

## Got something to say to Andy Warhol? She's listening

By Marylynn Pitz August 10, 2020



More than 10 years ago, Madelyn Roehrig found inspiration at Andy Warhol's grave in Bethel Park.

As she left the cemetery, the Upper St. Clair artist got the idea to turn photographs of television programs about terrorism and violence into a film. She began visiting Warhol's grave daily, meeting other people making pilgrimages to seek help from the Pop artist or pay tribute to him. She made 13 films of those encounters, some lasting a half-hour, others a few minutes.

On Thursday, after a 12-hour drive from her current home in South Carolina, Ms. Roehrig marked Warhol's 92nd birthday at his grave in St. John the Baptist Byzantine Catholic Cemetery in Bethel Park.

Surrounded by 40 people, she signed copies of her new book, "Andy, Can You Hear Us?" The well-designed book, whose subtitle is "Communing with Warhol at His Gravesite," features essays and pictures of dozens of visitors and notes and tokens left there.

"This whole community of people grew out of this project," Ms. Roehrig said.

Born on Aug. 6, the patron saint of Pop Art was not big on birthdays. So how does she imagine Warhol, who died in February 1987, would have celebrated this one?

"He'd go get a fancy meal, find the first homeless person and give it to them," said Ms. Roehrig, who lives in Beaufort, S.C.

Eric Shiner, a former director of The Andy Warhol Museum, visited the gravesite with Ms. Roehrig his first day on the job, he says in the book's introduction. On Warhol's birthday in 2013, the North Side museum and EarthCam placed live video cameras at Warhol's resting place around the clock. It streams at [www.earthcam.com/usa/pennsylvania/pittsburgh/warhol](http://www.earthcam.com/usa/pennsylvania/pittsburgh/warhol).

The cameras sometimes catch visitors that Ms. Roehrig got to know in the six years she worked on the book. One is Carolyn English, of Cecil, who dressed up as a 1980s version of Elvis Presley for the book signing.

Another is Ultra Violet, an artist and author who appeared in many of Warhol's films. Mrs. Roehrig spent the night at a posh penthouse in New York City that belonged to the late artist, whose real name was Isabelle Collin Dufresne.

On a snowy Christmas Eve in 2010, Ms. Roehrig was visiting the grave when she saw a man and woman approach with a wreath. That's how she met Jarmila and [Donald Warhola, the artist's nephew](#). It was the day he lost his father, John Warhola, who helped raise Andy and helped to start the Pittsburgh museum that celebrates his younger brother's work.

Mr. Warhola regularly stops by the cemetery to tend to the graves of his parents, his famous uncle and Andrew and Julia Warhola,

John and Andy's parents. He often gives items left in the cemetery to Ms. Roehrig, who saves them in "time capsules."

"I keep it in boxes, just like Andy," she said, referring to the artist's habit of saving mementos from his daily life.

"Andy, Can You Hear Us?" includes some of the 1,600 notes left at Warhol's grave.

"Even people who don't like him come," Ms. Roehrig said.

One note said, "Andy, I don't like your work but I'm sorry you're dead."

"He's not dead," Ms. Roehrig insisted. "He continues to transform our ordinary lives into the art of daily life. That's how I think of it."