

Campaigners Condemn Workshop on Extreme Violent Pornography at Women's Arts Festival

Groups campaigning against violent pornography, including Object and Campaigners Against Pornography, have condemned the decision of Ladyfest Leeds, a women's arts festival, to hold a workshop questioning if the possession of extreme violent pornography, such as necrophilia, rape and torture, should be made illegal. The workshop on the 15 th April at the Carriageworks in Leeds entitled 'Feminism, Censorship and Pornography', will be led by 2 women who oppose plans in the Criminal Justice Bill to make possession of extreme violent porn illegal.

Liz Longhurst campaigned for this bill following the death of her daughter Jane. Graham Coutts was found guilty of murdering Jane Longhurst in 2004, which has now been overturned on the legal technicality that the jury were not offered the possibility of bringing in a manslaughter verdict, adding to Mrs Longhurst's distress. Coutts is currently in custody awaiting retrial. Coutts was shown at the original trial to have spent considerable time viewing extreme violent pornography websites depicting asphyxia and rape before the death of Jane Longhurst, whose body he kept in a lock up for 3 weeks. Coutts' defence was that Jane Longhurst died accidentally during consensual sex involving strangulation

The main opponents of the criminal justice bill are Bondage, Domination and Sado Masochism (BDSM) groups and the two women who set up the workshop, known as 'Verte' and 'Elderflower' are both regular users of BDSM website 'Informed consent'. Verte has set up a discussion board (see: <http://www.informedconsent.co.uk/boards/activism/137595/>) attacking anti pornography campaigner Charlieerrl who criticised the workshop on her blog. On this male and female contributors discuss 'rape fantasies' and 'rape play'. Informed consent is owned by 'Tanos' whose own personal website (see: <http://www.tanos.org.uk/>) describes how he keeps 2 female 'slaves' and has purpose built cells with cages in the cellar of his Manchester home.

Elizabeth Abbott of Campaigners Against Pornography said "We are not opposed to free speech. However we believe a workshop of this type is completely out of place at an event which is advertised as '**a week long extravaganza of arts.... to celebrate the talents of all women**' and which contains many other interesting and worthwhile events. It also appears that although the event is being advertised as a debate, Ladyfest Leeds have only sought panel members who are anti violent pornography after the workshop was set up and objections were raised, and as far as we are aware to date all those approached have refused to participate. We think the event is particularly inappropriate given the fact that Graham Coutts is currently awaiting retrial "

"It is estimated that as many as 1 in 3 women experience rape or sexual assault at some time in their lives. We do not accept Ladyfest Leeds' assertion that holding this workshop will not be harmful to women. We are dismayed that those who describe themselves as feminists can defend their right to possess and view images of the rape and torture of women, even if they are simulated. Rape for a huge number of women is a horrific reality, not a fantasy. The new law applies only to images which are '**real or appear to be real**' therefore it is entirely possible that images of this kind could depict real crimes of rape and murder – there is no practical way of knowing. Advocating that the possession of such images should remain legal is disrespectful to victims of rape and sexual violence attending Ladyfest, and is likely to be deeply distressing for them"

END

Further information:

Object: www.object.org.uk <http://www.object.org.uk/>

Charliegrl <http://www.charliegrl.wordpress.com>

Ladyfest leeds: <http://www.ladyfestleeds.co.uk>