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WARHOL STATUE FOR UNION SQ.

BY RICH CALDER



Douglas Healey

Washington. Lincoln. Ghandi ... and now Warhol.

A massive monument honoring Andy Warhol -- the late, great Father of Pop Art -- will be unveiled today at a new pedestrian plaza in Union Square.

The nearly 10-foot-tall statue by visual artist Rob Pruitt will set up outside a building at Broadway and 17th Street that housed the final rendition of Warhol's legendary "Factory" from 1973 to 1984.

Warhol and his contemporaries previously produced silkscreen paintings, magazines and other works out of a site a block away from 1967 to 1973. The original Warhol "Factory" on E. 47th Street operated from 1962 to 1967.

"The Andy Monument" will debut across the street from Union Square's famed park statuary that includes monuments to George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Mahatma Gandhi.

Part of New York Public Art Fund's exhibitions for 2011, it will remain on display through Oct. 2.

Pruitt told the Post that molding the piece particularly hit home for him because his admiration for Warhol led to him leaving his hometown of Washington DC at 17 years old and moving to New York to study art.

"Andy Warhol still remains a vital symbol of why so many people come to New York to try and make it big here," said Pruitt.

Pruitt, 46, began molding the statue in October and completed it through a combination of hand sculpting and digital scanning of both a live model and photos of Warhol.

The statue's surface is finished in chrome, and at a Connecticut factory yesterday, it was mounted atop a concrete pedestal before being transported by train to New York in time for today's unveiling.

The statue will be displayed at a street corner where Warhol, who died in 1987 at age 58, regularly stood and handed out copies of his brainchild, Interview magazine.

The monument features the icon with a Polaroid camera around his neck and holding a Bloomingdale's bag in his right hand because Warhol, said Pruitt, regularly carried a shopping bag filled with copies of the magazine and candy.

Warhol would tell friends, "Death is like going to Bloomingdale's" because it's heavenly, Pruitt explained.

The statue Warhol is dressed in 70s attire, sporting Levi's 501 jeans, a tweed Brooks Brothers' jacket and a silk tie with stripes.

"Andy Warhol spent much of his time here in Union Square, and so it is fitting that 'The Andy Monument' is our first public art installation to grace the new pedestrian plazas," said Union Square Partnership Executive Director Jennifer Falk.

Pruitt said his ultimate dream is having the statue remain full-time in Union Square.

"Yes, I'm hoping there will be a public demand for the statue to stay permanent because this is the perfect place for it to be," he added.

Falk said she's happy the artist is excited about having his work on display at Union Square but "it's too early to discuss" such a full-time commitment.