

Preliminary draft, 25 November 2011

# FUNDAMENTALISM

An art installation by Jens Galschiot on monotheist dogmas

at

**heart** - Herning Museum of Contemporary Art  
spring/summer 2013



## **Background:**

For many years people have asked me why I haven't made an art installation that grasps the great questions about the growing influence of religious dogmas in our society. The newspaper Jyllands-Posten tried to get my backup on the Muhammad cartoons - but I refused because I believe the cartoons were not an attempt at artistic interpretation and dialogue, but a project seeking to mob and provoke Muslims and this would act as a sort of 'hate speech' and stigmatization.

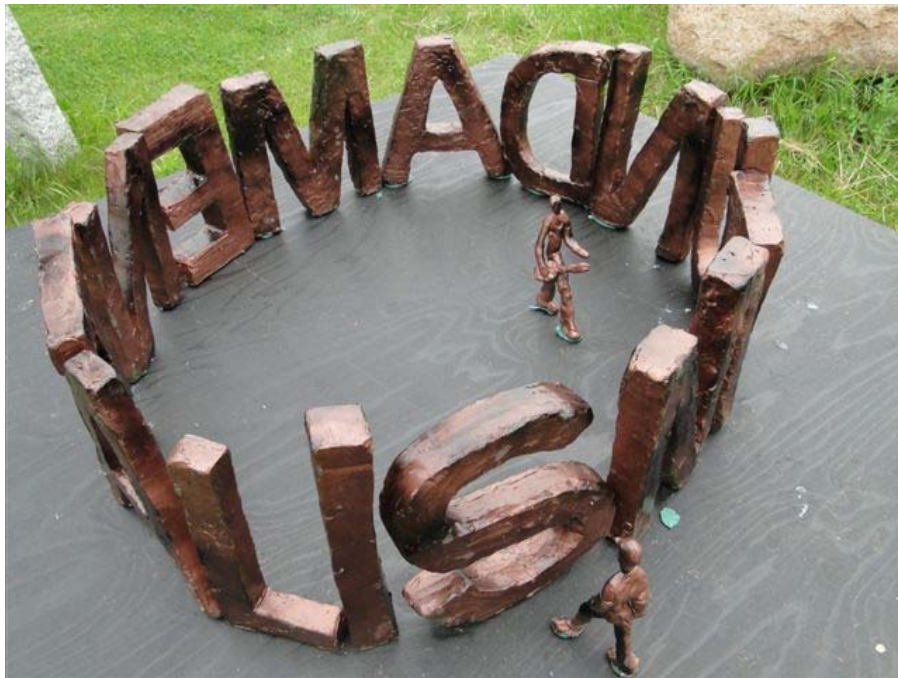
I have for some years now had a sculpture installation in my head, which deals precisely with this issue and I believe that now is the time to give a more balanced artistic bid on this discussion.

This project is not anti-religious. Religion is probably deep down humanity's attempts to find the meaning of existence. Religions are not fundamentally bad for humanity; on the contrary, all the three mono-theistic religions → often had a good impact on communities, particularly the requirement for mercy to the poor and other basic guidelines to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence.

There are many beautiful words and rules in the monotheistic books, but there are also many nonsensical and callous rules belonging to a medieval civilization. If you take everything in the religious writings literally and strictly obey the wording, the people and their communities risk to get heartless and callous.

It is important for me to create a dialogue based on the assumption that the books are not essentially wrong, but to blame are those who choose to interpret them headless, without regard to the progress of human civilization and increasing tolerance among people. You can easily find a humane interpretation of the books if you want to take this approach. But it is equally feasible to defend an inhuman interpretation of the same books. Precisely this is the point of 'Fundamentalism'.

### **Sculpture description / Idea:**



**The idea is to create a monumental bronze sculpture consisting of the letters of the word 'FUNDAMENTALISM'.** The individual letters are 2.5 meters tall and erected in a large closed circle of 7 meters. A small opening at one of the letters is the only entrance to the inside of the installation. Each letter of the sculpture is built up of religious books 'from the people of the book - monotheism', respectively:

- Quran (perhaps Hadith and other Islamic holy books?)
- The Christian Bible (Old and New Testaments) different versions?
- The Jewish Torah (Torah ('Act') Nevi'im ('prophets') and Ketuvim ('Scriptures'))?







**The books are stacked on each other** to form individual letters, but separately so that one character is built of Korans, another of Bibles, and a third of the Torah. To avoid a barren discussion about blasphemy, I have chosen not to make castings of original religious books, but to model the books by hand, with real religious books of all sizes and forms used as models. They are stacked irregularly, so the sculpture appears with a slightly shaky expression.

As there are only 14 letters and 3 religions, one religion will have only 4 letters – in return it will be some of the big letters.

**On the outside of the circle directly on the individual books** are posted small signs, similar to pieces of paper. On these small notes are engraved quotations from the book of which each letter is constructed. Some of the texts will be in the original language, others in English. These quotes will be the 'good' ones that express a humane approach to issues such as reconciliation, forgiveness, women's rights, care for the weak, equality, wisdom, beauty, compassion, Faith, Hope and Charity, etc.



**On the inside of the circle** is engraved the corresponding negation of a humane attitude found in the same book, of which the letter is composed, for example. 'Eye for eye, tooth for tooth', that sinners must be subject to cruel punishment (stoning, amputation of limbs), persecution and intolerance towards religious, sexual and other minorities, the woman must obey her husband, be silent in public gatherings, must wear veils, etc.

**The whole letter structure is placed on a dark ring** which is attached to a sort of newspaper text, where the religious quotes are continuously displayed. It has the advantage that they can get quotes in their own languages and they can also see and read quotes without having to go all the way towards the sculpture and read the engraved bronze

patches. You can see quotes both inside and outside the circle; especially will this text band seem overwhelming inside the circle.

**There is only one entrance to the interior of the installation:** a small hole through one of the letters (the T) above which a sign says 'Welcome'. When you come into the circle, one can only get out of the same opening, but here is a sign saying 'NO EXIT'.

**Size:** H 250 cm, circle about 8 meters. It is important that the sculpture has a size and monumental radiance to emphasize that there are forces at work that make an individual insignificant and could easily destroy it. The religious books in the sculpture must exude age, weight and significance. The sculpture will have a presence as a 'Stonehenge' of books.



### **Dialogue component**

This topic is obviously hazardous to work with and there is great danger that the project goes astray ending up in infertile and shrill debates. It can easily be exploited by the fundamentalists or the political right / left-wing to promote their views. This obviously cannot be avoided completely, even though Jens Galschiot who is the artist behind the installation is known to have a balanced relationship with all three religions. There will therefore from the outset of the project be taken various initiatives and actions to help ensure a good and open dialogue, without taking the sting out of the art installation and the idea behind it.

**Working with religious leaders and prominent persons:** We are attempting to establish cooperation / dialogue with religious leaders and prominent persons from all three religions, who could support the idea that religious books must be interpreted symbolically and not literally. We hope that this cooperation will make it possible to use this installation as a platform for an open and unbiased discussion and dialogue about the consequences of fundamentalism.

A sort of support group can contribute to a constructive debate about 'FUNDAMENTALISM'.



**Catalogue / book:** the whole art installation is described in a book, both in printed and E-book edition. The contents are:

- All quotations from religious books which were written and categorized
- Photos and description of the installation
- Statements from high-ranking religious leaders and eminent persons who relate to the sculpture and to the discussions about the literal interpretation of the books

**Website / Facebook / Twitter, etc.:** An interactive website will be established with description of the sculpture and the many quotations from the books where you can download, sort and search. At the same time, user pages are created where you can debate about the sculpture and fundamentalism. You can also sign up for an email list where you will be informed about the project's development and ongoing dialog.



**Poster:** There will be published a poster in A3 oversize, with pictures of the sculpture installation and a text on the back where the project is explained. The posters are distributed free to the public.

#### **Quotes / books:**

The quotations from the books are selected by the artist in collaboration with experts (scholars of religion) within each religious denomination. Due to their professional expertise they can guarantee that the quotes stem from authorized and reputable translations.



It would be desirable that the members of the support groups themselves are believers, as they must participate in dialogue sessions about the sculpture 'Fundamentalism'



The quotes are engraved in the original languages of the books: Aramaic, Arabic, Hebrew and Ancient Greek and also in English translation.

So far we envisage 100 quotations per letter – a total of 1400 different quotations.

We only use the religious books as models for modelling in wax. So we by no means destroy or damage the original books, what would probably offend many religious people.



### Symbolism:

The symbolism can of course be interpreted differently, but here are some of my suggestions:

- The crucial point is not the literal wording of the religious books, but rather how they are interpreted and by whom.
- All religions contain contradictory texts and could be used to justify both the most brutal and the noblest deeds.
- Many people get caught by the beautiful quotes, but end up suffering the bad ones.
- You must break the rule (the plate 'NO EXIT') to get out of the circle, which symbolizes that when you have only entered into a fundamentalist interpretation of religion, it is hard to get out because the exit would be an offence against 'God's rules'.

**This is and not a worked-out concept, but just a preliminary draft by Jens Galschiot, July 2011.**

Updated information and photos available at [www.Aidoh.dk/Fundamentalism](http://www.Aidoh.dk/Fundamentalism)

**Jens Galschiot - Banevaenget 22 – DK-5270 Odense N - Denmark**

**Tel. +45 6618 4058 aidoh@aidoh.dk - [www.aidoh.dk](http://www.aidoh.dk)**







