

## Brigid Berlin 1939-2020

'Brigid was always my favourite underground movie star,' said director John Waters, who cast the fast-talking Berlin in two of his films. Andy Warhol's longest and most devoted friend - the essential 'B' to Warhol's 'A' in *From A to B and Back Again*, 1975, and the most mentioned person in the *Diaries*, 1989 - Berlin's tough, unsmiling, topless self still intimates in vintage 1960s Factory photos. Born fabulously rich (father Richard was chairman of the Hearst Corporation) and accustomed to such guests at their vast Fifth Avenue apartment as movie star Clark Gable and President Lyndon B Johnson - Brigid Berlin was nonetheless a born non-conformist. Prodigious food binges infuriated slim, glamorous, ever-disapproving mom Honey, who got the family doctor to prescribe her daughter appetite-curbing speed at age 12. Eventually Berlin would be twee-

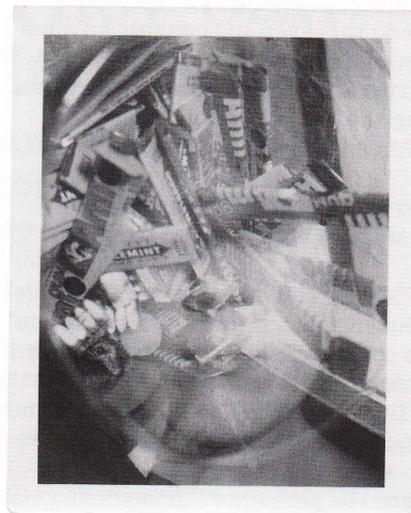
ing rubies out of a jewelled box that the Shah of Iran had gifted her father in order to fund her drug habit and lifestyle - as 1970s regular Bob Colacello remembered in his 1990 book *Holy Terror*. By her early 20s Brigid had married and divorced (from the openly gay window-dresser John Parker - 'good luck with that fairy', Honey'd snapped), and had met Andy.

Sharp-tongued and fearless, in cult classic *Chelsea Girls*, 1966, Berlin debuted as The Duchess (aka Brigid 'Polk', for her expert 'pokes' of amphetamine), bullying Ingrid Superstar on screen nearly to tears. The only Silver Factory 'crazy' to fully survive the transition into the 1970s and 1980s 'Business Art' office-studio, Berlin 'worked her way down from Superstar to receptionist', as Colacello put it, becoming famous for the withering glances she would cast over her needlepoint at anyone who dared cross the Factory threshold.

Berlin spoke to Warhol every day in mutually recorded phone calls, some of which formed the basis of Andy Warhol's play *Pork*, 1971, a thinly veiled, devastating portrait of the warring Berlin family. (*Pork* eventually played at London's Roundhouse, allegedly inspiring an impressed David Bowie to write the song 'Andy Warhol'.) The Tate Collection includes one of Gerhard Richter's five oil paintings of the famed Berlin, painted in 1971. Brigid refused to describe herself as an artist; 'I've always liked art supplies better than art', she said. Yet her projects such as 'Polaroids and Tapes' (Galerie Heiner Friedrich, Cologne, 1970); 'Tit Prints' (produced pressing her paint-smearred breasts to paper); and the three-volume *The Cock Book* collection (purchased by Richard Prince for \$175,000); as well as Warhol's unending appreciation of her advice and conversation - despite their on-again/off-again feuds - attest to how much Berlin 'thought like an artist', as film-biographer and friend Vincent Fremont has noted.

In the early 1970s, at the legendary Manhattan drinking hole Max's Kansas City, Berlin was among the few accepted both by the front-room artist 'heavies' (Robert Rauschenberg et al) and at Warhol's 'Captain's table' at the back. Berlin was a unique rebel, a political conservative who despised the 1960s' counter-cultural hippies, marijuana and rock music ('I can honestly say I never bought a rock and roll record,' she boasted) yet seems to have taped or taken a Polaroid of virtually every New York art icon of her era, from John Lennon and Yoko Ono to Lou Reed to Robert Smithson. Even in her final reclusive years the indomitable Berlin was the ultimate insider - 'never a groupie', as Waters has rightly described her.

### Gilda Williams



Brigid Berlin, *Untitled (Self-Portrait Double Exposure with Candy)*, c1971-73, polaroid