

Nude art pieces pulled from exhibit

Work was shown at government site

By Kathleen Wilson

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Three nudes have been pulled from an art exhibit celebrating passion after officials determined the pieces were too racy for a gallery in a government building in Ventura.

The Ventura County Arts Council rejected "Euterpe," a painting showing a nude woman and a fully clothed man, before the 40-piece exhibit went up Feb. 7 in the county government's Hall of Administration. But the nonprofit group decided to see whether the public would fuss over a few other pieces of nude art in the building where people go to pay their taxes, record deeds and get married.

An undisclosed number of complaints started coming in within a couple of hours over two of the pieces, so they were pulled within days, said officials for the council, which supervises the exhibits.

In an interview Thursday, Arts Council President Monica Nolan said callers were particularly incensed over "Luscious," a sculpture of a woman's buttocks in Italian

marble. Including its pedestal, the sculpture stood 6 feet tall. They also complained about "Ambrosia," a tile mosaic showing a Roman nymph's breasts.

Nolan said this is not a case of censorship but of whether the art was appropriate for this particular space. Under a statement of the public gallery's purpose, the art placed there must be "suitably appropriate" for the space to which 3,000 people come daily.

"People are coming here not to see art, they are coming here to work and do business," Nolan said. "This is a public space. Because it's a public space, we have to be aware of the public's attitude."

Still remaining is a black-and-white photograph of a nude woman, but her form is clouded. Also remaining is another photograph that shows a partially clad woman.

The council invited the artists whose works were pulled to submit substitutes.

Paul Zanotti, who made the mosaic, submitted another piece. But G. Ramon Byrne, who made the buttocks sculpture, said that would have been meaningless.

He said the purpose of the exhibit is to showcase pieces being auctioned at "A Night of Passion," a fundraiser on March 29 for the Ventura Music Festival. This year's festival, which runs from April 30 to mid-May, has been named "Appassionata!" an Italian word for passion.

"For me to substitute a piece that wouldn't be part of the show and has nothing to do with it made no sense to me," Byrne said Thursday.

Byrne, though, said he could understand why county officials would not want to anger citizens going to the government center to conduct business.

"Apparently that's not an appropriate site for art without having some sort of censorship," he said. "It's the Music Festival's responsibility to find a venue that absolutely embraces the artist as opposed to filling a slot."

Cheryl Heitmann, executive director of the festival, said whoever is in charge of a venue has the right to decide whether artwork is appropriate.

The rest of the exhibit will remain at the government center until March 12.

— On the Net:

http://www.vcmfa.org/special_events.html