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Rob Pruitt, *The Andy Monument*, 2011, Chromed, fiberglass reinforced polyester resin, concrete base, Figure: 84 x 26 in. (213.4 x 66 cm); base: 40 ½ x 50 x 50 in. (113 x 127 x 127 cm), maximum overall dimensions: 124 ½ x 50 x 5 in. (316.2 x 127 x 12.7 cm), Union Square (17th St. & Broadway); March 30–October 2, 2011, Photo James Ewing, Courtesy of Public Art Fund.

Comeback Kids

BY ANTHONY HADEN-GUEST

Rob Pruitt's *Andy Monument* stands on Union Square West outside Warhol's second Factory. The unveiling was on a gray day in March, and amongst those that attended or went to the cocktails that followed in the actual building at 860 Broadway (though not on the right floor) and the subsequent dinner were of the Warhol years, such as Ultra Violet, Taylor Mead, Vincent Fremont and Christopher Makos. The monument is a life-size portrait sculpture, chromed, with mundane details smoothed out, so that, like the late artist himself, it both absorbs and reflects. And, it's a monument to a comeback—two comebacks, in fact.

The first being that of Rob Pruitt. In the late 80s, Pruitt and Jack Early were known as Pruitt-Early and piping hot. But then their 1992 show at Leo Castelli, *Red, Black, Green, Red, White, Blue*, a take on African-American culture, was widely slammed for racism. The charges seem very much to do with that moment in time, but were so ferocious that Pruitt-Early fractured and both departed the art world for many years. Then, in 1998, Pruitt was invited to contribute a piece to what we would nowadays call a pop-up show on 14th Street. He laid out \$500 worth of cocaine in a three foot line. *Cocaine Buffet* was a socko re-launch, and Pruitt is now the New York art world's well regarded prankster-in-chief.

Arguably, though, the greater comeback that the monument celebrates is of Warhol himself. So great is the esteem in which the artist now is held that a recent press release from Christie's New York describes him as "the high priest of Pop art." It's a posthumous priesthood. "When he was alive, he couldn't get more than \$50,000 for a painting," says Ronnie Cutrone, who ran the Factory's art production. "It was pathetic. Other artists who weren't nearly as

good as he was, were getting two hundred and fifty, four hundred and fifty thousand for each canvas. And Andy would never even get the fifty; there would be a big discount. So he might get \$35,000 top dollar for his art. Which I found to be a travesty. In the mid-70s, you couldn't give those paintings away. He did the *Hammer and Sickle* show. They all came back. Not one sold. *The Dollar Sign* show. Nothing!"

So, to the portraits. "In the early 70s, Andy was charging like \$25,000 a pop!" says Gerard Malanga. Warhol began doing well, but was dismissed as a sell-out. "He was put down, he was laughed at, he was considered not important, a put-on, and all of that," says Cutrone. Warhol's early work was, yes, "important," but less so than that of his fellow Popsters, and his auction record during his lifetime was \$385,000 in 1986 for *200 One Dollar Bills*, bought by collector, Pauline Karpidas. Warhol's death on February 22, 1987 did not immediately jack up his market. On May 4, 1993, ten of twelve early works consigned by Fred Hughes at Sotheby's were bought in. But then the Warhol market *did* pick up: Karpidas recently resold her piece for \$43,762,500.

Every art world comeback is not necessarily a special case, but there are patterns. Llyn Foulkes is a Los Angeles artist, now in his late 70s, who first exhibited at the Ferus Gallery in the early 60s. He won a prize at the Biennale de Paris, he was in the São Paulo Bienal, and was given a show by the late, great curator, Walter Hopps. In 1992, he was in *Helter Skelter*, Paul Schimmel's sock-in-the-eye show at MOCA LA. "Llyn was kind of the star of the show and he titled it," says Doug Walla of New York's Kent Gallery, who had been working with him for five years. "He had a retrospective in '94. But then things really cooled for him. There were some flurries, but no momentum."

Walla gave Foulkes an exhibition in his New York gallery in 2005. "This was the height of the boom, a time when collectors were besotted with the Next Young Thing. Collectors were rushing into Columbia and Yale and UCLA, particularly those three universities," he said. "Everybody was so focused on young, emerging people that didn't have any pimples, you know. That's the story of 2004 to 2007, I think. Post 9/11." His Foulkes show centered upon *The Lost Frontier*, a big painting that the artist had worked on for seven years. "About thirty people came to the opening. Nothing sold," he said. "I said, this is what happens when you don't show in New York for fifteen years. People forget. This is not an artist that networks. This is an artist who works in the studio."

Walla did another show with Foulkes in 2007. This time, about 300 people came, but again, nothing sold right away. "In 2007, it wasn't happening," said Walla. So he published a book about Foulkes and put it on the web in 2009. That same year, though, Foulkes' work was brought to the attention of Ali Subotnick, chief curator at the Hammer Museum in Westwood, by a collector who was on the board.

She paid him a studio visit, was knocked out, and made Foulkes the mainstay of *Nine Lives*, a show of idiosyncratic West Coast artists that she already had in the planning stage. "We bought *The Lost Frontier*," she says. "They bought it for half a million bucks," Walla



Richard Hambleton, *Rodeo*, 1984-2009, Acrylic on canvas, 68 x 50 in. (172.7 x 127 cm), Courtesy of Woodward Gallery, NYC.

says. "Llyn just blew everyone away. But it was also Ali. She has become very passionate over this older artist. I told Llyn when we were working together that it has to come from someone who's young. And Ali, I think, was refreshed, let's say. We all become weary of the hype and the bullshit of young artists, who've got their press agents and their record prices and what not." François Pinault now has bought *Deliverance*, one of the paintings that Walla showed in 2007. Foulkes is to be in the Venice Biennale, the Getty, at *Documenta* in Kassel, Germany, and he will have a retrospective at the Hammer, curated by Ali Subotnick.

It's hard to say exactly why Foulkes fell from grace in the marketplace. His age? His elusiveness? But with many artists, it's easier. Yayoi Kusama had severe psychological problems. Lee Bontecou's career at Castelli was throttled by her husband. Otto Muehl of *Wiener Aktionismus*, who ran a commune that was at once anarchic and authoritarian, faded from view while he was serving a seven year prison term after his 1991 conviction for sexual activities involving adolescents. All have had comebacks.

So to Lee Lozano. Lozano, who lived in New York from the mid-60s until 1972, made paintings, including Word art that was often sexually raw and purely Conceptual work. She WAS also ever more acutely concerned with her privacy, and kept her distance both from newly vigorous Feminism, and from such phenomena of the time as the Art Workers' Coalition, announcing, I WILL

PARTICIPATE ONLY IN A TOTAL REVOLUTION. And in 1969, she began work on her *General Strike Piece*, beginning her instructions to herself thus: GRADUALLY BUT DETERMINEDLY AVOID BEING PRESENT AT OFFICIAL OR PUBLIC "UPTOWN" FUNCTIONS OR GATHERINGS RELATED TO THE "ART WORLD."

A solo show, *Lee Lozano—Painter*, opened at the Whitney on December 2, 1970 and ran until January. Later that year, she launched another project with her announcement to herself: 1st WEEK AUGUST, 71: DECIDE TO BOYCOTT WOMEN and took her *General Strike Piece* to its logical conclusion, beginning work on *Dropout Piece*. In 1972, she was evicted from her loft on Grand and moved to Dallas, Texas. And oblivion. She died in 1999.

On December 9 that year, a story in the *Dallas Observer* read: "Lee Lozano was among the most celebrated Conceptual artists of the 1960s. So why is she buried in an unmarked grave in Grand Prairie?" Plans for her 'unburying' were well underway though; two dealers, Jaap van Liere and Barry Rosen, undertook to organize her estate and care for her while she was still alive.

Van Liere and Rosen placed Lozano's art in small shows. Then, after her death, the pace began to pick up. In 2004, Lozano's work was featured at MOMA PS1. Two years later, she was in the Kunsthallen in Basel and Vienna. In 2006, Hauser & Wirth, who is now her primary dealer, exhibited her work in London and the following year in Zurich. In 2010, she was in the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. So, the privacy that Lee Lozano sought so ferociously has finally eluded her.

James Mayor, whose gallery on Cork Street, London, has made a forte of career resurrections, observes that the surest candidates are artists who have had solid careers and landed in distinguished collections, but whose work has faded.

Such was certainly the case of Richard Hambleton, who was making outstanding Street art at the same time as Keith Haring and Jean-Michel Basquiat, and also was making remarkable work in the studio. An art star in the early 80s, Hambleton self-immolated as surely as Lee Lozano, though not as terminally as Basquiat, and in Hambleton's case, the reason was a devastating substance addiction that severed his relationships with a string of art dealers. But Hambleton, whose studio I often visited, was making brilliant work despite everything, and two years ago, two dealers, Andy Valmorbidia, a New York-based Australian, and the Paris-based Vladimir Restoin-Roitfeld, son of the editor of French *Vogue*, moved in.

With the backing of Giorgio Armani, they gave a show in New York in September 2009. "We've hit London, we've hit Milan," Valmorbidia says. "Some pieces have gone up to 400,000 Euros. What we're doing with Richard hasn't even started."

Are there conclusions to be drawn, other than that careers rise and fall and sometimes rise again, and that dealers, collectors and artists are forever on the alert? Yes. There has been a change in the weather, I believe. "I think it's been kind of interesting to see, post-recession, depression, when things kind of fell apart, that people have gone back to searching for some value," says Doug Walla. □

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