

Dear Ralf,

We are writing to you in connection with the mural that the RainbowHouse commissioned for the Lollepstraat in Brussels. As you know, recently there has been criticism from our community. We believe in dialogue and believe that it is necessary to involve the different views in order to create a supportive and safe environment for all members of our community. That is why we have organized meetings with individuals and associations of our community who wanted to discuss the mural. Together we tried to find a solution that appeases everyone. With this letter we want to inform you about this and explain which decision we have come to. For the sake of transparency, this letter and also your answer will be publicly published.

In the mural there are a variety of members of the LGBTQ+ community and it shows the beautiful diversity we are. Making our differences visible is a necessary step to acknowledging the existence and specific needs of each minority. But unfortunately, the depiction of some of the characters are discriminatory, painful, and are experienced as pushing transphobia, fatphobia and racism. Because you yourself are part of the LGBTQ+ community, you will probably know that the power dynamics (eg racism, transphobia and fatphobia) that still exist in our society, also continue to work in our community. The discrimination is that two characters are treated very differently from the rest of the group. The traits used to make the caricature of the trans woman and the black woman are rooted in implicit transphobia and racial prejudice.

For example, the representation of the woman in the pink dress goes back to many stereotypes that really do live in our society, and so effectively continues the idea that trans women are very unhappy, hairy "men in a dress" with exaggerated makeup. up. She is essentially a caricature of what is feminine. That she is fat and clearly visible trans is not a problem in itself. The way in which she is presented as the only unhappy one in a group of happy and proud queers. She emerges as the only person with a depressed attitude, with arms hanging down and an empty gaze. And by choosing on top of that to portray the shadow of the beard, the chest hair and hair on her arms and legs can be interpreted as rather insensitive or even cruel, just because those are things that trans women find difficult and about very sensitive. In short, transphobic and fatphobic visual material was brought in to present it intentionally as ugly, and that within a mural that, for the rest, is a tribute to the diversity and pride of our community.

As far as the image of the black woman is concerned, what was used to portray her stems from racist and colonialist imagery that essentially reduces black people to that one common trait: having thick lips. We know that it is a caricature and that you had no bad intentions, but unfortunately we live in a racist society, and our collective subconscious mind is full of implicit racist prejudices. And we must actively question that if we want to move towards a more inclusive society that truly embraces and celebrates diversity. In addition, she also stands out because of her not particularly intelligent facial expression. Again her depiction is treated differently and this is discriminatory. And when caricatures belittle oppressed minorities, that is not satire but consequently negatively differentiates them and makes direct racist behavior possible.

As it was stated earlier "Satire is meant to ridicule power. If you smile with people being suppressed, it's not satire, but bullying "(Terry Pratchett). It is indeed possible to represent minorities without being oppressive, as the work of Stephanie Dehennin shows, who published a drawing to explain how you could draw and avoid racist images. Discrimination comes in many different ways and forms, not always as direct violence. Using images based on stereotypes that are part of how our society views people of colour and black people, transgender and fat people is an implicit and invisible way that, together with racist jokes and other "harmless" behavior, is the invisible part of an iceberg that leads to more explicit and visible racist behavior such as violence and harassment.

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Please bear in mind that we appreciate that you tried to represent the diversity of characters and that we respect and value the other elements of the mural. It is for that reason that, after the feedback from our communities, we ask you to adapt the mural to these criticisms, to present the two problematic characters with more respect and empowerment, and to help them to also " shine". We hope you understand that we have no choice but to listen to the more oppressed minorities of our LGBTQ + community when they talk about the oppression they experience. And that we cannot leave this wall painting unchanged. If, unfortunately, you would not be able to do this, we will have no choice but to ask another artist to design a replacement mural.

With best regards,

The RainbowHouse Brussels

1 Fans verbeteren 'racistische' nieuwe Suske en Wiske, NRC, 27 juni 2017.

<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/06/27/fans-verbeteren-racistische-nieuwe-suske-en-wiske-11311612-a1564698>

2 What composes "Racism". <https://twitter.com/mspackyetti/status/896836937645817856>