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Collezione Ettore Molinario : Dialogues #49 : Christopher Makos

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Ettore Molinario

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The 49th dialogue is a tribute to **Andy Warhol**, signed by **Christopher Makos**. During our meeting in Paris, I asked Christopher what was the most important lesson the American master had passed on to him. This was his answer: « Be yourself and let most of yourself shine through ». Perhaps that is the key to success; it is certainly a good wish with which to close the year and look ahead to 2026.

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I wanted them all – every version, every nuance: Andy Warhol with those marvellous, impeccably groomed hands, resting on his jeans, on his hip, vaguely over his pubis, and intertwined with one another. Those hands that translate the vast feminine, from Botticelli's Venus to Marilyn Monroe for her blondness, to Faye Dunaway for her cruelty. At last I own one of the most beautiful Lady Warhols, a splendid portrait by Christopher Makos, interpreter, friend, and accomplice for ten years of the genius, of the man-woman who told us that we are all copies and all originals, « famous » for at least fifteen minutes of our lives. This dialogue lives in this way, within itself, like a mirror, a hallucination, multiplying in the contact sheet that Christopher kindly offered me to accompany his portrait. And as I look Andy Warhol in the eyes – a rare concession, since the king of Pop Art shunned the gaze of others – I also retrace the history of my collection, which, moreover, by coincidence –though do coincidences really exist? – shares the same initials as Christopher Ernesto Makos: CEM.

A brief note of chronicle. In 1981 Andy Warhol and Christopher Makos decided to reinterpret *Rose Sélavy*, the famous portrait Marcel Duchamp commissioned from Man Ray while dressed in women's clothing – a work included in my collection. And once again, since coincidences do not exist, Christopher had been Man Ray's assistant in Paris and, in his book *White Trash* published in 1977, he reproduced the great surrealist's passport. Our passport for travelling through history – our own history too, the most intimate one – is instead Warhol's white, Kabuki-like face, framed by one of seven women's wigs and one men's wig, which Christopher had purchased from Jean Louis on 57th Street. The shoot – 349 frames divided into sixteen contact sheets – took place at the Factory, the last one, at 860 Broadway, Union Square. Today, in what can only be called a desecration given the sacredness of the site, it houses a Pecto branch, a shop for dogs and cats. I speak of a sacred place because, at the back of the studio where Warhol painted, against one of the walls draped with a white backdrop, a profound, initiatory – indeed sacred – transformation takes place. Of this metamorphosis Warhol allows us to contemplate the extremes: the face of a woman and the body of a man, dressed in Andy's classic wardrobe – white button-down shirt, checked tie, jeans, cowboy boots. Halston, the famous fashion designer, had proposed an evening gown: skirt, lace, décolletage. Warhol refused. It was not the drag effect he was after – not a caricature, but an alteration, a process, a becoming. Not by chance, the series is titled *Altered Image*.

The makeup required two hours: heavy, theatrical foundation, milky on Warhol's skin, which, according to Makos, was already of a dazzling luminosity. Then, slowly, like an image lying on the seabed of our mind, Warhol's feminine alteration began to take shape and rise to the surface: first the eyes, naturally blue and darkly lined; then the eyebrows, covered and redrawn; and finally the mouth, scarlet even though we do not see it. Incidentally, the makeup artist who transformed Warhol was the same one who made up the wealthy clients who commissioned his very expensive portraits. That, too, was an alteration: transforming oneself into the money that fame as a great artist guarantees, becoming a commodity of exchange. But I would not trade my Warhol – the Warhol who made me discover the « multiples » within myself – for anyone.

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