

A sculptural outcry by Danish artist Jens Galschiot

# In the Name of God

In memory of the victims of fundamentalism



A copper sculpture titled *In the Name of God* was inaugurated on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006, International AIDS Day in front of the cathedral of Copenhagen. The sculpture depicts a pregnant teenage girl in natural size crucified on a high cross. It is intended as a sculptural outcry, an artist's comment to the crusade against contraception and sexual launched by Christian fundamentalists with President Bush and the Roman Catholic Pope in the lead. The exhibition was carried out in co-operation with Dean Anders Gadegaard and the parish council. The event ignited immediately a vivid debate in the press and on the Internet, see a collection of links at:

<http://www.aidoh.dk/debate>

The sculpture set up in Copenhagen is the first in a series of similar sculptures to be displayed worldwide. It is not intended as a contribution to the abortion debate. The aim is to advocate for the right to contraception and to truthful and unprejudiced sexual education, a view that undoubtedly is shared by wide circles without regard to their stance on the abortion issue.

## Description of the concept and the sculpture

The sculpture depicts a crucified pregnant teenage girl in natural size. There will be various versions cast in copper. Some of the sculptures are naked – others are wearing clothes covering the intimate parts of the body, to avoid a futile dispute about nudity that in some countries might derail the debate. The sculpture can be displayed in different ways. It can be mounted on a cross or standing on tiptoe on a plinth. The height of the cross can vary according to the site of exhibition, from 2.5 to 5 metres.

A poster is made with a big colour photo of the crucified teenager on the front page with the title of the sculpture and the subtitle *In memory of the victims of fundamentalism*. On the rear side there will be a presentation of the basic facts about the consequences of the fundamentalist interference in projects carried out by contraception clinics.

The sculpture and the poster will be used in various contexts:

- Display of the sculpture and sculptural manifestations will fan discussions about contraception, sex-phobia and Christian fundamentalists' ban on condoms.
- The poster will be issued in big numbers (70,000) and distributed all over the world to relevant NGO-s that will be prompted to display them so that thousands of small art exhibitions will highlight the discussion. The print files are uploaded on our website. The press is invited to publish the poster.
- 40,000 flyers will be printed with the same motif as the A3 size poster, and an explanation about the project. The flyers will be distributed in connection with the various sculptural erections.

You can constantly follow the state of events at:

<http://www.aidoh.dk/InTheNameOfGod>

You'll find comprehensive documentation and plenty of links about the HIV/AIDS situation in the world at:

<http://www.aidoh.dk/GlobalGag>

## Sites of exhibition

The art installation was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> December 2006, the international AIDS day in front of the Cathedral of Copenhagen. Afterwards it will be exhibited in Nairobi, London, Texas, and Italy.

- In Denmark the sculpture was erected in co-operation with the parish council of the Cathedral. Dean Anders Gadegaard declared that it is important that Danish Christians this way take some responsibility and express an opinion about what 'their' God is being used for globally.
- In Nairobi, Kenya, the sculpture will be displayed at the World Social Forum 20 - 25 January 2007. It is expected that 100,000 people from around the world will join the forum. It takes place in the heart of Africa, exactly where the contraception discussions are most intense and it will make possible the presentation of the project globally.
- A big women's association rooted in Africa is envisaging exhibiting the sculpture in London.
- In Italy the sculpture will be displayed in Rome, on St. Peters Square / in front of the Vatican and will later be exhibited at a gallery or the like, in central Rome.
- In Texas the sculpture will be launched in cohesion with liberal Christians and various NGOs.
- Other sites might be considered, e.g. Poland and the EU Parliament.

## Partners

We expect to be able to co-operate with the following:

- Artists and art institutions who are interested in seeing art in general coming out of the museums and challenge opinions in real life in the public domain.
- Progressive Christians who are not interested in 'their' God being taken prisoner in a right wing conservative interpretation of the Bible's word with disastrous consequences for many people.
- Organisations working with HIV/AIDS and contraception policies all over the world. Also organisations defending women's rights.

## Symbolism

The sculpture contains various layers of possible symbolic interpretations. Here are just some suggestions:

- As a symbol of Christianity, the cross immediately associates to the Christian faith. Due to a fundamentalist interpretation of this faith a shift in contraception policy has been enforced in many places in the world. The consequences have been disastrous, especially in Africa.
- The cross is an ancient execution device, a brutal method for killing the victim. In Africa the diagnosis of HIV/AIDS is often synonymous with a death sentence.
- Crucifixion was a public and protracted mode of execution. The agony could last several days. Likewise the death process of the HIV contaminated is protracted and painful. The sexual offence is tabooed, hence extramarital pregnancy often leads to social exclusion, stigmatizing (cp. the holes in Jesus' hands and feet).
- The pregnant teenager symbolizes innocence. The child that has been lead astray due to ignorance, impulsiveness or maybe is the victim of rape is mercilessly exposed to the ultimate punishment. The association to Jesus as the innocent sacrificial lamb is apparent.
- The female body symbolizes that women are those bearing the brunt of suffering. They display the apparent proof of the sexual act. Often the woman has become the HIV contamination through rape, or from her husband who has been infected through extramarital intercourse.

## Blasphemy?

The cross is a very strong symbol, so I risk that the sculpture will provoke passionate reactions. Many people may be outraged and see it as blasphemous.

The sculpture is by no means intended as blasphemous. When a parallel is drawn from Jesus' suffering on the cross to the suffering women of our time, we envisage a modern interpretation of the compassionate Jesus. His suffering and death on the cross was an expression of endless compassion and solidarity with man. Jesus himself makes a junction between man's



suffering and his own through the statement “I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.” (Matthew 25,40). The quotation spurs us to take the compassionate Jesus seriously in a modern context. This is exactly what the sculpture is doing in the form of living symbolism, expressing compassion with those suffering.

Should it not be allowed, through the symbolic language of art, to show the crucified Jesus taking the side of the present day’s suffering and oppressed people, then the narrative of the Gospel will at best be reduced to barren ceremony void of connection to the world we live in – at worst it will be instrumentalized to legitimate a policy causing suffering and death to millions of people. In fact, I think that this abuse of God and the Bible deserves the designation ‘blasphemous’.

This art manifestation is aimed at a religious interpretation causing increased suffering and hardships to the world’s most vulnerable people, not at Christianity as such. The artist appreciates co-operation with Christian groups that take the Christian claim for charity seriously, and accordingly take the side of those suffering. Such an attitude is a prolongation of a Christian tradition practiced throughout history, displaying a commitment for help and relief. A hasty search in church history will reveal a multitude of monasteries and hospitals, connected to the Catholic Church or other Churches, displaying readiness to help the sick and poor, when all others failed.

On more than one occasion Jens Galschiot has carried out projects in co-operation with Christian groups both in Denmark and abroad.

## **Factual background**

Recently the fundamentalists, with President Bush and the Roman Catholic Pope in the lead, have usurped still more influence on the discussion about AIDS and contraception. The disastrous consequence has been the withdrawal of funds from the contraception programs carried out by the UN and NGO-s all around the world. The fundamentalists assert that handing out condoms and giving information on contraception is instigation to promiscuity. Instead they claim that people should be taught not to have sex before marriage, and when married only for the purpose of procreation.

This policy has entailed disasters where it has been introduced. For ten years Uganda succeeded to reduce the spread of HIV contamination through massive campaigns to use condoms and to limit the number of sexual partners. At the same time condoms were handed out for free. As a result the rate of contamination decreased from 15% of the population in 1990 to 5% in 2001. But in 2002 Uganda changes its policy: compelled by the US President the condoms were removed from the campaign, and sexual abstinence was extolled as the only means to fight the HIV contamination. The result has been the doubling of new contaminations each year from 70,000 in 2003 to 130,000 in 2005.

As a result of the implementation of the same policy, Texas is one of the states with the highest per capita number of HIV contaminated in the USA and the highest number of teenage pregnancies.

## **Brief presentation of the artist**

Jens Galschiot, Denmark, born 1954, sculptor. He stakes his art to defend the ethical values of our society, regardless of political, religious or economic interests. His sculptures suddenly appear in public areas and start the performance. Best known are *My Inner Beast* (European cities in 1993) and *the Pillar of Shame* (Hong Kong, Mexico and Brazil).

The projects are financed through the sale of Galschiot’s bronze sculptures to art collectors all over the world. He has a huge industrial area in Odense, Denmark with a bronze foundry, gallery and workshop. Photos of all Jens Galschiot's sculptures: <http://sculptures.aidoh.dk>

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