

# GALERIE BRUNO BISCHOFBERGER

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MY RELATIONSHIP WITH ANDY WARHOL

Bruno Bischofberger, May 2001

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I have been involved with Andy Warhol for a large part of my life as an art dealer, collector and friend. Please allow me to indulge myself in a brief history of my relationship with the artist.

I exhibited some of Andy's paintings in a group exhibition on Pop Art at my gallery in Zurich in 1965, but I did not meet Andy in person until the following year when I visited the Factory for the first time. During a subsequent trip to New York in 1968 I tried to buy some paintings from him. He told me that he had given up painting, but he agreed to offer me some of the early paintings which he had kept. He let me choose from a group of about twenty, and I bought eleven of them: hand-painted works including *Superman*, *Batman* and a colourful *Coca-Cola*, and several large *Disasters* and serial portraits. I had to pay what seemed a very high price at the time to convince him to part with them. He also granted me a "right of first refusal," which started a long professional and personal relationship that lasted until his untimely death in 1987.

At around this time I asked him about doing portrait commissions for clients of mine, and we worked out a simple standardised system of size and price per panel. In 1971, after I had brought in a number of portrait commissions, I asked him to make me a series of portraits of a well-known person in a large size to offer for sale to the public. I wanted him to use Albert Einstein, but Warhol suggested Mao Tse-Tung as he had recently read in the newspapers that Mao was the most famous living person. Mao it was, and Warhol made his ten big blue Maos for me in 1972, which were exhibited at the Kunstmuseum Basel in the same year.

In 1969 I was one of the founding partners of *Interview Magazine*, with twenty-five percent interest. I maintained my stake until 1986, when I traded it with Andy for a group of paintings. In 1971, I published Andy's *Electric Chairs* portfolio, which was printed in Zurich. I was also the producer of *L'amour*, a Warhol movie which was shot mostly in Paris in 1970, though it

was not edited and screened until 1972.

In 1970, the first serious catalogue raisonné of works by Andy Warhol was published, a laudable but not entirely complete effort. It was compiled by Rainer Crone, an academic whose research I had supported. After publication, I suggested to Andy that I would assemble an ongoing archive with a view to publishing a comprehensive and complete catalogue raisonné at some point in the future. I entrusted Thomas Ammann, who had started working for me in 1971, with the day-to-day activity of archiving the material as it accumulated. When Thomas left my Gallery in 1976 to become an independent art dealer, he asked me if he could continue the project on his own. I agreed, and he kept working on it until his premature death in 1993. Work on the catalogue was continued by his collaborator George Frei in partnership with Neil Printz at the Andy Warhol Foundation. The first volume was published by Phaidon Press in 2002.

Andy and I travelled a lot together in the seventies and eighties, frequently accompanied by Fred Hughes and Andy's ever-changing entourage, for openings of exhibitions and to visit collectors who had commissioned portraits. Warhol came to Zurich on numerous occasions, stayed with us in St. Moritz and we visited Appenzell together. The most special visit on a personal level being for the christening of my son Magnus, for whom Andy had agreed to become godfather. I bought paintings on a regular basis and sometimes an entire series such as the *Reversals*, which Andy made in between 1978–1980. This series culminated in a group of horizontal paintings which are almost eleven-metres wide. In 1982 I asked him to create a group of small works for children. Andy responded with the *Toy Paintings*, which I showed in my gallery in Zurich in 1983. Warhol designed wallpaper of silver fish swimming on a blue background which made the gallery look like an aquarium, and the paintings were hung at eye level for three- to five-year-old children. Adults had to squat to examine the paintings closely, the opposite of me having to lift up my little children when looking at paintings in museums. We even went so far as to charge an entry fee for adults not accompanied by children under six, the proceeds being donated to a Swiss children's charity.

In 1984 I commissioned Andy, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Francesco Clemente to create a group of collaborative works, which were exhibited in Zurich in the same year. After this show, Andy and Jean-Michel went on to create a further group of mostly large collaborative paintings, the majority of which I subsequently acquired. In these paintings, at Jean-Michel's urging, Andy returned to painting by hand, picking up where he left off in 1962.

I came to New York eight to ten times every year in the seventies and eighties, and Warhol's Factory was like a second home to my wife Christina and me. I have always considered New York to be Andy's town, and since his death, it has never been quite the same.