

The man who wanted to be beautiful

Sara Marilungo

FOUR people stand in line in the middle of a black room wearing sun glasses. As the dark grows all around they linger like statues, while the public waits in silence. “I always wanted to be beautiful, that’s where it all started.” That was where the show began to trace, with a series of quick sketches, the enigmatic figure of the artist who invented the concept of beauty in the 20th century.

Andy Warhol was born Andrew Warhola. He was an awkward nine year old boy who at school put a Coca-Cola in his still life because he thought that apples and bananas were boring. He was a bohemian star, the one who could say phlegmatically that “art is the work I do for champagne.” But he was also a disenchanted lover, who said that there was no romance in love because love was made by the movies.

As he played many characters, the four actors played many characters at the same time in the show *Andy Warhol’s Nothing Special*. The show, staged at the Project Art Centre on Friday 4th of December, was directed by Maeve Stone and written by James Hickson of the Spin Gilt Theatre Company.

The set design was minimal, two bright cubical shelves and a couple of chairs. The actors played on the floor, in close proximity to the public, who surrounded them on two sides of the acting space.

The show questioned the person behind the persona, the inner thoughts of one of the 20th century most famous and celebrated artist. Rather than being a well-plotted drama, the show unfolded more as a painting, where the figure emerged from quick brushstrokes, more akin to a stream of consciousness than to a theatre script.

The personality of the artist took shape from a background of childhood memories, thoughts about art and love, his attitude toward fame and his relation with the beautiful Edie Sedgwick, Warhol’s own superstar. Warhol was enigmatic but ironic, as if behind the vagueness of his anecdotes he was hiding some truth about an age which lost its values to worship consumerism and appearance.

Dazed by the idea of death, he asked Edie when she thought she would have died. As she answered

“on Thursday” - Thursday being her favourite day of the week - he remarked, obsessed with her beauty, “you’ll be very beautiful dead,” which raised a laugh from the public.

Ironic moments were spaced out by sessions of relentless, urgent questions, as in a timeless interview: who are you, what is art, do you enjoy being in the news, do you think your work will be around in the future? But the questions always remained suspended in mid air because Warhol answered anecdotal like a sphinx, with phrases as “art is anything you can get away with” or “I never use pure white because white is always touched by the things next to it.”

The show and the festival

The company skilfully succeeded in outlining a complex character, providing some clues but leaving the answer of Andy Warhol’s mystery to the public, who, in the end, probably wondered if, behind the scenes, Andy Warhol was actually nothing special, that is, a mere human being.

“I really liked the show and the use of multimedia in it. The music also was able to set the historic period and the character was well-constructed” stated Fidelma, one of the spectators.

“However, I don’t think Andy Warhol was a nice person, I don’t think that he was shy. He was cruel and he didn’t seem to care about people”, She added, on reflecting.

The show is part of the festival *The Theatre Machine Turns You On*, a project which gathered 50 young theatre makers last June to provide their own fresh ideas. “All the shows were written and directed by young artists” said Shane Byrne of TheatreClub, the company which run the festival.

“In June we asked people to apply with an experimental idea and they all met for the first time to work on different shows, with no budget. We wanted something new, a different, contemporary style of theatre writing. We are really pleased with the result, all the shows were sold out and the public was enthusiastic.”

Indeed, the show proved that good theatre doesn’t need expensive set designs. Good theatre doesn’t even need a theatre. It needs fresh ideas, willing young up and coming talents who will challenge the rules of the game and a curious public.