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General Custer

Andy Warhol, American artist (1928-1987)
Silk-screen print, artist's proof 1986

This image is a unique artist's proof printed when Warhol was still experimenting with various colors for the final edition. It came from the collection of the printer who assisted Warhol in this project.

General Custer is from the suite of 10 prints called ***Cowboys and Indians*** that Warhol completed shortly before his death. Andy Warhol, well-known for his portrayal of celebrities became engaged in stories, myths, and controversies surrounding America's perception of cowboys and Indians. The series was based on publicity and archival photographs and postcards. Teddy Roosevelt, Annie Oakley, John Wayne, Sitting Bull, and Geranimo were included in the lineup of Western icons.

General Custer is based upon the best known photograph of the remarkable young officer. Warhol has enlarged the image and used flat areas of brilliant neon color to recreate the General as the larger than life hero of American history. The simple composition, large subject dead center of the canvas, and the bright primary colors and flat shapes could easily be transferred to a modern billboard or neon signage for a restaurant instead of a portrait from the 1800's.

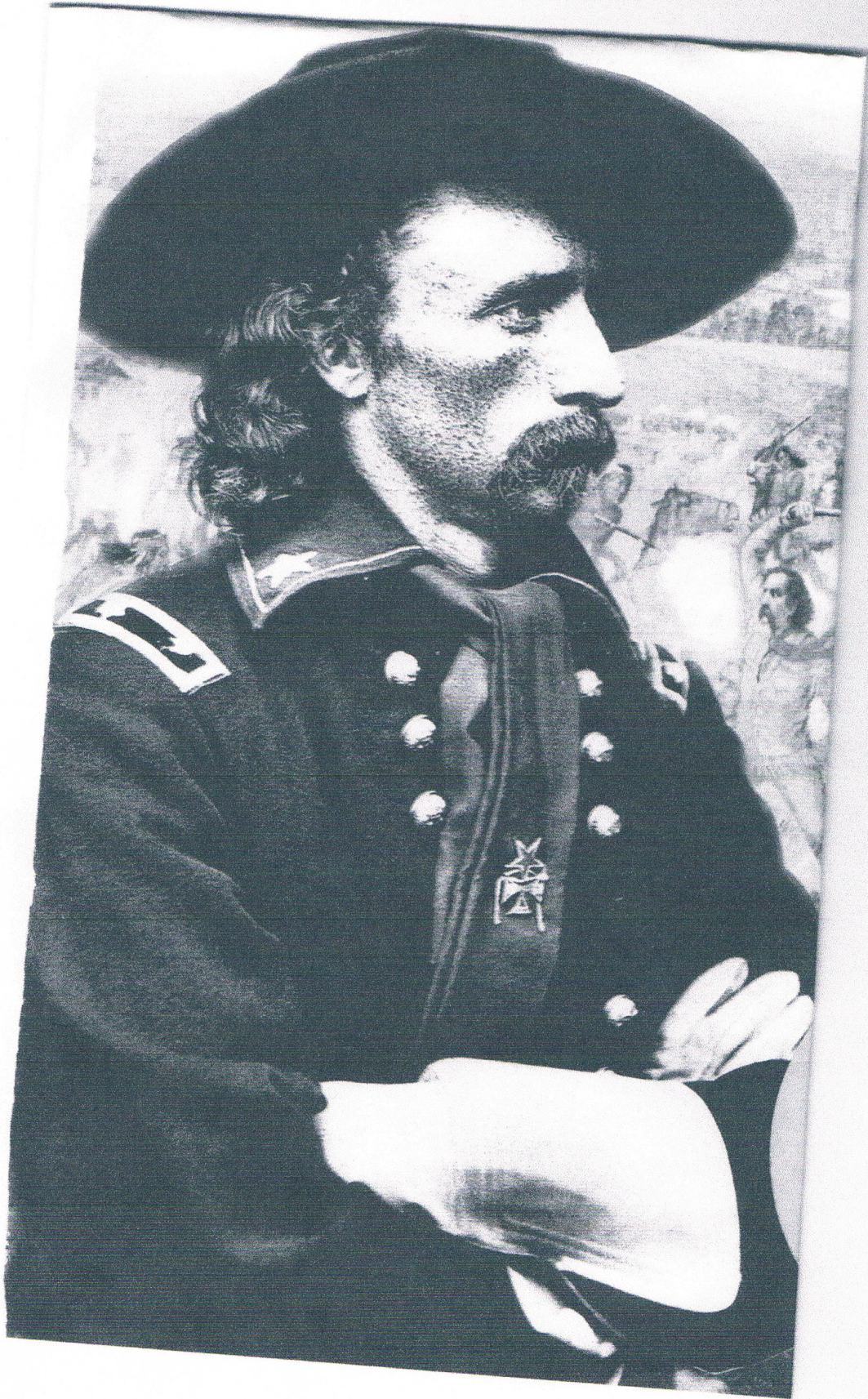
Interesting facts about General Custer:

He moved to Monroe, Michigan with his parents when he was 10 years old. There's a monument in Monroe of General Custer on a horse.

He graduated last in his class of 34 men, but because the military needed officers during the Civil War, Custer was given the opportunity for quite an outstanding career. At age 24, Brigadier General Custer successfully led the Michigan Cavalry Brigade, an all volunteer unit of the hardest fighting cavalry, into the bloodiest battle of the Civil War, Gettysburg, with the battle cry, "Come on you Wolverines!"

Custer's Last Stand occurred at Little Big Horn, Montana, 1876, where he and his 200 men were defeated by the Sioux Chief, Sitting Bull and 3500 braves. Washington officials were concerned for gold discovered on the lands given by treaty to the Great Plains Indians. Greed was the motive for the battle.

General George Armstrong Custer is buried at West Point. Fort Custer, Michigan is named after him.



Andy Warhol
1928-1987

Andy Warhola was born near the mills of Pittsburgh, Pa. at the beginning of the Depression. His parents were Roman Catholic Czech immigrants. He had two brothers, Paul and John Warhola. Andy was a sensitive, intelligent, shy, sickly child who enjoyed painting, drawing, reading, and was fascinated by movie stars. Andy's father died in an accident when Andy was 14 years old.

From a young age, it seems that Andy was interested in becoming part of the glamorous American dream and escaping his linguistic, cultural, and religious differences to become handsome, wealthy, and famous. His often quoted wish was that in the future, everyone would be famous for 15 minutes.

After graduating from Carnegie Tech, he moved to New York and became a successful commercial illustrator specializing in shoes. In the 1950's, Warhol gave up his commercial art career and joined other young artists such as: Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, and Robert Rauschenberg. They had become disillusioned with Abstract Expressionism and started introducing everyday mundane objects into their art from their popular culture. Thus, Pop Art was born. These artists were influenced by huge animated displays, neon signs, techniques, colors, and the scale of advertising. Pop used uniquely American images of their time that the artists grew up with including celebrities, comics, and supermarket products.

Andy Warhol, the Pope of Pop, meticulously re-created one of Pop's most memorable symbols- a can of Campbell's soup (which he had for lunch everyday as a child) 3 feet tall. He also created giant prints of Coke bottles, his favorite drink. Pop art's most visible trademark was simplicity so that the audience could recognize the subject immediately.

Pop Art was detached from any personal involvement by the artist and appeared as a glossy smooth surface similar to images seen on T.V. or magazine ads. Andy Warhol liked to think of himself as a machine and his studio was called The Factory. He elevated the silk-screen process which was used for commercial mass production to a fine art technique for much of his work including prints of famous celebrities of the day.

Warhol's work was usually executed in series emphasizing the redundancy of imagery that is a natural by-product of the assembly line, mass production, and technology. Although Warhol is best known for his Pop Art works, his career included photography, moviemaking, writing, and magazine publishing.

Warhol died of a heart attack at age 58 a day after gall bladder surgery. He had a premonition, a lifelong fear of hospitals.

Andy Warhol achieved his dream of becoming wealthy and famous. He was a celebrity and an artist; an artist who celebrated celebrity.

"Andy has fought by repetition to show us that there is no repetition really, that everything we look at is worthy of our attention. That's been a major direction for the twentieth century, it seems to me." John Cage

Possible questions to ask people when viewing Andy Warhol's print of General Custer:

Do you recognize this person from your American Civil War studies?

What do you know about General Custer??

Even if you didn't recognize this man, what would you guess was this man's profession?

What were the clues that helped you to come to this conclusion?

As you study his pose (you might even strike this same pose), what type of a personality could you guess this man might have? (brave, confident, relaxed, thinking about battle plans??)

Comparing the portraits that you saw in the previous gallery of early American settlers, do you think this was also created in the 1800's ?

Do you think this was a realistic portrait?

What are the differences between how the artist created this portrait compared to the work we viewed earlier this morning?

(Is he looking at you? What could he be looking at or thinking?)

Size- larger than life /hero Large empty negative space for background/ no scenery Subject in the center of picture

Bright neon colors esp. red outline and contour lines

Basic primary colors: red, yellow, blue Simple composition

No brushstrokes- smooth texture of a silk-screen print

Almost flat shape for face, hat, gloves Little shading

Easily recognized.)

Many of the above observations reflect the characteristics of Pop Art.

What do you usually think of when you think of Andy Warhol?