

Gross Indecency II – Strange Bedfellows

ARTIST STATEMENT #2 - MARK FORD

Staring at this once blank sheet of paper wondering how to describe this experience, I was tempted to write “I just did it for the dick” and leave it at that.

But that wouldn't have been honest. And if anything this experience has been about honesty.

For me the true experience wasn't about sex. I am no stranger to sex. I am no stranger to sex with a stranger. I'm not even a stranger to strange sex with a stranger.

But I am a stranger to sharing such activities with the world. Until now this has been a part of my life lived in the shadows. Not drenched in shame or guilt – not at all. I don't consider the acts unseemly. But I have always considered the retelling of the acts unseemly – why on earth would anybody want to know such things? Surely the decent thing to do is to spare them that?

By way of context, it's probably worth knowing that I came out to my own brother by text. Aged 47. And only then because it was impossible to put it off any longer as I had a loud and proud boyfriend practically stapled to my hip.

So why did I agree to have this mucky piece of laundry displayed so proudly on our Big Day?

Well first of all I should point out that it was me that insisted it be displayed in it's own room, behind a curtain with a warning sign. A life lived on either side of the broadcasting watershed does that to a man.

So if you're reading this and you're feeling a little queasy, you have only yourself to blame – you were warned! Because that's the odd thing: I don't care what anyone knows about me – I just don't want to be the one to tell them.

But now I am telling them. And here's why: I have too much respect for the true institution of marriage not to. I'm marrying the most open and honest person I know (apart from Derek Rothera whose overshares are as legendary as they are wonderful).

In my time with Jason he has taught me the dignity of going through life with head held high, never apologising or seeking to hide who you really are. I think his father deserves some credit here: a proud black man from an era when being both those things was far from easy. I'm only sad that he couldn't bring himself to come today to support his son as a proud gay man. I'm so glad, however, that his mother is here – someone who also led by example, never being ashamed. (And if you're reading this, Denise, erm...hello....sorry about the mess....)

When the US Supreme Court summarised their findings on Gay Marriage, this is what they said:

"No union is more profound than marriage for it embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion, sacrifice and family"

Our problem is with the word fidelity.

Now we could chose to 'interpret' the meaning of the word the way nicer Christians and nicer Muslims chose to 'interpret' all the raping and the smiting and the slave-trading in their holy books. For instance, we have certainly promised each other emotional fidelity.

But ultimately all that is so much apologist bullshit, weasle-words to avoid the obvious: fidelity is an expectation of marriage and we're not prepared to meet that expectation. And we don't think we are any less worthy of the institution of marriage because of it.

And that, for me, is why I feel we must display our mucky little protest loud and proud.

And do I really think of our duvet as 'mucky'? Actually no. Apart from its somewhat feral smell, I take comfort gazing at it – as a map of our journey together. Each yellowing splatter being a record of someone's story. Some stories were horny, some funny and a lot were both.

But they were all people – vital engaging people who we were privileged to have met at a moment of passion and vulnerability like no other. Most stayed to chat, many became friends, some became close friends. And of course there were a few who were so freaked out or ashamed that they virtually had their shoes and socks back on before their jizz hit the duvet.

But not many. My over-riding analogy for the experience is that of a bunch of horny, fluffy, friendly rabbits in need of some human warmth and body contact, coming over for a rut and a cuddle and a chat. And then going back about their business just that bit more reassured and comforted.

When stripped of its pressures and expectations, its shame and its guilt, there can be such a vital, life-affirming honesty to uncomplicated sex.

And people, when you relieve them of the burden of expectation and allow them to be honest, also tend to be very nice.

My life, my life's journey and my relationship to Jason have all become deeper, wiser and simply better for having undergone this experience.