

Taking off on Andy Warhol

CHILDREN'S
MUSEUM
EXHIBIT ON
THE ICONIC
ARTIST WILL BE
AS ORIGINAL
AS HE WAS

By Charlotte Prong Parkhill

ANDY WARHOL SAID everyone would have 15 minutes of fame.

Now, an original Warhol exhibit could give The Children's Museum of Waterloo Region 15 weeks of fame in the international art world.

The exhibit is the offspring of a marriage of sorts between the museum's chief executive officer, David Marskell, and Toronto curator Marla Wasser.

"We're soulmates," says Wasser, on a day when the duo paired up to go over blueprints and finish each other's sentences as they talked about the creation of Andy Warhol's Factory, an exhibit scheduled to open Jan. 10.

Attendance at the museum doubled over the last year, from 28,000 to 56,000, and the number of members also jumped from 300 to 600, largely due to the popular Discovering Chimpanzees and Dinosaurs Alive exhibits.

Fresh from those successes, Marskell cast about for a project to keep the momentum going. ▶



David Marskell, CEO of The Children's Museum of Waterloo Region, and exhibit curator Marla Wasser are photographed in museum space that will be transformed into Andy Warhol's Factory. Photography • Mathew McCarthy



▲ Campbell's Soup T-shirt, 1981, Andy Warhol

◀ Campbell's Can (Won Ton Soup), 1981, Andy Warhol

Images courtesy of Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

► He managed to secure a pre-curated travelling exhibit called the Art of Andy Warhol for Children from the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh, Warhol's birthplace. But that wasn't enough, because Marskell is a lot like Warhol: a public relations machine, a ringleader in the big top, a silver-haired leader of the factory.

He wanted more, so he took plans for the travelling exhibit to the museum's board of directors, seeking ideas on how to expand it. Board president Tim Jackson's business partner, Andrew Abouchar, just happened to have a friend with Warhol expertise.

Enter Marla Wasser.

It was serendipity. "My husband and I have been passionate about art for 20 years," says Wasser. "It has become a huge part of our lives. We plan our vacations around art, going to shows and galleries."

Wasser, who owns an art advising and curating company called Pursuits, came up with the idea for the exhibit, to be called *The Art, Inspiration and Appropriation of Andy Warhol*.

The show will focus not just on prolific showman Warhol, but on artists who used his work as a springboard for their own creativity. Installations will include original Warhols alongside appropriations of his work by contemporary artists from around the world.

We're all familiar with Warhol's iconic images: the 32 Campbell's soup cans (Warhol had soup for lunch every day), Marilyn Monroe, Mick Jagger and Elizabeth Taylor. Their images seeped into the public consciousness and were used and reused in popular culture in a way and to a degree that perhaps never happened with any other artist.

Warhol, who died in 1987, might love the children's museum show.

"During his lifetime, Warhol didn't care if people appropriated his work. He was happy to have the images — and himself — become more famous," says Wasser. "He loved being famous."

She took the idea to Marskell, who approved it right away and gave Wasser complete creative freedom. She travelled to the Pittsburgh museum and to the Andy Warhol Foundation in New York City to pitch the idea and arrange to borrow some pieces of his art.

"They both are totally supportive and loved it," says Wasser. "It's completely original. No one has done a Warhol appropriation show — ever!"

The opportunity to create her own show,



The Last Supper, 1986, Andy Warhol ▲

Flowers, 1970, Andy Warhol ►

Images courtesy of Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts

one involving not just one artist but many, is a challenge and a dream come true for her. She is responsible for begging and borrowing 50 Warhol originals from museums, galleries and private collectors, as well as the original pieces of at least 10 contemporary artists from the U.S. and Europe. Heavy-hitters such as David LaChapelle, Richard Pettibone, Ray Beldner and Devorah Sperber all agreed to loan their works to her.

A recent behind-the-scenes peek at the Children's Museum revealed a crack staff of seven people, most in their 20s, pulling together myriad details for the exhibit. It was a maelstrom of activity with Marskell at the centre. An anonymous donation of \$150,000 from two Kitchener entrepreneurs allowed construction to get underway on the fourth floor, which ►





▲ Above, **Mick Jagger**, 1975, by Andy Warhol. ► An appropriation: **Can't Get No**, 2003, by Ray Beldner, created with sewn U.S. currency.

Images courtesy of Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts




► will be enclosed with glass walls. The new ventilation system will regulate heat and humidity levels to protect the valuable art work.

Business executives were being approached in the hope of securing sponsorships to support the exhibit, which will cost \$700,000 to mount and market.

There were plenty of decisions yet to be made — the minutiae of an original show. What Warhol-related merchandise would be sold in the gift shop? How should tickets be priced? Where would visitors line up? What special events could be held at the museum in conjunction with the exhibit? What about security, insurance, lighting? What partnerships could be made with the downtown business association and local hotels to draw visitors to the region?

Wasser sails through the controlled chaos, confident the exhibit will have a huge impact on the museum and the region.

"Why not in Kitchener?" she says. "This

is the Silicon Valley of the north. These things don't have to happen only in major city centres. The show is edgy, exciting, fun and interesting. And it's not elitist. Warhol saw art in everyday life." 

ALL ABOUT ANDY WARHOL'S FACTORY

When: Jan. 10 – April 19, 2009.

Where: Waterloo Region Children's Museum, 10 King St. W., Kitchener.

What: Original Andy Warhol artwork and appropriations, on loan from various sources.

- The Art of Andy Warhol for Children, on loan from the Andy Warhol Museum in Pittsburgh.
- The Velvet Years: 56 photographs on loan from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.
- The Factory: an opportunity to create your own Warhol-inspired work using modern technology.
- JMO Studio 54 fundraiser, Saturday, Feb. 28, at Andy Warhol's Factory 2009 at the museum, 10 King St. W., Kitchener. Includes live entertainment, cocktails; other refreshments, live entertainment and exhibit of fine art. Tickets are \$250; call 519-749-9387. All proceeds go to The Children's Museum.



▲ **After Warhol Campbell's Soup**, 2008, by Deborah Sperber, created with 698 spools of thread. Images courtesy of Andy Warhol Foundation for Visual Arts