

# From Pittsburgh to Promise: The Friendship and Flight of Dorothy Cantor, Philip Pearlstein, and Andy Warhol

ARTSY EDITORIAL

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In 1949, two young, aspiring artists, Philip Pearlstein and Andy Warhol, bought bus tickets out of Pittsburgh. They arrived in New York with a few shopping bags stuffed with clothes, art supplies, and little else. This summer, the Andy Warhol Museum tracks the friendship and flight of the two painters, along with fellow classmate Dorothy Cantor, from their industrial hometown to the lodestar of the 1950s art world. Through paintings and drawings—bolstered by a bewitching cache of ephemera including photos of the friends painting in class or lounging on the beach—“Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York” balances the legacies of three artists who, in the end, followed distinctly different trajectories.



Andy Warhol, Dorothy Cantor, and Philip Pearlstein on Carnegie Institute of Technology campus, ca. 1948, courtesy of the Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Photo by Leonard Kessler.

While Warhol is one of the greatest artists of the last century, Cantor is largely unknown, and Pearlstein has seen success and recognition, but has flown just under the international radar. The exhibition hinges on the years when the three artists met, while attending Carnegie Tech in the mid-1940s. Pearlstein's tuition was covered by the G.I. Bill; his college years were interrupted by a tour in Italy. Prior to the war, he won the National Scholastic High School Art competition, establishing himself as something of a Pittsburgh celebrity. When Warhol installed his easel next to Pearlstein's in 1946, during a painting course, he recognized his classmate immediately. According to Pearlstein's memoirs, Warhol asked him, "How does it feel to be famous?" Pearlstein's answer: "It only lasted five minutes." So began a kinship and collaboration that fostered the rise of both artists' careers. (One enticing painting by Pearlstein shows a scene from art class, Warhol gazing at a deskmate's pad of paper instead of his own.) The two soon amassed a tight-knit crew of friends, including Cantor, who would later join them in New York and marry Pearlstein.

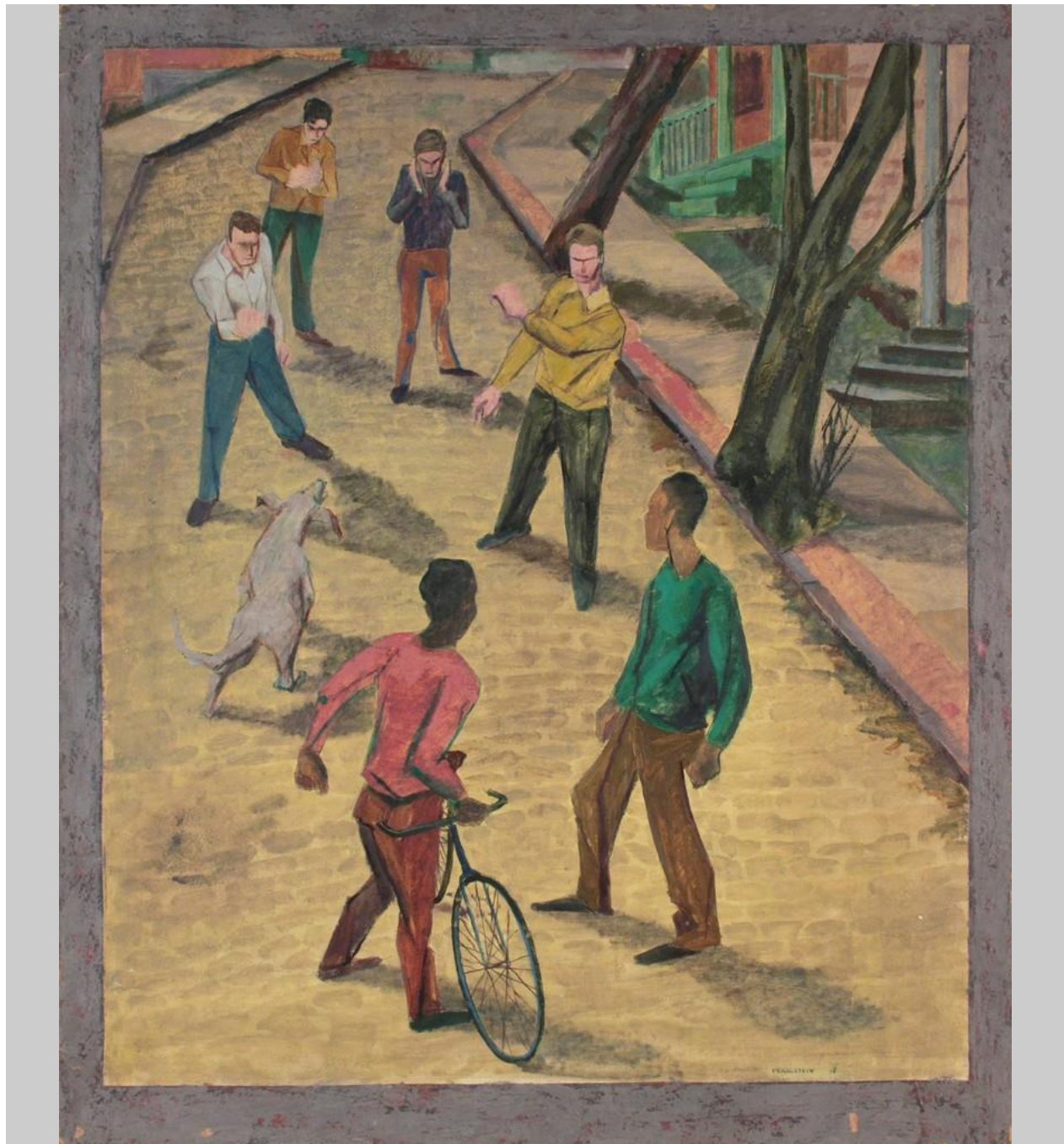


**Philip Pearlstein**

*Art Class, 1946-1947*

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)





Philip Pearlstein

*Street Fight*, 1946-1947

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)

The show opens with an image of the three cohorts sprawled on a Carnegie campus lawn. From our retrospective view, it's easy to read their body language as a harbinger of things to come: Warhol takes center stage, reclining

confidently, like a bespectacled pin-up; Cantor and Pearlstein sit behind him, hugging their legs looking mostly content, if not a bit bemused. Across from the photograph, hang three portraits by Pearlstein depicting him, Cantor, and Warhol, all from 1950. Faces are built from blocks of color, puzzled together like auras—Pearlstein’s in bright, psychedelic hues; Cantor’s in subdued blues and browns; and Warhol’s tiny portrait, in muted greens.

From there, the exhibition unfolds from the high school paintings that won Pearlstein his awards and settles on the work the three friends made in college and during their first years in New York. “The story in the exhibition starts using Pearlstein as kind of a compass for the entire thing,” says Jessica Beck, the museum’s assistant curator of art, who organized the exhibition along with Matt Wrbican, the museum’s chief archivist. “It shows, in the very beginning of the installation, the ambition that Philip had in high school—and that Andy had, too, because we have a beautiful loan from the Warhol family of a self-portrait that Andy made during his early years,” she continues.



Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York, installation, 2015. © The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh.

Pearlstein’s continued commitment is reflected in a series of works made during his military years in Florida and Italy (he was drafted in 1943, just after finishing his first year at Carnegie Tech). His time in Rome and Florence was especially influential. There, he visited the Roman ruins and the Vatican collection, and returned to Pittsburgh with detailed paintings and drawings of soldiers at rest on the Spanish Steps or couched in the Italian countryside.

Back in his hometown, Pearlstein continued to explore figuration against city backdrops—and had his fateful meet-cute with Warhol. Spurred by assignments that sent students around Pittsburgh to capture the city and its people, Pearlstein and Warhol began to develop their signature styles—often through depictions of the same scenes. In two works from the late-1940s, Pearlstein’s *String Quartet* (1948-49) and Warhol’s *View of Concert Hall* (1940s), the artists each painted a performance from a perch high in the balcony of a concert hall. While both pieces reveal an interest in the intersection of figuration and abstraction, Pearlstein’s shows a vested fascination with the

characteristics of the concert goers, while Warhol is more engaged with the environment as whole—in the ambience of the concert, rather than his neighbors. The museum displays an almost exhaustive amount of work from this period, but the fascinating comparisons to be drawn from the artists' nascent paintings—revelatory of two minds in the process of wangling distinct styles—held this writer's interest.



**Philip Pearlstein**

*String Quartet*, 1948-1949

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)



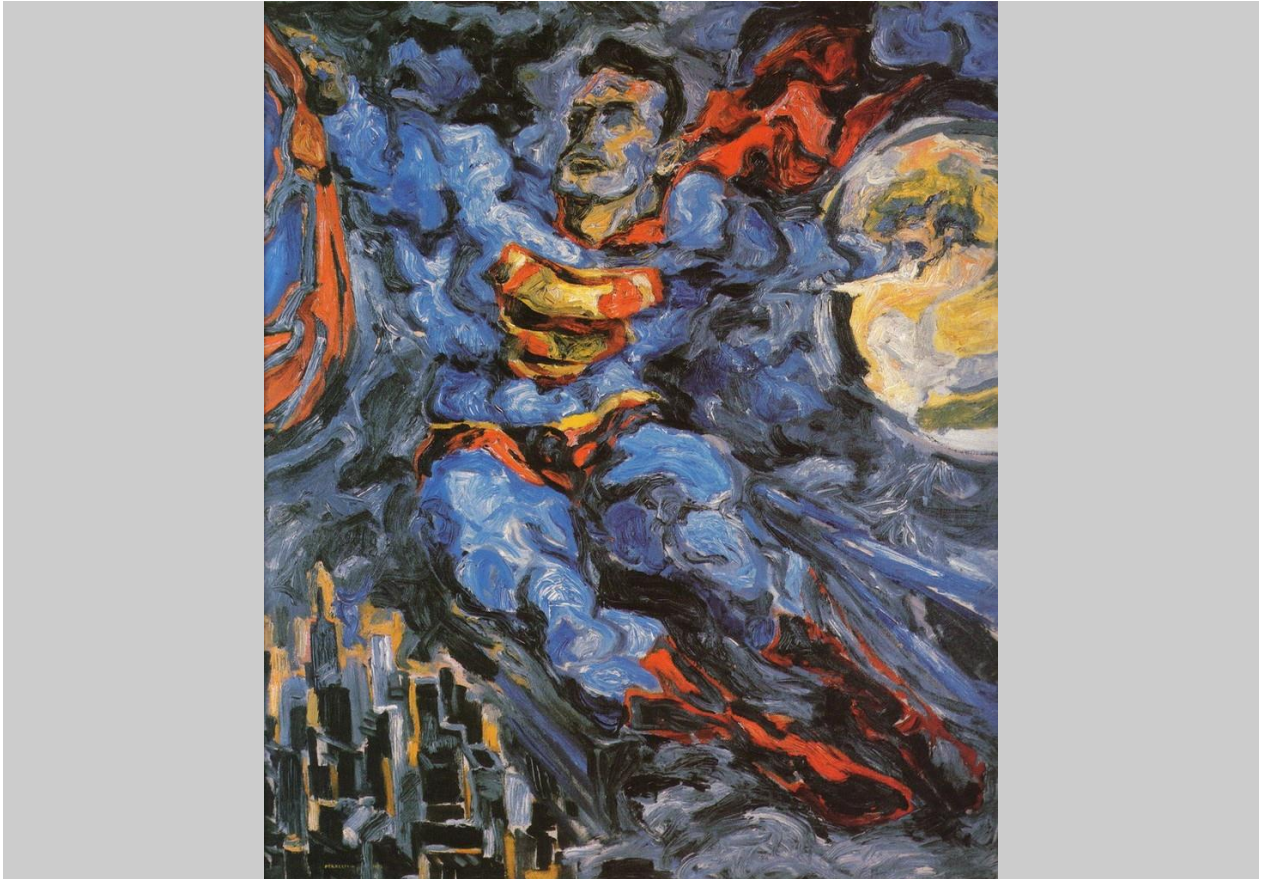
Andy Warhol

*View of Concert Hall, ca. 1940*

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)

After landing in New York, Pearlstein and Warhol moved in together. "They had a sublet arranged from a professor at Carnegie Tech," says Beck. "They shared one little bedroom, and would tell funny stories of cockroaches they were dealing with." Despite the close quarters, here the artists' styles began to diverge. Cantor soon joined them,

and the three used the city as their inspiration—each with an eye toward different details. Pearlstein focused more acutely on portraiture; Warhol on pared-down, cartoonish depictions of everyday objects; Cantor on the angular lines and sinuous curves of New York’s skyscrapers, bridges, and subway systems.



**Philip Pearlstein**

*Superman, 1952*

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)



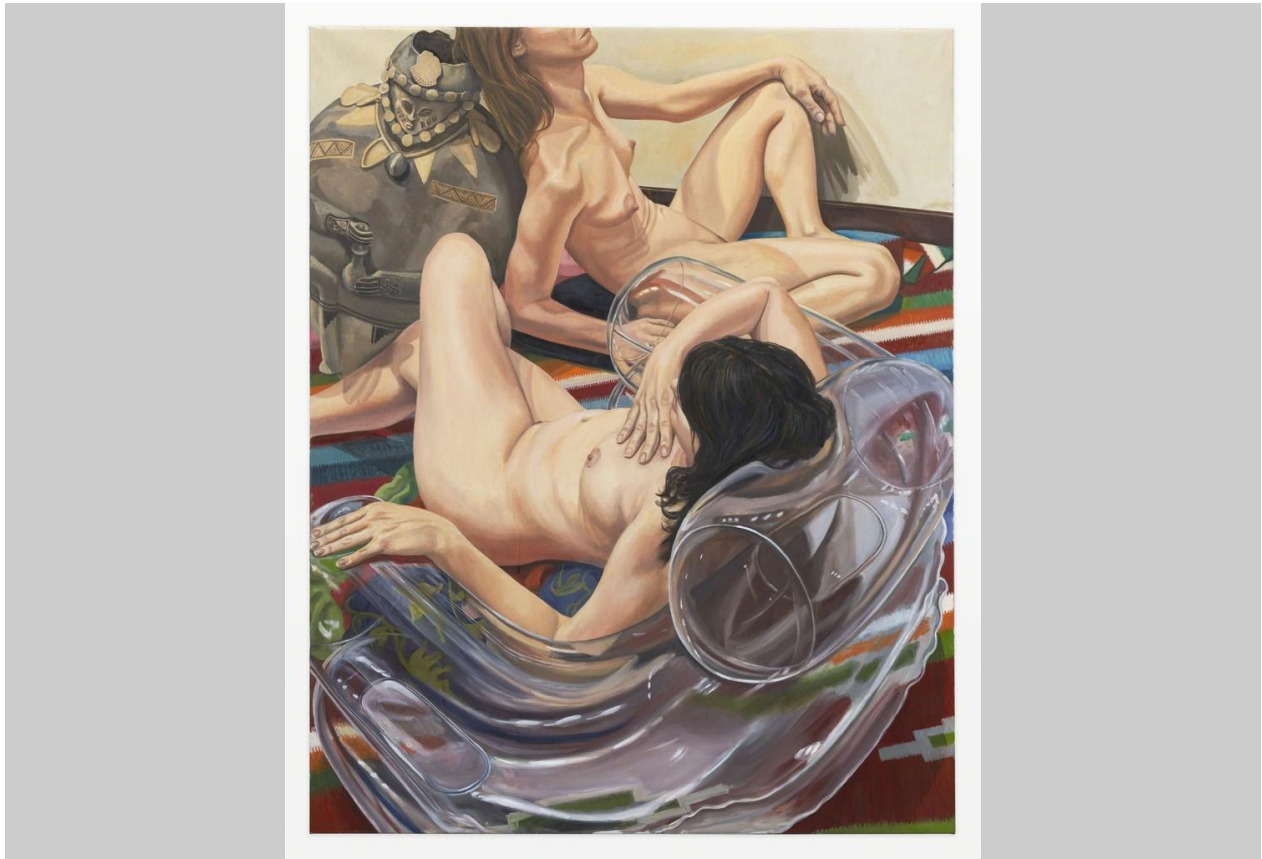
Andy Warhol

*Campbell's Soup Can (Tomato Rice)*, 1961

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)



A fantastic anomaly of a painting from Pearlstein, *Superman* (1952), shows a fleeting interest in Warhol's favored pop cultural themes; we see Pearlstein move away from this model and toward more realistic depictions of the figure, evidenced by recent paintings that make up the core of the installation. These sumptuous high-definition nudes lounge supine, in a disinterested way, on persian rugs and blow-up furniture. For Warhol's part, the museum presents a sampling of work from the 1950s that laid the groundwork for his most celebrated Pop paintings—graphic drawings and even an early soup can, *Campbell's Soup Can (Tomato Rice)*, from 1961.

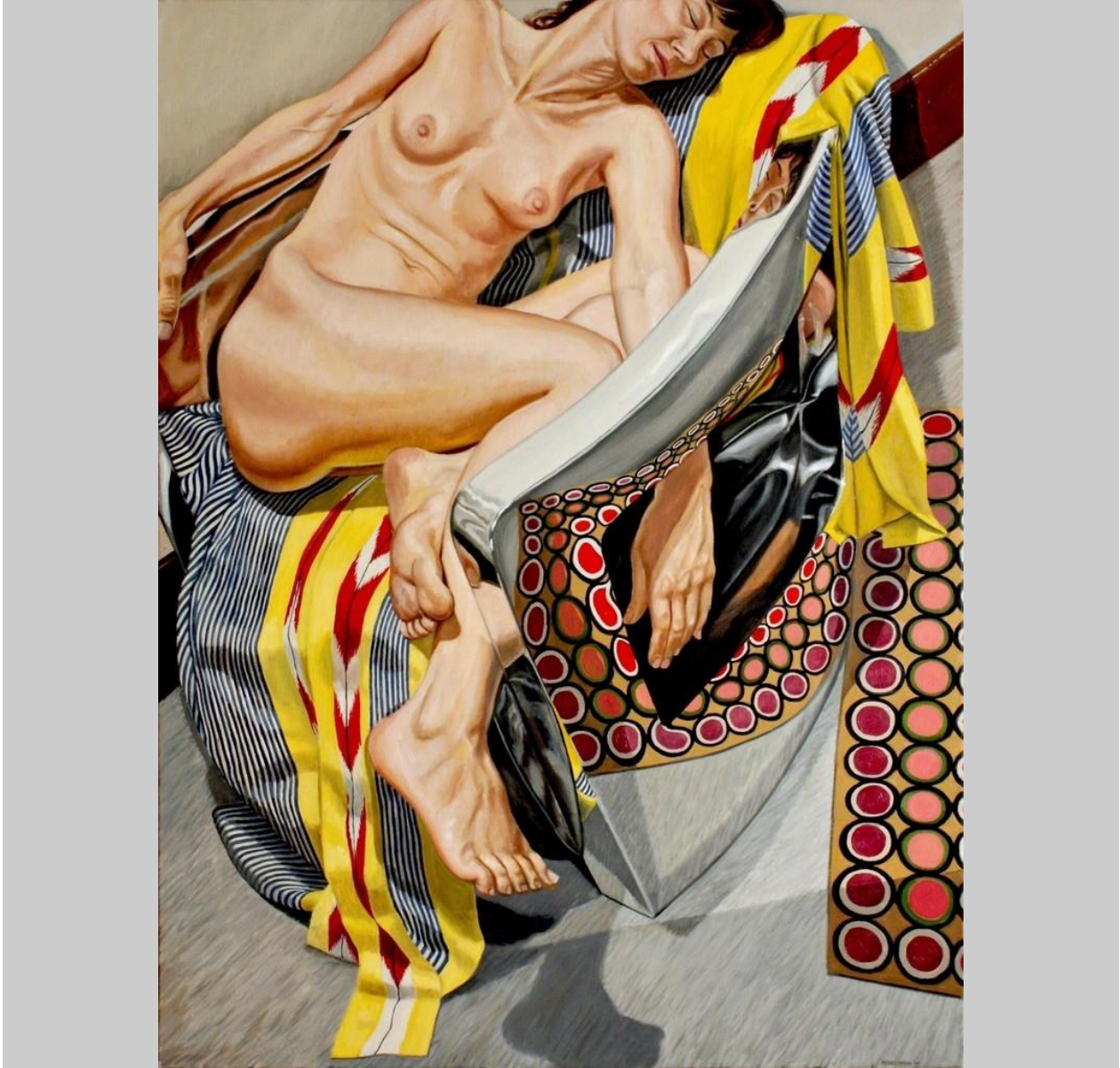


**Philip Pearlstein**

*Two Models with Peruvian Medicine Man*, 2011

Betty Cuningham

\$150,000 - 200,000



**Philip Pearlstein**

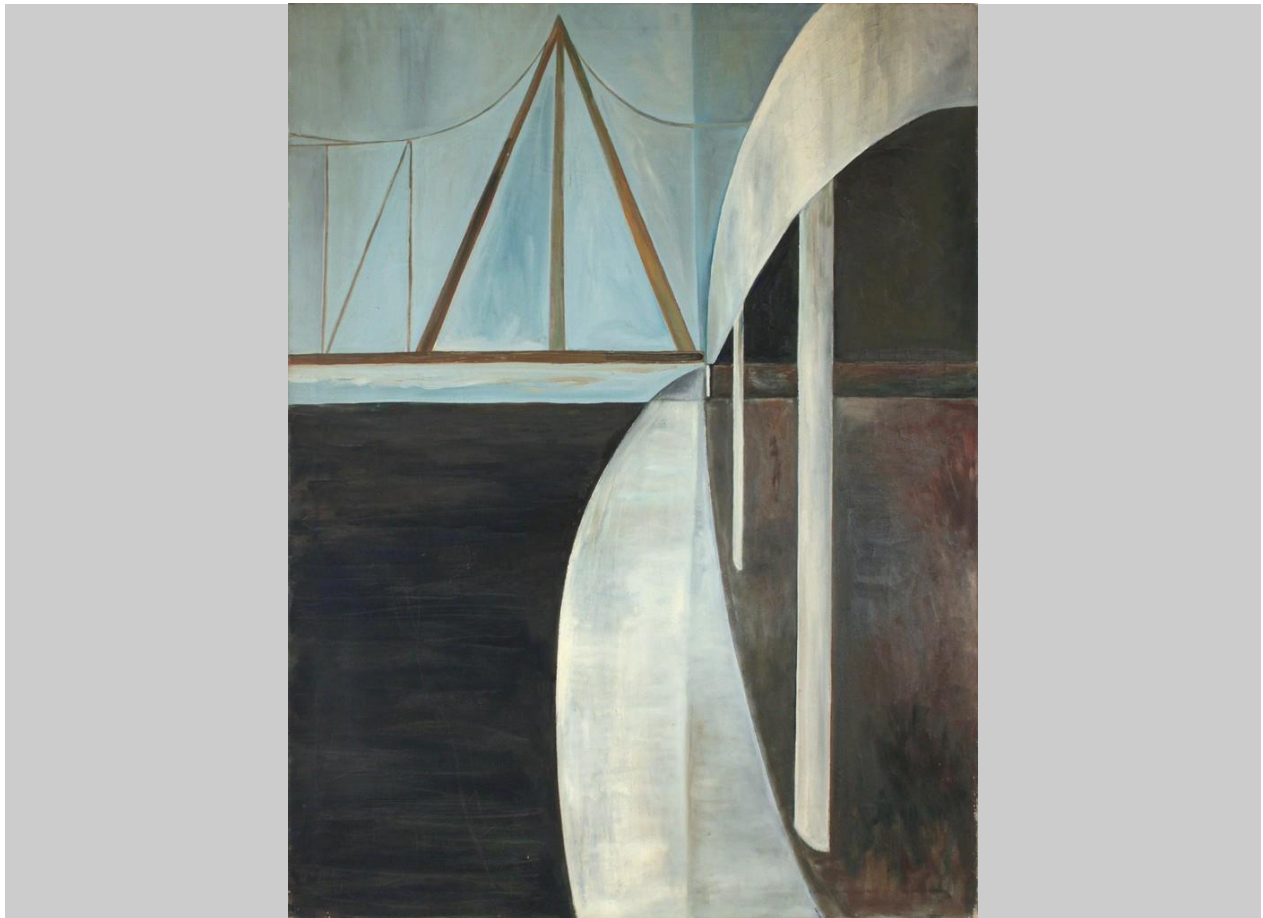
*Model With Chrome Chair and Dotted Felt Rug, 2009*

Betty Cuningham

\$100,000 - 150,000

The great disappointment of the show—at no fault of the curators, but perhaps we can blame the gender dynamics of a bygone generation—is that we don't see more of Cantor's sublime, minimalist cityscapes. After having children with Pearlstein in 1957, she stopped making work.

In any case, the Warhol offers a fascinating, comprehensive view into the formative years of the three artists' practices—and into the everlasting effects of their shared dialogue and early collaboration. “It’s a narrative of this young, nascent period of formative years for the three of them. Then, in the center of the exhibition you get this real commitment to craft with the late paintings,” explained Beck. “Through the show, you see that beautiful trajectory which normally you don’t get to see—because people don’t often show student work; it’s usually used only as educational material.”



Dorothy Cantor

*Untitled (FDR Drive), 1951-1952*

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)



**Dorothy Cantor**

*Untitled (cat grooming and walking), 1955-1957*

"Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York" at Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh (2015)

Here, the smaller drawings and ephemeral photos shine, not just as biographical gems, but as siphoned examples of the talents of the three artists. In one photo from 1957, Warhol holds a small kitten. An enthralling little line drawing by Cantor from the same year depicts two cats, stretching and standing in space. We learn it represents two pets, gifted to Cantor and Pearlstein by Warhol. They are named for Italian Renaissance masters, Cimabue and Sassetta. Individual histories connect; everything comes full circle.

—Alexxa Gotthardt

*“Pearlstein, Warhol, Cantor: From Pittsburgh to New York,” is on view at the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh,  
May 30–Sept. 6, 2015.*

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