

Even if the theme of ‘hearts’ is one that Andy Warhol did not often use in his work, it had been present throughout his career. In his early drawings that depicted the male body and also featured portraits of men, the themes of love and sex were very much present.<sup>1</sup> Hearts appeared on these drawings in black ink, sometimes even overpainted in red or gold contrasting with the ink strokes he used in his fine blotted line technique. In later years, he would even use diamond dust to achieve a sparkly surface. Throughout his work, Andy Warhol was fascinated by the theme of love. Hearts hardly appear in his work, or, if they do, these hearts are so overworked that they disappear in the profusion.

In the Nicola Erni Collection, the monumental *Human Hearts* created in 1979 hangs across from *Sixty Last Suppers*. In the former work, the potent, larger-than-life-size organic form of human hearts throb against a dark background. The vibrant colours give them an even greater intimation of life and the beating heart, and is it difficult to overlook. The monumental size of the canvas (297 × 1052 cm) gives the painting an overwhelming air. These astonishing serial hearts form a dramatic contrast in juxtaposition with Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Suppers* in black and white set in a precise grid, also ten metres wide. Life and death are represented so near to one another in a single room that one’s own heart is struck. Warhol’s career was marked by occasions in which life and death lingered so very near to each another. Whether in 1968, when he was shot and survived, or towards the end of his life in the 1980s when many of his friends were struck by the AIDS epidemic and eventually died: life and death were always there, on the fringes.

Warhol’s religious family upbringing and the theme of the Holy Heart may have also influenced his use of this symbol in his work. As with his earlier *Skulls* (1976), the eponymous subjects of this oversized canvas are depicted anatomically correct. Yet he would generally represent the familiar symbolic heart as a cliché of the theme of love as seen through a child’s eyes. Hearts can be found in the form of a candy box, or on playing cards, all drawn in a naïve style. In contrast, a heart in Andy Warhol’s work can also be depicted as a physiological diagram, as instructions on what to do in case of a heart attack, or on the pages of a phone book listing those whose surname is ‘Heart’.<sup>2</sup>

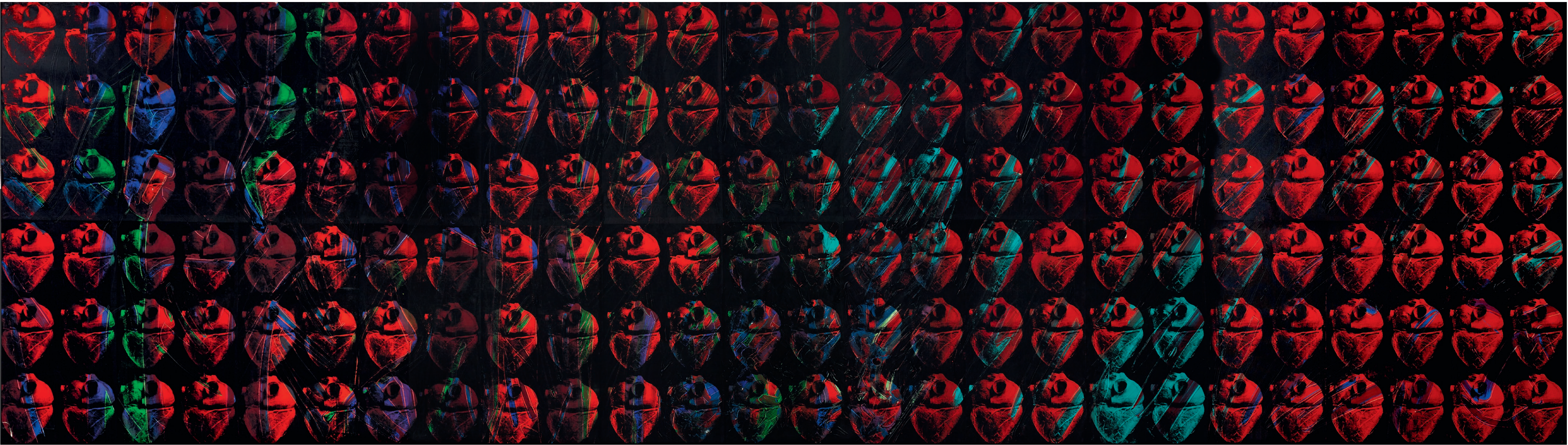
Andy Warhol elevated mundane everyday items – not only hearts, but also Campbell’s soup cans or Brillo boxes. His works reveal the beauty within ordinary objects and in familiar images. His subjects tend to be those things people typically acknowledge, about themes central to their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Andy Warhol: Love, Sex & Desire: Drawings 1950–1962*, ed. Blake Gopnik, Cologne 2020.

<sup>2</sup> *Andy Warhol: Hearts*, Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 20 April–25 May 2002, [www.ropac.net/exhibitions/515-andy-warhol-hearts/](http://www.ropac.net/exhibitions/515-andy-warhol-hearts/), accessed 24 June 2021.







*The repetition of the images, like all repetitions, simultaneously emphasizes the subject of the image and deflates it.* – Andy Grundberg<sup>1</sup>

It is perhaps one of the most well-known (and final) gathering of this particular group of people: the meal between Jesus and his Apostles the night before the crucifixion. And it is perhaps one of the most recognised works of art of all time: Leonardo da Vinci's mural painting *The Last Supper* executed at the end of the fifteenth century in the Milanese church of Santa Maria delle Grazie. Many aspiring artists attempted to imitate his skilled hand and they worshipped the very few works attributed to him. Finally, about 500 years later, the most reproduced religious painting of all time was to be copied not once but multiple times in various techniques by a single artist: American Pop art master Andy Warhol.

It is no surprise that Warhol felt challenged by the idea of appropriating such a seminal work, having made copies from reproductions of da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* already in the early 1960s.<sup>2</sup> And, of course, copying other masters – such as Botticelli, de Chirico and Raphael – followed shortly after.<sup>3</sup> It was in 1984 when the flamboyant art dealer Alexander Iolas commissioned Warhol to create a series of paintings and prints based on da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. The works were to be acquired by the bank Credito Valtellinese (based in Milan's Palazzo delle Stelline) and exhibited in its 2,000-square-metre space.<sup>4</sup> It was the location of the bank building, directly across the street from Santa Maria delle Grazie, that guided Warhol's engagement with Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece.<sup>5</sup> Warhol created over one hundred renditions of *The Last Supper*, but ultimately only twenty-five works were displayed in 1987 – *Warhol: Il Cenacolo* would be the last exhibition held during his lifetime.<sup>6</sup>

The ten-metre-long *Sixty Last Suppers*, executed by Warhol in 1986, is one of several canvases he produced in this monumental size. Made with his preferred technique of silkscreening, Warhol used the *Cyclopedia of Painters and Paintings* (1886) as his source, reproducing from the book an earlier engraving of Leonardo's *The Last Supper* and repeating it sixty times in a tightly structured grid across the horizontal surface.<sup>7</sup> Though the same reproduction is rendered repeatedly in black and white in a generally ordered grid, the contrast of each image varies slightly and the traces of the work's production are faintly visible. The rectangular form and intense contrast release an amazing combination of opposite effects: while the repetition of the image emphasises the flat surface of the canvas, the image itself oscillates between flatness and illusionistic depth. Moreover, the rectangular form seems to align with the cube of a television screen, thereby objectifying itself as it also evokes a moving image. The table where *The Last Supper* takes place is abstracted, visualised as a flat white band that runs through the canvas in several rows like filmstrips.

Is the repetition of the image responsible for both the emphasis and the deflation of the subject as Andy Grundberg asserts? Putting aside the question of Warhol's religiosity, the reproduction, distribution and reception of the image is emphasised through the composition and its repetitive image rather than as a result of what we actually see. Warhol heroises Leonardo's iconic painting and through its appropriation allows both works to enter popular culture, to stimulate debate and – due to its reimagining – to be accessible as a movable non-site-specific work of art.

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1 Andy Grundberg, *How Photography Became Contemporary Art: Inside an Artistic Revolution from Pop to the Digital Age*, New Haven 2021, p. 16.  
2 Georg Frei and Neil Printz (eds.), *The Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné*, vol. 1: *Warhol: Paintings and Sculptures 1961–1963*, New York 2002, p. 293.  
3 Jessica Beck, 'Andy Warhol: Sixty Last Suppers', *Gagosian Quarterly*, Summer 2017, p. 86.

4 Blake Gopnik, *Warhol: A Life as Art*, London 2020, p. 900.  
5 Beck, 'Andy Warhol: Sixty Last Suppers', p. 86.  
6 Gopnik, *Warhol: A Life as Art*.  
7 Beck, 'Andy Warhol: Sixty Last Suppers', p. 87.





Andy Warhol

*Sixty Last Suppers, 1986*  
Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas  
295 x 998 cm