

Behind The Green Door- Painting Installation by Barahona Possollo

SEX AND POLITICS

It would be virtually impossible not to approach this painting installation through its social and political significance, both due to its contents and to its very distinctive setting.

Why evoke the 5 natural elements, today, in painted depictions of 5 gay sexual fetishes? Why show them in an underground ex-public urinal that was notorious, in its day, as a place of secret sexual encounters between men, often raided by the police, in the most central area of the capital city of what was the first Christian colonial empire in the world?

The answer to these questions should probably begin by stressing the clear social and political implications of such choices.

To consider the fairly recent changes in attitude towards sexuality, particularly gay sexuality, within western societies, the reason why this show is possible here and now, falls evidently short.

The international LGBT liberation movement, though rebellious and confrontational at the outset, in the Stonewall days, gradually opted for a conciliatory public image, demanding equal rights for hetero and homo (and later non-hetero) sexual orientations: - equal rights to love, to build families and to marry -, with forbearance and equanimity... The overcoming of the patriarchal model and the **subversion** of the 'status quo' that accession to such rights by couples of women, of men (or of people who consider themselves neither) necessarily meant, was deliberately sidelined.

Tolerance was, often explicitly, called for. Tolerance, however, by implying condescendence on behalf of the stronger party, - to whom one should be thankful-, establishes a hierarchy.

(Tolerance for Jews is what Heidegger asked of the Nazi Germans in order to avoid turning them into the martyrs of history...).

By seeming to willingly concede rights to homosexuals, the traditional patriarchy felt safeguarded while claiming a clear conscience.

Now, this installation ostensibly discards tolerance.

It takes on the taboo of fetish without flinching.

By portraying it in a gay context, it both discloses and embraces the abominable practices that traditionalist bigots have always attributed to 'homosexual perversion'.

By placing it in a subterranean disused public lavatory, it confronts the dominant social model with the centuries of exclusion, sexual repression, abuse, cruelty and injustice, it subjected (and subjects) homosexuals to.

By matching each fetish with an element, it gives it the natural, uncomplicated quality of spontaneity. It effectively dismantles the notion that paraphilia is a mental disorder, which, in any case, is far from being unanimous among psychiatrists, psychologists and sexologists.

By bringing them to the 'Marquês de Pombal', the very centre of Lisbon, it renders them visible, releasing them from the concealment that Christian ideology has long forced upon them.

This painting installation asserts the political character of sex.

In the Freudian-Marxist perspective of Wilhelm Reich, it stresses that control, even suppression, of sexual behaviours is crucial in shaping each individual psyche in accordance with the repressive and authoritarian principles of class society, so as to ensure the hereditary lines of property. This happens mainly through socialization in children and adolescents, but equally through social coercion in adults. If chastity was initially imposed on the ruling classes, especially on patrician women, sexual repression became the rule in every social class, as the ideology of the dominant classes is both hegemonic and aspirational.

Likewise, rejection by parts of the gay community (at least in public) of any connection with what are considered more 'deviant' practices, reveals its internalization of sexual repression and its adherence to the model of 'granted' tolerance.

Echoing Herbert Marcuse's concept of 'civilization being based on the constant subjection of human instinct', it is the struggle to overcome **all** sexual repression that is summoned here.

It alone may result in a radically different future.

Leonel Pedroso Gonçalves
Sociologist

Lisbon, 25th August 2020