

Sean Gyshen Fennell
Lars Larson Show
11 October 2005

LL: Sean Gyshen Fennell is an artist at Willamette University. How are you doing Sean?

G: Doing pretty well Lars, how are you?

LL: Glad to have you on the program but I'm not real happy about that artwork. I mean it's a private university you can put what you want on the walls. I've had a lot of people trying to figure out what this artwork means. These naked figures of people who appear to be in embraces that would indicate they are homosexuals and then torn up pages of something at the bottom of the photos. Why don't you tell us what it's all about.

G: I'd love to. First of all the goal of the icon project is to yield art that investigates societal constructs and visually stimulates the viewer and to facilitate discussion. Which is why I am very happy to be on your show because that is what the work is intended to do. The text that is in the background is actually some of the measures that were passed, excluding gay marriage, Measure 36 and the smaller icons that are below are the Patron saints such as St. Anthony of Padua or St. Patrick who are the patron saints of the oppressed people and excluded people. And the figures in fact, in the icons are homosexuals and its trying to draw lines between these and investigate the current political and religious climate.

LL: Does one of those figures work for Kate Brown, the senator?

G: I am not familiar with that.

LL: Sure, you don't know the people you took naked pictures of?

G: I know them very well but I don't know what they are doing now. I actually moved to St. Louis. I am attending graduate school.

LL: OK So here's the concern I have. Why would you show a ballot measure passed by Oregonians overwhelmingly torn up at the bottom of the picture like that?

G: Well, it is actually not torn up. It's in its completion there is gold leafing over the entire image which I guess gives it an appearance of being torn.

LL: So it's not really torn up?

G: No, it is not torn up. It is in its completion.

LL: It's in completion?

G: All the text is there it is just that some of it is obscured with gold leaf.

LL: Okay, So it wasn't intended to look torn up.

G: No

LL: Okay. Now the figures appear to be posed in a way that I thought it looked like icons like you'd seen in Russian icon, the little kind of circles around the head and a little gold leaf.

G: Exactly

LL: So you are depicting homosexual figures in photos as saints.

G: I am referencing Byzantine Icons and religion through those forms. I do not consider the objects to be venerated in any way. I am merely using visual language.

LL: No, now what's the visual language when you depict homosexual figures in a photo as saints?

G: I am referencing the saint figures as well as drawing attention the fact there are saints within the religion such as St. Anthony of Padua for oppressed people yet the religion in of itself is oppressing individuals and saints themselves have been martyred. And...

(Interrupts) LL: How is religion oppressing homosexual people?

G: Well, I mean it's pretty clear within the legislation and in your show that all Christians should be offended by images like the ones I made....

LL: Well no no, I am bothered by images if they if they if they are comments on religion by taking homosexual figures and portraying them as saints. I don't think any religion on earth makes people saints by their personal behavior or homosexual behavior. And I don't know how it is you think religion oppresses people with regard to their sexuality. You have a choice as to which religion you participate in. Tell me which religion oppresses homosexual people.

G: Well right now Catholicism especially the Vatican is saying homosexuals cannot be ordained. I mean for example...

LL: Well well but that's the rules of their group. If you are a homosexual and you want to be ordained, you go to a different church.

G: Well are you saying homosexuals should not be able to be Catholic?

LL: Well that's what the Catholic Church has decided. Does a church have the right to set the standards for its religion?

G: I believe.....

LL: I mean for example. If.. I like I like to drink whiskey on occasion. I try to do it in moderation and I try to do it only on the weekends with friends and when I am not going to drive. But if I wanted to join the Mormon Church Sean, I can guaran damn tee you that the Mormons are not going to let me in as a whiskey drinker.

If I say, well you ought to change your rules and let whiskey drinkers into the Mormon Church they'd say Lars, one of the tenants of our religion is that you don't drink booze. So why would a booze drinker want to join the Mormon Church? Why would a homosexual want to become ordained as a member of a church that doesn't... you know that does not believe that homosexuals should become priests?

G: Well drinking whiskey Lars is a choice where I do not believe homosexuality is a choice and there are these people who have been brought up as Christians.....

LL: No but joining a church is a choice, becoming a religion is a choice. Can we agree on that?

G: Joining a religion is a choice..

LL: I could choose to become a Catholic tomorrow, I could choose to to convert to Judaism tomorrow so but why would I want to join a church that doesn't respect the way I conduct my life?

G: Well possibly that was the church you were brought up in and that is the community you feel comfortable in and perhaps that is the faith you actually believe in yet it discriminates against you and you should still have the choice to join that religion, I believe.

LL: Do you think the people should be offended by your art work?

G: If people are offended by my artwork I think that is fine. The work in of it's self is there to facilitate discussion and hopefully draw connections and get people to start thinking about that there are certain societal constructs that prohibit people from doing things and..

LL: You're trying to get people to think differently, right?

G: I am trying to bring a different prospective to these issues that have intertwined through out history. I mean homosexuality in the church and art is nothing new. It has been there for an extremely long time.

LL: Good point. Sean I'm up against a clock but I appreciate your time sir. Thank you very much.

G: Thank you very much