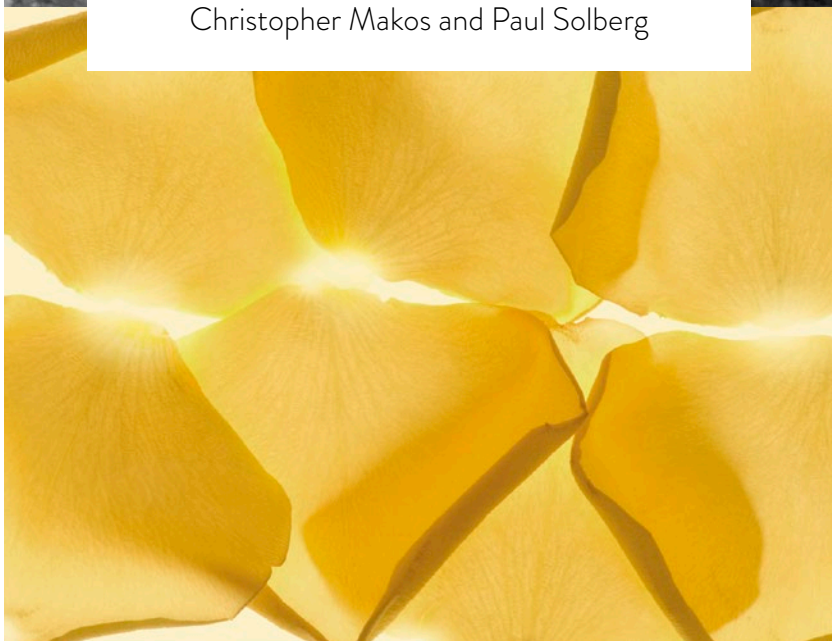


# ANDY IN NATURE

Christopher Makos and Paul Solberg



There was a boy  
A very strange, enchanted boy  
They say he wandered very far, very far  
Over land and sea  
A little shy and sad of eye  
But very wise was he

And then one day  
One magic day he passed my way  
And while we spoke of many things  
Fools and kings  
This he said to me:  
The greatest thing you'll ever learn  
Is just to love and be loved in return

— NATURE BOY by Eden Ahbez

**I think having land and not ruining it is the  
most beautiful art that anybody could ever want.**

— Andy Warhol, *The  
Philosophy of Andy Warhol*  
(From A to B and Back Again)

## FOREWARD

Andy Warhol spent much of his life and career obsessed with fame, celebrity, media personas, and, in essence, all that was mass-produced and commercial.

In the 1960s Warhol declared his greatest desire was to be “a machine” and built a public image that reinforced his sense of separateness through his physicality, as well as an air of affected cool detachment. He was pointedly unemotional and indifferent in public: like his can of soup, Warhol worked to turn himself into a famous symbol of mass production in late capitalist America.

Following the success of Netflix’s *The Andy Warhol Diaries* series, this exhibit examines how Warhol’s rich and increasingly conflicted inner life led him to engage with nature through the photography and film footage of Christopher Makos, his closest friend and confidante.

Though Warhol never publicly strayed from his urbane, white-wigged persona when he was away from Manhattan and the public eye, as Makos shows here, Warhol was able to relax in nature and embody a more sincere, stripped back self.

Paul Solberg’s flower series riffs on Warhol’s own treatment of flowers. *Andy in Nature* is the latest collaboration between Solberg and Christopher Makos. Solberg’s delicate nods to the beauty of nature relate both to the Makos images of Andy in Nature as well as the exhibit venue, Forest Hall, which is the birthplace of the American Conservation Movement, which today is many efforts to protect and conserve our land and resources. As Andy once said, “Land really is the best art.”

Forest Hall was built by James Pinchot, to house the summer program for Yale's Forestry School. The large room was an auditorium and lecture hall. The building also has an apartment which was purpose-built to serve as a studio for painters. Some of the most famous painters of the Hudson River School, including Worthington Whittredge, John Weir, Jervis McEntee and Sanford Gifford painted in Milford.

An appreciation for nature's richness, as well as the significance of how it is depicted in American art and considered philosophically, is at the heart of this exhibit and the historic town of Milford.

At the end of his life, Warhol pledged that both his properties in Montauk and his land in Colorado should be turned into nature preserves.

## ANDY AND NATURE

In this photograph, we see Warhol standing alone, clutching an umbrella. Not only is he fully clad, but twice shirted and apparently indifferent to the beach scene in which he finds himself.

Warhol's attire and the use of black and white film mean that it is not at all clear at first glance that this photograph was taken on a hot summer's day. The crisp quality loaned to the sand by Makos's bleaching it white, along with Warhol's cool, if not frosty stare, mean that the landscape could almost be a wintery, snow-covered one.

It is only Warhol's fellow beach goers, who we can see peppered along the shore beyond his spectral figure, that ground us in the season. For they are, as one would expect, soaking up the sun's rays, frolicking in the water and chatting in small groups.



*Andy protecting himself from the sun at  
Calvin Klein's house Fire Island, 1982  
©Christopher Makos*

Makos's flash reinforces the separation between the foreground figure of Warhol and his backdrop. Warhol is standing alone and a-glow, but not from the sun's rays, rather from the artificial light of the camera flash. This has illuminated the Yankees symbol on the hat on top of his head: an iconic emblem of Manhattan. This seemingly marks out Warhol as on the side that of the urban; as opposed to those standing behind, in the second plain, who are apparently embracing the natural world.

The distinction between the foreground and background, as created by the flash, makes Warhol appear as if he had been photoshopped into the setting. The photograph also hints at Warhol's complicated relationship both with the natural world and with himself: it draws our attention to Warhol's fragility, his need for protection and quite literal struggle to exist in his own, extremely sensitive skin.

What is illustrated clearly in the image is how Warhol's desire to be both within and a part of nature conflicts with his equally strong desire to separate and protect himself from it.

## QUEERING NATURE

The importance of Makos's photographs and films of Warhol that are featured in this exhibit is that they allow us to see another, more intimate side to him; one which not only was never presented to the public, but also one that was developed in the latter part of his life. In the natural settings that Makos depicts, Warhol was able to connect with himself away from his public persona. Indeed, this body of work documents an important shift in Warhol, who increasingly engaged with the natural world in his art, and also wanted to spend more time in nature in his later years.

All the photographs in the exhibition were taken in the 1980s. This was a profoundly traumatic and difficult period for New York City and its queer community due to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Warhol's acute awareness of his own fragility post-shooting, together with pre-existing hypochondria, meant that he increasingly retreated into nature as an escape from New York. His beloved Manhattan had begun to represent a site of illness and disease; the epicenter of an epidemic.

There is, therefore, a duality to the photographs, a joy and a melancholy. There is also a sense of impending loss in both Makos's film footage and his photographs of Warhol and his cohort from this period. This is a reflection of the enormity of the threat of HIV/AIDS

that was hanging over them. Indeed, many of the photographs take on a new meaning considering the omnipresence of personal loss which we know Warhol was facing. This sense is particularly palpable and poignant in Makos's footage of Warhol's love interest, the young Paramount executive Jon Gould, who tragically died due to complications from HIV/AIDS in 1986.

Throughout the 1980s, Warhol became increasingly protective of and selective in his group of friends. He started orchestrating group trips out of Manhattan to his land in Colorado, or his home in Montauk, or to Calvin Klein's Estate on Fire Island. These trips served not only as an escape but also as a conscious attempt to cultivate joy. He wanted to recognize the value in queer relationships amid a culture that was not only failing to recognize that value, but actively stigmatizing homosexuality. Much of American media at the time strove to portray AIDS/HIV as divine punishment for the 'unnaturalness' of queer sexuality and same sex acts. This revealed a homophobic culture which portrayed queer relationships as depraved and saw the disease as validation of this view.

When interviewed about this period and the photographs, Makos explains: "They are important photographs to me because they are about joy and happiness. They were taken during a period that was defined by the Aids epidemic, but what we see in these images, and what it's important to remember, is that while that was going on there were levels of happiness that we worked really hard to create."

Interestingly, it is during the same period that these photographs were taken that we see Warhol engaging more fully with nature than he ever had previously. He completed his *Endangered Species* (1983) and *Vanishing Animals* (1986) series, the first of which was commissioned by art dealers Ronald and Frayed Feldman. The commission was undertaken after conversations with Warhol about his concerns over rising sea levels and beach erosion, which he was noticing as he spent increasing amounts of time at his home in Montauk.

There is a curious kind of nature-nostalgia present in both the *Endangered Species* (1983) and the *Vanishing Animals* (1986) series. This is partly because Warhol chose animals that have not yet fully been lost to extinction. Thus, the loss is abstract and they are left in a state of suspended mourning, meaning they remain ‘un-grievable’. They then become melancholic, nostalgic emblems of a natural world that is not yet fully lost and therefore unable to be let go.

This same nostalgic, melancholic quality can be seen in much of the Makos’s footage, especially in that of Gould. After having been introduced by Makos in 1980, Gould and Warhol embarked on an intense relationship that Warhol often found frustrating. Gould struggled with his sexuality and had a great fear of being publicly outed, so was reluctant to fully commit to Warhol. This dynamic reminds us of the struggle to metabolize emotions in Warhol, which had led him to want to become a machine devoid of them.

*I’ve got these desperate feelings that nothing means anything. And then I decide that I should try to fall in love, and that’s what I’m doing now with Jon Gould, but then it’s just too hard.*

– Andy Warhol, diary entry, 1981

If we look at Makos’s portraits together with the contact sheets from Warhol’s camera, we can glimpse what was going on behind the images. We see Warhol’s own eerily eager and somewhat obsessive attempts to preserve memories and times with Gould, who had yet to be diagnosed. There are hundreds of photos of Gould engaging in all kinds of activities: sheets and sheets of contacts, for example, of him swimming and getting out of the pool. Particularly poignant are the photos that Warhol took from the group trips to Aspen in the winter of 1982-1983. We can see multiple images of Jon Gould drawing Warhol a heart in the snow. These were taken only a month before the HIV/AIDS diagnosis which would take Gould’s life.

Having initially bought the land in Aspen where Warhol, Makos, Gould and their friends vacationed with the plan to build an estate, Warhol later changed his mind, stating simply, “having land and not ruining it is the most beautiful art that anybody could ever want.”

Warhol used the natural world to create protected spaces of queer fantasy in the shadow of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Love, illness and death combined and cohabited in his conception of nature with ever greater significance over the course of his life.

After Gould’s death, Warhol started to seek out nature as a protected place in which to respond to loss, both personal and ecological. He chose to not only preserve his land in Colorado, but also set out plans in his will to turn his estate in Montauk into nature preserve for artistic practice. Warhol went about ensuring that the memory of the lives and times spent on the land would survive through the encouragement of artistic and sensuous engagement with the plants, shingle, sand and salt that he himself had sought refuge in.

## THE HILTON BROTHERS AND SOLBERG'S FLOWERS

Warhol's relationship with nature was very much rooted in the artistic and queer community that he cultivated in his later years. Makos and Solberg's own artistic collaboration takes the form of "the Hilton Brothers", a dual identity that they created 18 years ago. This is very much inspired by, and indeed something of an offshoot of, Warhol's desire to foster a community of queer relationships centered on creative collaboration.

It was not only from Warhol that Makos learnt to appreciate the importance of creative relationships: he had apprenticed with Man Ray in Paris decades earlier. In the 1920s, Man Ray worked with Duchamp on a photographic series that focused on the construction of Duchamp's drag persona, Rose Sélavy. Makos used this as his inspiration for the *Altered Image Series* (1981). Warhol eagerly agreed to the project: he had a pre-existing fascination with image manipulation and self-construction, especially as it pertained to drag queens, and he had previously explored this in his *Ladies and Gentleman Series* (1975).

*Andy Dandy* (2007) is Solberg and Makos's own attempt (as the Hilton Brothers) to continue this rich lineage of collaboration. The series of twenty diptychs considers the historical association between Andy Warhol and flowers, as rooted in his *Flowers* (1964) paintings. In these works, Warhol asks the viewer to draw on their preexisting knowledge and experience of flowers and compare this

to the symbolized, unrealistic and plastic forms on the silk screen. He shows us how the image can capture something organic and reduce it, through reproduction, into a reduced symbol that can be turned into commercial products, such as wallpaper or fabric prints.

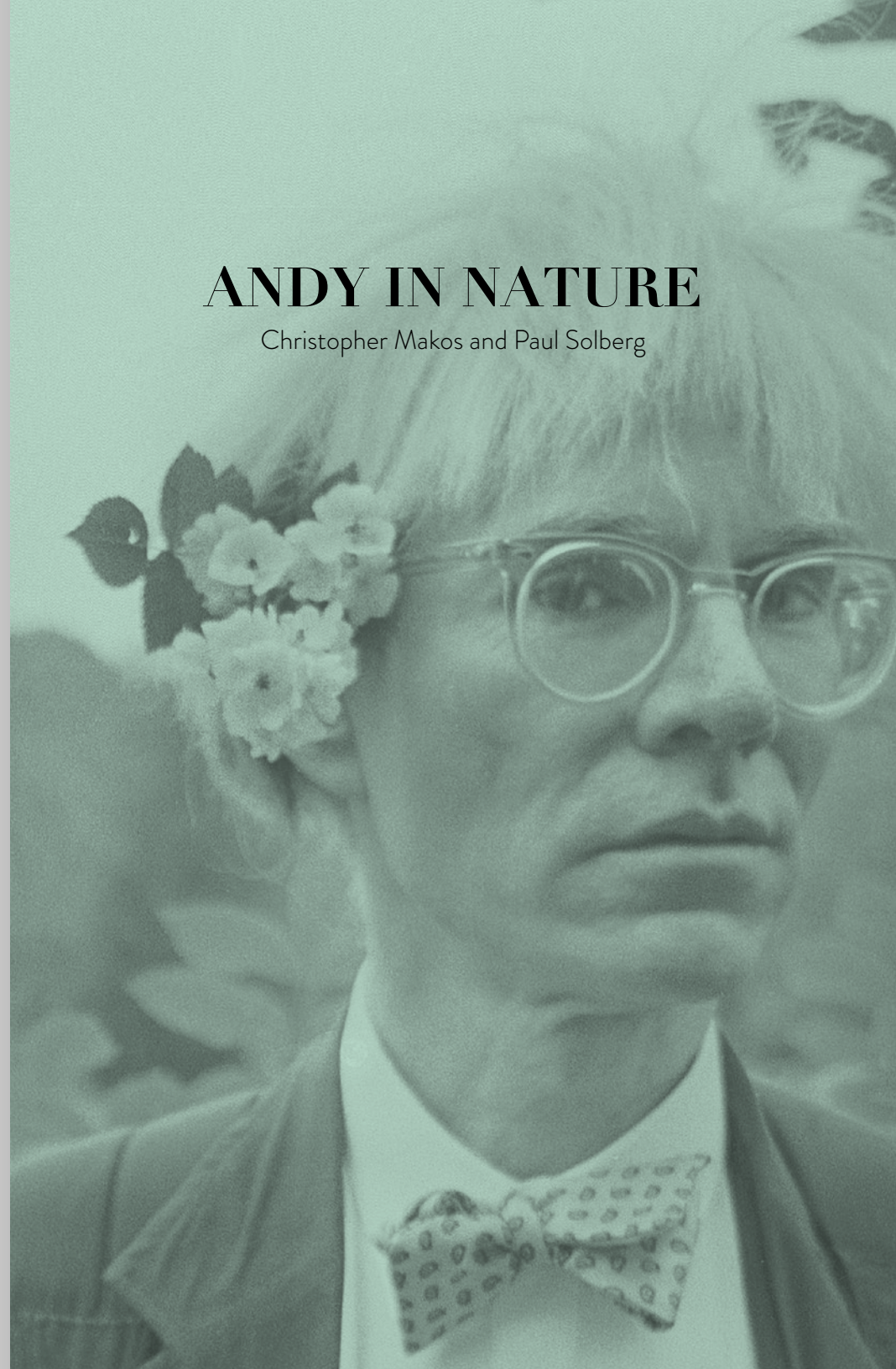
In *Andy Dandy* (2007) Makos and Solberg combine selected portraits from the *Altered Image Series* (1981) and juxtaposes them with Solberg's own renditions of flowers. Unlike Warhol's reduced, flat, plastic, caricatured hibiscus, however, Solberg's flowers are vivid portraits, detailing living anatomical entities. This creates a playful dialogue between Warhol, Makos' and Solberg's work that reminds us of Warhol's vitality despite his public machine-like persona.

Indeed, Solberg's flowers ground the exhibit in its main theme, the power of a deep appreciation for the natural world. Like Warhol, Solberg eschews the saccharine sentimentality common in so much photography and art which considers floral blooms. Yet, in deliberate contrast with Warhol's images, Solberg renders hyper-realistic living objects, bringing compositional clarity to his subject. Whether his flower portraits or portraits of a human being, there is an ideological yearning in his photographs. He sees the flower as idol, with a sensitivity of light as though it is washing over human skin, whether the flower is intact, or he has disassembled as temporary sculpture. He reminds us of the temporal nature of life. That the subject will change after the moment of capture. There is a soulful anatomical focus, bringing a pulse to the adamant object. Solberg creates these photographic ideals, perhaps a response to the era in which he lives.

Solberg's considered and sincere appreciation of nature, connects this exhibition to Milford and seeks to pay homage to the town as the birthplace of the American Conservation Movement. Forest Hall has a rich history of examining and celebrating the intimate relationship between art and nature. The original portion of the building, designed by Calvert Vaux, included a studio space for some of the most prominent Hudson River School painters, including Worthington Whittredge, John Weir, Jervis McEntee and Sanford Gifford. The extended section where Andy in Nature is on view, was built in 1904 to house Yale University Forestry's School summer program, bringing the first generation of American Foresters to Milford.

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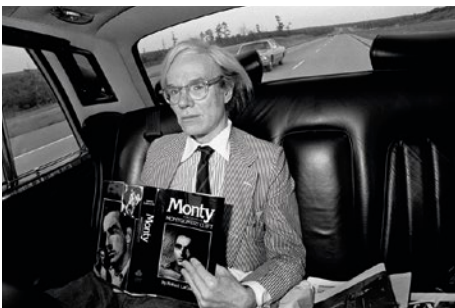
Andy in the Garden of the Philip Johnson House, New Canaan Ct. 1982



Andy at the Fire Island home of Calvin Klein 1982



Warhol at the Aspen Airport, standing behind the experimental plane of John Denver 1981



Warhol in his Rolls Royce on his way to his Montauk, L.I. Stanford White compound 1977



Study 602 P.P. 2/2 44"x66.2" / 2008



Two Tulips P.P. 2/2 / 44"x65.3" / 2007



White P.P. 2/2 44x62.4" / 2008



Water Lily Five P.P. 2/2 44"x66.2" / 2005





Andy on the West Side Highway New York with some Bikers 1981



Andy with fellow artists Edgartown, Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts 1981



Andy in Front of Aspen Mountain, Colorado 1983



Andy rowing at the Bois de Boulogne, Paris, France 1982



Andy in Nature P.P. 2/2 44"x63" / 2005



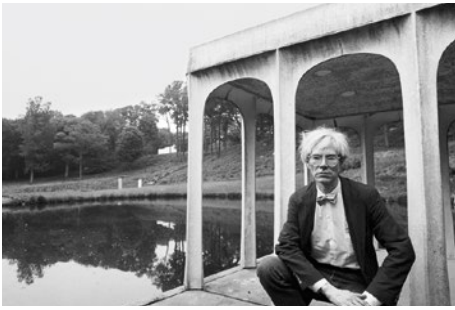
Study 616 P.P. 2/2 / 44"x66.2" / 2008



Space Two P.P 2/2 / 44"x66.3" / 2008



Study 619 P.P. 2/2 44"x66.4" / 2008



Andy sitting in front of the Philip Johnson Folly, 1982



Andy with Peter Wise on the Baby Slopes, Aspen, Colorado 1982



Andy at his Montauk compound with his Caretaker 1977



Andy at the Bird Market, in Beijing, Chine 1982



Pedals in Water A.P. 2/2 / 2007



Space Five A.P. 2/2 / 44"x66.3" / 2008



Piaf A.P. 2/2 / 44"x66.4" / 2009



Grey Rose P.P. 2/2 / 44"x66.2" / 2004



Andy at the New York Zoo, in front of a Trash Pale 1982



Andy in Front of the Philip Johnson "Glass House" New Canaan Ct. 1982



Warhol standing on his property in Carbondale, Colorado by his stream 1981



Andy in the Fur Jacket that the Fashion designer Halston gave him on the slopes in Aspen 1982



On the rented house in Aspen, Colorado in front of Icicles 1984



Andy at Colorado State University, touring the animal husbandry campus 1981



At the Moccasin shop, New York 1984



In Montauk with Halston model, Pat Cleveland 1981



Andy Dandy Eight, 2007



Andy Dandy Five, 2007



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