

NATHAN PANKRATZ

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Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 36 in



COURTESY BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

GAIL REITANO

Wanting Warhol

My connections to
Andy Warhol

Growing up, I watched my mother cover large canvases in oils using a knife, which she said freed her; a brush was too much like saying, *I am an artist*. I recalled how difficult it was for her to get her ideas down. She would paint over numerous failed canvases, until finally, after many tries, a chair leg would be allowed to stand for the leg of a deer lost in our remote New Jersey woods. With pride she showed off this happy accident, one she daringly decided to keep. But these moments of self-confidence were short-lived, and in the next breath she would belittle her efforts with a ferocity that shocked me. She would paint for a while, and then that inner critic would step forward to lampoon her belief in herself, her trust in her own work.

I have always been intimidated by people who have the nerve to make art. I couldn't even admit to myself that I wanted to write, though from a very young age I had always written short stories and poems, and I'd shown promise. But then giving my mother a story to read, and seeing that sad face, like an unfortunate thing had happened for which there was no cure, no solution, undid me.

For as long as I could remember, tall buildings glowed at the edges of my dreams, and I had always wanted to live in New York. It could have been the influence of movies like *Sunday in New York* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, where skinny women in beautiful clothes dashed around the city, hoping for love and adventure. Maybe it was the simple fact that in southern New Jersey there weren't any tall buildings, or overly thin, fashionable women, or handsome men with wild, free spirits. Or if there were, I never noticed. What we had instead were flat plains full of pine trees and sex in the back of Chevy Impalas.

When I was in high school my mother and I would take the bus from our tiny main street, change *up the line*, and in two and a half hours find ourselves in the New York Port Authority bus terminal, a glow of anticipation on our country faces. Then after a chicken salad at the Bird Cage in Lord & Taylor, we'd walk up Fifth Avenue to Bergdorf's and Bendel's, where the number of items we couldn't afford far outweighed those we could. Rarely did we tire as we shopped, poring over those same dreamy items we'd seen women wearing on the streets, as we weighed not just the price but the practicality, and the opportunity to wear such things. If and when we tired of shopping, we'd

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go to MoMA or the Metropolitan. Mom loved art, and though she had never gone to college, she knew a lot about modernists like Picasso and Modigliani and Matisse, who were the inspirations for her own painting. I loved going to museums with her, seeing her tireless capacity for examining the paintings that were familiar to her and therefore to me. We tasted only a very small percentage of what New York had to offer, but we had our spots, our routines, and forged a comfortable way of being in that tall city, one hundred monotonous miles from the isolation of home. And at the end of the day one of us would throw up an arm and hail a cab, and we'd begin the long journey in reverse, returning well after dark, breathless with stories and a modest number of shopping bags.

After college I moved to that big, glassy city, and after looking for a job for nearly nine months—there was a recession going on that I was only partially aware of—I was finally hired by *W Magazine*, which thrust me headlong into the fashion industry. I spent a year as a secretary to five advertising executives, and when I was finally promoted it was across the hall to *Women's Wear Daily*. There my job was to traipse around the garment district selling ads—ready-to-wear on Tuesdays, sportswear on Wednesdays. I darted in and out of buildings, running as fast as my high heels would take me, my bag heavy with magazines and rate cards, while projecting the very New York illusion that everything was fabulous. It was a mask I wore to

convince myself that I was on the way to glittering success. Just keep moving, I told myself, and something will turn up. Though rarely did I have enough money to see me through to the end of the week, when I'd be eating practically nothing, that is, unless a man bought me dinner. And I sucked in what little stomach I had, feeling both hungry and fat. It wasn't an eating disorder I suffered from, but the expectations of the fashion business, where one couldn't be tall or skinny enough. I wasn't tall, but I was model thin and clothes looked good on me. Yet I was convinced I could always be thinner, especially when a waistband was tight, not because I'd gained weight but because I'd bought an expensive designer item that was too small. My prized pieces were a red kimono top and matching harem pants by Kenzō Takada, and a silk jersey cocktail dress by Giorgio Sant'Angelo, which was also red, the color of my passion, the color of my restless heart.

I didn't sleep well. There was the noise of the city, and the smells that wafted through windows that didn't quite meet their sills. Worried I'd fucked up something at work, or if a guy I was interested in had failed to call, I'd wake in the middle of the night full of insecurities and dread. So I would get up, and that's when I began writing stories full of unnameable terrors and phones ringing. Then, one night, the phone actually did ring around 3:00 a.m. Guardedly I answered, but heard only breathing on the other end. *A pervert*, I thought, and hung up. Then it happened again, and again, always at the same time. Then one night, she spoke.

"I see you're up, too."

"Who's this?"

"Does it matter?"

She had a point; I hung up on her.

The calls continued, and I became convinced she lived near me, maybe on the same block, though this made no sense. Surely it was nothing more than a crank, another bored, lonely person reaching out, wanting to appear creepy but also psychologically interesting. New York was full of such characters.

Then one day I came home and couldn't manage to get my key into the lock. On closer inspection I saw someone had filled it with what looked like glue. I knocked on my neighbor's door, and Benny opened up right away.

"Someone put glue in my lock," I said.

"That's terrible. Wait here." Benny disappeared inside his filthy apartment that I had only ever glimpsed from the doorway, and he returned with what looked like an ice pick. He knelt in front of my lock and picked out the glue, while explaining in detail how he thought someone on the floor must not like me.

"I don't know anyone on the floor besides you," I said.

"There. All gone." He wore a pleased expression. He waited, wanting to be praised, so I praised him. "If it happens again, just call me," he said.

I thanked him, closed my door, triple locked it, and then sat down to think. Later that week I ran into Benny, and he asked whether it had happened again, and when I told him no, he seemed disappointed. Then I lied, "I called the police. They said if it happens again to call them, and they'll come right over and question my neighbors."

But it never happened again.

I returned home one morning, having spent the night with a man, and found my door open and my apartment ransacked. All my jewelry was gone, including my grandmother's wedding ring, my mother's pearls, and of course the television set. The break-in had happened from the fire escape that zigzagged past my window and terminated in an alley that for all I knew resembled the jaws of hell. Later that year, as I returned home from spending Thanksgiving with my family, I was mugged in the lobby. So when finally, through a connection at work, I was offered a loft on the Bowery, I jumped at the chance to move.

The place was too expensive and a real dump with plywood floors and a healthy roach infestation, but it was more space than I'd ever hoped to have. Its windows, rather than facing a brick wall, looked out onto the busy, noisy Bowery. Outside my dirt splattered windows was a miniature Ganges, a gutter with a mysterious flow of water full of socks and T-shirts, which caused a potent stench to waft in whenever I opened a window. But then there was that large dose of status on account of the building being owned by Andy Warhol.

Andy Warhol.

All the bells are rolling out for you

And stones are all erupting out for you

And all the cheap bloodsuckers are flying after you.

Lou Reed's lyrics made him sound like a victim. But there was no bigger star, no more recognizable image than

that of the white-wigged cipher. *Women's Wear Daily* regularly featured a steady parade of gods and goddesses. YSL in a huddle with Betty Catroux and Loulou de la Falaise, Calvin Klein with Halston and Bianca Jagger. Then there was Warhol, popping up everywhere like Waldo.

I continued my weekly trek around the garment center, hit on by practically every man I tried to sell an ad to. The truth was I wanted to be writing and not selling advertising, but I didn't see how I could do it. I needed money. Then I thought I might try to write for the magazine, but people in the editorial department were making even less than I was. Besides, it scared me. I'd never been schooled in the do-it-if-it-scares-you theory of success. Everything my parents did was in order to avoid being scared. So I stayed where I was, and selling ads involved not a single thread of my soul, and in no way engaged my mind or my heart, and in that it was easy.

Three of us were leaving Fanelli's, having had our one drink on a weeknight, when we decided to take Lafayette instead of the noisier but brighter-lit Bowery. I remember how my head was lowered as if I'd expected what would happen next. Someone pushed a large wooden conduit spool out of a third-story window. We would later learn they'd deliberately tried to hit us. One of my companions was hit in the leg, the other came out without a scratch. But the heavy spool grazed my head. Had it hit me full on, I would have died. The gash required thirteen stitches, and for a week afterward I was ordered to sleep sitting up in case of bleeding on the brain. I didn't tell my parents, just as I couldn't tell them I'd been burgled and mugged, or about the glue in my lock, nor how I'd been nearly raped by someone I thought I knew. Three years' worth of calamities in my adopted city.

I hired a lawyer and sued the owners of the building, the nonprofit that was housing the boys who'd pushed the spool out at us. The lawyer had me photograph myself with a black-and-blue bandaged head, holding that day's newspaper as proof that the accident had happened when I said. I still have the Polaroids, the headline of the *New York Post* that day read "Miracle."

One day my office mate asked me to have a drink with him. There was someone he wanted me to meet. "You'll love her. She's a friend of Warhol's," he said.

A friend of Warhol's . . .

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when V came around to asking me where I lived, I gave instead my previous address. “Thirteenth between Fifth and University,” I said, which prompted Hot Guy to throw me a glance. But one thing about Hot Guy, he had the instincts of a river boat gambler, and I knew he wouldn’t contradict me.

“Sounds nice,” said V in a distracted tone. She was hardly listening, while waiting for her next chance to talk about *Andy*.

By now my mind was racing, and the room had begun to shift and churn. Hot Guy and I kissed between bouts of conversation. Observing us, V said, “You can use my bedroom. Go ahead.”

“That’s okay,” I said quickly.

“No, you can. Don’t worry. It’s cool with me. Really, go ahead.”

I’d gone to an apartment on the Upper East Side once owned by Frank Sinatra. The new owner laughed when he told us there was camera equipment in the bedroom, a room covered floor to ceiling in leopard skin and reflective glass. When I thought about how those being filmed wouldn’t necessarily know it, my little-used Catholic girl prudishness reared up. As much as I wanted to pull off Hot Guy’s clothes, V’s offer struck me as sordid. I didn’t entirely trust her. Not that I thought she meant harm, but she was a voyeur, someone who spent her days listening and

I figured my luck was about to change. So when, at the last minute, Dylan begged off, I decided to go anyway. But not wanting to go alone, I took Hot Guy, someone I’d been seeing purely for sex.

I’d met Hot Guy the previous summer, and we’d had any number of drug-fueled dates. “Here,” he’d say, “snort this.” An hour later my legs would be melting, unable to hold me up as we entered a club with lights darting across shimmering bodies, sweat pooling in my armpits.

We went roller-skating on the collapsed West Side Highway on a scorching summer day. The morning had started out cool and so I was wearing long jeans, and when I complained, he said, “If I had scissors, I’d cut your pants off and make them into shorts.” And I spent the rest of the day wishing we’d had scissors.

Hot Guy had his arm draped heavily across my shoulder as we entered the dark bar. We found an empty table, and in a matter of seconds a blond woman began making her way over. I will call her V.

“Dylan described you,” she said first thing.

V was in her late thirties, at least ten years older than I, and with the slightly worn look of a party girl. She pulled out a chair, and immediately I felt her probing eye, observant, curious.

V wasn’t chic, and I couldn’t picture her melding into the well-dressed Warhol crowd. Rather, my first impression was how could this nondescript person be a friend of Warhol’s? What was so special about her?

I asked V where she worked, though of course I knew. “*Interview*,” she said, with a sly glance, as if to say, you don’t need to pretend you don’t know *who I am*.

I gulped down the first drink, which was watery, and ordered a second. It was clear that V wanted someone new to drink with, a diversion, another hit-and-run encounter in 1970s New York. I had the impression, too, that Hot Guy and I were there simply to be a fresh audience, a chance for V to do what she loved most, talk nonstop about *Andy*.

“God it’s boring transcribing those tapes. I sit there all day wearing headphones, and I have to go back and back. I’m not good at it,” she said in a world-weary tone. She wanted us to know what a trial it was to work at *Interview*. Or was the real trial working for the great artist?

“Andy and I were the only ones in the beginning, in San Francisco. You know it was *my idea* to tape,” she said,

pausing to let this sink in. “Sometimes I just sit there and knit, and if he dares say a word, I’ll quit!” And so unlocked, the subject of Warhol carried her.

V had a hearty laugh, loud, confident. She was obviously smart, the kind of person people refer to as not missing a trick. Her eyes would narrow, she’d lean in close to my face, and I’d feel inspected, like she could turn me inside out, read my every thought. There was something a little scary about her.

Hot Guy and I were mostly silent. There was no answer, no comeback to most of what V said. Rather it was a performance, a spiel about *Andy* one had the impression she’d given many times.

By now we were all pretty drunk, and Hot Guy had his hand on my leg. I pictured us back at his place, full of the music and rhythm of our sex under the pressed-metal ceiling of his basement apartment. And I was starting to feel a little bored by V’s stories, even if she was a commanding presence. But I could easily picture Andy leaning on her for whatever it was he needed. She was *motherly*.

“He’s always calling me up. Always. Sometimes I just hang up. He can be a real asshole.” Her voice rose, “Sometimes when people try to talk to him, he just turns away.”

For the next hour, whenever a glass was in danger of emptying, V motioned for a waiter. And when, finally, we’d exhausted the bar’s possibilities, she invited us back to her apartment.

Snow had begun to fall, but we had only to trudge around the corner to her brownstone. Her apartment was a padded nest with a generous number of small rooms. And whereas my floors were bare and painted gallery gray, V’s were parqueted and covered in oriental carpets. Her furniture was broad and comfortable and low to the ground, like miniatures from a doll-house mansion. I shuddered at the comparison between these items and my own castoffs gleaned from dumpsters—my latest “find” made of unadorned, yellow foam. No matter how much was added, my loft remained empty looking in the hard light that traveled up from lower Third Avenue. Nothing but glare entered my curtainless windows, but V’s were beautiful objects in themselves, festooned in lush fabrics, with a layer of sheer for further adjustment of the light. And I’d only ever seen such paintings in the Metropolitan, delicate landscapes of Europe and several portraits of dogs reclining on cushions

in stately homes. One thing I knew, I wanted V’s apartment, her furniture, her mohair cushions.

When she invited us to sit down, Hot Guy sat on the floor, and I sat next to him.

“You can sit in a chair,” she said, amused.

I looked over at Hot Guy, but he was laser focused on the bottle of red V was opening. He didn’t care that she knew Warhol, nor that we were in an apartment as opulent as ours were squalid. What I liked about Hot Guy was how comfortable he was in his own skin. And as I watched V inspect him from head to toe, I thought she might be thinking what I was, that he looked just like Joe Dallesandro from Warhol’s *Trash*, which I’d seen in college. Naked, I wanted to tell her, he looked even better.

We sipped our wine, bathed in a glow from a warm yellow streetlamp, that is until V got up and pulled the curtains, and we were completely cocooned. She joined us on the floor, and we drank some more, while continuing the subject we’d been discussing all night. *Andy*.

We talked about the fashion scene in droll tones, the same ones used by the Warhol crowd, her crowd, sophisticated and telegraphing a boredom I longed to imitate.

It had taken a lot of alcohol, but finally I began to relax. I even started to feel at home in V’s lair. She hadn’t spoken about her background, but she didn’t need to, the evidence of old money was everywhere. And for once I didn’t allow the cultural backwater of southern Jersey to invade. I felt reinvented and pretended to be in the know about whatever we discussed. We touched on Princess Galitzine’s palazzo pants and Margaret Trudeau at Studio 54. And to V’s descriptions of her sibling-like rivalry with Andy, I nodded, as if I too understood how difficult he could be, how annoying and impossible.

This would have been a good time to mention my own connection to Warhol, but then I remembered hearing his irritated, laconic drawl on the stairwell the week I moved in. I never actually saw him, but I’d heard that unmistakable voice on the other side of my door. “This place smells like cat piss,” he’d droned, like a tourist inspecting a pillaged holy site. He was disgusted by his own building, but the way he’d said it seemed to indicate that those of us who rented from him were the real disappointment. I felt embarrassed to be living in, and paying good money for, a place the owner himself thought was a dump. So

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watching. She and Warhol taped the embarrassingly stupid remarks of celebrities, actors, idle rich kids, who, after they'd appeared in *Interview*, had their banalities quoted. The put-down was the favorite joke among the Warhol crowd. *Look how stupid they are! How is she paid so much? You call that handsome?*

If Hot Guy and I had sex in V's bed, would she be tapping us, and might she laughingly tell Warhol? I pictured him asking, *What did they look like? What did they sound like?*

I stared at my near-empty glass and wondered why I wasn't able to sip, a clear sign it was time to go, but my proximity to Warhol kept me rooted to V's floor.

V left the room and returned carrying an armload of what looked like scrapbooks.

"Take a look at this," she said, selecting one from the stack deposited on the floor in front of us. "This is the Fur Book."

She invited me to touch. It was heavy, leathery, and bulged with pasted bits of paper, Polaroids, matchbooks, event tickets, lost buttons, and objects from the street. My fingers lingered on a swatch of white fur. "That's from Marilyn Monroe's coat," she said, staring up into my face. "Look, she signed it," she said, coming even closer to me. Next to the swatch was a bold, loopy signature. *Marilyn Monroe*. V pointed at a roughly scissored hunk of thick, auburn fur. "This is Liz Taylor's. Sable."

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. What artist had the power to get a famous actress to cut up her coat? I took the book in my hands and began going through more slowly. The quality of the work was obvious, not just the quirkiness of the pasted items, but the juxtaposition of exquisite drawings and pieces of collage.

Picasso once said, *When the work is there, the painter has already gone*. But he was wrong. Far from fading, Warhol had entered the room. He was at my elbow; he peered over my shoulder.

Hot Guy and I stared drowsily at what V was showing us, and when I looked up, through a crack in the curtains I noticed it was snowing heavily. I was aware of muted sounds wafting up from the street. There was a world outside, and I was surprised to be reminded.

"Take a look at this," she said. "The Cum Book." She handed over the next scrapbook with a raised eyebrow. If it could be believed, the precious liquids had been sealed into glossy patches with the texture of fiberglass; to some, glitter had been added. I had stroked the Fur Book, but now I gave respectful taps to the varnished traces of—Peter Fonda—the only name I would remember later, and next to it, his signature.

I had trouble sitting up—we were still on the floor so I could easily have lain there, drunk and overwhelmed. V wouldn't have cared; she would simply have covered me up with one of those luscious throws. But I roused myself, and she stared, trying to gauge my reaction to the works on the floor. Again, I felt as if my nose were pressed up against glass, a feeling of dissatisfaction, of greed and jealousy.

Warhol talked a lot about jealousy, how he envied practically everyone, and he made no attempt to hide it. I wondered at his ability to produce those feelings so readily in others. Was it deliberate? Was the homely boy from Pittsburgh taking his revenge? Similar to my parochial small town, I imagined, were the horrors of 1950s working-class Pittsburgh, particularly for Warhol, who must have thought, *If I remain here, I will die*. Then there was the Catholicism. How did that square with his voyeurism, his desire to consume with his lens people's willingness to embarrass themselves, even harm themselves, while he stood back, aloof. I didn't understand. When I read that Warhol went to church often, I wondered at his fascination with that ritual. As a woman, the Catholic Church held

no fascination for me. The church wasn't so forgiving of women. It was the reason I'd stopped going. I'd been with my mother that last time, when our pastor, who everyone knew was gay, and who had had a *life before* that was admirably whispered about—he had apparently been a dancer in New York—when talking about abortion from the pulpit, had called women "baby killers." He said it not once, but over and over again, his voice growing louder each time. And that was it. Something snapped and I never went back. I wondered what the Catholic Church thought about Warhol, their famous patron.

He proved art could be anything: Brillo boxes, Campbell's soup cans. Yet despite the worship and fanfare, he seemed the epitome of getting away with murder. And just like the fashion industry sold its illusions, so Warhol's work seemed to say, *This is fake, and if you believe it, the joke is on you*.

It took unbelievable confidence to express something so new and with so little precedent. But wasn't that what artists did? It was that confidence that made me jealous.

Months after I'd moved into the Bowery loft, I came across several of Mom's paintings leaning up against the wall behind my bed. They were primitive and energetic and surprisingly good. But when a new friend, who liked to brag about how many artists she knew, sniffed at the paintings while pointing out how her friends were *real artists*, I was embarrassed. What did that mean, *real artists*?

Days after she made her comment, I hiked Mom's canvases up under my arm and struggled down to the street. On the Bowery there was always free stuff for the taking, and on that day a dank collection of Elvis memorabilia lay heaped in a mound. I leaned the paintings up against a lamppost and fled upstairs. A minute later I peered down. The paintings were still there. I asked myself why I was doing this. I reasoned it was to free up space in the loft. But a subtler motivation was to erase my friend's comment, which had made me feel ashamed of my mother's work. How had she the audacity to think the ephemera inside her head was worth all that effort? Who, after all, would want what she had to say? She was hardly famous. She was hardly anybody. Her work scared me with its hopes, its untapped potential.

My heart was pounding when a few minutes later I looked down again, and the paintings were gone. I wasn't

proud of what I'd done. I see it now as my first real taste of revenge. I was paying my mother back for her critical eye, which had destroyed not only the hopes she'd had for her own work, but those I might have had for my own. And on those sleepless nights when I took out my Bowery stories and reworked them, after a couple of hours in which I pushed sentences around, I would put them carefully back, unresolved until the next time. Subconsciously at least, it was as if I ended each session with the thought, *If you never try, you can never fail*.

I was jolted out of my reverie by V's sudden outburst. "I don't want this stuff anymore. I'm sick of storing *his crap*."

So these *were* Warhol's.

Long ago I had internalized my parents' mission, that my sisters and I have a life that was bigger, to go where people pursued dreams, made names and money. It was what drove me from the safe, rural, pastoral of my upbringing and into the arms of the city. A place that could be frightening but filled with the conflict and angst that was the stuff of art. I was in search of my future and supposedly open, but at each demonstration of another's success, I felt ever more stuck, more an observer than a participant in my own life.

I started to wonder whether V herself might be an artist. It was clear, even as she bragged about her closeness to *Andy*, that part of her wished to obliterate him. These perfect exhibits of the times and the moment were strewn across the carpet in front of us. Their mastery was undeniable. None of us could look away. Was V merely annoyed at having to store them, or did she feel like a servant to a greater talent? Every artist knew that feeling. There was always someone better, more famous, richer. Yet judging by V's apartment, she wasn't burdened by the need to make money. This too drove home a point, that to be an artist was to invite pain, even if, like V, one had the means. It was still hard. It was suffering, and I was afraid of suffering.

Again she left the room, this time returning with a bulging armload of files, narrow like the drawers of a library card catalogue. "Go ahead," she said, depositing them on the floor. Was this more of *Andy's storage*? I opened one, and inside were hundreds of Polaroids grouped by theme: New York, flowers, friends, and blowjobs were just some of the titles. The last one proved too tempting. A series of black-and-white images of men standing and kneeling,

Wasn't this Warhol's skill? To reduce art to the egalitarian notion of use, of recycling, the commodification of celebrity, all human activity, banal, accessible.

many taken outside, in nature, in summer, under trees. Casual groupings of friends gathered around. The pictures had that bored, static quality of a Warhol film. Some were formally staged, composed as if for posterity, while the near-disposable and instantaneous character of the Polaroid foiled those pretensions. Here was Warhol, impossibly cool and hip, while seeming to shun and make fun of it all. I studied those lucky acolytes escaping the Manhattan heat, relaxing at the beach or in someone's country house. Often in summer I dreamed of taking the seaplane from Twenty-Third Street harbor directly to Fire Island, instead of the long haul, first by subway, followed by the hot, rickety Long Island Rail Road to the ferry.

The work on the floor had begun to cause me pain. I took a large gulp of wine. V refilled our glasses and was up again. From a closet she produced a cardboard tube from which she allowed a rolled-up paper to unfurl. It was a Warhol *Electric Chair*, purple, gold, and sinister. It was signed, "To V, Merry Christmas. Love, Andy."

"I hate this the most," she said, rolling it back up and handing it to me. "Take it. I've got no more space!" Her

voice rose, "Take it all! I don't want any of it. All *he* does is leave his *stuff*. Get . . . it . . . the . . . hell . . . out . . . of . . . here!"

I looked at my friend; he looked at me. I stared at the stash and thought, *Could I sell these?* A practical thought: *Who would I dare show them to?* Then out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of my large bag full of magazines and rate cards. It would be easy to slip one, even two scrapbooks inside.

I reached for the Fur Book, then pulled back. "Go ahead," said V, slurring her words. "Take it."

Take nothing. From no one. Ever. The yes ma'am and no ma'am of my upbringing. Polite girls accepted nothing they were offered. Humility. Class. *No thank you!* The thought of removing anything from V's apartment, especially an item of value, let alone from someone who was drunk, was impossible. Here was some of the most sought-after artwork of the time. It was too frightening to contemplate. Warhol frightened me. Not just that I was made to suffer the embarrassment of paying my rent in person at the Factory if I happened to be late. But to be stared at by his entourage, his lackeys and sycophants. To stand by the stuffed Great Dane that had once belonged to Cecil B. DeMille while being humiliated by a handsome preppy was artful in its torture.

V knew where I worked. When she sobered up, would she want the works back? Might she show up at *Women's Wear Daily* and accuse me of stealing? My mind raced with the implications of accepting her offer. But I wanted them. I wanted them all.

I'd seen Warhol in person only once, outside the Pierre Hotel. I was walking past when I noticed a crowd gathering. Someone explained how Jackie O was about to arrive for a gala, so I decided to wait. I was standing behind a wall of photographers when I spotted him coming up a side street. He hugged the building, dragging his hand behind him along the limestone, and when he turned the corner, he continued very close to the wall before stealthily slipping inside like he wasn't even there.

The art on the floor had begun to glow like radioactive material. All manner of effluent, scraps from the street, precious relics of fur, or photographs, all given equal weight. Wasn't this Warhol's skill? To reduce art to the egalitarian notion of use, of recycling, the commodification of

celebrity, all human activity, banal, accessible. We could all have our fifteen minutes.

V poured us one more for the road, and I was thinking, *There are two of us. We can carry everything.*

"Get this shit out of here!" said V, as we got to our feet. Hot Guy swayed as V and I loaded up his arms with the booty. I remember the feeling of weight being piled into my arms. I leaned against the wall as V said goodnight and closed the door. There we stood, in the hallway, for perhaps a minute.

The good girl raised by law-abiding parents finds herself holding god knows how many dollars' worth of artwork. Too drunk to move, I stared at V's door, while Hot Guy, his arms full, leaned against the opposite wall. I mustered the nerve to try the knob. It wasn't locked. I made a snap decision to drag my companion back inside, where there was no sign of V. I crept forward, and he followed. I motioned for him to set the stuff down on the living room floor, and I did the same. Then we backed out, quietly as we could.

I turned and took one last look. I caught a glimpse of something shiny, a piece of foil or glitter, a rebuke. Warhol once said about his possessions, *I hope they all get lost and I never have to look at them again.* How did I feel? Was I sorry I wouldn't get a chance to open a scrapbook at my leisure and touch reverently? I would soon be sorry not to have taken a Polaroid, or two, or three. What would have been the harm?

A question that would haunt me was why V had seemed so repelled, even angry. Was it that her closeness to Warhol didn't allow her to acknowledge her own art, rendering her unable to make her own mark? I wondered at the comment, *It was me who came up with the idea to tape.* Warhol, that master of appropriation.

There was by now a good two inches of snow on the ground, and Hot Guy and I were the only two people out on the street. There were no cabs, so we shuffled along, our heads bent to the swirling gusts. Soon we would be tearing each other's clothes off, but for now we stumbled through the gathering drifts, and I at least felt weighed down. It was as if I still held the objects, their heft and importance making me think not just of value in monetary terms, but as an example of a philosophy, a confidence it wasn't possible to steal or imitate.

Gail Reitano was born and raised in the southern New Jersey Pinelands and lived in London for twelve years before moving to the Bay Area. Her writing includes memoir, fiction, and personal essays. Her work has appeared in the anthology *Songs of Ourselves: America's Interior Landscape* (Blue Heron Book Works, 2015) as well as in *Ovunque Siamo*, *Glimmer Train*, and other journals. A first novel, *Italian Love Cake*, will be published by Bordighera Press in April 2021.