



Photo by Larry Fortner

Tom DiSalvo with his controversial painting

Painting booted from show because of explicit detail

By LARRY FORTNER
News Staff Writer

Salome is no stranger to trouble. In the first century A.D. she caused John the Baptist to lose his head. In the 20th century A.D. she's causing headaches in Boca Raton.

Salome, in this case is the title of a work entered by Tom DiSalvo in a water color exhibition at the Boca Raton Center for the Arts.

DiSalvo's painting was determined by judge Millard Wells to be good

enough to be hung in the gallery — 24 of the 79 entries were not — but Salome did not win one of the \$200 merit awards or an honorable mention ribbon.

When the gallery was opened for a two-hour reception Sunday evening for members and guests only, DiSalvo's Salome was on the wall in its appointed place.

When the gallery closed Monday evening, Salome was gone. Banished to a corner of the executive director's office, her face to the wall.

During the reception, a member of the center's board of directors noticed in the painting a sexually explicit detail: abstract representation of King Herod holding his erect penis — and Salome was on her way out.

Monday, four members of the 14-member board met to determine Salome's fate. They found the explicit detail to be in poor taste and had the painting removed from the gallery.

Tuesday Maria Lawton, executive director of the center, called artist DiSalvo to tell him his painting had been taken down but that his \$10 entry fee, usually non-refundable, would be

returned as a show of good faith and of no hard feelings.

"We just wanted to encourage him to show again," said Mrs. Lawton. "His work has been exhibited here before and we want him to come back."

DiSalvo refused the refund but said he would enter paintings in future exhibitions.

Not that he agrees with the decision. "I very much disagree with their decision that this is pornographic," said the 30-year-old self-taught artist who holds a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Chicago. "I think the erotic content plays a very important part in the situation and the ideas being expressed in the painting."

"I don't feel it should have been taken down — and that people should know about this."

"Also, I feel there's a question of legality here. Wells judged this show and once he judged this painting it should have stayed up."

See SALOME, Page 3A

Salome

From Page 1A

There Mrs. Lawton disagrees, saying, "Any gallery, public or private, has the last word. The gallery has the right to take down a painting if it chooses to."

"We do not object to nudity. We're an art gallery, after all, but the detail in that painting was in poor taste."

Meanwhile, the judge of the show has returned to his gallery in the Keys.

"I just didn't see it," Wells said Tuesday by telephone while discussing the erotic-pornographic-whatever it was detail in the painting.

"I'm sorry I missed it. When you're judging a show

with so many entries, you look at each painting and to on general, wide-range impact. Only if you're really interested do you get a lot closer to check the details."

"I guess this one slipped by me."

That Salome, she's trouble.

Erotic content not key

To the Editor:

In your Jan. 7 article on the expulsion of my painting from the watercolor exhibition I am quoted as follows: "I think the erotic content plays a very important part in the situation and the ideas being expressed in the painting." The erotic content is important, but it is not the key to the meaning of the painting, whose central theme is the abuse of power for personal gratification which has always been the hallmark of the tyrant.

Herod was so pleased with Salome's dance that he rashly promised her even half his kingdom as a reward. The fact that he sacrificed the life of a just man to fulfill this promise stamps him as a weak tyrant who set his personal pleasure above the welfare of his kingdom. John the Baptist was not only a holy man, he also had a large following, and his execution, therefore, was not without political risk. This abuse of power is represented in my painting by a visual metaphor for self-gratification: masturbation. This act is sometimes referred to as self-abuse, and is particularly apt to express Herod's abuse of

power, for the setting of this abuse is a situation of an unquestionably erotic character.

It is no cause for wonder that a myopic judge who "just didn't see the detail" should also have missed its significance.

Your article further states that only four out of 14 members of the Board of Directors of the Boca Raton Center for the Arts voted to expel my painting. I believe your readers will agree that this is at best a doubtful quorum and leaves the legality of the expulsion in question. Were the other 10 members consulted? Is this an attempt on the part of a few to decide and dictate what shall and what shall not be seen by the many?

I respectfully request that the board reconsider its decision, or better, that it make a legal decision either to reject the painting or to allow it to hang for the balance of the exhibition.

Tom Di Salvo,
525 NW 53rd St.