

# Conversations

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between his political agenda and his art. Obviously, the line is intentionally blurred.

**What is "art?"**

But inevitably, the decision to exhibit his "art" must be based on a qualitative judgment: whether it is indeed "art." That judgment belongs to the DIA. (And when it comes to deciding what's art, curators shouldn't shy away from an artist's demonstrable mastery of his or her chosen medium.)

In essence, the DIA did not censor Bourgeois's work. He was free to create his own interpretations of "shock art," many of which are derivative and hardly original. When the DIA got something they didn't expect, they had a change of heart. And, according to Beal, they still wanted to work with Bourgeois to find a compromise.

Meanwhile, Bourgeois claimed any modification to his exhibit would be censorship. Yet he confessed that he had already prepared an alternative description to the Brazilian nut piece

**■ If Bourgeois was willing to modify his work, why was it "censorship" when the DIA - also concerned with the offensive nature of the piece - simply asked him if there was an alternative description?**

(which used the "n word"). If he was willing to modify his work, why was it "censorship" when the DIA - also concerned with the offensive nature of the piece - simply asked him if there was an alternative description?

The power of Bourgeois's message, that prejudice is oftentimes mindlessly passed down from one generation to the next, dissipated into a discussion of semantics.

Of course, the question that most people who are unaware of the history and relevance of "shock art" are asking is: What, if anything, about Bourgeois's exhibit could be consid-

ered "art?"

Not an easy question. Especially considering the last 15 years of "shock art" and a tradition of provocative art that dates back more than 100 years with the optical painting innovation known as Impressionism. Indeed, the notion of "shock" has a different connotation for each generation.

**Sign of the times**

In the span of a few days, what unfolded at the DIA was the type of controversy that makes good copy for the 24-hour news channel and a hot-button topic for the stream of conversational drivels on talk shows.

Like past controversies involving depictions of homosexuals, strange displays of body fluids and dung-laden paintings, the dispute at the DIA is another example of how our culture has become self-consuming, bizarre and reactionary.

Does what passes today as "shock art" foster a broader debate about art, race, religion, sex and gender? Who's fooling who? Did Jesse Helms' or

Rudolph Giuliani's opposition to public funding of art museums broaden the debate about the role and purpose of contemporary art in a democracy?

Provocation has replaced prudence. Struggles at a museum gain more attention than dealing with social problems of violence, poverty and injustice.

There's no doubt that an art exhibit can evoke a powerful response. The question, however, is whether an art exhibit can be about more than an individual artist's bowel habits or notions of identity.

On the surface, the DIA and Bourgeois became locked in the ongoing First Amendment drama about whose right takes precedence.

Maybe, for a moment, both should have asked what was the point of Bourgeois's exhibit. The point, if there was one, has to do with how we've become so numb by the onslaught of information and images that we can't even find the time to reflect. We simply await the next jolt of controversy. In reactionary times, what makes

curators and artists think that "shock art" is a remedy for our collective attention deficit disorder? "Shock art" is an end in itself. Yet there's a rub: "Shock art" is a reflection of who we are, a society that thrives on one spectacle after another.

Maybe there's a chance to get beyond political correctness and reactionary responses to figure out what's at stake, and what's important. The DIA must become more accessible and relevant to the needs of a highly divergent population of the region.

And perhaps, now more than ever, a serious discussion must ensue about the need for a legitimate contemporary arts museum to enhance the encyclopedic DIA.


But as long as artists become instant media stars and misunderstandings keep artists, curators and museum directors fighting with each other rather than joining together for the sake of the arts, we'll continue to be distracted.

It's time to ask: What lies beyond the 15 minutes of fame?

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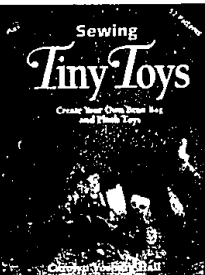
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**WSU BOOK FAIR**  
The Wayne State University Press Council is sponsoring "Noel Night Book Fair" 3-8 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 4.

The book fair will be held at Old main Building, Wayne State campus at the corner of Cass and Warren.

The first annual event will bring together 25 area authors who will autograph copies of their latest books. Authors scheduled to appear include mystery writers William Kienzle and Loren Estleman; editorial cartoonist Draper Hill; historians Arthur Woodford, Philip Mason and Roberts Hughes Wright.

Also participating are antiquarian book dealer James Babcock and aviation historian Philip Handelman. Actress/singer Mary Callaghan-Lynch will perform stories.



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**How-to: Carolyn Vosburg**  
Hall's new book illustrates sewing techniques to help readers create their own bean bags.

Honorary chairs are Frank Angelo, former managing editor of the Detroit Free Press, and Frederick G. Ruffner, Jr., founder of Gale Research and Omnigraphics, publishers of reference books, children's litera-

ture and historic reprints. For information, call (313) 856-8534.

**CREATE YOUR OWN TOYS**  
With the holiday season in mind, Carolyn Vosburg Hall of Bloomfield Hills has released her new book, "Sewing Tiny Toys," a guide to create small toys using common materials such as felt, beads, ribbons, pipe cleaners, and lace.

Hall has also written 12 other how-to craft books. Her recent book is divided in sections featuring different construction techniques, learning to create sewing patterns and translating a drawing into sewing.

"Sewing Tiny Toys" is available at local book stores at amazon.com.

For more information, call (248) 853-7264.

**ANDERSON MOVES TO B'HAM**

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