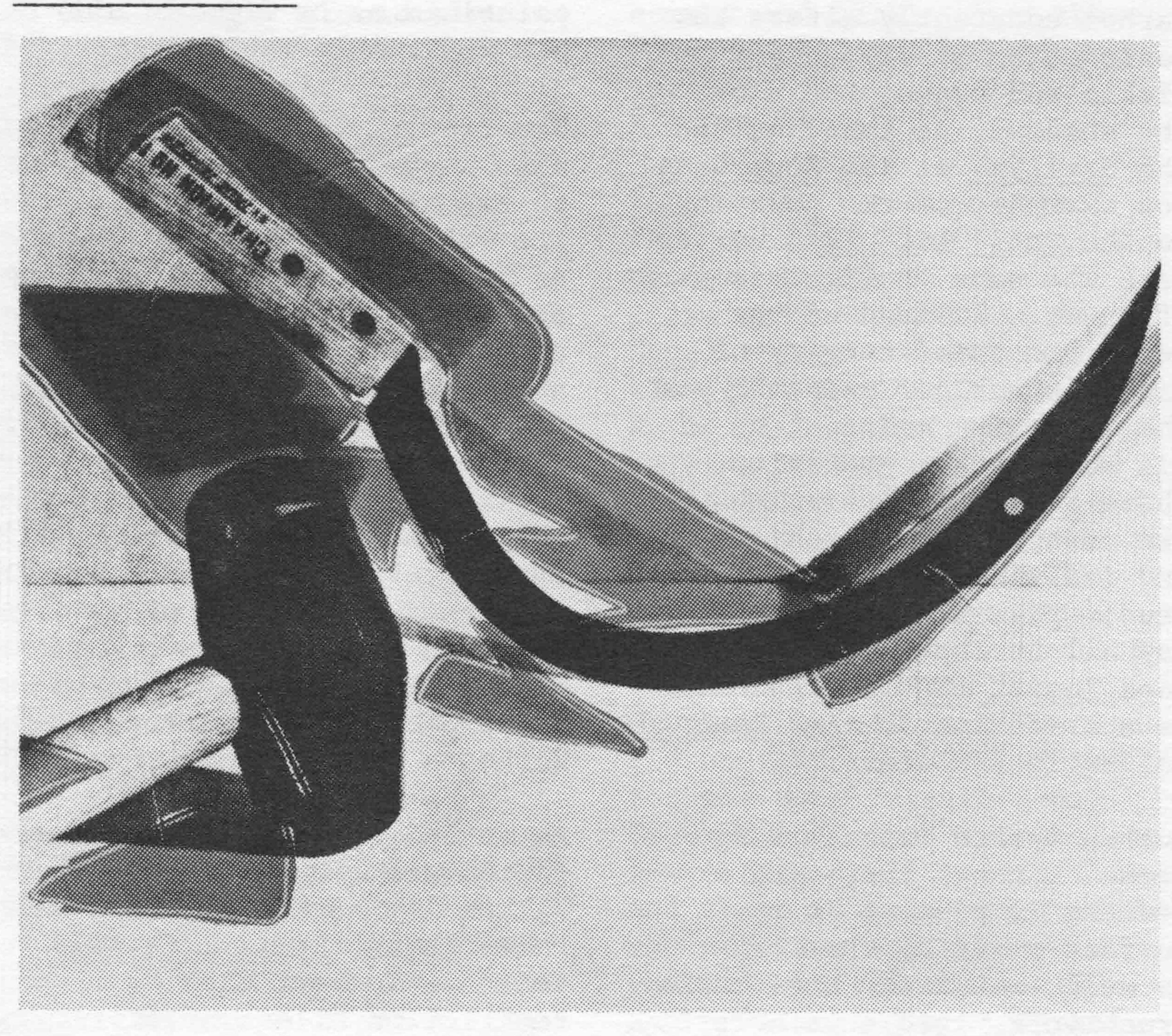
Still Life 1976



The complexities of pictorial representation which characterize the Still Life 1976 paintings mark a definitive step in Warhol's acknowledgement of the history of twentieth century painting and of his role in that history. Unlike Warhol's earlier work the Still Life 1976 paintings do not repeatedly reproduce the same image (or screen) from canvas to canvas. Rather Warhol constantly alters the positioning of the hammer and sickle and consequently of the shadows, so that, unlike the Marilyns or the Soup Cans, for example, no two paintings in the Still Life 1976 series have the same configuration of forms. Instead of the media processed imagery of Warhol's earlier painting and the imitative media gloss of his more recent portraits, these Still Life paintings are each different, unique and individually composed studio pieces. The titles may all be the same, but each does insist that the painting is a traditional, time-honored painterly set piece.

Such a marked departure from Warhol's usual operating procedures is present in the surface style of the works as well, where the noticeable brush work, laid down before the screening of the image, is deliberately referential to New York School painting, in particular to the style of painters such as Franz Kline and William de Kooning, a painter whom Warhol himself has referred to as a model. Such explicit references to the heroic period of modern American painting comes at a time of intense scholarly and critical reassessment of that style of painting, a decade and a half after Warhol's own earlier works had helped to eclipse the

movement, at least in the critical press. However, through the thinness of his application of the acrylic paint Warhol has characteristically drained the broad brush strokes of any distinctive personality, thus flying in the face of earlier critical and popular appraisals of abstract expressionism as a record of the psyche of the artist. Warhol himself remains anonymous in these paintings as he does in all his work.

The Still Life 1976 paintings also include other references to twentieth century art. The selection of still-life as a subject, the intersecting and interpenetration of forms and shadows, the shifting alternation between background and foreground derive from cubism, while the strong formal properties of negative shapes and the long, irregularly broken lines and patterned decoration of the drawings reflect the work of Matisse whose draughtsmanship had provided inspiration for Warhol's earlier work.

As an extension of figurative and compositional devices Warhol limits his use of color in the Still Life 1976 series. In part such a restriction allows more intense investigation of formal relationships between one pictorial form and another, but more importantly, the red, white and black are iconographically suggestive. During the period just before and just after the Russian Revolution El Lissitzky, Malevich and other Russian artists used these same colors in their paintings and their prints to assert an ideological position in support of the Bolsheviks (the Reds) against the counter-revolutionaries (the Whites).

Ultimately we must confront the political implications of Warhol's Still Life 1976 paintings, the artist's protestations that he paints merely for fun notwithstanding. Although the paintings are certainly not a political manifesto (though they may, in their variety and style be an artistic one), the paintings are comments, and wry ones at that, on the world which Warhol has always seen so unblinkingly around him. Like his earlier work, the iconography of the Still Life 1976 canvasses is provocative. Political issues have appeared throughout Warhols work in such images as the electric chair paintings (1963-1967), the race riots (1963), the atomic bomb (1965), the Mao portraits (1972), the Vote McGovern poster (1974), and the American Indian paintings (1976). Yet none of these images focuses on the symbolic generality of a social, economic and political system with such incisiveness and clarity as the Still Life 1976 paintings.

Considering Warhol's position in the world of patron-gallerymuseum which he so consciously orchestrates from his offices overlooking Union Square, the political implications of the Still Life 1976 paintings assume more powerful meaning. In a very real way any artist is dependent upon a gallery system to market his product. Yet Warhol presents a symbol antithetic to the entire capitalist marketing system upon which he so obviously depends and to which the name of his studio/office-the Factory--so consciously refers. Ironically, of course, only those private collectors, corporations or museums who particularly benefit from the capitalist

system can afford to purchase these pictures. Warhol thus establishes an equivocal situation in which the capitalist elite display a referent symbol of a competing and antagonistic economic system in their homes, corporate offices and museum galleries. American consumerism thus advertises communism. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that Warhol produced these hammer and sickle (and the American Indian) paintings in 1976, the year of the Bicentennial.

In his early career Warhol forced the cultural establishment to integrate signs of crass consumerism (the Soup Cans) and commercial exploitation (the Marilyns) into the world of high art, thus helping to destroy the very distinction between high and low art. Now Warhol presents hammers and sickles (and paintings of Mao, American Indians and black transvestites with the Ladies and Gentlemen), all more lusciously and seductively painted, for the same integration. Perhaps more than ever before in history, politics is life and there is no other artist who previews and records that life as perceptively and unflinchingly as Warhol.

Excerpts from an essay by
John Paoletti, Guest Curator
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This exhibition of recent paintings by one of America's most influential artists was originated by the MATRIX/HARTFORD project at the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut and is part of an ongoing series of exchanges between that project and the MATRIX/BERKELEY project of

the University Art Museum, Berkeley. Last Fall, MATRIX/ HARTFORD presented a performance by San Francisco artist Jim Pomeroy with the assistance of MATRIX/BERKELEY. We would like to thank Andrea Miller-Keller, MATRIX/ HARTFORD Curator, for her help in coordinating this exhibition of Andy Warhol's paintings in Berkeley. Our thanks also to art historian John Paoletti of Wesleyan University for allowing us to reprint excerpts from his MATRIX/HARTFORD essay.

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Works in MATRIX:

Still Life 1976, 1976, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas. 72" x 86" (LC # 1170).

Still Life 1976, 1976, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas. 72" x 86" (LC # 1173).

Still Life 1976, 1976, acrylic and silkscreen on canvas. 72" x 86" (LC # 1176).

Still Life 1976, 1976, pencil and watercolor on paper. 28 3/8"x 41 1/4" (LC #D088).

Still Life 1976, 1976, pencil and watercolor on paper.
41 1/4" x 28 3/8" (LC #D-94).

All works in this exhibition are lent by the Leo Castelli Gallery, New York City.

Selected one-person exhibitions:
Bodley Gallery, NYC '56, '57, '58, '59; Ferus Gallery, LA '62, '63, '66; Stable Gallery, NYC '62, '64; Leo Castelli Gallery, NYC '64, '66, '69, '77; Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylania, '65.

'68; Moderna Museet, Stockholm
'68; Neue Nationalgalerie der
Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin '69;
Pasadena Art Museum '70;
Whitney Museum of American
Art, NYC '71; Tate Gallery,
London '71; Baltimore Museum
of Art '75; Wurttembergischer
Kunstverein, Stuttgart '76;
Kunsthaus, Zurich '78;
Wadsworth Atheneum, MATRIX 50,
Hartford, CT '79.

Selected bibliography by Warhol:

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