

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

VANITY FAIR

The Bardot Variations

Ingrid Sischy spotlights Andy Warhol's 1974 Brigitte Bardot portraits, now pinned up in London's Gagosian Gallery.

By Ingrid Sischy



Andy Warhol's *Brigitte Bardot*, February 1974.

Here's one for the annals of unlikely conversations you wish you'd been able to eavesdrop on: Sir Winston Churchill discussing his hobby as a Sunday painter with Brigitte Bardot in the South of France in the mid-50s, near the beginning of her reign as the most-drooled-over woman on earth. "You know, my films are not nearly as good as your paintings," said Bardot, famously unconcerned about her work, even though during her heyday she was pursued by every director who counted at the time, from Roger Vadim to Jean-Luc Godard. "And," she added, "I never won a war." Bardot was wrong on both counts. The less said about Churchill's landscapes the better, but as for her other point, while Bardot may not have looked like a leader of the women's-liberation movement, her emancipated attitudes were, in their own way, every bit as feminist as those of Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Kate Millett; which is why Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras both deconstructed her place in the sexual revolution in essays that were farsighted for their time.

It should come as no surprise that Bardot's paradoxical role as both pinup and suffragette earned her another fan in Andy Warhol, who loved those kinds of contradictions. What are unexpected, however, are the eight paintings of Bardot that Warhol created in 1974, using the kind of wild color combinations that replay in your dreams. The suite of paintings—to be exhibited at London's Gagosian Gallery from October 10 through November 12—was a commission from the late Gunter Sachs, the German automotive heir and photographer who was also, by then, Bardot's ex-husband. As the story goes, he simply tore out a picture of Bardot from a magazine—it happened to have been taken by Richard Avedon, so Sachs had an eye—and sent the image to Warhol to appropriate. At last count, the gallery had secured six of the eight Bardots—their first-ever public outing as a group. The show is timed to coincide with the Frieze Art Fair, and proves once again that there's no one as tuned in to what's hot as Andy. Even when he's dead.