The Analysis Of Andy Warhol's Marilyn Diptych

Formal Interpretation

Artist Andy Warhol has used Marilyn Monroe as both inspiration and as a focal point. The way he has arranged the whole piece has created a sense of balance. He has created balance by using numerous art elements and principles including colour, contrast and repetition. He has evenly divided the piece into two. Furthermore he used vibrant colours against dull colours which creates contrast.On the left hand side a warm but bright and bold palette has been utilised. It is harmonious and complementary and for the most part is similar but then a different colour is used to make it seem more intense and add a level of interest. However, on the right hand side a bland and dull platte has been utilised. It has been coloured using simply black and white but there is no consistency when looking at each painting. To expand some have more black, more grey or more white, they are all different and unique in some way. In comparison half of the Marilyn Diptych piece was ‘heavily pigmented while the other half was coloured in black and white.’ Plus, by using black and white against bright and vibrant colours contrast was created. There is a high level of contrast that has been produced and it has given it a dramatic effect. In addition repetition has been used by repeatedly using a common and well-known photograph of Marilyn Monroe. It is said that ‘by repeating the image, he evokes her ubiquitous presence in the media.’

Personal Context

Warhol was encouraged by his mother, a casual artist, to embrace his artistic side as child. As a child he collected pictures of movie stars and at the age of nine his mother gave him his first camera. At a young age he was exposed to current events which he said ‘later shaped his obsession with pop culture and celebrities'. This obsession led to a lifelong fascination with Hollywood. This fascination can be seen in his series of ‘iconic images’ of celebrities including Marilyn Monroe and Elizabeth Taylor. In 1960, ‘Warhol began using advertisements and comic strips’ in paintings. These works are examples of early Pop art, something that Warhol is now known for. Then later in 1962 Warhol started to explore silkscreening. These two artistic styles were combined to create one of Andy Warhol’s famous pieces of Marilyn Monroe in 1962 known as Marilyn Diptych.

Cultural/Historical Context

This particular piece of artwork was created during the following months after the sudden death of Marilyn Monroe in August 1962. Marilyn Monroe’s ‘life, career, and tragedy became a worldwide obsession.’ However, for artist Andy Warhol Marilyn was already a familiar subject so shortly after her death he began creating the piece now known as Marilyn Diptych, 1962. When Warhol began to look further into Marilyn he discovered a fusion of two consistent themes including death and cult of celebrity. During the following months after her tragic death Warhol created more than 20 silkscreen paintings of her. These 20 paintings were all of the same individual and extremely common publicity photograph from there 1953 film Niagara. It is said that by repeating the image it evokes her ‘ubiquitous presence in the media.’

Personal Opinion

I find this particular piece appealing and intriguing. At first I found it simple but wanted to know more, it made me curious. Many questions rose such as why is half of it colour and half black and white, why Marilyn Monroe, why is it repeated so many times? I personally like this piece of art and my eyes are instantly drawn to the bold colours and once unique style. I wonder whether the bold colours represent her life and her impact and the coldness of the fading black and white images represents her sudden death and departure from the world and slowly from the media. I wonder this because of the very different reactions I feel when looking at either side. Furthermore, unsurprisingly the left hand side radiates happiness and excitement whereas the right hand side radiates no emotion, it makes me feel flat and saddened.