

Putting the 'ink' in 'kink'

La Petite Mort Gallery shows some skin in month-long *Kinked* exhibit

BY BRITTANY MAHANEY

Spanning across Robert Ridgeway's entire abdomen is a tattoo that says "faggot." He stands topless in front of a brick wall that is veiled with graffiti, and covers his eyes with his left hand.

The photograph, snapped by Kenny Lee, combines ink tattoos and kinky sexuality, otherwise called "Kinked." Lee is known for photographing the underground gay community in Toronto.

"I have a huge crush on Robert," laughed Guy Bérubé, owner of La Petite Mort Gallery, which will be featuring Lee's work for the month of April.

"I decided to take an edgy subject but show the beautiful side of it as opposed to just shock value because he clearly has images that are disturbing, even to me," Bérubé said.

The photographs represent the erotic and sensual side of a subject that is sometimes considered pure porn.

"I'm tired of seeing your basic newsstand porn rag photo spread with flat, light, overly-groomed models fluffed and preened," said Lee in an artist statement.

"I capture energy and depth, not poses."

Strolling through the gallery is like touring an underground sex club. Ridgeway, who is in more than one photo, seems to invite spectators to glimpse into a world where sex, drugs, bondage, leather and exhibitionists roam free.

Ridgeway, who says he is genetically prone to sexual deviance, said Lee quickly got around to finding what makes him "kink."

"When he asked what turned my crank I quickly said . . . 'guns, dogs and fighting are what get me hard,'" Ridgeway said.

A few steps down from Ridgeway is a huge photo that is scribbled with expressions like "homo," "hot ass," "piss," "spit" and "jock." The words, like Ridgeway's tattoo, are significant, Bérubé said.

For example, the word "faggot" in French refers to the butt of a cigarette, so "you're basically considered that much of a piece of garbage," Bérubé said. The word also denotes kindling, which is the means by which gays were burnt under outdated heretic laws.

Although Bérubé is gay himself he said he is not making a political statement, despite common perception. Another

misconception is that Bérubé has censored the photographs.

Although Ridgeway wore a swastika in the original photo by Lee, it was Photoshopped out of the gallery invitations. Lee followed suit by taking out the Swastika from the original photo, though the business decision was only meant for the invitations. Some media have jumped on the omission and claimed censorship.

The gallery opening, described on the website as "an evening of experimental discomfort and beautiful pain," brought the pictures to life.

In the middle of the floor stood a Japanese wooden shibari that nearly reached the ceiling. At the gallery opening April 3, a woman was tied into the shibari, lifted from the ground to enter into a state of nirvana.

"It's not a misogynist sex piece," Bérubé said. "She's fully into what she's doing."

Bérubé said he tries to incorporate different worlds into the gallery that are reactionary, but not shocking.

"Some people expect something over the top when they come in, but it's just really great art." □

