

Artist attacks GoMA for 'censorship' of gay life exhibition

Videos containing nudity and references to drugs and sexual acts will not be screened in gallery

BY EDD McCRACKEN
ARTS CORRESPONDENT

FIRST unsupervised children were barred because of the explicit content, then the Bible was "defaced". Now the Glasgow Gallery of Modern Art's controversial exhibition celebrating gay life and love has stirred up more outrage – this time, however, it's for censoring art that might shock the public.

Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG), the body which runs the city's museums and galleries, has been accused of censors art at the 'sh[OUT]' exhibition after it refused to show three works about HIV positive gay men at GoMA because it contained nudity and references to drugs and sexual acts.

The works are by Dani Marti, 45, an internationally renowned artist who spent a three month, £5000 residency at the gallery as part of the exhibition. He said CSG's decision not to show his two videos and a sound installation at the city centre gallery went against the very purpose of the exhibition, the fourth in GoMA's social justice series of exhibitions.

"sh[OUT] is about civil rights," he said. "But they are compromising freedom of speech. They are compromising the permission of the people in my art works to speak about their emotions in public. The reaction of GoMA and the council is exactly the same that is happening to these individuals, making it hard to talk about coming out, about being gay, about disclosing their HIV status."

He blamed political pressure from within the council following earlier controversy around the exhibition.

The most explosive element of the seven-month programme so far was Made In God's Image, which featured an open Bible with instructions beside it: "If you feel you've been excluded from the Bible, please feel free to find a way to write yourself back in." Religious groups were offended by some of the comments.

Following the outcry CSG said Marti's work had to be moved to "reframe the debate". It plans to show his art over a weekend at the Tramway during the

autumn instead. Marti, who was born in Spain and splits his time between Glasgow and Australia, said he would fight this compromise. He insists the works should be shown at GoMA as was originally planned. He fears that moving them to the Tramway, located on the city's south side, would marginalise the art and the issues.

"The whole purpose of my residency is to bring an awareness of these issues to the widest audience," he said. "The whole thing is lost. To take it to Tramway and just speak to four or five arty farty's is no good. It is not doing the purpose."

One of the videos, Time Is The Fire In Which We Burn, was commissioned especially for the exhibition. It is an interview with a man called John from Glasgow, a former male prostitute and porn film actor, who talks about his life in Miami, being HIV positive, taking the drug crystal meth and extreme sexual acts he has taken part in.

The second video, Ausmusdad, is a portrait of a 63 year old who came out to his family in his late 40s and is HIV positive. It features full frontal male nudity. It has previously been shown in Zurich.

CULTURE and Sport Glasgow were uncomfortable with nudity and the reference to drugs and sexual acts, according to Marti. He, however, said the videos showed HIV positive men "enjoying life and not being victims".

The final work planned to appear at GoMA was a sound installation, recorded in the basement of a gay club in Glasgow. A fourth, more conventional, installation – several large red drapes of scourers woven together and hung from the central staircase – was originally allowed to be shown at the gallery. Marti, however, said it could not be shown without the other three works and withdrew it personally.

To protest the city's decision, in the coming weeks he plans to create guerilla artworks around the city in front of council property.

CSG defended its decision to move Marti's work from GoMA. A spokesperson said: "The sh[OUT] programme is the fourth in our acclaimed series



Artist Dani Marti believes free speech is being compromised by GoMA's decision
Photograph: Colin Templeton

focusing on Contemporary Art and Human Rights at GoMA. It's purpose has always been to raise awareness and open debate through art. The nature of some of the exhibits, and more specifically, certain elements of the outreach programme have provoked a response that has negated both the artistic and societal endeavour.

"In order to reframe the debate, a weekend of film and discussion at Tramway will be held and Dani Marti's work will be included. We respect his decision to withdraw his installation at GoMA and understand his disappointment, but our first priority must be to protect the integrity of the entire programme, 99% of which is unchanged."

Tom Lusk, community development manager for Gay Men's Health, Scotland's largest gay men's charity, said he was "disappointed" by GoMA's decision and hoped it would be reversed.

Swinney's 'sycophancy' to Sir Fred

BY TOM GORDON
SCOTTISH POLITICAL EDITOR

FINANCE Secretary John Swinney was last night embarrassed by the release of a fawning letter he wrote to Sir Fred Goodwin before he became a national hate figure.

Swinney congratulated the Royal Bank of Scotland's then-chief executive on his £48billion takeover of the Dutch bank ABN-Amro, on October 8, 2007, calling the deal, which subsequently proved disastrous, an "enormous achievement".

His praise was in spite of widespread warnings in the financial press that the takeover was misguided and dangerously over-priced.

Swinney also said the SNP government greatly valued the "positive impression" which RBS bestowed on the Scottish economy. The bank would go on to make a £24bn loss in 2008, the largest in UK corporate history, and is now 70% owned by the taxpayer.

Swinney's letter from October 2007 was only released to *The Sunday Herald* after a seven-month fight under freedom of information legislation. After repeated requests for correspondence were ignored, the Scottish Information Commissioner finally ordered ministers to respond and criticised their failure to obey the law.

After a handwritten "Dear Fred", the letter reads: "I was trying to catch a word with you last week to convey my good wishes and congratulations in the light of the ABN-Amro deal."

"This is an enormous achievement for RBS and your partners, made more significant by the scale of effort that has been required to deliver the deal."

"Our Government recognises the immense contribution RBS makes to the Scottish economy. We also value the positive impression RBS' contribution to the Scottish economy makes to perceptions in other countries about Scotland as an attractive place to do business."

In February this year, Sir Tom McKillop, the former RBS chairman, admitted the takeover had forced the bank go to the government for a £20bn bailout.

Andy Kerr, Labour's finance spokesman, said: "The sycophantic nature of the letter is bad enough, but more important is Mr Swinney's complete lack of judgement on the issue of the ABN-Amro takeover. The same lack of understanding has been a running thread through the SNP's response to the banking collapse."

A Scottish government spokesman said: "The financial position of RBS and its exposure to bad debt were only revealed subsequently as a consequence of the global credit crunch."

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Co-produced by barbicorbite09, Dance Umbrella, Michael Clark Company, Edinburgh International Festival, Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg and Maison des Arts de Créteil.

Dancer: Simon Williams
Photo by Jake Walters

