

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

A Visit With Warhol Superstar Gerard Malanga

R. Daniel Foster · Tuesday, March 4th, 2025

Revisiting a legendary past, and one as alluring and dynamic as Andy Warhol's Factory era, is strewn with landmines. One explosive fact is that most of Warhol's superstars are dead. Edie Sedgwick. Candy Darling. Billy Name. Ultra Violet. Donyale Luna. Paul America. Ondine. Brigid Berlin. Andrea Feldman. Mario Montez. Jackie Curtis. Holly Woodlawn. All of them are gone, along with their recollection of that unprecedented era, albeit much has been preserved in vast Warhol archives.

Warhol, ever his own brand ambassador, saw to that.



Stills from Andy Warhol: Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man, 1964-1965. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

Among others, a key Warhol superstar remains: [Gerard Malanga](#), Warhol's chief assistant and collaborator for seven years during the 1960s. Malanga was Warhol's *Screen Tests* cinematographer, the eye behind the camera for nearly all of the approximately 500 three-minute films. *Screen Tests* were revealing portraits of visitors to the Factory studio, some of them famous. Malanga also co-directed, edited, and starred in several of Warhol's films, and helped with the Factory's operation, as well as contributing to its prodigious output.

Malanga famously put Warhol in front of the camera for a filmic portrait, mimicking a *Screen Test*. It's among the most remarkable cuts of film in the Warhol archives: *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man (1964–1965)*.

The film, along with three others, drew me to Pittsburgh in mid-December 2024. The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust [presented Malanga's 16mm works](#), newly transferred to 4K, in a world premiere at the Harris Theater. Pittsburgh is Warhol's birthplace.

Malanga, 81, was present, so the weekend was an opportunity to brush against the Warhol mystique, view some outstanding historical cinema, and hang out with one of the Factory's star

players.



Salvador Dalí & Gerard Malanga in a sequence from *Film Notebooks*, the Factory, 1966. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

A Teacher Sparks Malanga's Inner Poet

On the day of the screening, I met Malanga at a cafe in Pittsburgh's downtown Cultural District, a 14-block stretch of art galleries, theaters, and restaurants. Seated when I entered, Malanga wore a tweed jacket, fedora, crimson tie, and loafers without socks. A walker was placed next to him. I noted a medal pinned to his jacket that honored him as a Chevalier of Arts and Letters, awarded by the French Republic for his life's work. That work includes art created with Warhol, his poetry, and photographs of such notables as Robert Mapplethorpe, Iggy Pop, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, and Roman Polanski.

Malanga started writing poems as a teenager, and has since published 27 books. While studying graphic art as a young man, he believed he would graduate and get a job on Madison Avenue, but a chance teacher, Daisy Aldan, sparked his interest in poems.

“We were reading Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Lautréamont,” Malanga recalled. “She also had real poets come into our class: Anaïs Nin, Kenward Elmslie. I was fascinated. I moved from my desk in the back of the room to the front.”



From left: Andy Warhol, Nico, Danny Williams, Maureen Tucker, Sterling Morrison, Mary Woronov, Paul Morrissey, Lou Reed, John Cale, and Gerard Malanga (kneeling), Los Angeles, 1966.. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

Writing poetry became a constant in Malanga’s life, his singular passion.

On the subject of Warhol and his Factory days, Malanga was subdued, and in some ways detached, as if his extraordinary life had happened to someone else. I suspected I wasn’t going to get much about the countercultural excess, chaos, celebrity worship, and amphetamine-fueled free-for-all that is the legend of the Warhol Factory era.

Also seated at the table: [Anastasia James](#), a leading Warhol scholar and Pittsburgh Cultural Trust’s director of galleries and public art.

“Gerard is not nostalgic about his past,” James later told me. “Many of the other superstars mythologize a bit. Gerard doesn’t. It’s a straight remembrance, straight facts.”

Malanga Is as Close as You Can Get to Warhol

A Warhol scholar for two decades, James credits Malanga as crucial to her work. “He has been as close as I can get to Warhol,” she said. “I’ve gotten statements from him that I haven’t gotten from anyone else.” James has collaborated with Malanga for a dozen years, chronicling how his influence was integral to molding the Factory aesthetic.

Seated at the cafe next to James: her husband Dagon James, owner of [The Waverly Press](#). He handed me a copy of the recently published *Gerard Malanga’s Secret Cinema*, which documents nearly every movie Malanga created from 1964-71. About 200 photos are paired with Malanga’s film notes and recollections. The Waverly Press book, compiled and edited by Anastasia and Dagon James, was an extraordinary undertaking given that Malanga’s films were dispersed and needed to be tracked down.

Many of the films included in the book are of visits to the Factory—by Bob Dylan, Edie Sedgwick, Mary Woronov, Salvador Dalí, Jack Smith, Loulou de la Falaise, Candy Darling, Roger Vadim, Jane Fonda, and the Velvet Underground, among others.



Agneta Frieberg driving for a weekend with Gerard at Morty & Lita Hornick's estate in New City, NY, 1969. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

"I Just Had Fun Doing It."

Back at the cafe, Malanga said he never considered himself as a documentarian when working with Warhol. Film and photography "just seemed the natural thing to do," he said. "I wasn't doing it for any ulterior motive or career-building move. I just had fun doing it." Malanga, however, possessed an archival consciousness, a term writer and artist Charles Henri Ford ascribed to him. "That was a very good characterization of what I was doing," said Malanga, who lives in the Hudson Valley region.

It was Ford who introduced a 20-year-old Malanga to Warhol.

"Charles knew I had experience in silk screening," Malanga said. "I had a summer job, working for a successful textile chemist, Leon Hecht. He taught me how to silkscreen—we were silk screening 30 yards of fabric, cutting it up to make rooster ties which were very popular at the time."

Knowing his silk-screening experience, Warhol turned to Malanga at a poetry reading reception and asked, “Well, when can you come and work with me?” Malanga recalled. “Two days later on a Tuesday, I went to work with Andy. The first thing we silk-screened was Elizabeth Taylor’s silver portrait.” *Silver Liz* now resides at Pittsburgh’s Andy Warhol Museum, among numerous Elizabeth Taylor works Warhol created in the early 1960s.



Still photograph of Marie Menken & Gerard Malanga filming a scene from “The Gerard Malanga Story” reel in *The Chelsea Girls*, 1966. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

“I got there on time, it was a bright sunny day,” Malanga recalled. “Andy was renting a studio, an old building that used to be a firehouse on 87th between 3rd and Lexington Avenues.”

After finishing up with *Silver Liz*, Warhol and Malanga went to his mother’s house for lunch, two blocks away.

“The first thing out of Julia’s mouth was, ‘You are Andy’s younger brother.’” Malanga said. “Andy was practically laughing his head off in the background. I was sort of blessed by his mother, you know? She was absolutely wonderful; I got along so well with her. She had a great sense of humor and was smart as a whip. A very talented lady, an artist in in her own right.”

Julia Warhola (Warhol shortened his name in 1949) was born Júlia Justína Zavacká, and was raised by a peasant family in a village in what’s now known as Slovakia. After marriage, she emigrated to the United States in 1921. Malanga’s extensive recollections of Julia Warhola are found in a [2015 interview](#) with Berkshire Fine Arts.

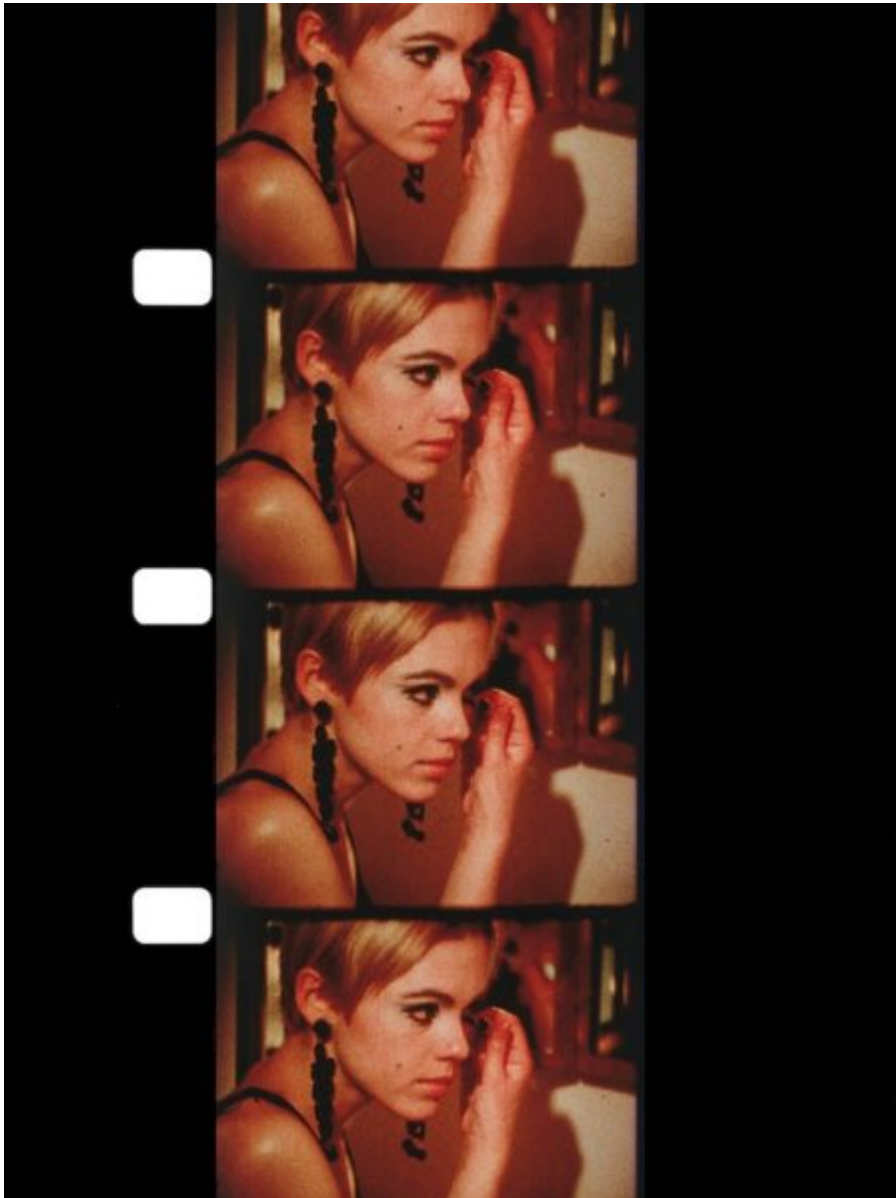
A Summer Job Became a Life-Defining Decade

Malanga faced a crossroads in the fall of 1963: end his summer job with Warhol and go back to school, or join the rising artist in Los Angeles for his second show at the Ferus Gallery on North La

Cienega Boulevard. The exhibit featured 23 Elvis canvases, including *Double Elvis*.

“I told myself that lots of people take a semester off,” Malanga recalled. “And so, I could do the same thing. Why not?”

Warhol, Malanga, Wynn Chamberlain, and Taylor Mead left for Los Angeles on September 24, 1963, the road trip taking four days, according to the website Warholstars. The previous year, Warhol had the first exhibition of *Campbell's Soup Cans* at Ferus, with five of the canvases selling for \$100 each, according to the Ferus Gallery website. The series became the defining symbol for pop art. They now sell for millions, with a top price of \$11.776 million for *Small Torn Campbell's Soup Can (Pepper Pot)*, purchased by Eli Broad. The painting can be viewed at the Broad Museum in downtown Los Angeles.



Stills of Edie Sedgwick filmed by Malanga, 1965. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

Seven years after the trip, which included filming an outré Tarzan and Jane film, Malanga was still working at the Factory, his summer job turned into a life-defining era. He left the Factory in 1970 to pursue his photography and other passions.

After returning to New York from Los Angeles, Warhol learned his lease would not be renewed on his firehouse studio space. “We spent over a month looking, in mid-October 1963,” Malanga said. “The clock was ticking; we had to find space. Andy and I hoofed the sidewalks, just searching.”

Warhol found a factory space across from the YMCA on East 47th Street, “which wasn’t a very arty spot, but I went along with it,” Malanga said. “Sure enough, it turned out to be ideal.” The space, a former hat factory, would be Warhol’s work studio for four years. “There was no electricity,” Malanga said. “There was a toilet, a sink, a broken mirror. That’s about it.”

Around the same time, Warhol and Malanga went to a party thrown by Billy Name at his East Village apartment. “He had sprayed his apartment silver, most of it,” Malanga said. “Andy liked that, so Billy came over a few weeks later and sprayed the studio silver.”

Warhol’s famed Silver Factory was born.



Bob Dylan and Gerard Malanga at the Factory, 1965. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

Was Malanga the Silver Factory Stud? “Not Exactly.”

Before Malanga's films were screened at the Harris Theater, I joined Malanga and Anastasia and Dagon James at a Thai restaurant. Archivists from the Andy Warhol Museum also joined us. I caught whiffs of gossip, the usual politics that surround large institutions, marveling at careers wholly built around the star, nearly 40 years after his death.



Gerard Malanga with the author. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

An image came to mind: Warhol's white-hot career as an explosion in space that happened more than half a century ago. The blast's aftermath continues to fall to earth—scholars, archivists and younger generations are still examining, analyzing, and musing about the shock wave that Warhol created.



Malanga & Donovan Leitch at the Factory in Gerard Malanga's Film Notebooks, 1966. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

At dinner, I turned to Malanga, bringing up a [Victor Bockris interview](#) I had read. Bockris stated that the Factory was always run by a “triangular power group,” the first being Ondine, Billy Name, and Malanga. He also termed Malanga as “the Silver Factory’s stud.” A bemused look crossed Malanga’s weathered face. “Not exactly,” he said. “That’s a little misleading.”

The Internet is strewn with scores of Warhol superstar interviews. As Anastasia James mentioned, some Factory players veer to mythologizing. But from photos, it’s undeniable that Malanga was a looker, one of the beautiful people Warhol drew to his inner circle. “He was unbelievably beautiful,” Bockris said. “The sort of beauty that he had, in his sort of Renaissance face, was drop dead sexy.”



Jane Fonda, Candy Darling, and Andy Warhol, 1969. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

Disrupting the “Trope of the Lone Auteur”

After dinner, we walked to the 1931 Harris Theater on Liberty Avenue; the venue is operated by the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, which reopened the building in 1995 after extensive renovations.

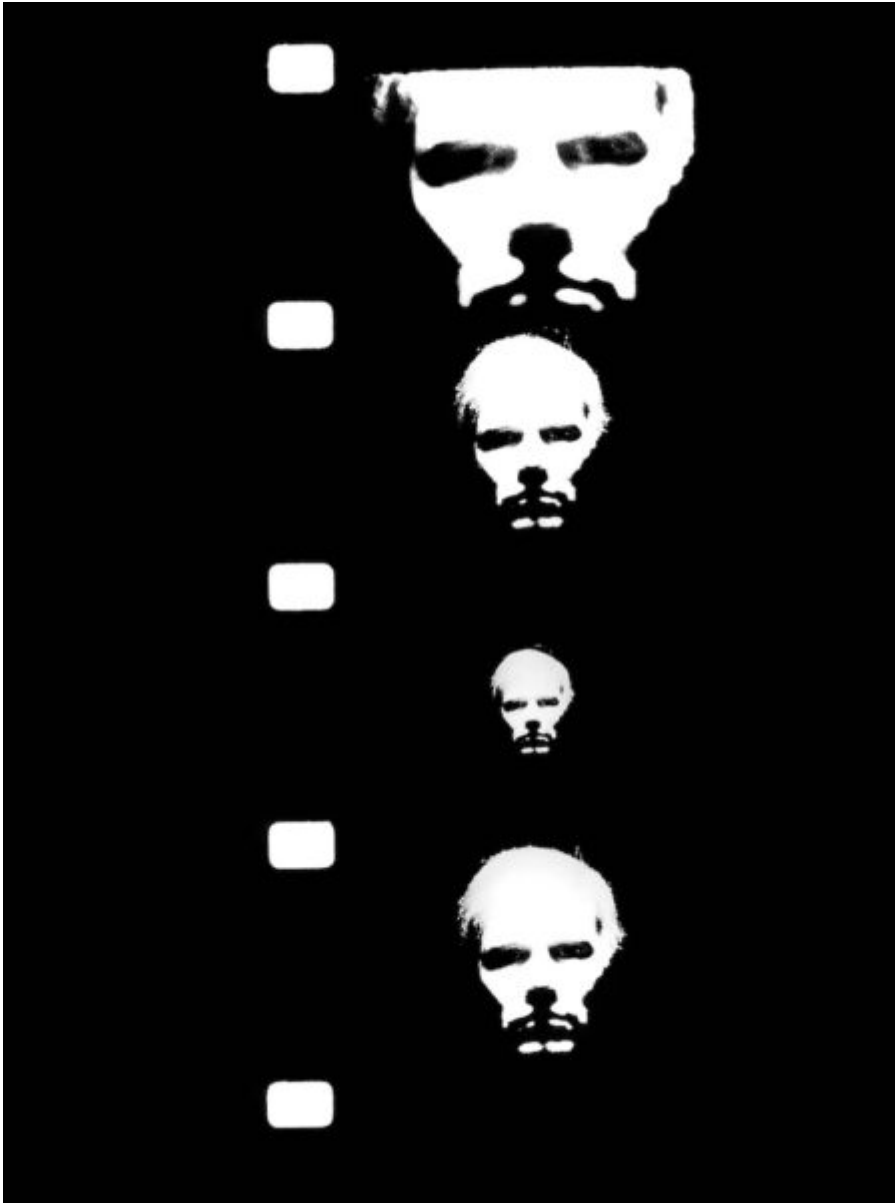
An assistant pushed Malanga in a wheelchair, cautious of rutted ice edging sidewalks. Malanga parked himself in front of the Harris marquee, ablaze with lettering: SECRET CINEMA WITH GERARD MALANGA. He snapped a few photos with his phone. It was a moment to memorize. I sensed the Warhol shock wave, the improbable blast of genius that still reverberates. Malanga adjusted his fedora, wheeling his chair back to get another angle, ever cued to visual aesthetics. There are only a handful of Warhol superstars left: Geri Miller, Viva, Max Delys, Baby Jane Holzer, Joe Dallesandro, and a few others. And then there is Gerard Malanga, who given his Factory stature, seems to now embody the bulk of the Warhol legacy.



Gerard Malanga at the Harris Theater for the screening of his films. Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Inside, nearly 200 seats filled the narrow space, some of them occupied by those in their 20s and 30s. It was gratifying to see a younger generation interested in Warhol—enough that they would come out on a cold winter's night to meet one of his star collaborators. And to see his films.

After introductions, the films rolled, offering a glimpse into the 1960s New York avant-garde scene. *The Filmmaker Records a Portion of His Life in the Month of August, 1968* included bikini-clad women frolicking in a field, soon becoming topless, and finally naked. *Film Notebooks, 1964–1970* was a restored compilation of footage from Malanga's personal archive. It's a document of Factory moments with Bob Dylan, Edie Sedgwick, and Salvador Dali, along with a performance by the Velvet Underground. Malanga's unique eye was evident, the way he lingered on Dylan's hands, how his shots were invariably unpredictable.



A still from *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1964-1965. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

The third standout film was *Andy Warhol: Portraits of the Artist as a Young Man* (1964–1965). The 21-minute reel consists of seven three-minute sequences reminiscent of Warhol's *Screen Tests*. Warhol is the subject. The work is a rare unvarnished look into his persona. Warhol is seen in semi-profile, light sharply edging his face, which eventually bleaches to white. Through Malanga's lens, he looks like a god. Another segment shows him in sunglasses, his eyes barely visible, looking boyish with pouty lips.

In another segment, Malanga downlights Warhol's face. The camera zooms in and out, a technique accomplished by shooting one frame at a time. "A trick of the eye," Malanga later explained in a Q&A session. "I discovered the effect by chance."

As the image seemingly strobos, the effect grows hypnotic. Warhol's face shifts and morphs, resembling a skull or perhaps a monkey-like mask. It's a drastic contrast to the previous segment where Warhol looked Olympian. Here, Warhol at times turns grotesque.



Gerard Malanga preparing to shoot a scene for his Techniscope movie, *The Recording Zone Operator*, Rome, Winter, 1968. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

The film was shot as Warhol was fully becoming a pop artist, leaving his illustrator career behind. “You see his confidence emerging,” James said. “For me, it’s one of the most revealing and intimate portraits of Warhol that exists.”

The film alters the “trope of the lone auteur,” James said—the idea that a singular artistic vision produces a body of work. “Malanga’s films disrupt this assumption.” Boundaries of authorship are challenged, “demonstrating that two artists could engage in a collaborative relationship” while serving Warhol’s legacy and also being true to Malanga’s aesthetic. “Warhol never created a ‘self-portrait’ *Screen Test*, which he could have easily done,” she added. “Instead, he willingly became the subject of Malanga’s film.”



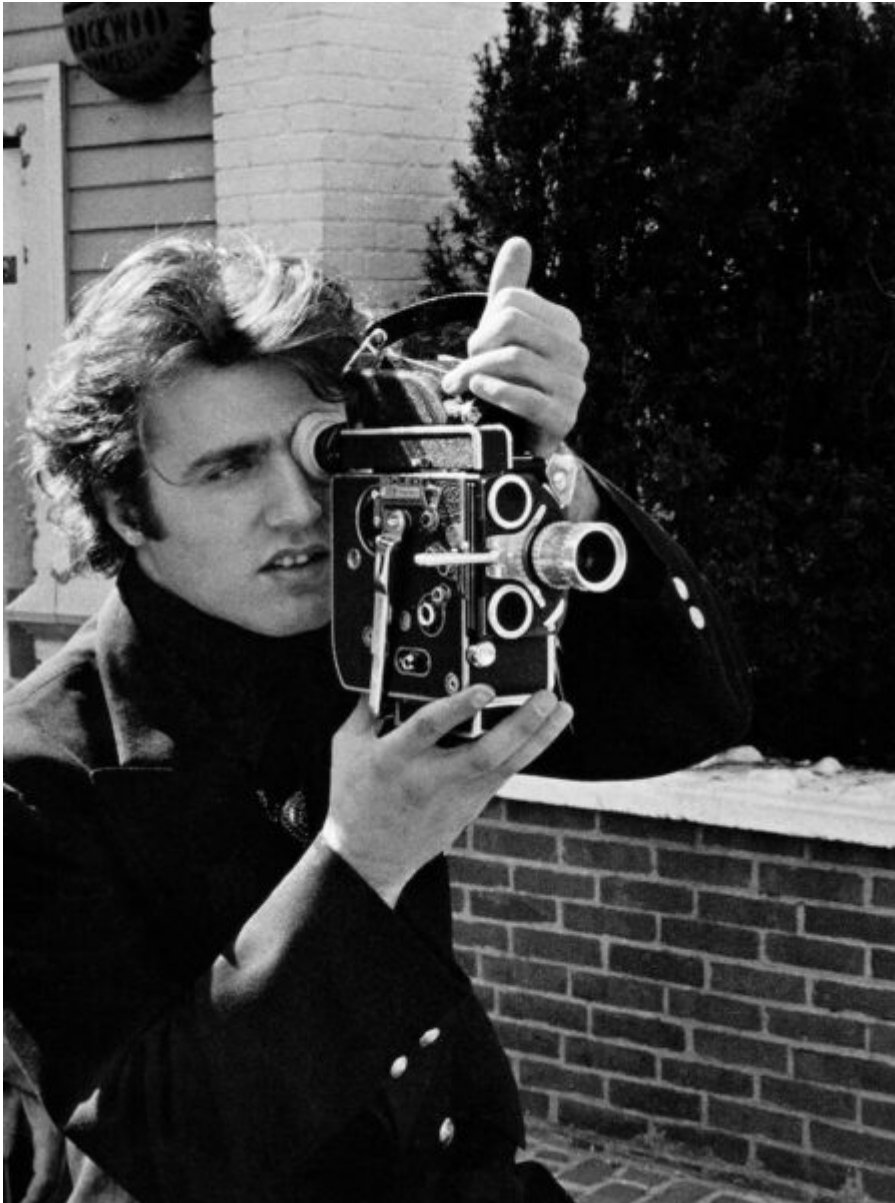
Gerard Malanga with a guest at his Harris Theater screening. Photo: R. Daniel Foster.

A Struggle for Recognition

The next morning at breakfast, I asked Malanga what he thought about the screening. “It was okay,” he said, ever reticent to reveal more of his thoughts. Through the weekend, I had a strong sense that he felt marginalized. I wasn’t sure if he simply believed he had never gotten his due, or if it was actual, that he had never been fully recognized in proportion to his Factory contributions.

Anastasia James filled me in.

“Gerard has really been marginalized in cultural history,” she told me. “All the collaborators in the Factory, they’re not often acknowledged, and there’s a variety of reasons for that. Even now decades later, Gerard struggles for recognition.”



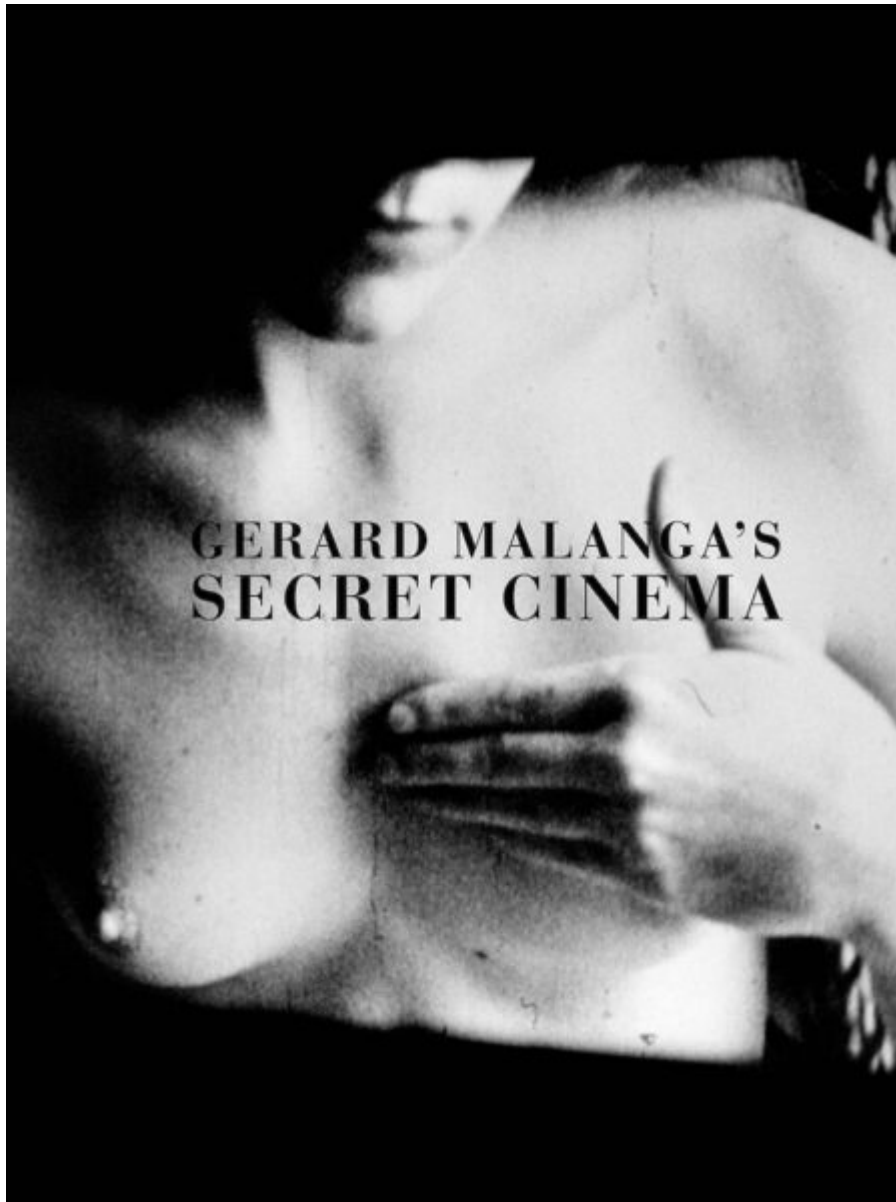
Gerard Malanga filming *Preraphaelite Dream*, 1968. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

James first met Malanga in 2013 during an exhibition of Warhol's "The 13 Most Wanted Men," a commission for the 1964 World's Fair that sparked a scandal given its subject: enlarged mug shots of NYPD's most wanted criminals. Fair officials painted it over.

"We hit it off, and as I worked with Dagon, Gerard was always a part of what I was doing," James said. She and her husband view their new book, *Gerard Malanga's Secret Cinema*, as the completion of a trilogy of volumes about Warhol superstars, the others being *Brigid Berlin: Polaroids* and *Billy Name: The Silver Age*.

In many ways, the pair are Malanga's champions.

"Warhol had an overwhelming persona that eclipsed most of his collaborators," Anastasia James said. After the Andy Warhol Foundation and the Andy Warhol Museum were established, "it reinforced his genius, and sidelined his collaborators." In essence, the word "assistant" implies a lesser role, she added. "But they were contributors in their own right."



The book cover for Gerard Malanga's *Secret Cinema*, compiled and edited by Dagon James and Anastasia James. © Gerard Malanga / Courtesy The Waverly Press.

After the films concluded, I noticed a shy woman in her 20s holding a bouquet of flowers. She was edged into a corner of the lobby, waiting for the right moment to approach Malanga who greeted guests. After about ten minutes, she found her opening and rushed to him, pushing her bouquet into his arms. She expressed how much his films meant to her, and what a rare experience the night had been.

For a moment, the simple gesture of gratitude—for a man who helped Warhol become a supernova artist—seemed enough.

[Anthology Film Archives](#) in New York City will screen Malanga's films on May 10, paired with a selection of Roger Jacoby's films. In coordination with the Malanga Harris Theater screenings, Pittsburgh's Wood Street Galleries showed [three newly restored films](#) by Roger Jacoby, a gay experimental filmmaker who died from AIDS in 1985.

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