

The perfect spot for a porno shoot?

Sarah Boesveld, National Post · Saturday, Jan. 22, 2011

In five short years, Ottawa's Galerie La Petite Mort has established itself as one sexy little gallery. Broadly speaking, it's a space that welcomes radical and, at times, graphic artwork that examines social ethics. It also hosts events for art types, government officials and the odd porn company. Well, not yet. Owner Guy Berube hasn't formally agreed to rent his gallery for a porno shoot, but just the idea of it has ruffled feathers in a city better known for its politics than its sex. The Post's Sarah Boesveld spoke with Mr. Berube from his Byward Market art space.

Q Your gallery is known for being fairly open about sexuality-- its name is an ode to the orgasm, after all. But a set for a porn shoot?

A We've always been very, very open to all sorts of art and all sorts of people who make art. That's everyone from the incarcerated to people who deal with mental illness and people who do works that are graphic or not. We don't really try to push the envelope, the envelope is pushing itself. I've been doing this for 25 years. But Ottawa is the guy at the orgy complaining about the drapes.

Q How did all of this come about?

A On my Facebook, where I only post business stuff, I recently wrote 'Hey today I got a call from a porn company asking to shoot in here -how cool is that?' And then I got some crazy comments from some of the 4,000 or so people on there. I have people who rent here for wedding receptions, for 40th birthday parties, foreign affairs, politicians, embassies. And the porn company calling is just another rental for me. So basically what happened is I posted it on Facebook and I was receptive to meeting the people in the company and I said I was open to doing it. This porn company, we've only been emailing and I said I would agree to meet them. I need to see what their company is, because if it's stuff that's degrading to women or men, not things that are not of my sexual interests but meaning that they would just be crap, I wouldn't do it.

Q Does the company take an artistic approach to porn production?

A Well I think there's a reason they asked me. Our dialogue was fantastic. It wasn't just 'We need a location, we'll give you \$1,000.' It was 'We love your gallery' and that's what I like to hear from any conversation about rentals.

Q Most people do think about the hotel room and the basement when they think of porn ...

A I was a cameraman in New York for a porn company for a brief time. We've got to pay the rent, right? I realized one of the really big issues is location. In porn, if you're trying to do something creative and different, it can't always be a hotel room and it can't always be someone's sleazy basement. I think they were trying for something more creative and, ironically, with class. And the artwork blends in very nicely.

Q You wouldn't just rent your place to any old porn company, would you?

A I asked [the porn company] to send me a script. I'm not just renting out for \$1,000. I want to know what the heck's going on, and I'll be here. People joke about that. They think I just want to see some porn.

Q What other reactions have you had?

A We've got people that are going 'Thumbs up' and we've got people saying that I'm shooting myself in the foot advertising this, that I'm asking for trouble. I've got people clearly saying they'll never set foot here again. That pleases me, because there are a lot of

people who walk in here just to see the freak show. What I'm thrilled to see is my own artists backing me up. I've got artists fighting to have their art in the background now. I'm getting a lot of support, but, true, I am concerned about someone coming in and smashing a window or spitting. But I've had threats for having a topless painting in a window.

Q You've been portrayed as being in a struggle financially and that's why you'd like a porn company to come shoot at your place.

A They offered me double [the regular rate]. I think I would have done it for free to support them because I'm always for the underdog. If they're telling me they have no budget and they're looking for a location and they're supercool and they're cute, I'd do it. Of course I would. You have to realize I donate my space for a ton of fundraising and that's not to try to make me look good, because a lot of people don't know about it.

Q You're not in such financial trouble you could close down.

A No. But to be honest, it's always hard. I'm sick of struggling for the rent. I have staff I don't want to let go and I'm concerned for them. I'm speaking for a lot of people that are suffering who would never admit it because they're trying to keep a persona of success and of being financially secure. I have no problem telling people it can be difficult. It has been, and yet I'm still selling well and internationally.

Q So how do you get a space ready for a porn shoot, anyway?

A: Logistics--covering the windows, what do I do with my furniture? I'm concerned about my furniture because it's all '50s modern originals. I have extra furniture. I'd be here to help them like I would with any other rental.

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