

# ArtPrize entry offers snapshot of our culture

Of the 1,524 pieces of art being placed on display for the upcoming ArtPrize in Grand Rapids (competition runs from Sept. 18-Oct. 6) four are getting all the comments (and press) already.

One of the pieces had to be moved to avoid causing traffic accidents. Astute readers may either guess or have read about the four lifelike nude sculptures situated in front of DeVos Hall.

What is adding to the interest (for me) and the indignation of some more uptight citizens is the nudes are life-like in two ways: First they are anatomically correct with penises and vaginas and secondly, they reflect the body shapes of average people ... with the flaws, pear-shaped bodies and a lack of model attractiveness.

Reading the comments made to the media, it's difficult to tell which sensitivity is outraged more ... the nudity or the fact the sculptures reflect average humans with the level of attractiveness most of us possess.

"You know this is really one ugly ... entry," and, "The nudity



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NOTHING TO HIDE

doesn't bother me a bit, but that is one ugly sculpture."

But, then there was the anticipated outrage over the nudity "Oh the insanity! Won't someone think of the children?"

Some viewers though, absolutely were thinking of the children "... my son ... and my girl ... (6 and 2) wouldn't think twice about these sculptures, except maybe they would be jealous that they (the sculptures) get to hang out in public without clothes on."

This mom went on to point out "If you teach your kids that bodies are natural you won't have to

shield them from harmless things like this." Is she from Europe or what?

Of course, Europe has nude sculptures everywhere and Americans just have to deal with it when they're over there.

But to bring nude sculpture to Grand Rapids? Is this art or cheap sensationalist exploitation?

I'm not qualified to answer that ... but I will say I believe this is art and the reaction to it is a snapshot of American culture ... which is often what art is about.

As a naturist, when I talk about social nudism, I'm sometimes confronted by people who either believe non-sexual public nudity is immoral or, more often "I would never let anyone see me nude (outside of my spouse)."

"Why not?"

"My body is terrible."

"No it isn't...."

But, far too many of us haven't been able to accept our own bodies ... let alone others. So when we see a nude sculpture, we get uncomfortable and when

we see one that reminds us of us ... it's even worse.

It is the lack of acceptance of our own bodies, not the nudity that is affecting an entire generation (or the greater number thereof) of those children that one viewer was so distressed about.

I gave a talk to the Optimists Club in Battle Creek recently about naturism and mentioned in the 1950s, segregated classes of boys (and I presume girls?) swam nude at Battle Creek Central and other school swimming pools. It was no big deal. Several of the older members of the audience perked right up when I mentioned this ... and confirmed my report. They recalled swimming nude back then and smiled at the memories.

Contrast that with today's inability of schools to get students taking P.E. to take a shower afterward. The problem is so bad there are products on the market students use to camouflage the smell of body odor that comes from working out. They will buy and use those products

rather than take their clothes off and take a shower. Want to talk about insanity?

The sculptures at ArtPrize may shock or make some nervous ... but they may just encourage some people (teens and up) to confront their bodies with a little more tolerance and acceptance. But don't worry about the 2 and 6 year olds ... they're just fine with their bodies and being nude. Seeing this exhibit they may well be jealous those sculptures get to hang out in front of DeVos Hall without clothes on.

Me too.

May they hold that comfort level with their bodies as they grow. There may be hope for body acceptance in the future if we have enough exhibits like this. In the meantime, take your kids to ArtPrize and be open to the art.

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