

THE SUN

Monday, July 24, 2000

30p

THE PEOPLE'S PAPER

As sick sex film of Diana goes on show, we ask...

ARTIST Alison Jackson is set to shock the public again with a video nasty of Princess Diana on a huge screen in London's Leicester Square.

She caused a storm in May with a film of a David Beckham lookalike wearing his wife Victoria's thong.

Now she has filmed an actress dressed as Diana crossing and uncrossing her legs like a knickerless Sharon Stone in *Basic Instinct*.

Offensive exhibits by other artists have included a statue of the Virgin Mary inside a condom.

Here art critic **DAVID LEE** explains why modern artists stoop to such sick stunts.

If you think a film of a look-alike Princess Di rehearsing sex scenes from a Hollywood movie is cheap and exploitative, you're right.

There's no justification for it except to shock and titillate audiences. The artists know this. They realise no artist gets famous today by working quietly in obscurity.

Shocking us is their passport to fame, higher prices and more exhibitions.

They do it quite deliberately. In the last few years we've had one artist stuffing a statue of the Virgin Mary in a condom. Another, who won the Turner Prize, stuck Mary adjacent to pornography and elephant dung.

An American artist dropped a crucifix in a tank of urine.

We've also had Princess Diana as the Virgin Mary and a sculpture of the Pope struck down by a meteorite.

Mainly to blame is a corrupting and complacent art establishment. Too terrified to be seen criticising anything, they accept and defend everything.

Even the activities of brainless artists who exploit child killers like Myra Hindley by creating her image out of hundreds of children's handprints have to be defended in the name of freedom of expression.

HOW LOW CAN ART GO?

Those in the art establishment are terrified of missing the next great art. So in order to avoid being seen to be square they praise everything, then spend our money on it.

Yes, it is disgusting that the stuff of cheap fairground side-shows should be promoted as the height of achievement in contemporary art when there is so much else happening which deserves consideration.

And make no mistake, shock art will get worse as artists compete for attention. The ultimate stunt, in which an artist

commits suicide, rape or murder and justifies it in the name of art, is surely only just around the corner.

The enthusiasts for this rubbish at the Arts Council and the Tate Gallery are like fanatical members of a new religious sect. They expect us to show blind faith and then dismiss us as Philistines when we don't.

There is nothing wrong with nudity in art. There is nothing wrong with art which questions conventional attitudes.

But there is everything wrong with a bankrupt art establishment which encourages

artists and students to shock and offend and which rewards novelty for its own sake.

At the end of last year's Turner Prize, when the dirty sheets and soiled knickers failed to win the £20,000 award, artist Tracey Emin unwittingly summed up the whole squalid system.

She said that she didn't care about not winning because she had already made enough money from the fuss created by her bed to retire to a house by the sea.

● **DAVID LEE** is editor of visual arts newsletter *The Jackdaw*.



OFFENSIVE . . . Alison's film of "Becks" in thong



SHOCKER . . . kids' handprints on Hindley picture