

Gross Indecency II – Strange Bedfellows

ARTIST STATEMENT #1 - JASON FORD

I wish, dearly, that gay men sought intimate sex as frequently as we seek the recreational kind... I think that's (partly) what I marched in Pride for – a better sex and romantic life, beyond the shameful gutter.

- Dave Stuart, Sex & The Sauna

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Gross Indecency II was originally a response to the idea that marriage equality meant assimilation into the mainstream and adhering to the constraints of what the radical queer movement felt was an outdated and ineffectual institution of social control. Our original premise was that while we were a committed couple on the road to getting married, that did not mean that we were planning on having a monogamous, heteronormative lifestyle. We wanted to stand up in front of our family and friends to commit our love to each other, just like any heterosexual couple in love, however that is where the comparison ends. Our marriage will be a contract that we decide together and that will be made up of the rules that work for us, not those that society has dictated for centuries. We will continue to include other people, other sexual acts and locations other than our marital bed in our sex life.

However, as we have proceeded to meet and have sex with the 144 anonymous men off of gay dating sites, like Grindr, Scruff and the casual encounters section of Craigslist, the project began to morph into an exploration of something quite different.

The perceived opinion is that sex is meant to be shared only with someone that you love and are committed to, and anything else is dismissed as nothing more than satisfying the itch of instant gratification. The assumption is that sex can only really be satisfying when it is two individuals sharing an intimate moment that is an expression of the love that they feel for each other and each other alone. Even amongst the so-called liberated gay community the idea of multiple partners, saunas and cruising grounds are frowned upon and subjected to derision. We laugh and use words like slut, greedy pig, whore, and so on and so forth to describe our sexual identities. While it hides under the guise of reclamation, what these words really highlight is a form of internalised homophobia and guilt.

What we began to discover with our anonymous partners was a level of intimacy that the opponents of casual, non-monogamous sex say is simply not possible. Yes, we have sex with these men whose names we often don't even know when we are all taking our clothes off, but afterwards, basking in the afterglow of what is an intimate act, regardless of the method that got us to that point, we begin to see the real person. We chat and get to know details of their lives. They ask us about ours. We begin to share the parts of ourselves that we keep hidden, because let's face it once you have seen someone's cum face, it takes quite an effort to put the walls back up that we all wear in our day-to-day lives. We lie there, naked and entwined, without shame or guilt. In some instances, we have sat up all night with previous strangers discussing art and politics and sex. In these moments, we have formed genuine connections and it is real, because it is the result of a truly intimate act. And through all this, I am experiencing this with the man that I love and the level of intimacy in our own relationship has been enhanced by these experiences that we have shared in the process of the project.

What has changed for me in the premise of GI2 is that it no longer seems to be about creating a new form of marriage and become more about the unnecessary shame and guilt that we all carry around regarding sex. We have tried to divorce intimacy from sex, because we are all so afraid of getting hurt. But what I have learnt from this project is that try as we might, it is simply not possible to do and if you are willing to let go, you may just find that in that moment something beautiful can happen.

There is much talk about the slut shaming of women and this is a very real and important debate, and whilst we do have more positive words for men who have multiple partners, men are not exempt from social constraints. We are raised to hide our feelings for fear of being called a sissy. Even gay men who have grown up being labelled weaker and less than still suffer from this idea that there is only one way to be a man. You only have to look at the amount of gay profiles that describe themselves as 'straight acting' to see the proof of this. In a world where we text instead of talk, email instead of writing letters, live through social media rather than through actual experience, we have become a society divorced from actual intimacy. What Gross Indecency II has shown me is that despite all of that, we all still crave that intimacy, perhaps now more than ever, and it is out there if you want. We need to stop judging ourselves and we especially need to stop judging others. We need to leave behind this idea of a shameful gutter. I thought this project was about giving the finger to those in my community that were saying I was a traitor for wanting to be married, but now I think this project is about calling for end to fear and shame. These are the tactics of our enemies and that is the reason I march in Pride marches, so that we can each be free to live the lives that we desire, and for all of our choices to be honoured and respected.