

Out of Hours

Art

POP, POWER AND POLITICS ANDY WARHOL

5 October–3 November 2013

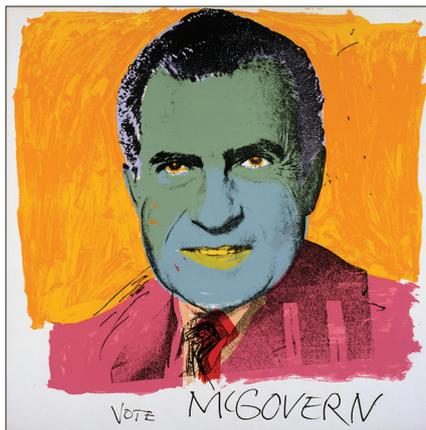
Scottish Parliament, Holyrood, Edinburgh

In an unusual move, the Scottish Parliament has hosted its first ever art exhibition, comprising a collection of works by the 20th century pop artist Andy Warhol (on loan from the US Foundation that bears his name). The somewhat tenuous links are the Scottish Parliament's current homage to Scottish-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, founder of the Carnegie-Mellon University where Warhol trained in the 1940s, and the central theme of 'Pop, Power and Politics'. Whether you take that as read or pause to reflect on the PR incentive, given the impending independence referendum, this ticketed exhibition has been hugely popular, drawing in visitors of all ages.

There can be few people in the western world who haven't at least a passing familiarity with Warhol's work, whether through his eye-catching *32 Campbell's Soup Cans* or his lurid images of celebrities, often grouped in repetitive multi-tonal collages. Like them or loathe them (and their enduringly high market price favours the former) there is no doubt that the Warhol look is inextricably bound with post-war 'cool' and has inspired generations of imitators.

Firmly rooted in the advertising genre of the 1940s and 1950s, Warhol's use of everyday objects and commercial poster art aimed to blur the lines between high and low art, and the aesthetic and ordinary, while his representation of the rich and powerful through a medium hitherto regarded as cheap and disposable evokes the transitory nature of success and status and implies a many-facedness on the part of its subjects. Paradoxically, the popularity of these

*Andy Warhol, Vote McGovern, 1972.
Richard Nixon, American, 1913–1994 (depicted)
George McGovern, American, 1922–2012 (associated)
Collection of the Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh
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images generated huge demand for this treatment among politicians of all shades, eager to capitalise on its promotional value, which Warhol cashed in on enthusiastically. Although his use of machine printing and his empire of outsourced studios and 'Factory' workers provoked criticism of unoriginality from the art establishment, there were enough signs of wit (the Queen), sympathy (the Kennedy set), diplomacy (Lenin, Mao) and irony (Nixon) in his work to offset these tensions. Described as elusive, private, and contradictory, one can't help wonder whether Warhol was at pains to disguise his sense of fraud, given his patent commercialism coupled with the reverence accorded to his 'movement' by elements of the boho literati. Either way, perhaps the significant irony for readers of the *BJGP* is of a man whose fear of hospitals not only delayed his treatment but ultimately proved justified, when he died of a sudden postoperative cardiac arrhythmia following routine gallbladder surgery. The family sued the hospital for inadequate care and settled comfortably out of court.

Claudia Pagliari,
Senior Lecturer in Primary Care, University of
Edinburgh, Edinburgh.
Email: claudia.pagliari@ed.ac.uk

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