

POLEMIC

Vatican pays gay pride and sex toys artist to design Jubilee mascot

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The inevitable polemics and jokes about the Jubilee 2025 mascot chosen by the Vatican's Dicastery for Evangelisation are bound to escalate. And not only because of the extraordinary resemblance of 'Luce' to Greta Thunberg and her ever-present yellow

mackintosh. The mascot, in fact, is the result of the artistic production of a designer who has been involved in many things in the past, including several gay pride events and even a line of sex toys.

The mascot was made public on Monday during the press conference presenting the cultural events scheduled to take place in Rome before the official opening of the Jubilee and the Holy See Pavilion at Expo Osaka, and was conducted by Msgr. Rino Fisichella, who concluded his speech by presenting 'Luce', the mascot of both events: 'Dulcis in fundo, I am pleased to present the mascot of the Jubilee and Osaka; it is Luce, created from the desire to live within pop culture, so loved by our young people,' Fisichella explained. 'Born from the creativity of Simone Legno, Luce is the mascot that will accompany us. As you can see, she is a pilgrim depicted with the typical elements of the pilgrim: the yellow k way to shelter from the weather; the boots soiled with earth from the road travelled; the missionary cross around her neck; the pilgrim's staff and above all the luminous eyes, symbol of the Hope of the heart'.

Could it be that the Vatican, in commissioning Legno to do the work, did not know that it was entrusting itself to a creative designer in the field of merchandising applied to commercial brands who in his colourful portfolio also had products that could hardly be associated with the Church such as devil-shaped vibrators and rainbow unicorns?

And yet, one only has to do a quick research to discover that Simone Legno, the name of the cartoonist, is indeed involved in many productions and forges commercial partnerships to advertise the most disparate products with his 'characters'.

It is the law of commerce, one might say, but within the whole Catholic world were there no artists capable of designing a mascot for the Jubilee and who might not have been successful even in sectors decidedly unbecoming to the Church?

Everything suddenly becomes clear when reading the Simone Legno's Instagram page, who yesterday announced with great honour that he had participated in a historic project for the Vatican: the birth of the first mascot dedicated to a Jubilee. As can be seen from the photo posted by Legno, the bottom left-hand corner reads 'Designed by Tokidoki' with the logo of the company of which Legno appears as co-founder and front man.

What is Tokidoki? The word comes from Japanese and means 'sometimes'. But Tokidoki is the brand created by Simone Legno, who today collaborates with some of

the most important global brands: from Karl Lagerfeld to the Guggenheim Museum, from Sephora to Hello Kitty. And again: Marvel, Barbie and Canon.

In short, a designer who creates images influenced by Japanese culture (Luce was in fact immediately recognised as a typical product of the cartoons of the Rising Sun). A cartoonist who is highly regarded and recognised in the world of comics and who is becoming increasingly popular internationally. He is, for example, the creator of 'Italia Chan', the official mascot of the Italian Pavilion at Expo 2025 in Osaka, which was presented at the last Milan Design Week earlier this year.

The Vatican, therefore, seems to have entrusted itself to a 'name' in the comics genre. But not all that glitters is gold. In fact, in its rich pool of collaborations, we find the Tokidoki brand associated with pride month. In a special post on Instagram, Legno wishes 'Happy pride to all' and does so with a special graphic of sharp-toothed, rainbow characters with the words 'love'. His commitment to merchandising in support of gay pride, which dates back to 2021 and took him to San Francisco, also takes the form of the creation of special merchandising made of puppets and unicorns, which seem to be his speciality. Gadgets such as Pride Lulu Unicorn, Prisma Unicorn, and hats with the Tokidoki logo called New Era Toki pride are on sale on E-bay. Items for sale, therefore, because let's be clear, we are not in the field of charity, but of merchandising applied to any kind of event.

Yesterday it was the Gay pride and today it is the Vatican Jubilee. Doesn't it cause embarrassment that gay pride events are increasingly a commercial and propaganda event with a clear anti-Catholic matrix, often displaying images that are disrespectful towards the Church, sometimes even blasphemous?

Apparently, the matter does not seem to bother the department headed by Fisichella, after all, pecunia non olet. Little does it matter if whoever made the image that will end up in the pockets of millions of pilgrims around the world has made money with this (the pride) and with that (the Jubilee). It is therefore to be expected that with this operation, the Holy See hopes to collect a few thousand euros, if not hundreds, from the sale of the Luce mascot in all its variations and raincoats. And Legno will thus be able to boast, among his various collaborations, also that with the Vatican, which will certainly benefit his business.

It is no coincidence, in fact, that the news announced by Monsignor Rino Fisichella of the creation of Luce took place at the same time as the inauguration of Lucca Comics & games, the most important European event in the sector that will attract

over 200,000 visitors to the Tuscan town, where Legno with Tokidoki will be one of the most visited exhibitors. And with the publicity the Vatican is giving him with Operation Mascot, this visibility will increase straight away.

Without doubt it is all legitimate, but that even the Holy See should bend to the rules of the market and marketing is a bit odd, especially if the context is that of the Jubilee, which is supposed to celebrate the joy of the faithful pilgrim to Rome, finally freed from all the distortions of sin in finding God's mercy. In short, something is jarring.

Just as jarring is the fact that Tokidoki and Simone Legno's carnet also includes items that are not really suitable for a pilgrim audience. In 2017, for example, in collaboration with the Lovehoney brand, Tokidoki also lent his images to a line of vibrators. These items can also be found on the Ebay site, complete with description, and on other sites there is even a review of the special sex toy by someone who evidently knows all about it. All for the 'modest' sum - so to speak - of 26 euros plus shipping costs. Clearly visible in the packaging is the logo of Tokidoki, Simone Legno's baby, who yesterday announced with great honour that he had entered into an important partnership with the Vatican for the mascot.

So that, in its prestigious curriculum, from now on we will not only have Tokidoki for Pride or Tokidoki for lovehoney(the vibrators ed.) but also Tokidoki for Vatican. It's the law of the market, fantastic. And it looks no one in the face. Let alone sin against the sixth commandment.