

Pig farming and art

Earlier this year the National Gallery of Canada purchased a painting by an American artist for \$1.76-million and clearly, there has not been such a display of outrage in Ottawa since an armed tourist shot and killed two blades of grass on the lawn of Parliament Hill last year. Whatever else it is, *Voices of Fire* is big and colorful - an 18' - high canvas of one central red stripe flanked by two bright blue stripes. Like all great abstract art, *Voices of Fire* is misunderstood because it has been mistitled. It's a huge rectangle of three stripes - no people, no voices, no flames, no fire. I believe artist Barnett Newman could have avoided all this controversy if he had just put the correct and obvious title on this piece - Big Flag That Used to Fly Over British Honduras. But of course people would have understood that, thus defeating the purpose of abstract art. Every

William J. Thomas

All The World's A Circus

work of abstract art ever produced could carry the title "*And There's No Freakin' Onions Neither*" - and it would be better understood and appreciated by the masses.

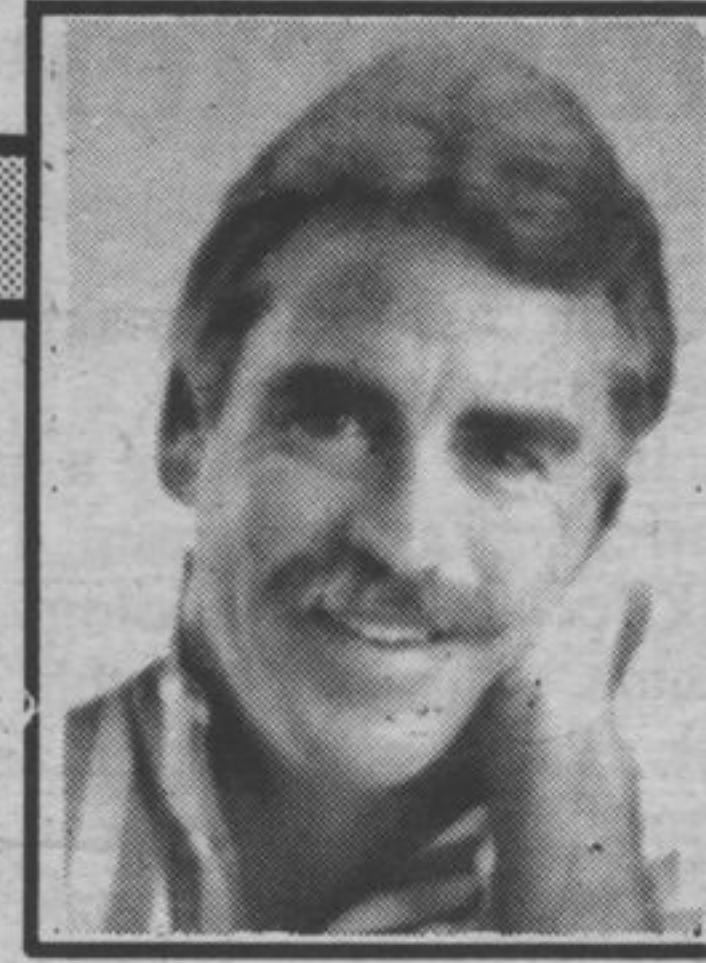
Some people are upset that the National Gallery bought an American work of art rather than a Canadian painting. Remembering the last artwork that grabbed headlines in this country - namely, the human-like being from Vancouver who was going to create a masterpiece by dropping a concrete block on a live pet rat - well it makes me kind of proud to buy American.

The men most bothered by the gallery's purchase is Felix Holtmann, chairman of the powerful House of Commons

Standing Committee on Communication and Culture. Felix Holtmann is a pig farmer from Winnipeg. What, you're no doubt asking yourself, is a pig farmer doing in charge of Canadian culture? This is a very unfair question. What does Benoit Bouchard know about trains? Ask Joe Clark where Lower Volta went or Brian Mulroney to describe what a poor person looks like.

This is why a pig farmer in charge of national culture does not surprise me. What surprises me is that Bryce Mackasey didn't run away with the liberal leadership race and Yolanda Ballard isn't managing the mint.

The most common appraisal uttered by your average person



standing face-to-face with the gigantic *Voices Of Fire* is: "Something my kid could have done." The most common reaction of the guy standing directly behind this person is "You must have one damn tall kid."

The real burr in Felix Holtmann's bib overalls is of course the money. Any time a million or more taxpayers' dollars are squandered and some of it doesn't wind up in a cabinet min-

ister's pocket, they demand a complete investigation by the R.C.M.P. Twelve nuclear submarines at a cost of \$8-billion each - ships that were destined to protect ice in the Arctic ships that we would never see and God willing, never use - this was a good idea. But an expensive painting that everybody could see and appreciate and make fun of - this is heresy.

Mr. Holtmann feels we could buy a lot more paintings than just one for the price of \$1.76-million. Buying on volume is usually a pretty good idea. Just down the road at Minor Brothers Farm Supply for instance, they'll knock off 20 per cent if you buy a minimum of 100 bags of the Pig Starter or Hog Grower brands.

But art is sometimes different. As far as I know, only the black velvet portraits of Elvis can be

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Everybody's on stage

Old Bill Shakes (William Shakespeare to the purists) said it best of all when he penned the immortal lines, "All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely players." in his play "As you Like It".

His 'seven ages of man' (and woman), is still as valid today as in those long-ago Elizabethan times. Well, why not? After all, we never stopped being human, but he caught it all in one beautiful soliloquy, as follows. The bracketed words are mine, as a nod to the rabid feminists among us.

'All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players. They have their exits and their entrances, and one man (woman) in his (her) time plays many parts. At first the infant, mewling and puking (you bet!) in the nurse's (mama or papa's) arms; then the whining school-

Olga Landiak

Life, According to Baba

boy (girl)...creeping like snail unwillingly to school (still too true). And then the lover, sighing like a furnace, with a woeful ballad (or rock song) to his (her) mistress' (boy friend's) eyebrow (or whatever)".

Then, if he (she) is unlucky enough to get involved in one of our many idiocies of war, there would come, "the soldier (soldierette?), full of strange oaths (oh, and how!), and bearded like a pard, (well, I guess that lets the gals out, unless some of them have a hormone problem), and seeking the bubble reputation in the cannon's mouth." Times sure haven't changed, have they?

Next, "The justice (men and women) with fair, round belly

(oh, oh, here comes middle age), and full of wise saws and modern instances." (Well, I don't know so much about the 'wise saws' bit, but 'modern instances'? Oh you bet. Everybody's full of their own 'modern instances' about this 'n that.)

Now, we're into the sixth age with "...spectacles on nose...shrunk shank...and big, manly voice (small, womanly voice) turning again towards childish treble which pipes...and whistles."

Oh, ain't that the truth when here we stand on top of Sunset Hill looking down into the Valley of You-Know-What. The shanks (and everything else!) are shrunk and sagging, there most certainly



are spectacles on the old nose, and the old voice is shrill and demanding that somebody, anybody, pay attention and give a listen as it 'pipes and whistles'.

Old Will could surely have expanded on this sixth section of the seven ages since dear wife Anne (Hathaway, i.e.) was sixty-seven when she died. That certainly made her one of us Goldie-Oldies and able to give him an

earful of all the trials and tribulations of the Big M time. But, being eight years younger and only fifty-three when he finally kicked ye ole bucket, and much too busy with the ole playwriting to even dream of the Big R (retirement), guess Old Will didn't twig to this 'sixth age' as much as he could have.

As for his final lines on the seventh age, "Last scene of all...is second childishness...sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.", well, it doesn't necessarily have to be 'sans everything' you know. Not as long as among those 'sans' is NOT thinking, wondering, and living it up to the best of one's physical and mental capabilities.

I've got an eighth age for Ole Will - the golden one of accumulated experience when, hopefully, we're a whole lot wiser though a little older. Amen!

Geographical racism

Open letter to:
David Pears, Producer
Street Legal
CBC Television

Dear Mr. Pears

My family and I are regular viewers of your program. On the whole, we admire your effort to create a Canadian equivalent of *L.A. Law*. Your series does an admirable job of entertaining, while providing our children with useful role models - showing that women, blacks, native people and other visible minorities can be lawyers, judges, and crown attorneys. At the same time, you are providing Canadians with some free education about the nuances of our Canadian judicial system. My 14 year old daughter is thinking of a career in law, in part because of her weekly viewing of your program. That's the good news.

However, I take great offense, as a resident of northern Ontario, to the episode which aired last Friday, October 12th. I have therefore taken the liberty of writing this open letter to you in my weekly column, in part to find out how many other northerners also



NORTHERN INSIGHTS

by Larry Sanders

took offense to your portrayal of northerners. In the episode one of the principal characters, Olivia Novack, is "exposed" as coming from our home community, Thunder Bay. Until this episode, Olivia's law partners (Chuck, Carrie and Leon) have been led to believe that she grew up as a child in Mississauga. In this episode we are introduced to Olivia's two disreputable brothers, Larry and Sid Novack. They have come to Toronto supposedly to buy out Olivia's share of the family cottage on Lake Superior. After their broken down car is hauled away by Toronto's finest, they con Chuck into loaning them his sports car, and proceed to get arrested for attempting to sell six bear gall bladders, a popular aphrodisiac in the Orient.

Confronting her brothers in jail after the arrest, an outraged Olivia tells them "you make me sick." Sid yells back, "back off! People north of Toronto have to make a living, just like you do." Later, in their trial, the crown attorney, Dillon, tells the judge "wanton slaughter of Canadian wildlife is a crime against all Canadians. The defendants, while not solely responsible for this tragic state of affairs, are nevertheless representative of the problem. I would therefore like to ask the court to impose the maximum penalty as a deterrent." The judge agrees, fines them \$5,000 each and confiscates Chuck's car.

We also learn from the incident that Olivia did not come from a very happy home, to say

the least. She points out to her brothers that "I'm the girl you used to spit at. I'm the one who used to wash your clothes and cook every one of your meals, and I'm the girl who got out." Sid disdainfully spits back "[got out] to this [referring to her plush law office]." Olivia, nearly screaming, says "yes, to this." Sid scoffs and says "this is nothing." Olivia screams back, "this is more than you ever dreamed of."

Reading between the lines, we are led to believe that after Olivia's mother died, she was forced to take over the care of her two brothers, and they may have even abused her. She is now doing everything she can to hide her past, going as far as denying it to her law partners.

Normally, your program goes

out of it's way to rip up racial stereotypes, portraying blacks like Dillon as successful crown attorneys. You even show what would have been considered taboo a few years ago: inter-racial love-making between Dillon and Carrie. Why then do you reinforce an equally distasteful kind of racism, based on where people live?

The hundreds of thousands of Canadians who watch your show had all their misconceptions about northerners reinforced by the characters Larry and Sid Novack. They wear checked shirts, sometimes without sleeves, and Sid, the real evil one, wears a beard. They mock the game laws, attempting to profit at the expense of the natural environment. Another stereotype - assuming that only righteous southerners are defenders of those poor black bears. On top of all that you leave incomplete hints that Olivia's northern lifestyle was horrible - only worth disguising and rejecting.

If the script for this episode had portrayed these peddlers of

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