



LIDDLE'S GOT ISSUES

► Our controversial columnist dons a hi-vis jacket and takes on the health and safety killjoys

THE SUNDAY TIMES

Panayiotis Lamprou

The photographer defends the intimate picture of his wife with no underwear that has caused a prize stir

The Sunday Times Published: 19 September 2010



Panayiotis Lamprou and his wife Christina, the subject of the infamous photo (Handout)

So innocent

I can honestly say that nobody has issued a warning about one of my photographs before — let alone a leading British art gallery. Why would they? Among other things, I take a lot of pictures of

interiors and beautiful, quiet landscapes.

The picture that's causing all the fuss, though, is a portrait of my wife. It was taken last summer when we were on holiday with our two children — aged three and four — on the island of Schinoussa, in the Aegean Sea.

That afternoon, we were sitting at a table after lunch. Christina, who is British, was wearing a sky-blue Laura Ashley dress with small red flowers, and feeling very relaxed. Her left arm was resting on the table, and her right foot was perched up on her wooden chair.

Although her legs were apart and she wasn't wearing any underwear, she had a look of innocence about her. I knew straight away that I had to capture this intimate and beautiful moment

She wanted it

Afterwards, I showed the picture to my wife and children, and they all loved it. The kids know what their mother looks like nude, so it seemed perfectly natural to them. I didn't, however, show the picture to a single colleague or friend.

But when I heard about the Taylor Wessing prize, just a month before the submissions deadline this summer, I knew that it was time to reconsider. After all, if I won, my photograph — which I've called *Portrait of My British Wife* — would be displayed in the National Portrait Gallery, which is world-renowned for its portraits, paintings and photography.

I discussed this with Christina, and then sent it in. Like any woman, she was glad to have the chance of being the subject of an award-winning photograph.

It was only when we found out two weeks ago that it had been selected for the shortlist that we suddenly started to wonder how people would react to the element of nudity.

Well, the shortlist announcement was made on Thursday — and we soon had our answer. No newspaper has featured the image in its entirety, and you can guess which part was cropped.

It is true femininity

I believe passionately that every artist should be given the space to express himself. On the other hand, everybody is entitled to their own perceptions.

I can only hope that anyone looking at the entire picture will realise that the nudity of the woman is not important. What is far more important is the character of the image. If it had been vulgar, then, yes, it would have been pornography. But in my photograph, the woman portrayed is clearly elegant, kind and beautiful.

If you get a chance to see it, I'm sure you will appreciate both the expression in Christina's face, and at the same time the freedom of her pose. There is nothing sexual or erotic about it. This is a photograph that tells you that Christina, a woman and a mother, is the embodiment of true "femininity". It expresses female power and independence as well as my own devotion to my wife. Now that's interesting, isn't it?

Don't call the yard

As far as I'm concerned, the National Portrait Gallery is perfectly entitled to put up a warning to visitors about the picture. I doubt it will stop many people. I would be far more concerned if a member of the public complained to the Metropolitan police, because they have said they would have to investigate if that happened.

If there were any chance of my portrait being taken down, I would turn up at the gallery like a shot. I'm not sure what I could do, but I'd certainly be asking the question: why?

Why take up valuable police time to mull over parts of my wife's body when we have a financial crisis and a war in Afghanistan, not to mention the various moral crises that are part of living in the 21st century?

Is it a crime to see beauty and innocence in a photograph? Is that something that we have to deny ourselves? If so, then I throw up my hands: we should all fly off to another planet, and leave this world in peace.

Police portraits

Whatever happens, I plan to be in London on November 9, the day the winner of the prize is due to be announced. Perhaps it's a good omen that it's my birthday the following day. In the meantime, I'm engaged in a new project — photographing Greek police officers. With their clothes on.

As told to Clio Williams