

OUR LIVES, FLASHING IN FRONT OF US

Bourden, David. Warhol. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1989)

"Once *My Hustler* made its debut—and took in \$23,400 during its first week of showings at an old legitimate stage theater in midtown Manhattan—the way was clear for others to print their negatives of twilight zone sex capers." — Confidential

After *Chelsea Girls*, Warhol concentrated almost entirely on movies that he produced and distributed under a corporate entity called Andy Warhol Films, Inc. He no longer had to sell his paintings in order to subsidize his movies, because *Chelsea Girls* earned enough money to produce the next two features, and every movie afterward made a profit. Andy and Paul Morrissey (who became a studious reader of *Variety*) now felt themselves to be part of the commercial movie establishment. But at the same time, they still hoped that a studio would put them in charge of a big-budget film. They frequently discussed projects with various movie moguls, but none was willing to put up a dime without seeing a script.

In April 1967, Warhol flew to Los Angeles, his "dream city," to attend the opening of *Chelsea Girls* at the Cinema Theatre. He was accompanied by an entourage that included Morrissey, Susan Bottomly (alias International Velvet), producer Lester Persky, John Wilcock, a French beauty—née Isabelle Collin Dufresne—who assumed the vivid name Ultra Violet, and one of the artist's current infatuations, a strapping, square-jawed young man who answered to the name Rodney La Rod. One night the whole entourage descended on station KPFK to do the Radio Oz show, on which International Velvet pretended to be Andy.

Chelsea Girls continued to do well wherever it played. "Despite its extraordinarily frank language and one scene of complete male nudity, it has not yet run into any police censorship," the *New York Times* reported toward the end of April.² That situation was remedied on May 30, when Boston vice squad detectives seized the film following an afternoon screening at the Symphony Cinema II Theater, where the movie had been playing for two and a half weeks. The manager of the theater was found guilty of four charges under the state's obscenity laws and fined five hundred dollars on each count.³ Warhol was delighted to be able to say that his film had been "banned in Boston," traditionally a publicist's dream.

Chelsea Girls was invited to be shown during the Cannes Film Festival's Critic's Week that spring. Andy departed for France, feeling confident that *Chelsea Girls* would be a hit at the festival and attract distributors in foreign countries. He brought along an entourage that included Nico, Gerard Malanga, Bottomly, Eric Emerson, Morrissey, and La Rod. When Warhol arrived in Cannes,

217. *Big Electric Chair*, 1967. Acrylic and silkscreen ink on canvas, 54 x 74". Courtesy Thomas Ammann Fine Arts, Zurich