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Beethoven-Haus Bonn Unravels the Mystery of Warhol's Final Masterpiece

Special exhibition at the Beethoven-Haus presents new findings and works relating to Warhol's iconic Pop Art portrait of the Bonn-born composer

*High-resolution images for editorial use are available in the digital press kit at:
www.beethoven.de/en/g/pressebereich_beethoven_by_warhol
Image credits: Beethoven-Haus Bonn; Photo: vigilux_Meike Böschemeyer*



Short Version

In 1987, Andy Warhol created his final print series, BEETHOVEN. Long regarded as a commercial commission produced by the Warhol Factory in New York just a few weeks before the Pop Art artist's death, a new exhibition in Bonn now reveals it to be one of the most innovative artistic interpretations of Ludwig van Beethoven of the 20th century.

Marking the 200th anniversary of Ludwig van Beethoven's death and the 40th anniversary of Andy Warhol's death in early 2027, the Beethoven-Haus Bonn is presenting a new special exhibition. Entitled *Beethoven by Warhol*, the exhibition presents new findings that change our understanding of BEETHOVEN (1987), the four-part screenprint portfolio and the last of its kind created during Warhol's lifetime. Extensive research reconstructs the complete story of its creation, provides evidence of Warhol's personal artistic engagement with the subject, and brings previously unknown works by Warhol relating to Beethoven to light.

The exhibition traces a path from Warhol's first photographic screenprint portrait to BEETHOVEN (1987), his final Pop Art icon, while also shedding light on a significant chapter in the art history of the Bonn Republic. Wolfram Weimer, Minister of State for Culture and the Media, is patron of the exhibition, which will be on view in Bonn from 9 September 2026 to 5 April 2027.

Long Version

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On 26 March 2027, the 200th anniversary of Beethoven's death will be commemorated. Just a few weeks earlier, on 22 February 2027, the 40th anniversary of Andy Warhol's death will also be marked. With the generous support of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media and the Gielen-Leyendecker Foundation, the Beethoven-Haus Bonn is now dedicating an exhibition to Warhol's artistic engagement with Beethoven.

Wolfram Weimer, Minister of State for Culture and the Media and patron of the exhibition, welcomes this encounter between classical music and Pop Art: *"This exhibition is a wonderful prelude to the Beethoven commemorative year 2027, in which Germany will mark the 200th anniversary of the Bonn-born composer's death. In his iconic portrait, Andy Warhol brilliantly captured the worldwide fascination with Beethoven. This is the perfect moment to dedicate an exhibition to this portrait for the first time."*

Warhol's Engagement with Images from the Beethoven-Haus Can Be Traced Back to 1979

The Bonn-based gallerist Hermann Wünsche played a key role in the creation of Warhol's Beethoven works. He brought the New York artist to the Rhineland on several occasions and commissioned important works from him. A dedicated room in the exhibition explores Wünsche's activities as a gallerist in Bonn, featuring, among other things, the "making of" as well as the original portraits WILLY BRANDT (1976) and TONI SCHUMACHER (1983).

Warhol's first engagement with Beethoven imagery can be traced back to his first major exhibition of graphic works in Germany, organised by Wünsche in a Bonn furniture store in late 1979. At the opening, Warhol took an interest in motifs from Bonn and images of Beethoven that a visitor presented to him in the form of reproductions from the Beethoven-Haus, as the Bonn exhibition now documents.

The decisive impetus came from Wünsche in the mid-1980s, when he commissioned Warhol to create a Beethoven work for Bonn's 2,000th anniversary celebrations in 1989. The result was the four-part print portfolio BEETHOVEN (1987), for which Warhol used postcards from the Beethoven-Haus depicting Joseph Karl Stieler's (1781–1858) portrait of Beethoven and the manuscript of the so-called *Moonlight Sonata*. A meeting between Warhol and Wünsche in New York is documented just a few weeks before Warhol's death, during which the gallerist received the first Beethoven prints. Two years later, Wünsche presented the print series publicly for the first time at the Beethovenhalle Bonn.

Malte Boecker, Director of the Beethoven-Haus Bonn, comments: *"Warhol transforms the composer into a contemporary star. This is the media image of Beethoven in the 20th century: Beethoven for everyone. This portrait has had a profound influence on the modern reception of Beethoven – making it all the more fascinating that its visual sources come directly from the Beethoven-Haus."*

On View for the First Time: Warhol Drawings of the Beethoven Monument on Bonn's Münsterplatz, Previously Unknown Colour Variations of the Print, and a Previously Unpublished Beethoven Portrait by Warhol on Canvas

Among the exhibition's major surprises are Beethoven works by Warhol that have until now remained largely unknown. They provide compelling evidence that Warhol explored a variety of Beethoven motifs beyond Joseph Karl Stieler's portrait. The exhibition includes drawings by Warhol's own hand of the Beethoven bust by Johann Baptist Schreiner (1866–1935) and of the monument by Ernst Julius Hähnel (1811–1891) on Bonn's Münsterplatz.

Also presented for the first time are photographs, source materials and further colour variations of the BEETHOVEN print, which make it possible to trace the development of the final portfolio in considerable detail. A highlight of the exhibition is an unknown Beethoven painting on canvas that has never previously been documented. For the duration of the Warhol exhibition, it will take the place in the museum of Stieler's original portrait, which will be on loan to the Museum der bildenden Künste Leipzig until early 2027.

Malte Boecker explains: *"Together with people who worked closely with Wünsche, we followed every lead in and around Bonn: we spoke to contemporary witnesses, visited private collections and interviewed Warhol experts. The wealth of material, some of it completely unknown, enabled us to reconstruct how the commission came about, how Warhol developed the motif over an extended period of time, and how, within a commercial framework, he created such an artistically outstanding work."*

BEETHOVEN Occupies a Unique Position within Warhol's Body of Commissioned Portraits

BEETHOVEN (1987) is regarded as Warhol's final screenprint portrait. The Bonn exhibition places it in the context of numerous other portraits, including those of artists such as GOETHE (1982), as well as musicians whom Warhol portrayed particularly for record covers. Among the works on display is Warhol's very first screenprint portrait, created in 1962: a portrait of jazz musician Paul Desmond for his album *Take Ten*. The exhibition also features portraits of Mick Jagger, Blondie, Paul Anka, Aretha Franklin and the Beatles, to name just a few.

For BEETHOVEN (1987), Warhol used the postcard motifs from the Beethoven-Haus, superimposing them and transforming them in his characteristic aesthetic: a halftone image, high-contrast areas of colour and an outline drawing. The result is the creation of a media star through the visual fusion of Beethoven's best-known historical portrait with his most frequently performed music.

Silke Bettermann, art historian at the Beethoven-Haus, explains what makes this depiction so innovative: *"Never before has Beethoven been depicted so completely immersed in music. Nor is there any comparable meta-commentary on a portrait elsewhere in Warhol's work. This is a truly unique feature."*

Exhibition Guide

A printed exhibition guide in German and English, featuring texts by Silke Bettermann, Guy Minnebach and Thomas Kliemann, accompanies the exhibition. Published by the Beethoven-Haus, the guide is available free of charge at the museum.

The Munich-based start-up Trouby also offers a free interactive media guide to the exhibition at beethovenxwarhol.com. Visitors can listen to audio features and discover additional content, while an AI-powered dialogue function allows them to ask their own questions about Beethoven, Warhol and the exhibits, enabling them to explore the exhibition according to their individual interests.

Organiser

Beethoven-Haus Bonn

Team

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Voices on the Exhibition

“The forthcoming exhibition at Beethoven-Haus, Beethoven by Warhol, promises to be revelatory. It zeroes in on Warhol’s last project dedicated to Ludwig van Beethoven and executed in collaboration with the legendary Bonn dealer Herman Wünsche during the final weeks of Warhol’s life, before his untimely death on February 22, 1987. More than this, the exhibition at Beethoven-Haus delves into an interlocking network of images in the various media of painting, drawing, printmaking, and photography that Warhol produced during his decade-long association with Wünsche. With a series of brilliant but rarely seen experimental prints, they shed new light on Warhol’s working methods and artistic process.”

Neil Printz, Editor of the Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné

Visitor Information

The special exhibition will be on view from **9 September 2026 to 5 April 2027** and is included in the admission ticket to the museum of the Beethoven-Haus Bonn (Bonngasse 20).

Advance tickets are available online at tickets.beethoven.gmbh/ (tickets from €12 plus advance booking fee). Subject to availability, tickets can also be purchased at the museum ticket desk without an advance booking fee.

Opening Hours:

Wednesday–Monday: 10 am–6 pm

Supporting Programme

The special exhibition is accompanied by an extensive programme of guided tours, workshops and lectures.

The programme opens with an English-language keynote lecture by **Neil Printz, Editor of the Andy Warhol Catalogue Raisonné**, on 9 September 2026 at 6 pm in the Chamber Music Hall. His lecture is entitled *Andy Warhol’s “Portrait of Society”*. Free tickets are available online at beethoven.de/en, from the Beethoven-Haus shop or at the box office on the evening of the event.

Further information on the supporting programme is available at:

internet.beethoven.de/beethoven-by-warhol/en.html

Interviews

We are happy to arrange interviews with Malte Boecker, Neil Printz and other contributors to the exhibition upon request.

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Press materials for editorial use are available here:

www.beethoven.de/en/g/pressebereich_beethoven_by_warhol

Beethoven-Haus Bonn:

Founded in 1889, the Beethoven-Haus Bonn association is considered the leading international Beethoven centre. Its mission is to keep Beethoven's life, work, and legacy alive. The cultural institution includes the world's most significant Beethoven collection, the museum in Beethoven's birthplace with some 100,000 visitors per year, a musicological research department alongside a library and publishing house, as well as the Chamber Music Hall named after Hermann J. Abs. Supported by hundreds of friends, patrons, and members from over 20 countries, and funded by the Federal Government, the State of North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), the Rhineland Regional Association (LVR), and the Federal City of Bonn, the Beethoven-Haus fulfills a cultural mandate of national and international importance. The violinist Daniel Hope has been its president since March 2020.