



MICHAEL CRISP/Emerald

This piece of artwork does fall under the Collier House's guidelines for 'artwork that [is] compatible for serving people food and as a backdrop for wedding pictures,' according to Joan MacDonald.

Art: Collier has no-nudes policy

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says. "I wouldn't have taken part in [the show] if I would have known about [the policy]."

The paintings in question display the female body in various ways. "Goddess in Bird Mask #1" shows a woman's naked torso; "Baba at the Beach" depicts a woman's whole body. MacDonald says this is enough to be excluded from the Collier House, given its mission.

"We are not an art gallery," she says. "The artwork that's here has to be compatible for serving people food and as a backdrop for wedding pictures. We can't have potential customers walk in, see the art and walk out."

The no-nudes policy, in its current blanket format, has been in place for about five years, she says. Similar policies have existed for "at least" 10 years and can extend to some political works, she says.

"Our purpose is not to educate or provoke," she says. "There's too many sensibilities [among our customers]."

One other figure plays a key role in the controversy. Jerry Ross is the director of New Zone, the group of community artists whose work made up the show. MacDonald says Ross, a long-time exhibitor at the house, had previous knowledge of the policy and should have told the artists.

"Jerry and I have worked together for years," she says. "He understood we don't do nudes."

Ross says if he was told of the policy, he doesn't remember it. His only recollection, he says, is of a similar incident about a year ago when some photographs depicting nudity were taken down at the house.

"I thought it was an isolated in-

"I think it would be nicer to be known as a cultural impresario than a censor."

Chris Surbaugh
Censored artist

cident," he says. "I never knew it was codified into an official policy. Otherwise, I would have warned everybody."

Surbaugh says he wouldn't have an objection if he had been notified about the policy before the installation; however, he and Ross both say it was MacDonald's job to make that clear.

"There was no printed guideline or anything written down for us," Surbaugh says. "She should have contacted everybody or called Jerry."

Regardless of how the policy was communicated, the controversy brings up a larger issue.

Ross and Surbaugh both think the Collier House, as part of a public university, shouldn't judge art by such standards. MacDonald says she has a different mission.

"My job at the University is to serve food and run a banquet facility," she says. "I show art because I like art and am sympathetic to artists."

Surbaugh says he understands the Collier House's purpose, but displaying art, even provocative art, would only enhance its marketability, he says.

"I think it would be nicer to be known as a cultural impresario than as a censor," he says. "The place is really a gem, but it can be better."

MacDonald, however, stands by her duty as manager of the house — a restaurant and banquet facility, she says, and only that.

"We're not the University art museum or gallery in the EMU," she says. "The University wouldn't notice or care if we stopped showing art today."



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People gather around to discuss a piece of art at the Collier House.

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