



By David E. Parvin, A.L.I.

Warning: this article may be considered adult in nature.
Reader discretion advised.

Recently there was an entry on the Forums page of the Association of Lifecasters International web site encouraging members to view a “terrific” life casting and providing a link. Always wanting to see anything really terrific, I clicked on the link. What popped up was a “wall” of 84 life casts of breasts, vulvas, and penises which ranged from flaccid to erect. It is titled “The Spice of Life” though alternative names are so tempting. I had written two *Sculpture Journal* articles in the past, the latest just last month, expressing my non appreciation **for** and poking fun **at** nonsensical art. Signed urinals, blank canvases, vacuum cleaners enclosed clear plastic, etc. are so absurd that they are easy targets for deserved criticism. Another genre of nonsense is the “looks like my seven year old grand child could have done it” category. I really don’t care if people want to produce such junk; I encourage expression at whatever level a person is capable. But I am surprised that any suckers can be found to acquire it, especially if the price is greater than the cost of materials. But a wall of genitalia is different. The parts are realistic, recognizable, and at least took some, albeit not particularly advanced, skill to construct. But I still don’t like it.

Interestingly, this same “Wall of Wieners, etc.” had been discussed in the A.L.I. Forum several months previously. Ed McCormick explained that it had been presented for display in the Gallery on the association’s web site. While Ed had never refused to show anything submitted by any member, he felt uneasy about this particular piece and asked for commits from the membership. There were nine replies against censorship and for accepting “Vistas of Vulvas, etc.” and only one against. In fact, one of the “Yeas” was mine even though I had not seen “Bunches of Breasts, etc.” I explained that censorship is a slippery slope to be avoided and reminding the membership that Hitler started out burning dirty books, then was burning all books, and before he was finished, was burning people. Ed agreed to accept “Genitalia Galore” into the Gallery. However, as I recall, the application was withdrawn and the issue disappeared until its recent reappearance.

If one criticizes something which happens to have a sexual aspect, some will be quick to accuse that person of being a prude. A similar thing happens to politicians who express positions concerning controversial issues.

Immediately, the politicians may be accused of being racists, religious zealots, homophiles, etc. Regardless of what I may sound like up to this point, I’m not a prude nor even a puritan (or a racist, etc.); I do not believe that our bodies and their functions are evil. I have been a serious sculptor of the human form, mostly nude, for over thirty years and a life caster for twenty. I have seen more body parts than just about anyone outside of the medical profession. Speaking of which, I flew a medical helicopter for over ten years and assisted the doctors and nurses in the emergency rooms when needed, e.g. to help restrain some out of control and usually without clothes patient while the same doctors and nurses did things to the patients which, while necessary, were not pleasant. In addition, I am a card caring member of the two major nudists organizations, The Naturists Society and The American Association for Nude Recreation. So what bothers me about a “Pile of Privy Parts?” I’ll explain.

Remember, we are not suppose to be judgmental about art. “Oh, all art is equal, there is no good nor bad, and we must accept it all because there is a place for everything.” Whenever I hear someone say something like that, I just want to slap some sense into him or her. Something I would never do, of course, since I am far too accepting of others’ opinions. But while art is primarily subjective, there is some objectivity and it should be O.K. and we should even be encouraged to say that a particular piece is just bad art. I think that “Two Kinds of Outies and an Innie Repeated 84 Times” is just bad art.

Art should invoke emotion; the greater the art, the greater the emotion. This is true of not just sculpture and painting but all the arts including writing, music, theater, dance, etc. At the end of most movies, I ask whomever I’m with what he/she thought. The answer usually is that it was, “O.K.” But sometimes, I don’t even need to ask, we just linger in our seats and say, “Wow!” Movies that can do that are good maybe even terrific art. The problem is that while most artists strive for emotion, some don’t realize that all emotions are not equal and, in my opinion, take the cheap shot, the easy one. If all one wants is to get one’s name out there, to become a celebrity, all one needs is publicity. The easiest way to get publicity is to do something outrageous, e.g. Paris Hilton. From the book *Realism in Revolution*, pages 55 and 56, Kirk Richards laments, “Beauty and ugliness were terms that did not need to be dealt with in art. Beauty was out: SHOCK, SHOCK FACTOR was in.”

Thinking back over the years, the pieces of art that have gotten the most publicity have been the ones with the most shock value. I will not mention the perpetrators’ names (I can’t bring myself to call them artists) because I don’t want to promote them. But remember the crucifix submerged in urine? How about the Virgin Mary in elephant dung? There were the table settings with vulvas on the dinner plates. Even though I would like to, I can not forget the photograph of a guy with his hand and half of a forearm shoved up someone’s rectum. Another high point in art history occurred when another guy canned his own excrement. It has been said that there is no such thing as bad publicity unless it concerns tiny children or small furry animals in a negative way. Or put to me in another way at a motion picture convention in Pasadena, CA, “Two things you do not want to be caught in bed with are a dead girl or a live boy.”

Sadly there seems to be some truth here since people flocked (as in sheep) to see the above mentioned stuff.

Inevitably, I have noticed, shock value is inversely proportional to the skill of the artist. The more marginally qualified the artist, the more likely he/she is to rely on shock. Competent artists can communicate with their skills. Consider Bob Newhart, a great comedian who never used the gutter language that so many less talented have resorted to. It takes very little skill to be shocking.

The supposed purpose of the “Barricade of Body Parts” is to show our differences and our similarities. What a crock! I have no doubt that penises, vulvas, and breasts were used instead of, say, faces for only one reason, for shock. There has been no shortage of critics who have attempted to demonstrate the sophistication that we ignoramuses don’t possess with long explanations about the relevance of nonsense art in “art speak,” better known as meaningless gibberish. Remember that the quality of art is inversely proportional to the length of the explanation. In this case be prepared for long winded speeches. Ideally, one should become well known for the quality of one’s work and not for its outrageousness. As Robert Frost said:
“Some have relied on what they knew,
Others on being simply true.
What worked for them might work for you.”
But then old Robert seems to offer some hope to those who have limited abilities and may need to rely on the cheap shot, “Better to go down dignified,
With boughten friendship at your side
Than none at all. Provide, provide!”

I am not saying that “Barrier of the Bare” is immoral, sinful, or even disgusting. I revere the human body and marvel at its functions. I just think our differences and similarities could have been portrayed better. Does it have any use? Well, as Ed McCormick pointed out, it makes a really unusual climbing wall with some great hand holds. But unlike traditional climbing walls, in this case, the harder the holds, the easier the grip.

If you have questions or a trick that you’re willing to share, please contact me at 303-321-1074 or parvinstudio@comcast.net. Even if you do email me, please include your phone number because I would rather talk than type. I promise to give credit for any new idea that I find useful.
