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Ephemera transformed: The collages of Nathan Gluck

Daily Photo Galleries

By Graham Shearing
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Nathan Gluck, who was born in 1918, got a job working for Andy Warhol in 1955 and stayed with him, on and off, for much of the '60s. He was his 'studio assistant,' a fact which reveals that, at a fairly early stage, Warhol's enterprises were well developed. Yes, for Andy, a job in New York was indeed success. Warhol's operation was commercial, rubbing shoulders with advertising agencies, photographic studios and the design departments of leading department stores (most notably Bonwit Teller and Tiffany). From the 'real' world of art, its magnificoes and dealers, he was somewhat distanced and in awe.

So it's fair to say that the studio hummed along in much the same way as the design (window-dressing) department at Tiffany. (Remember also that Warhol himself probably got into his bad habits dressing windows at Horne's department store in Pittsburgh). It's difficult to make too close a comparison between the practices of a commercial studio and the traditional artist's studio, where assistants executed a good deal of the work. John Smith, the Warhol's archivist, who has curated this excellent little exhibition, is clear that Warhol himself 'signed off' at the end of the production line, ensuring consistency and quality control. Even so, it's not too far from the reality of Rubens' studio nearly 400 years earlier.

In the gallery at the Warhol, there is a small glass case, which makes it very clear how indebted Warhol was to Gluck and his kind. Gluck visited the archives of the artist after Warhol's death, where much of the illustrative material dating to the 1950s is housed, pointing out work that he himself had executed. You wouldn't know, most of the time, that they weren't by Warhol. There's a little enameled ashtray with a drawing on it, sketched by Gluck, which seems a little wooden, but the rest of the material is incredibly good. Gluck showed Warhol how to make stamps carved from erasers, and seems to have been instrumental in the development of Warhol's 'blotted line' technique.

The concept of the 'original' work of art was not a leitmotif of the commercial studio. Nor did it become important when Warhol moved into the more rarified levels of fine art - he was a master of

'Nathan Gluck: Collages'

- Through July 1. Hours: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturdays through Thursdays; 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Fridays.
- \$8; \$7 for senior citizens; \$4 for students and children.
- Andy Warhol Museum, North Side.
- (412) 237-8300.

LUIS DE JESUS LOS ANGELES

2685 S La Cienega Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90034
T 310 838 6000 | F 310 838 6001
gallery@luisdejesus.com | luisdejesus.com

appropriation.

Gluck himself was an artist, and the Warhol exhibition is really about that. Some 50 of his most recent collages are on show, revealing a finely honed sensibility. The connection with Warhol doesn't seem surprising, although these works draw not at all on any aspect of Warhol's work.

Collage, whose origins go back to the 16th century and which was fashionable in the 18th and 19th centuries, is simply an extension of the art of decoupage. In the 20th century, it moved off in another direction. Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters and other (mainly Surrealist-inspired) artists used it to best effect, although Pablo Picasso and Robert Rauschenberg personalized its practice.

Gluck makes no claim to be a part of that tradition. He just does it. His house on the Upper East Side is filled with accumulated ephemera collected over the years. It was possible, in the past, to build up substantial collections of paper ephemera in the bookshops and stores of Manhattan. In the collages on show, you will find what are now valuable rarities. Shipping line labels from old suitcases, tickets and other scraps of advertising material are regularly incorporated into his work. Nostalgia is a risk in collage, but Gluck's ironic sense of humor prevents them from ever becoming cloying. Camp they indeed are. The verbal humor of the printed word (check out the titles of the exhibits) constantly comes into play.

Above all, Gluck's work is fastidious. The scraps of paper are meticulously arranged on the sheet. His sense of color is fearless. That is the lesson of the graphic design.