



"Fabulous" Archival Ink Jet Print 2015

Allied Artist

Linda Hesh pays tribute to gay rights at Dupont's Hillier

GAY IS GOOD!" "DON'T FEAR THE QUEER." "Wouldn't it be great to have big billboards like that all over?" says artist Linda Hesh, explaining her recent series of artworks, which draw inspiration from the many "heartfelt" homemade signs waved at gay rights rallies. Taking many of the gay-affirming slogans that have been in circulation, she digitally adds them to billboards in original cityscape photographs.

Over the past decade and a half, the photography-based artist has developed seven series along the same lines, all of which factor into her latest solo show at Dupont Circle's Hillier Art Space, *Linda Hesh's All Gay Review: A Heterosexual's Tribute to Homosexual Civil Rights*. "When I got the opportunity to do this show, I decided I wanted to do a show only about gay rights," she says.

Chicago-reared Hesh has been a straight ally for as long as she can remember. "My mother was a fag hag — literally that's what it is. Her two best friends were gay men," she explains. "I always knew there was something different about these men, although, of course, as a child, I didn't know what the difference was. And then as I grew up, I realized that my father was homophobic and a racist and misogynist. So when I'm doing this work about civil rights, I feel like I'm sort of doing reparations, and exploring those problems that I grew up with."

Another series of works in the Hillier show is a calendar Hesh describes as looking "like a normal wildlife calendar, with beautiful wildlife pictures — until you get close and then read the text underneath [which] tells you the same-sex behavior of that animal." More recently she's created a couple interactive selfie-inspired projects — a cutout allowing exhibit-goers to take "a selfie with a gay," as well as another option to snap a photo wearing a "gay" hat, a "gayer" necklace or a "gayest" sash.

Next weekend Hesh will staff a Valentine's Day Kissing Booth, where people can pose and kiss "in any combination." Says Hesh: "I'll be serving milk and cookies and taking photographs." — *Doug Rule*

The opening reception for Linda Hesh's All Gay Review is Friday, Feb. 6, from 6 to 9 p.m., while the Valentine's Day event is Saturday, Feb. 14, from 1 to 4 p.m. Exhibit runs to Feb 28. Hillier Art Space at International Arts & Artists, 9 Hillier Court NW. Call 202-338-0680 or visit artsandartists.org. ●