



Bolting Chargers Beat Warhol for Pop Artist of the Year

Andy Warhol, whose pop art corpus is drawing record crowds at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), described himself as “deeply superficial,” a supremely honest self-assessment if this show is representative.

In the 1960’s, Pop Art transformed the banal and tacky into monumentally expensive art pieces, but the movement likely achieved more success making fun of audiences by engaging their full complicity in this king-sized cultural rip.

The legendary media hype genius Warhol, who died a very ordinary death in 1987 during routine surgery, would have loved the thoroughly transparent San Diego Chargers performance art show now playing in every Southern California media market.

The comedy/drama about where, when and for whom the Chargers play football is as predictable as a Doris Day/Rock Hudson movie.

The Chargers chronicle, which began with satiated demands on the City of San Diego a few years ago for a \$78 million face-lift on the circa 1970 then-Jack Murphy stadium, is as sublimely obvious and manipulative as stacked cans of Campbell’s soup.

Yet, the audience is huge and although straining to avoid seduction, the public is already showing signs of succumbing to the real message screaming through the posturing and politics, that a brand new glitzy sports stadium is as necessary, somewhere, as say a new airport, also somewhere.

With Warhol command of media hype, Chargers team owners are deftly playing one city against another until one proves itself worthy of the golden Bolt’s attentions by agreeing to build a new NFL glitter dome through any means possible.

Los Angeles, at its best as the aloof suitor and showing no signs of damage since the Raiders and Rams left them for cities offering better pre-nuptial agreements, appears to be in no hurry to grab the lightning bolt.

LA, consciously or because of the ineptness that comes with so many competing interests, did not go stadium crazy when their teams threatened to abandon the relationship. And likely, LA did not break into a panicky sweat and offer either team anything close to the pre-nup Chargers owners got from San Diego, a public ticket guarantee that so far has cost the city \$25 million.

Instead, while patiently awaiting a worthy NFL wooer, LA built the dazzling J. Paul Getty Art Museum, and put the \$450 million architectural phenom, Frank Gehry’s massive Disney opera house, under construction. LA is a cool customer.

If a sampling of *Los Angeles Times* columnists provides any indication of Angeleno attitude about a new football stadium, no one is falling for the downtown redevelopment argument so

deftly used in San Diego to get the public to finance half of the Padres ballpark.

It does not help the Chargers cause that redevelopment projects in LA, like the Farmers Market Grove shopping complex or the Hollywood Boulevard makeover, are brilliant and unrelated to sports complexes.

Back in needy San Diego, where sports teams are supposedly the center of the economic and cultural universe, the Mayor decisively responded after glimpsing Spanos’s rear hemline sashaying north.

He announced the formation of a 16-member citizen committee to figure out if San Diego should divorce the Chargers and then recommend what to do about keeping them wed to America’s Finest City.

Warhol once produced 80 versions a day of his flower pictures for several months to satisfy anyone who wanted one. In like manner, Mayor Murphy spawns citizen advisory committees.

It is a wonder how the mayor finds enough recycled folks with time on their hands so that he can talk with himself, a notion surely endorsed by Andy Warhol’s ghost. Warhol prospered by silk-screening the same self-portrait photo repeatedly ad nauseum into eternity—or is it infinity.

The Mayor’s Charger Committee announcement came on the heels of perennial government watchdog attorney Mike Aguirre’s threat to sue the city for secretly conducting contract negotiations with the Chargers.

Aguirre’s hard charge into the media mix was surely inspired by Warhol’s missive, “Don’t pay any attention to what they write about you—just measure it in inches,” after the thumping former Councilman Bruce Henderson and Libertarian Richard Ryder took for almost taking down the Charger stadium deal five years ago.

A master at extending the allowed fifteen minutes of fame to fifteen years, Aguirre spends a lot of time exposing the real and suspected secret deals and negotiations that are the mother’s milk of municipal government.

But Aguirre, like others who predicted the demise of San Diego’s stadium when the Padres got a house of their own, including the 50,000 voters who signed petitions to rescind the City Council’s decision to issue \$60 million in bonds to finance what may now be a useless stadium remodel, can find wisdom in one more Andy Warhol insight.

“An artist is someone who produces things that people don’t need to have but that he—for some reason—thinks it would be a good idea to give them.” On this count, Chargers owner Alex Spanos beats Andy Warhol by miles for artist of the century.