are intended to provoke conflicted responses within viewers.

Warhol remained committed to the electric chair long after the national conversation on the death penalty had subsided and his attention had shifted to less grim topics. He claimed his objective was to divest the electric chair of meaning, arguing, quote, “when you see a gruesome image over and over again, it doesn’t really have any effect.” However, for viewers, faced with picture after picture of the empty chair – awaiting its next occupant or having just claimed another victim – it becomes impossible to ignore the lethal implications of this device. Warhol’s decision to lift an image from mass media for these screenprints is significant. In portraying a specific chair that was used to execute convicted criminals, the artist was making a political statement, not a passive observation.
STOP #5 – Helen Frankenthaler

Helen Frankenthaler’s biomorphic abstractions descend from the gestural painting style championed by the Abstract Expressionists. After initial reluctance, Frankenthaler turned to printmaking in 1961. She was thrilled to learn that the lyricism and rich, saturated colors she pursued in her paintings could be beautifully achieved through woodcut, a technique she would come to master. Although Frankenthaler often resisted identifying specific subjects in her work, she was known to look to the natural world and her surrounding environment for inspiration. She once explained, quote: “I think of my pictures as explosive landscapes, worlds, and distances held on a flat surface.” Exemplifying her aptitude for referencing nature without directly quoting it, the three woodcuts on view recall the golden hues of sunrise, the expanse of an insect’s milky wings, and the earthy shades of an evergreen forest.
STOP #6 – Sam Francis

Sam Francis relocated from his native California to Paris in 1950. While in France, he studied the work of modern masters including Claude Monet and Henri Matisse, absorbing their skill for communicating color and light on canvas. Over the next decade, Francis traveled extensively visiting the French coast, Mexico, Japan, and New York. In each new destination, his palette shifted subtly, reflecting the local quality of light, although his colors largely remained muted. In 1962, upon returning to California and its abundance of bright sunshine, Francis embraced the saturated jewel tones that would prevail in his work for the next thirty years. Sulfur Sails belongs to a series in which the artist pushes his colorful splatters to the edge of the picture plane, opening up a central white void. White would become increasingly important in Francis’ work throughout the 1960s and 1970s. During frequent trips to Tokyo, the artist was introduced to the Japanese concept of ma, which dictates that spatial construction is based on the interplay of form and non-form. Ma persuaded Francis to think about his application of color to a white surface as a document of his actions at a particular moment in time.
STOP #7 – Andy Warhol, Sunset

In 1964, Warhol turned his attention from grisly topics, like electric chairs, to a more uplifting theme: flowers. As he often did, he turned to print media for inspiration, selecting a picture from a June 1964 Modern Photography magazine article about a color processing system for the amateur photographer. After cropping and increasing the contrast of the source image, Warhol applied a dizzying array of intense colors to the flowers. More psychedelic than naturalistic, these prints reflect the inauthentic experience of looking at an altered image, reminding viewers that a photograph, like any other art form, represents a specific point of view.

Created as a commission for the Marquette Hotel in Minneapolis, Warhol’s Sunset series consists of an unprecedented 632 unique screenprints, each with a different color combination. Believed to have been inspired by the views from Warhol’s beach house in Montauk, New York, these vivid depictions of the moment the sun begins to dip below the horizon are not meant to mimic actual sunsets. Rather, they are the still equivalent of Technicolor film, intended to provide a heightened experience of a natural phenomenon.
STOP #8 – John Baldessari

John Baldessari repurposes found and appropriated images to explore political, social, cultural, and linguistic systems. The artist often blots out faces in these photographs with brightly colored dots, a trope he uses to eliminate specificity from his work. Baldessari believes that, without the distraction of determining people’s identities, viewers can delve deeper into the underlying meaning of images. His Cliché series brings together photographs that either explicitly or implicitly speak to stereotypes attached to three different ethnic groups whose unique cultural traditions are often thought of in near mythological terms – North American Indians, Eskimos, and Japanese. Assigning each print a chromatic theme, Baldessari comments on the absurdity of a system that attempts to reduce large, diverse groups of people to a single color. As with Warhol’s Marilyns, also on view in this gallery, the Cliché series calls attention to the capacity of collective imagination to warp the identity of others.
STOP #9 – Keith Haring

Although Keith Haring’s cartoonish style – characterized by pure colors and thick, black lines – may read as lighthearted, a dark undercurrent courses through his work. Coming of age at the height of the AIDS crisis, and eventually contracting the virus himself, Haring confronted issues relating to illness, death, and homophobia. The candy hues of the Pop Shop V prints belie their disquieting imagery. Tracing the interactions between a human figure and an anthropomorphic dolphin-like animal, this series suggests the dichotomy between heaven and hell that Haring explored in several other works. In one picture, the figure jumps into water where the dolphin awaits with its mouth open, as though it might devour the man. Another print captures the figure and the creature as they dance frenetically, although now the dolphin has legs, recalling representations of Satan as half-man, half-goat. In a third print, a mint-colored winged figure presides over two dolphins, suggesting that perhaps the man has died and been resurrected as a human-animal hybrid. Presenting this narrative playfully, Haring rejects the conventional notion that serious content should be treated with gravity.
STOP #10 – Andy Warhol, Mao

Warhol’s fascination with the cult of personality is perhaps most clearly articulated in his portraits of Mao Zedong. “Chairman Mao,” as he is often called, founded the socialist People’s Republic of China and was head of the Chinese Communist party from 1949 until his death in 1976. A lightening rod in global politics, he was lauded for modernizing China but condemned for committing egregious human rights abuses. In 1972, President Richard Nixon visited China, a landmark trip that coincided with the United States’ controversial decision to open diplomatic relations with that country. Warhol followed these developments closely, writing in his diary, quote: “I have been reading so much about China. They’re so nutty. They don’t believe in creativity. The only picture they ever have is of Mao Zedong. It’s great. It looks like a silkscreen.”

This portfolio features ten of the hundreds of portraits Warhol made of Mao using an image pulled from the “Little Red Book,” a compendium of the chairman’s speeches and writings printed in China between 1964 and 1976. In Warhol’s hands, Mao’s likeness shifts from the embodiment of global power to a hackneyed commodity. The artist’s gaudy palette, better suited for a flashy advertisement than a formal portrait, challenges Mao’s status as the one of the most commanding political figures of the twentieth century.