

The Emperors' New Clothes – A Cautionary Tale

*As retold to mark the occasion of the private launching of the
“Art from the New World” exhibition, Friday 14th May 2010...*

Once upon a time, that time being now, there was a famous City Museum and Art Gallery that had become intoxicated with the prestige and power of its new-found supremacy in the world of Modern Art. Some years in the past the people of the City had regarded the Museum as a rather dull and predictable place. But then suddenly, in the halcyon summer of 2009, all of that changed. The cityfolk queued for hours come rain or shine to view the Great Exhibition of Ironic, Post-Modern, Graffiti-Inspired Works of the City's Most Famous and Revered Artist and the Emperors (who ran the City's now vibrant *Leisure and Culture* Department) were most pleased with all they surveyed.

“Oh, this is so wonderful”, the Emperors said amongst themselves. “This truly has placed our city at the centre of the world's cultural Universe”, they all agreed. And it was true. The Emperors had everything – power, respect and a rapidly forged reputation for the cutting-edge dynamic exposition of modern life in all its pluralistic complexity.

However, in truth the Emperors were not completely happy. The Great Exhibition had been and gone; the world's press departed. Not even a solitary Japanese television crew remained. “We must have more,” grumbled one. “How do we top this?” wondered another. All of the Emperors frowned together – the question was simple, “where do we go from here?”

Now, it should just so happen that in the Spring of 2010, some new exhibitors planned to arrive in the City. The Emperors were blessed with the opportunity to host another fantastic cultural event, “*Art from the New World*”. Out went the publicity and the arrangements were duly made. The Emperors knew that the people of the city would be uncommonly happy – if not exactly “uncommonly gay” as mentioned in the original text of this story. After all, the point need not be laboured that many alternative sexualities are available - if not always adequately represented.

And yet, the Emperors were still not entirely satisfied. “We need more”, they would say. “How should we mark the launch of this wonderful new event?” It was therefore a matter of great fortune that a truly brilliant idea was presented to them as a solution to their grievous concern.

The launch of the exhibition was to be clothed in the very latest fashion from no lesser place than the New World itself – the Americas! “And what are these clothes in which we shall wrap our wonderful event?” asked the Emperors. “Why,” they answered to themselves, “these clothes are so fine, so extraordinary, so frankly *now*, that – as modelled by the *Performer Burlesque™* - you can scarcely see them upon her.”

“Summon The Internationally Known Burlesque Artist”, went out the cry – and summoned she was.

(Now in this city there were certain advisors. They approached the Emperors with their considerations and concerns. “It seems to us”, some advisors cautioned, “that this city is already awash with performers willing to divest themselves of clothing, on occasion. One thinks of the many (now to be known apparently as *Performers Burlesque™*) in Old Market and the *Dancers Von Lap and Pole* who would, quite frankly, launch your event in much the same way but for a mere fraction of the cost and logistical complication.”)

The Emperors of course knew better. “Ah, a classic misunderstanding”, they said. “You’d have to be mad, quite mad, to support pointless nudity designed with little more in mind than to objectify the female form and to provide salacious entertainment for gentlemen in raincoats to pleasure themselves over in the privacy of their own rather sad and limited imaginations. Of course, we are,” continued the Emperors, “as one in our opposition to such trivial and unpleasant matters. But *our* event, you see, is pointless nudity designed with a little more in mind than that. In fact it’s going to be a quick ten minute blast of hetero-normative guaranteed over-18 entertainment in the name of our Artistic Event. And by running this up the flagpole to see who salutes we shall be able to distinguish the wise from the foolish! Let us make it clear that there is nothing subversive nor ironic in this performance at all. We seek nothing more than to empower women’s sexuality. The prospect of nipple tassels alone makes that clear, not to mention the size zero corsetry.”

And so it was that the Emperors proceeded in all the finery of their launch party. “One day, the women of this city will be grateful to us”, they decreed, “one day you’ll all look at this and laugh.”