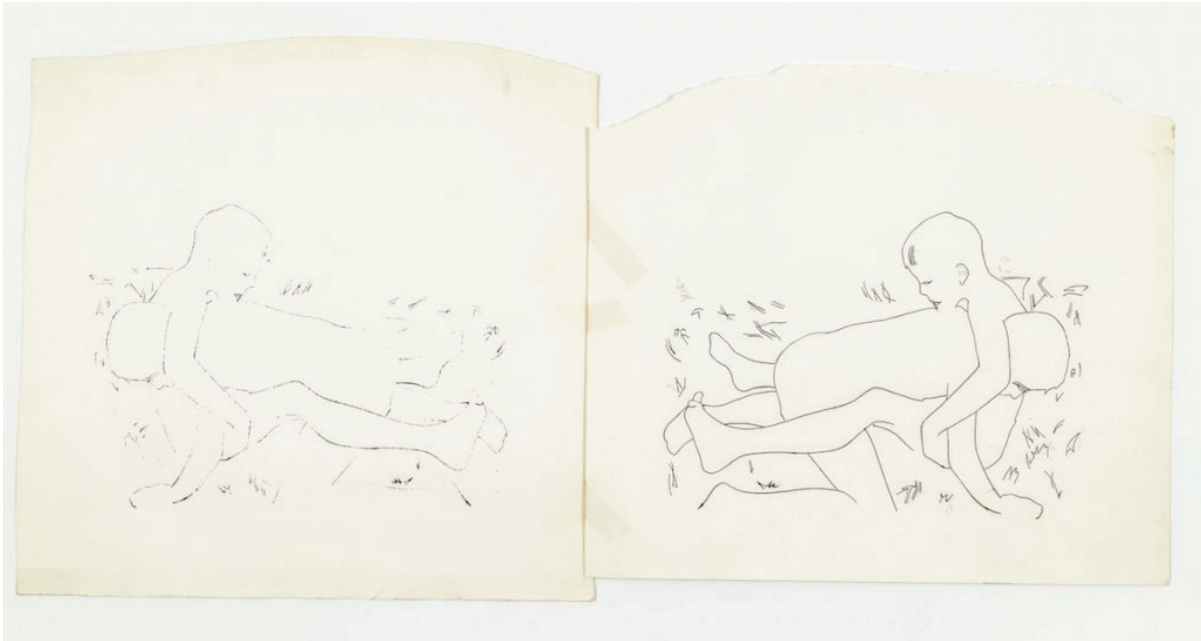




Andy Warhol's Fevered Dreams

Blake Gopnik, Tuesday, December 9, 2014



Andy Warhol made this drawing in the 1950s, and it's now on view in a big show of similar works, recently discovered among the holdings of the Andy Warhol Foundation, that are now on view at Anton Kern Gallery in New York.

I think the most important revelation of the show is the utter centrality of gay desire for Warhol's art and life, and the extent to which he was fully "out", at least on his drawing pad, from early on. A number of gracious drawings in the show are of beautiful young men—with huge erections.

Today's Daily Pic must have started life as a tracing from a banal photo of two boys wrestling—you can just make out a few stray details of their clothing. By turning the image into a pure contour drawing, however, Warhol strips the boys nude, so that the picture seems a memory or fantasy of a boyhood moment in his native Pittsburgh. I imagine it set in Schenley Park, just up the road from his parent's home and the family church. We know Warhol played and drew there as a boy—and also that it was a gay-cruising spot.

In a reversal of how things normally work in art, the clear, bold drawing at the right of my image is the preparatory piece; it got transferred, by blotting, onto the sheet at left, in order to give that sheet's "finished" drawing a more fractured, tentative line. That's Warhol signature move, in both life and art: Camouflaging bold certainty as hesitance and doubt. "Oh gee. Really? You think so?" are the classic lines of the man who just about invented uptalk. In his early years, at least, such simulated timidity must have been part of a gay man's self-defense. Even if Warhol did engage in some pre-teen "wrestling", it can only be put down on paper as a half-remembered dream. (© The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., courtesy Anton Kern Gallery, New York)