

# Out of Hours Exhibition

## GODS AND HEROES

Love is Enough: William Morris and Andy Warhol

The Birmingham Museum & Art Gallery  
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Showing the works of two artists together and drawing parallels and connections between them seems to be increasingly fashionable — Moore and Bacon at Oxford recently, for example, or Van Gogh and Munch in Oslo this year. There seems at first to be little common ground between Andy Warhol and William Morris, but they are being shown together in Birmingham, and we asked Professor David Fitzmaurice to take a look for us.

Love is enough: Andy Warhol and William Morris is curated by Turner Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller, and brings together the two greatest influences on his own work. While the exhibition itself contains some stunning pieces, the parallels drawn between the two protagonists feel rather forced. For example, Morris was from a wealthy background but founded The Socialist League, while Warhol was from a strictly working-class background, yet was a confirmed Reaganite, in thrall to the power of glamour and celebrity.

The stand-out pieces are Morris's Holy Grail tapestries, which were heavily influenced by Edward Burne-Jones. These demonstrate his preoccupation with myth and legend, a recurring theme in his work, quite at odds with Warhol's obsession with the here and now. The Grail tapestries

**NPG 6257 Joan Collins by Andy Warhol silkscreen ink on synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 1985 Credit line: © 2014 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York and DACS, London.**



**1907M130 Quest for the Holy Grail Tapestries — Panel 3 — The Failure of Sir Gawaine; Sir Gawaine and Sir Uwaine at the Ruined Chapel. By Sir Edward Burne-Jones, William Morris, John Henry Dearle, Wool, silk, mohair and camel hair weft on cotton warp, 1885–1896. Credit: Birmingham Museums Trust.**

are quite beautiful with exquisite colour jumping out from the 150-year-old works. They are offset by one Warhol tapestry of Marilyn Monroe, which, although it is one of the best of his works on display, pales into insignificance in comparison. Again, jarringly, there is a photograph of JFK and a silk screen print of Jackie Kennedy placed against the beautiful tapestries. This seems simply to highlight the differences between the two artists, while the forced narrative tries to assimilate them into a consistent theme.

Deller gets the whole thing completely askew with familiar Warhol prints of flowers, actually hung on beautiful Morris textiles. This obscures the skill of both and does neither any favours. He also crassly tries to represent this dissonance as representative of 'flower power'. It is difficult to imagine what Morris would have made of the Sixties in general, but I doubt he would have approved of the hippie movement. This juxtaposition also made Warhol seem rather ephemeral.

There are familiar Warhol motifs in the exhibition, including screen prints of a Campbell's soup can, Marilyn again,

and intriguingly Joan Collins. The Collins print is placed next to the best painting in the exhibition, *La Donna Della Finestra* (intriguingly translated as *The Lady of Pity*), by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. These are the first two items in the exhibition, the pretext for including the Rossetti being that the Donna in the painting is Jane Morris, William's wife and muse. So, in a Warhol/Morris exhibition, the stars of the show are by Rossetti and Burne-Jones!

Overall I found the exhibition disjointed and unsuccessful. There is an entry charge of £7, although the show had been free in Oxford. The entrance ticket does get you a 10% discount in the beautiful Victorian tea rooms, and the Museum and Art Gallery are worth a visit in themselves. While I was there, there was a free performance by a South African string quartet playing in the central hall. This would have been worth seven quid.

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