

“Mmm good, mmm good that’s what Campbell’s soup is, mmm, mmm, good”

How did we get from the Campbell soup radio jingle to Andy Warhol’s iconic soup cans??

While searching for something new to use for his canvases it was suggested to him that he use something that he knew like “What did you have for lunch?” He said that he had the same lunch for 20 years – Campbell’s tomato soup. Campbell’s tomato soup in its iconic red and white labeled can was the first soup created by Campbell in 1897. In 1962 Andy Warhol changed contemporary art by depicting Campbell soup cans on canvas. And so an icon was born. Thanks to Andy Warhol Campbell’s soup will always be linked to the Pop Art movement. Warhol did 32 canvases each one depicting one variety of soup and they were initially displayed like cans of soup on a grocery store shelf. Campbell’s soup company was initially concerned but they quickly became a supporter of Warhol’s work – sending him cases of soup and establishing the Warhol Scholarship Fund with the NY Art Academy.

At a quick glance the soup cans look like a series of repetitions on 20 x 16 inch canvases. But with closer inspection one can see variations among the 32 canvases. His placement varied from canvas to canvas. The hues of red and white vary slightly and one soup can is missing the gold band. Some critics have argued that these human touches are what make the Campbell Soup cans so compelling. Art dealer Irving Blum was so impressed with the series that he offered Warhol a show at the Ferus Gallery in LA. It was the first time that there was a Pop Art show on the West coast. Critics were harsh and mocked the work. Only five of the 32 paintings were sold but Blum realized that they would sell best as a group of 32. He bought back the five that had been sold and gave Warhol \$1000 for the lot. Blum kept them all for 34 years and finally sold them as a group to MOMA in NYC for more than \$15 million dollars. Together the 32 made a statement, the work seemed to speak to the spirit of a new America, one that embraced the consumer culture of the new decade. By the end of the year socialites wore soup can printed dresses to high society events!

