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[Russia-Ukraine war](#) [Art market](#) [Museums & heritage](#) [Exhibitions](#) [Books](#) [Podcasts](#) [Columns](#) [Adve](#)

[News](#)
[Archive](#)

Andy Warhol Authentication Board rejects claims of impropriety concerting Ekstract silk screens

The board acknowledges that the artist “employed assistants”, but says that he “carefully supervised them”

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The Andy Warhol Authentication Board issued a statement last month in response to The Art Newspaper’s front page lead in the October issue (No.140, pp.1,4). We reported allegations made by collectors and dealers that the four-member panel is rejecting genuine works by the artist and refusing to make public the reasons for those decisions. The board’s statement reaffirms its practices and gives no indication that any modification of procedure is being discussed.

At the centre of the dispute is a series of silk-screen self-portraits produced without the artist’s immediate supervision. In 1964, Warhol loaned acetates of his photographic self-portrait to magazine publisher Richard Ekstract and allowed him to find printers to construct silk screens and print an unspecified number of paintings.

The board has declared the run unauthorised, but collectors and many associates of Warhol say that the way the paintings were made is typical of an artist who challenged traditional standards of authorship.

The board, which is composed of Warhol experts Neil Printz and Sally King-Nero, art historian Robert Rosenblum and curator David Whitney, flatly rejects this argument: “The idea that Andy Warhol did not make his own work is a myth that is based on several misconceptions: that Warhol did not pay attention to the way his art looked; that he did not care about how it was made or who made it; that his only accomplishment was the public persona he created. Such misconceptions discredit Warhol’s work and discourage attempts to understand it.”

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“There are clear distinctions between what Warhol made and what he did not. The goal of the board is to clarify these distinctions.” The panel adamantly refuses, however, to disclose the reasons works are denied authentication. “This could provide a road map to forgery [and] moreover, explanations are subject to misunderstanding and misinterpretation.”

The owner of one of the Ekstract silk screens rejected by the board, Joe Simon, an American screenwriter based in London, says he is gathering evidence supporting his claim and preparing to mount a lawsuit. He says he will be joined in his claim by several others.

In reaction to the board statement Mr Simon said: “While Warhol and his executors were alive my painting fell into a category of works that Warhol saw as his own. Now the dealers who own the work [the board was set up by the Andy Warhol Foundation which inherited and sells work from the artist’s estate] and are editing the latest catalogue raisonné no longer see the works as by Warhol. By failing to give reasons for their decisions it is impossible for scholars, critics, historians or owners such as myself to respond.”

COOKIE SETTINGS