

UNSPEAKABLE FREEDOM

Local councillors in Blackpool have leaned on the Grundy Art Gallery in order to prevent a newly commissioned film by Jennie Thomas from being exhibited. Thomas's presently titled *The Unspeakable Freedom Device* was programmed to run at the gallery from 20 September to 22 November. However, an interview with the artist in which she criticised coalition government policies appears to have been used by some councillors as evidence that the film has an anti-Tory bias. The film does indeed feature a Margaret Thatcher doll but, like much of Thomas's work, it is a sci-fi fantasy that explores ideology as a kind of faith, this time using the Tory party conferences in Blackpool as the foundation of a collective myth.

Inadvertently mimicking the film's protagonists, the city's politicians let their interpretive fantasies run free, scaring themselves into believing that the people of Blackpool are not ready to see the work. Labour councillor Christine Wright, Blackpool's cabinet member for culture and heritage, made the following statement: 'The fact that we are in the lead up to a by-election in October and both a general and local election in May, it did not seem appropriate for us to host this exhibition at this time. We would not want anything displayed at the Grundy to be interpreted as either in favour or against any political parties. We will schedule the full exhibition later in 2015 when audiences are free to appreciate it on its own terms.'

The justification for this decision seems to spring from a very loose interpretation of the local council purdah rule, whereby in the six weeks prior to an election the council holds back announcements that may be perceived as influencing the result. It is absurd to imagine that an artwork in a public gallery should fall under the purdah rule and, in any case, delaying the presentation of the work by at least nine months is clearly not necessary under the six-week rule. Eyes will be on Blackpool to ensure that the work is exhibited as soon as possible, to ensure that this ill-judged postponement does not become outright political censorship. ■

Purdah

- The term 'purdah' has come into popular use across central and local government to describe the period of time immediately before elections or referendums when specific restrictions on communications activity are in place. The term 'pre-election period' is also used.
- The pre-election restrictions are governed by Section 2 of the Local Government Act 1986 , as amended in 1988 . Essentially councils should “not publish any material which, in whole or in part, appears to be designed to affect public support for a political party.”



SARAH VINE: Why their kitchen tells you all you need to know about the mirthless Milibands... and why there's nothing to suggest that Ed and Justine are not, in fact, aliens

By SARAH VINE FOR THE DAILY MAIL

PUBLISHED: 01:10, 12 March 2015 | UPDATED: 09:47, 12 March 2015



Seeing Ed Miliband in his drab kitchen made me want to bring him over some fresh Brownies

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Technical information:

*** STOP: 0x000000D1 (0x0000000C,0x00000002,0x00000000,0xF86B5A89)

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PHILIP K. DICK

DOUBLEDAY SCIENCE FICTION

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Average annual hours worked by paid workers age 18 to 64, by income percentile

