

Subject: RE: District Hall "art"- a horror show or (my comments) "the saints have finally discovered a true cause".

Date: Sat, 9 Apr 2005 16:18:28 -0700

From: "Ernie Crist" <ernie_crist@dnv.org>

To: "M E Craver" <mecraver@shaw.ca>

CC: <cathyadams@canada.com>, "James Ridge" <James_Ridge@dnv.org>, <fonvca@fonvca.org>, <Cagebc@yahoo.com>, <Bostwickm@dnv.org>, "Robyn Newton" <Robyn_Newton@dnv.org>, "Dennis Back" <dback@dnv.org>, "John McPherson" <John_McPherson@dnv.org>, "Mayor Harris" <Janice_Harris@dnv.org>, "Sherwood Johnson" <Sherwood_Johnson@dnv.org>, "Mayor and Council - DNV" <Council@dnv.org>, <Council@cnv.org>, <nvarscouncil@telus.net>

Dear Mrs Craver:

I never ascribed anything to these paintings other than that it should not be up to one individual or even a small group of individuals to decide whether they are suitable to be displayed in the Municipal Hall or not. This is why we have an Arts Council. This is another way of stating, I neither approved nor passed judgment on these paintings. If the artist stated that he wanted the public to interpret his so called "art" without comment on his part then he is merely saying he has painted what he considers to be his version of art for art's sake.

I can therefore not agree with your comments that my point is as valid as Mrs Adams for she made a definite statement of objection of the painting per se. Neither did I approve or comment on the quality of these paintings per se. I merely stated that it is dangerous to comment on "Art" without grasping what the underlying issues are. I stated what in my opinion some of these social, philosophical and moral issues might be. That is all.

I find it also curious I stated, that one individual or a small group of people, who never spoke up once, when the issue of either gratuitous violence on TV (which is the real killer) or corporate exploitation of human sexuality was raised in the past, should now all in a sudden decide what can and cannot be displayed in the Municipal Hall. From where did this moral high ground and pedestal all in a sudden materialize? Surely not from the "Together Against Violence" or the "CUPE" persons I hope. The objectors have every right to object, of course, but in my opinion no decision should be made without giving the Arts Council an opportunity to respond and without establishing some kind of future guidelines acceptable to the community.

What I also said, somewhat facetiously, is that I hope that none of these people will ever visit a swimming pool or any of the beaches for there are scantily dressed people everywhere, not to speak of the great art centers in Europe, where paintings of nude people are quite common including some by the great Michelangelo himself and in no less a place than the Vatican and even on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel so as to be visible to all who have eyes.

Other than that, I don't really care one way or another what is exhibited in the Municipal Hall. For all I care they can paint and exhibit turnips and blueberry bushes each and every week. Indeed, I think this would be very appropriate in a community which is silent in the face of corporate sponsored gratuitous violence on a grand scale not to mention some of the other rather disturbing issues, but gets excited about a painting depicting one or two scantily dressed persons.

Yours truly,

Ernie Crist

From: M E Craver [<mailto:mecraver@shaw.ca>]
Sent: Saturday, April 09, 2005 1:55 PM
To: Ernie Crist
Cc: cathyadams@canada.com; James Ridge; fonvca@fonvca.org;
Cagebc@yahoo.com; Bostwickm@dnv.org; Robyn Newton; Dennis Back; John
McPherson; Mayor Harris; Sherwood Johnson; Mayor and Council - DNV;
Council@cnv.org; nvartscouncil@telus.net
Subject: Re: District Hall "art"- a horror show

The following is a small portion of the text from the Georgia Straight article, published on March 31st. It pretty much sums up the problem with whose interpretation is right? The artist has said he does not "know what they're (his paintings) about". He states that his paintings are "very open to interpretation". So that means Mrs. Cathy Adams' interpretation is just as valid as Councillor Crist's interpretation. Once again, DNV Municipal Hall is a corporate place of work, and should go by corporate standards as to what kind of art should be displayed.

Corporate art should not offend the people who work there, nor offend the public who access the place. If it means only showing pictures of flowers and blueberries, etc., so be it. There are many interpretations of how flowers and blueberries can be painted, with very little chance of "offending". Not that we would, but sex and violence can and will offend some, no matter what the artist is trying to convey. In this case the artist admits he has no message, and through his paintings was expecting that people would interpret his art according to their "own psychological state". He was looking for reactions. He got it.

Should we really consider art placement by the message it is trying to give? In this case, there is none -- just guns and nude shadows of women portraying "colour". Sex and violence without meaning? Open to interpretation? At least movies like "Full Metal Jacket" (that send a message) can be viewed by choice -- not that we are forced to view it. Same with "art" that does send a message about exploitation of women, violence, etc. I am sure that some of these pieces of art (shown in major galleries), such as a dress made of meat hanging on a hanger-- to signify how some women are treated; or vials of blood displayed-- to signify "AIDS" victims. These at least send a message, but I am sure we would never see such a display in DNV's hall or display cases. Why? It will offend some, er...many! In galleries we have a choice to view what we want, and will react to it. Corporate art policies takes away that choice, thus, must remain as neutral as possible. "If in doubt, keep it out."

Mrs. Adams and Ms. Heal (any others?) exercised their right to complain, while many others probably just looked the other way, uncomfortably, trying to ignore it. But according to the artist, both Crist and Adams' interpretations are correct ones. Nobody is wrong. So whose interpretation is valid? Both. And Shawn Stibbards has gotten favourable publicity for his efforts. That is what an artist sets out to do -- get publicity and sell paintings. In this case he has achieved both. I do not care for his portrayals, nor like his style of art much, but I wish him all the success in the future. Thank you.

--Monica Craver--
North Vancouver, V7K 2R3

Nudity Nixed Inside North Van District Hall

By pieta woolley

Publish Date: 31-Mar-2005

.....Crist interpreted the paintings as a reflection of the reality of violence against women in society. He said it is "hypocritical" that Mayor Janice Harris and district councillors have allowed the paintings to be removed but didn't support his motion to challenge violence and sexual exploitation on TV.

Stibbards removed the three paintings and replaced one of them with a "blacked-out" canvas. The high-school English teacher told the Straight he has never experienced this kind of reaction to his work before and wasn't a part of the heated conversations that followed. To him, the paintings don't have a specific meaning.

"I don't know what they're 'about'," he said. "To me, they portray colour. They're very open to interpretation. I compare them to a Rorschach test: they reflect your own psychological state...."

Ernie Crist wrote:

A MESSAGE FROM ERNIE CRIST

There appears to be some misunderstanding about the role of the District CAO in regards to this issue. Mrs Adams a District resident in particular, expects the CAO to respond to her demands for removal of paintings from the Municipal Hall depicting partial nudity. Council, however, has mandated the Arts Council to determine criteria for displaying art objects in the Municipal Hall - this includes paintings.

Needless to say, since the Hall is a public place, any individual, including Mrs Adams a District resident has the right to voice his/her concerns to any member of Council, the Manager and/or the Arts Council itself. However, for an individual to voice concerns is one thing, to demand from the Manager unilateral action for removal, especially in the absence of any particular criteria, is quite another. To establish criteria of sorts, however difficult, since we are talking about art, is precisely the purpose of my upcoming motion.

We must keep in mind that artists use art as a tool to convey a message much as cartoonists use cartoons to convey social critique. To deny such a medium is to deny freedom of expression itself.

The point is, did the artist on canvass portray nudity and firearms to promote gratuitous exploitation of female sexuality and violence or did he do so to expose a social blight? Unless those who have criticized the paintings can answer this question, removal of the paintings is, in my opinion unjustified, if not dangerous, especially without providing the


Arts Council with an opportunity to respond.

It would be the same as condemning the anti war movies "All Quiet On The Western Front" or "Full Metal Jacket" for promoting violence. What we do know is that leading psychologists and internationally recognised authorities of the calibre of Noam Chomsky are on record against the serious dangers of gratuitous violence on TV made possible through corporate sponsorship.

We also know that when Councillor Crist in the form of motions suggested action through the UBCM and the FCM, there was not a single voice in support from this community, not from any individual on or off District Council, District Staff, CUPE, nor any of the churches nor from the "Together Against Violence" persons nor for that matter from any of the Community Associations.

My motion requesting to set up a committee to establish guidelines will or should at least come up this coming Monday.

Ernie Crist

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