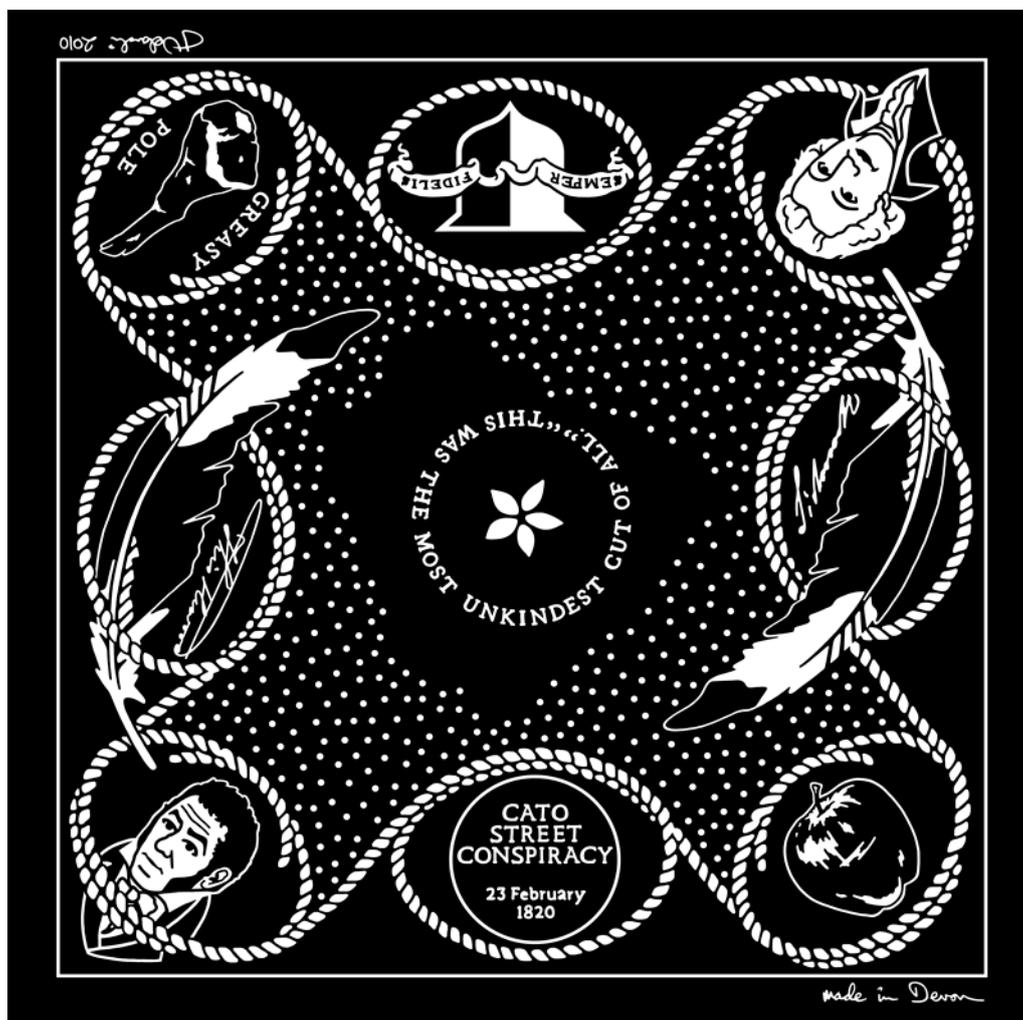


*POLITICS  
IN PRINT*

Press release & artist's statement

Jonathan Velardi has been commissioned by Devon County Council and Double Elephant Print Workshop to respond to political resources from Devon Record Office in Exeter.



*Semper Fidelis*, 2010  
Hand printed on 100% cotton  
465x465mm  
Edition of 25

In no other professional practice does division play such a fervent role as it does within the world of politics. With division lies the question of trust and it is with the simple action of loyalty, which has been the crux of many a high and low on the political timeline of Devon's history, where I have found inspiration for *Semper Fidelis*. The motto for the City of Exeter since 1660, these Latin words of "Always Faithful" rang like a mantra throughout my research at the Devon Record Office. Through multiple layers of narrative, the work details events from the nineteenth-century up to the present day and uses the medium of print to produce a bandana that possesses its own historical role as a product of identity; as a means of bridging ideas from the past and present as well as questions between notions of craft with the contemporary.

A conspiracy against the Conservative government and the then Home Secretary, Henry Addington, 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Sidmouth, is the earliest event within the bandana. Placed at opposite corners of the square lie the heads of Lord Sidmouth and the assassin behind the Cato Street Conspiracy of 1820, Arthur Thistlewood. Thistlewood took advantage of the critical state the government was in with the death of King George III and orchestrated a coup to kill all the cabinet ministers during a dinner that was advertised to take place at a home in Cato Street, London. However the government were one step ahead and surprised Thistlewood with an agent provocateur amongst the conspirators and used the dinner as a way of convicting Thistlewood for treason. Before his hanging on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1820, a letter in Thistlewood's hand pledging his loyalty for truth is chillingly signed, *'the Ghost of Arthur Thistlewood'*.

I was interested in discovering links between a year that has seen the country's political future rely so heavily on county loyalty in the general elections of May 2010, and the political policies nearly fifty years after the Cato Street Conspiracy being debated by locals on the streets during the Victorian era. The electoral events of 1868 saw a not too dissimilar reflection of a battle between the Conservative Party and Liberal Democrats earlier this year. A series of election posters titled, "Shakspeare Illustrated" were printed and distributed locally by the Liberals under William Gladstone. Presented in the form of scenes by famous plays by William Shakespeare and adapted to incorporate political figures and campaigning issues of the day, the policy du jour was the Conservative's Reform Act of 1867 that enfranchised many male householders, thus increasing the size of the electorate by a million-strong. The Conservative leader Benjamin Disraeli is noted for saying, "I have climbed to the top of the greasy pole" describing his rise to power in respect of his Jewish patronage but the leg of ham in the bandana design represents not only Disraeli's rise but also his fall in 1868 – having hoped for the new electorate to return their gratitude to the Conservatives for the Act with nearly triple the amount of votes cast in the election, the Liberals managed to gain majority over the Conservatives. It is for this reason I have focused on poster "No. 9" from the illustrated series – taken from Act III, Scene 2 in Julius Caesar – that quotes the poignant words of Antony towards Brutus's stabbing of Caesar, *"This was the most unkindest cut of all"*. Antony is not merely describing the deed of assassination, but of Brutus's disloyalty to Caesar. Disraeli may have felt let down by the public vote, but the 1868 general election is another example that the power in politics relies directly from the power of the people.

At no time like the present do Antony's words resonate at the dawn of a new coalition government who battled against each other in this year's elections and who now find themselves working from the same book, reading off the same pages that detail radical national budget cuts. Devon's identity was thrust into the media spotlight during the pre-budget period – pioneered by bandana-clad farmers and Wurzels alike - when plans were released to raise tax on the West County's very own *scrumpy* by ten-percent above inflation. Represented by a cider apple and the inside of a core placed in the centre of the square orbiting around what would have been the most unkindest cut that never was; cuts, divisions and separation are all important strands in Devon's political tapestry. From it's division between the constituencies of North Devon and South Devon in 1832 to Exeter's recent unitary bid from Devon County, ideas for change struggle for a majority when they go against the familiarity of the past.

There is no doubt these events have shaped Devon's identity and the journey around this cotton square, if a little rocky and slippery at times, represents this political web through my own narrative of Devon's rich and cultural history.

Jonathan Velardi, 2010



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