

MY NAME IS ART

A short play

by

Peter Snoad

Peter Snoad
50 Dunster Road #2
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
U.S.A.
(617) 522-4219
peter@petersnoad.com

© Peter Snoad 2006



Member
All rights & privileges.

MY NAME IS ART

CHARACTERS

GLORIA, a plumber, late 20's

ANTHONY, an architect, late 30's, early 40's

ART, an artist, late 20's

TIME

The present

PLACE

A modern art museum

MY NAME IS ART

A bare stage. GLORIA and ANTHONY stand facing the audience. GLORIA wears overalls, plaid shirt, workboots; perhaps a baseball cap. She has a brochure in her hand. ANTHONY wears a stylish suit. They are looking at a massive installation in a modern art museum. A long pause.

GLORIA

My daughter could have done that.

(Beat)

She's five.

(Pause)

Fucking crap.

(Beat)

What do you think?

ANTHONY

Excuse me?

GLORIA

What do you think of it?

ANTHONY

It's very interesting.

GLORIA

Interesting? Why?

ANTHONY

Why?

GLORIA

What's interesting about it?

ANTHONY

Well, I...it's personal, I guess.

GLORIA

I mean, what is interesting about hundreds of white Styrofoam boxes all piled on top of each other?

ANTHONY

It's more than that.

GLORIA

Oh yeah?

ANTHONY

Well, obviously.

GLORIA

Not to me. What's obvious to me is that Geraldine whatever-her-name-is—

(Starts to consult the brochure)

ANTHONY

Puffington-Smith.

GLORIA

Has been paid a ton of money to pile up a bunch of stupid boxes and call it "art".

ANTHONY

It's more than just a bunch of boxes.

GLORIA

It's a bunch of boxes!

ANTHONY

It's how they're arranged.

GLORIA

Ah, of course, silly me. It's a statement. A metaphor.

ANTHONY

That's right.

GLORIA

About what?

ANTHONY

Well, that's up to you.

GLORIA

Me? Why me? She's the artist. Geraldine Puffington-Smith. It's her statement.

ANTHONY

And you can interpret it any way you want. However it resonates with you.

GLORIA

(Slightly mocking tone)

Resonates?

ANTHONY

Look, you'll have to excuse me, I have an appointment—

He starts to leave.

GLORIA

No, no, I'm sorry, okay? I didn't mean to be rude. I want to understand this, I do. Really.

(Suddenly, with excitement)

You're an artist!

ANTHONY

No, no—

GLORIA

You are, you're an artist.

ANTHONY

Architect.

GLORIA

But an artist, too, right? I knew it, I knew it!

ANTHONY

I don't really... I dabble.

GLORIA

In what? What do you do?

ANTHONY

Oh, some free-form sculpture—

GLORIA

Sculpture? Really? Would I have seen any of your work?

ANTHONY

Oh no, no, no I just fool around—nothing like this. This is just so...so... irreverently metaphysical. So luminous. So coherent.

GLORIA

A bunch of white plastic boxes?

ANTHONY

Styrofoam.

GLORIA

Oh I'm sorry, Styrofoam.

ANTHONY

But that's it, you see, the choice of material. Styrofoam is non-biodegradable, it's here forever, until the end of time, if there is an end to time. In other words, how callous and short-sighted can we be in our relationship with the Earth, and by extension, with each other? And the boxes, they have a uniform size and shape—we're reproducing the same stupidity over and over and over again, intellectual pygmies that we are. And yet—and yet—if we re-arrange the boxes in different configurations, we convince ourselves, we create the grand self-perpetuating illusion, that we're actually being creative. Which is, of course, the devastating irony of the whole piece.

(Beat.)

GLORIA

Huh.

(Slight pause. She surveys the installation again)

Nah, it's just boxes.

ANTHONY

Well, it's all in the eye of the beholder.

GLORIA

Whatever. It's all about money anyway.

ANTHONY

Not in this case. I think, in this case, it's about art.

GLORIA

And who pays for this art?

ANTHONY

I'm not sure that's relevant—

GLORIA

I do. I pay.

ANTHONY

Actually, this exhibit has corporate sponsors—

GLORIA

My taxes. Me. I fund this museum. And I look at this and I ask myself: Why should I sweat my guts out week in and week out to pay Geraldine Puffington-Smith a small fortune to build something that my Crystal could have put together for nothing in half the time and better? Why should I do that?

ANTHONY

The arts enrich our lives.

GLORIA

Styrofoam boxes do not enrich my life.

ANTHONY

Well, maybe this isn't exactly to your taste, but the reality is... You know, it doesn't matter, it really doesn't.

GLORIA

No, no, what? What?

ANTHONY

Well. Without some government subsidy, this museum probably wouldn't exist. Neither would theatre or dance or the symphony—

GLORIA

So you don't mind spending your money on crap?

ANTHONY

It's not crap.

GLORIA

It's crap!

ANTHONY

You're entitled to your opinion, of course.

GLORIA

You're damn right I am. Freedom of expression.

ANTHONY

Exactly. Which is why you should support this, even if you don't like it.

GLORIA

But it's crap.

ANTHONY

But the artist should have the right to create it, to display it. Don't you think?

GLORIA

If I have the right to tear it apart. What's your point?

ANTHONY

My point is that public support—our taxes—helps to guarantee artistic freedom.

GLORIA

So when we invest in artists, we invest in...freedom.

ANTHONY

Yes.

GLORIA

And democracy.

ANTHONY

Exactly.

GLORIA

Yeah. Yeah! Man, you are smart. You are very smart, you know that?

ANTHONY

It's hardly original.

GLORIA

No, but I've never thought of it like that. It's great. It really...resonates.

They laugh. ART enters. He is naked except for a thong and knee-high leather boots. He has an anarcho-punk look (e.g. body piercings, purple Mohican hair etc.) Printed on his chest, in black marker and in big letters, is the word "ART". ART speaks with a faux Cockney accent and the pseudo-intellectual gravity of the British rockers in the movie "This is Spinal Tap". He stands alongside GLORIA and ANTHONY and

casts a critical eye over the boxes
installation.

GLORIA

(To ANTHONY, confidentially, indicating ART)
Talking of freedom of expression.

ANTHONY

Yes.

(Beat.)

GLORIA

(To ART)
Can I ask you a question?

ART

Sure.

GLORIA

(Indicating the word on his chest)
Are you, like, representing Art?

ART

I am Art.

GLORIA

Literally?

ART

It's my name.

GLORIA

Short for Arthur?

ART

No, just Art. My parents thought of me as a work of art. Hence the name.

GLORIA

Cool.

ART

Would you like to make a donation?

GLORIA

A donation?

ART

To my touring exhibit.

GLORIA

What exhibit?

ART

This.

GLORIA

You're the exhibit?

ART

It's multi-dimensional. This is the front, see, and—

(He turns round and his back becomes visible to the audience. On it, in black marker, is written the word "FUCKS")
—this is the back.

GLORIA

That's great, oh that is fucking brilliant!

(Turning to ANTHONY)
Don't you think? Don't you love it?

ANTHONY

No, I don't, to be honest.

GLORIA

(Indicating the boxes)
It's better than that.

ANTHONY

It's quite different.

GLORIA

That—

(Indicating the boxes)
—is a wet fart compared to this. This—
(Indicating ART)

—now this really resonates. This is powerful. This is pungent. It's—what can I say?—it's, it's, it's....provocative.

ANTHONY

Provocative? How?

ART

(To ANTHONY)

You obviously don't have much an eye for the avant-garde.

ANTHONY

I don't mean to be rude, but what is avant-garde about a naked man panhandling in a museum?

ART

I am a specimen of post-modern, post-industrial humanity in the final century of Homo Sapiens on Earth. I am the existential organic truth. Unvarnished, unabridged, uncensored, unmediated. I am Art. And I fuck.

GLORIA

Who?

ART

Why, you want to?

GLORIA

I like girls.

ART

(To ANTHONY)

What about you?

ANTHONY

I like girls, too. The point is—

ART

The point is that you may not appreciate my art, or my ass for that matter, but the Guggenheim does.

ANTHONY

The Guggenheim? In New York?

ART

It was still there a month ago.

ANTHONY

You've had this...exhibit...in the Guggenheim?

ART

And the Corcoran, and the ICA in Boston. The Guggi wants me back. But first I've got MOCA in L.A. and a couple of other West Coast gigs...well, if I can raise the money. Touring something like this is fucking expensive.

ART (CONT.)

And I don't get grants, stuff like that, it's all strictly, you know, self-financing, what people give me.

GLORIA

I'll give you ten bucks.

ART

Thanks.

GLORIA

I love what you're doing. God.

ART

Yeah, you just gotta go for it, right?

GLORIA

(Pulling out her wallet)

Yeah. Hey, what the fuck, here's twenty.

ART

Oh, brilliant. Cheers.

GLORIA

(Starts to hand over the money, but then holds back)

No, no, you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to give you fifty bucks if this gentleman here—I'm sorry, I didn't get your name—

ANTHONY

Anthony.

GLORIA

If Anthony will match it.

ANTHONY

I'm not giving him fifty dollars.

GLORIA

Why not?

ANTHONY

Because this isn't art!

GLORIA

Eye of the beholder.

ANTHONY

Okay, it's bad art.

GLORIA

So?

ANTHONY

I don't support bad art.

GLORIA

Oh, so you are an elitist. All that stuff you said just now—about investing in artists and democracy—that was all crap?

ANTHONY

No—

GLORIA

Anthony, here is a chance to put your money where your mouth is. A dedicated artist taking risks. Protecting *our* freedom of expression. Putting *his* life and *his* health on the line for art. That isn't worth fifty bucks to you?

ANTHONY

I'll give you twenty.

GLORIA

That's it? That's how much freedom and democracy is worth to you? Twenty dollars?

ANTHONY

ALL RIGHT! Fine. Here.

(He hands fifty dollars to ART)

GLORIA

And here's mine.

(She gives ART another fifty)

ANTHONY

(To ART)

Good luck.

He exits hastily.

ART

(Calling to the departing ANTHONY)

Yeah, you too, man.

GLORIA

(Taking back all the money)

Talk about blood from a stone.

ART

(In his normal American voice)

Yeah, but you had his number, you always do.

GLORIA

(Starting to head for the opposite exit)

I need a latte.

ART

That's two hundred so far today.

GLORIA

And we've still got the after-work crowd.

ART

Art fucks, man.

They exit.

END OF PLAY