

## THE ART OF BEER

## Variations

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In 1968, Andy Warhol (1928-1987) predicted, "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes." This was long before Facebook, YouTube or reality television, all of which have created a sort of fleeting fame. Very prescient.

And yet, Warhol's name is not uttered alongside those of other great psychics like Nostradamus or Camac the Magnificent. Instead, Warhol is best known as an artist. Indeed, he may very well be the most famous American artist who has ever lived (and was and continues to be famous for significantly longer than 15 minutes).

Today, Warhol's name is synonymous with the Pop art movement, a movement that elevated images from popular culture (for example, images of celebrities, commercial products or comic books) into the world of high art. As Warhol himself explained, "the most banal and even vulgar trappings of modern civilization can, when transposed to canvas, become Art." While many might not have understood the meaning of Pop art, the images themselves were usually very

approachable, if for no other reason than their familiarity.

Ironically, Pop art itself became part of popular culture, thanks to artists like Warhol using mass-reproduction techniques such as silk screening and commercial printing. Such mass production made Warhol's work ubiquitous. Warhol is therefore known by the broader public as well as the art community. Indeed, his works are so recognizable, there are even iPhone Apps that allow you to create Warhol-esque images based on your own photographs.

Warhol was particularly famous for recurring images, with slight variations. 32 Campbell's Soup Cans (the 32 paintings comprise a single work of art), for example, featured paintings of the various Campbell's soups available at the time. He also painted many other Campbell's soup cans, sometimes in incorrect colors or with torn labels. He chose this subject matter precisely because of its ubiquity.

The point of the art was sameness, but the result was that the viewer was left to focus on the subtle differences. The images themselves were so common, they lost their primary meaning. Thus, the viewer does not focus on the soup can. Instead, the

viewer focuses on the fact that this one is chicken noodle or that one is pink and blue instead of red and white.

These Warhol works remind me of the currently popular brewing trend to create variations of the same beer. Mikceller has now brewed over a dozen of its Single Hop IPAs along with variations of its Beer Geek, Black and other beers. Many other breweries are also creating single hop variations, including Bison Brewing of Berkeley, CA; Boundary Bay of Bellingham, WA and Sixpoint Brewery of Brooklyn, NY. Aging barleywines or imperial stouts in various types of barrels, barrels that previously held various types of Scotch, whisky, wine or spirits, also yields many variations of beer.

The point of all of this is the same point of Pop art. Beauty is not merely in dramatic things. Variations in a familiar image can be enjoyable, provoke thought or invoke emotion. So can small differences in beers. Trying variations of the same beer side by side is not merely educational, the subtle differences themselves contain great beauty. Ignore the big picture. Block out the noise. Focus on the small differences.

There is beauty in them. ♦ ♦ ♦