

Warhol Museum redesign takes its cues from the artist's Factory space

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By Marylynne Pitz / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

In 1963, Andy Warhol opened a midtown Manhattan studio where aluminum foil lined the walls and silver balloons floated in the air.

The Silver Factory -- a setting for raucous parties and walks on the wild side -- was the space where Warhol made screen tests of 500 visitors, including Bob Dylan, Dennis Hopper, Lou Reed, Salvador Dali and Marcel Duchamp. Aided by assistants, the driven artist created silkscreens and lithographs practically around the clock.

A major redesign of The Andy Warhol Museum's first floor, inspired by the Silver Factory's vibe, has just been completed, although papering the walls in aluminum foil was not an option. This is the first major renovation of this space since the museum opened to the public in 1994, nearly 20 years ago.

The result of \$800,000 worth of change is that the museum's 2,400-square-foot first floor, which felt rather like a cave, now looks like a cross between an industrial New York loft and a minimalist hotel lobby.

"You didn't really know what was going on behind the walls. Now, we are very transparent," said Eric Shiner, the museum's director. "I wanted to open up the space, make it welcoming, make it a community hub where people can hang out and create a space where ideas can be shared."

The architectural firm of Desmone & Associates, based in Lawrenceville, planned the redesign of the museum's first floor. The project was funded with money from the Heinz Endowments, the McCune Foundation, Eden Hall Foundation and Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh.

An invitation-only party was held Saturday night. Today, The Warhol opens an exhibition of the work of Yasumasa Morimura, which remains on view through Jan. 12.

Before renovations began in late June, Valspar mixed a suitable shade of silver to cover thick panels that now line the first-floor walls of the nation's largest museum devoted to a single artist. The remainder of the walls, once a burnt orange, are now a gun-metal gray.

Light floods into the lobby through banks of new silver-framed factory-style windows at the Sandusky Street entrance and on the building's General Robinson Street side.

"It gets really bright in here. Our gallery attendants need sunglasses," said Rachel Baron-Horn, the museum's director of finance and operations.

By the end of this month, visitors will be able to use a media bar featuring eight iPads loaded with information about Warhol and museum apps. It will be located just inside the main entrance and to the right. Free Wi-Fi will be available. Visitors also will be welcome to visit the cafe downstairs and carry food or drinks to the lobby. If they are just visiting the cafe and lobby, they will not have to pay the \$20 adult admission or \$10 student admission.

The lobby can become a performance space once a stage curtain made of silver flame-retardant velour panels is hung from a track in the ceiling.

The next project, Mrs. Baron-Horn said, is installing a cafe in the 300-square-foot space formerly occupied by a gift shop. Plans call for opening the cafe next May.

"We're the only place on the North Side that has Andy Warhol cookies," she added.

Three new LCD screens hang on the walls. One will announce daily events while a second will show film of Warhol at work in the Silver Factory or various screen tests. A third screen will broadcast an EarthCam feed from the artist's grave in Bethel Park, where visitors often leave Coca-Cola bottles, Campbell's soup cans and other items found in his work. An infrared camera will make it possible to see what's going on at the grave at night, too.

New amenities include sound absorption panels on the 16-foot-high ceilings so people won't have to shout at each other to be heard



during parties. The building, which has an elaborate creamy terra cotta exterior, began its life as a warehouse for Frick & Lindsay, distributors of oil well, mill and mine supplies. William E. Frick, who arrived in Pittsburgh in 1891 and was no relation to Henry Clay Frick, organized the business with his partner. It later became Volkwein's, a company that sold music and musical instruments and has since moved to RIDC Park West.

Furnishings include four new crank tables that can be raised or lowered, leather furniture by Restoration Hardware and a digital photo booth where you can take pictures that are color, black and white or sepia-toned.

"Everything has to be mobile," Mrs. Baron-Horn said, adding that booking more events at the museum to generate revenue is "a definite goal."

Next year, the museum will do a complete rehang of its works in chronological order. Warhol's earliest works will be shown on the building's seventh floor and later works will be hung on lower floors. The second floor will continue to hold changing exhibitions and time capsules, Mrs. Baron-Horn said.

In the Sandusky Street entry, pink and yellow cow wallpaper remains. Past the double doors, visitors see a floor-to-ceiling photo of Warhol at work in the Factory, holding up an acetate image of Marilyn Monroe taken by photographer William John Kennedy in 1964.

On the wall to the left, the lean king of Pop Art stretches out on a curved red velvet sofa, striking a quintessence-of-cool pose in a Bob Adelman photograph. He wears sunglasses, a tie and slacks. His slip-on shoes are propped on the upholstery.

A reproduction of that red sofa, made in Singapore, will sit below the large picture so guests can be photographed in the same pose. The red velvet cushions, Mrs. Baron-Horn said, will be washable.

One major change is the gift shop expansion. Formerly confined to 385 square feet in a first-floor corner, the shop has grown to nearly four times its original size and features silver Sputnik-style chandeliers and a metallic silver cork floor.

Located across from a 145-seat theater, the new gift shop occupies 1,440 square feet in a gallery that showed a timeline of Warhol's life. Large window displays lined in blue and yellow cow wallpaper showcase its wares. Paul Matarrese, who has managed the shop since it opened, said new inventory will include children's books, toys, movies, fashion and music, plus Keith Haring skateboards, which are already available.

Homer Laughlin China Co., the Newell, W.Va.-based company that makes Fiesta ware, produces a mug for the museum. Warhol began collecting Fiesta ware in the 1980s.