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‘The Wood Problem’ explores the tension between Grant Wood and the University of Io

Posted on [Nov 9, 2017](#) by [Rob Cline](#)



The Wood Problem

Cedar Rapids Museum of Art — Thursday, Nov. 9 at 6 p.m.



An earlier reading of the play at American Gothic House Center in Eldon, Iowa; playwright Scott Bradley is far right. — photo by Maura Pilcher

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As a member of the Iowa Playwrights Workshop, I took a course in creating docudrama, which is a new form for me. I knew, as an

Iowa native, I wanted to focus on an historic regional event that resonated with larger, national themes. I was reading Grant Wood's recent biography by R. Tripp Evans and came upon his mention of Wood's conflict with faculty at the University of Iowa. This intrigued me and led me to pursue the research of Professor Joni Kinsey in the School of Art, who has been a tremendous resource.

I was most struck with Wood's meteoric path from local eccentric painter to globally recognized savior of American art to embarrassing footnote in art history, and all within a 10-year span. The story illuminates the role of the artist in a time of social upheaval and crisis, as well as America's shifting national consciousness through economic depression and global war.

What has surprised you most during the research and writing of the piece?

I've been shocked at the vehemence with which many critics and historians attacked Wood, both during his lifetime and following, particularly in the halls of academia. And many of these same critics are the very voices that championed his work only ten years before.

It shouldn't surprise me, but even within the art world, I was startled at the homophobia and antisemitism openly expressed in correspondence between colleagues at the time. The campaign by University of Iowa art faculty to oust Wood from his post used Wood's highly guarded sexuality and his professional affiliation with Jewish colleagues to disgrace him.

I began this project with a passing appreciation for Wood's work, more interested in how national forces responded to it. I did not expect to become such a fan. His blending of high- and low-art influences, his embrace of commercial practices and illustrative tools, his meticulous formalism that winks with irony and even his savvy with self-promotion, all decried by the 1940 art world, will later become the hallmarks of Pop Art and pave the way for Warhol's arrival.

How soon will the script be ready for a fully staged

The University of Iowa archives are missing some vital documentation on Wood's feud within the art department. It is suggested that those documents were sealed in a time capsule in the old art building's cornerstone. I'm hopeful that the University will unseal the capsule soon so that the full story can be told. It could reveal important details about that time in our history as artists, as Iowans, and as Americans.



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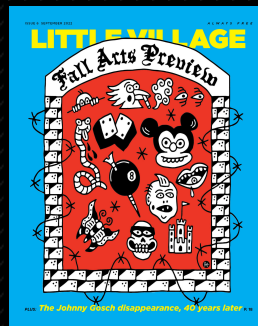
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