

# Artistic brands: Halston & Warhol

## *At the Mint*



Andy Warhol, Liza Minnelli, 1979, Collection of The Andy Warhol Museum.

Written by Katie Toussaint | Photos courtesy of The Andy Warhol Museum

**H**ad you been an artistic type navigating New York City's creative scene from the '60s to the '80s, you might have spent time at The Factory. This space was silver—it was decorated with paint, tin foil and mirrors—and it was artist Andy Warhol's studio. Walking in, you would have mingled with the likes of models, actors, filmmakers and artists. You would have run into actress Liza Minnelli, whose portrayal of an American singer in Berlin during the Nazi Uprising in the 1972 film "Cabaret" garnered an Oscar.

You would have perhaps chatted with famous fashion designer Roy Halston Frowick, better known as "Halston," who just happened to be Minnelli's confidant and fashion guru. Halston pioneered the use of Ultrasuede in our country's fashion sensibilities, and was known for draping fabrics and emphasizing simple elegance.

Last but not least, you would have crossed paths with Warhol. Warhol and Halston met in the '70s by way of fashion illustrator Joe Eula—Warhol worked with him in 1972 on Halston's fashion show for the Coty Awards at Lincoln Center while exploring his newfound interest in fashion as the new media art form in television. A friendship was born. And so was a sort of brand.

"Warhol and Halston are iconic names in American culture—luxury brands, if you will—but also deeply resonant of an era when experimentation and audacity were the hallmarks of a new kind of art." Eric Shriner, Director of The Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, wrote these words in the foreword of the catalogue "Halston & Warhol: Silver & Suede," detailing the museum's exhibition on the two men.

That exhibition, "Halston & Warhol: Silver & Suede," has traveled from The Andy Warhol Museum, to Des Moines in Halston's home state, to Mint Museum Uptown, where it is on view March 7 through June 14.

"It's a nice, in-depth exploration," said Jon Stuhlman, Senior Curator of American, Modern, and Contemporary Art at the Mint. "On one hand, it's the story of two of the leading creative minds of the time and how they inspired each other and what their friendship meant to each other, [as well as] the work they produced during the time they were connected."

As for the brands of these two innovative minds: America became their marketplace. "They were really amazing self-promoters," Stuhlman said. "They really clawed their way up into the world to create success."

Warhol burst onto the scene with his paintings and prints. His career as a commercial illustrator veered off into his pursuit of the Pop Art movement in the

1960s, "a reaction to art that was being seen as too intellectual and too divorced from everyday life," Stuhlman said.

Warhol commonly pulled inspiration from celebrities and products in popular culture for his subject matter. Take Liza Minnelli, for instance. Warhol drew out this familiar face from his social circle and turned it into a bright print. Herein lies Warhol's brand. Stuhlman explained, "It's this vibrant, art-is-everywhere, art-is-everything idea, that art could seep into many facets of life."

The artist also believed in the mass production of art. Through his silkscreen technique—a semi-mechanical way of reproducing an image—he would make dozens of slightly different variations of a print. With the Minnelli print, for example, he could change the color of the backdrop. "He was really prominent for pioneering this idea," Stuhlman said, "that art should be for the masses, and should use mechanical reproduction—and that it could still be an original work of art."

Halston's evolving creative brand catered to the masses as well. He stepped into the fashion scene as a milliner at Bergdorf Goodman in the 1970s, before he launched Halston Enterprises and branded his style with the use of new materials and innovative designs like the shirtdress and body stocking. In the early '80s, he signed a deal with JCPenney—losing his contract with Bergdorf Goodman—to produce well-designed clothing that was affordable for the masses. Therein was his brand: "It was a casual elegance for everyone," Stuhlman said. "He really wanted to make nice materials and nice clothing available to a broad range of people."

Throughout this creative brand development, Halston's and Warhol's lives were intertwined. A stroll through the "Silver & Suede" exhibition will reveal this. Stuhlman said, "It's almost as much about their creative relationship as it was about their personal relationship, and the times and culture that they lived in, and how, in a lot of ways, they were on parallel tracks in their different fields."

Once you enter the exhibition, you will walk through early years and ephemera, fashion setups and paintings, photos and a clubby section inspired by Studio 54, a nightclub Warhol and Halston frequented. You'll notice pieces that shared a muse, such as the pillbox hat famously crafted by Halston for Jackie Kennedy Onassis, juxtaposed with a black-and-white print of Jackie by Warhol. "Hopefully it will inspire more interdisciplinary work," Stuhlman said. "The Mint tries to represent a lot of different artistic genres and to try to have different partnerships within the community, and hopefully that will spark creativity in Charlotte."