

*The History of Art Criticism*

--a one-act by Daniel Curzon

CHARACTERS: (1) A versatile male or female who can play different types of passersby with just an accessory or two for each one: a scarf, a cap, a hat, glasses, moustache, etc., anything that can be added or subtracted by an actor quickly. No lengthy costume changes!

SETTING: A STREET

(There is a fairly large chalk drawing on the sidewalk, facing upside down so that the audience cannot tell what the drawing is of.)

(PASSERSBY #1 enters, spies the chalk drawing, goes to it, looks at it on the sidewalk.)

PASSERBY #1: I know what that is. Oh, it looks just like it! Wow! Impressive. (Exits.)

(The actor re-enters as PASSERBY #2.)

PASSERBY #2: (Sees the chalk drawing, goes to it.) What the hell is that?! Goddamn graffiti! (Thinks about rubbing out the drawing, then reconsiders, waves a dismissive hand at it, and leaves.) Goddamn bastards!

(The actor re-enters as PASSERBY #3.)

PASSERBY #3: (Sees the chalk drawing, goes to it.) (Laughs heartily.) Oh, my god, that's funny! (Starts to leave, stops, returns, re-examines the drawing, chuckles, begins to leave.) I've got to tell Terry about this. (Exits laughing.)

(The actor re-enters as PASSERBY #4.)

PASSERBY #4: (Sees the drawing, approaches it, is disgusted.) Oh, that's gross! What the hell!?! (Leaves, then returns for a second look.) Good grief! (Looks at the drawing yet again.) Somebody ought to report this to the authorities! (Exits.)

(The actor re-enters as PASSERBY #5.)

PASSERBY #5: (Sees the drawing, from afar, is shocked.) Yes, that's got to be removed. Pronto! (Exits.) Disgusting pornography!

(The actor re-enters as PASSERBY #6.)

PASSERBY #6: (hurrying in) Where's the dirty picture? (Can't find it.) (insistently) Where is it?! (Finds the drawing on the sidewalk.) Yum, that's nasty. (Starts to 'touch' his or her body sexually.) Fabulous!

(A noise off, startling PASSERBY #6.)

(PASSERBY #6 hurries off, afraid of being caught.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #7.)

PASSERBY #7: (Sees the drawing) Children need to be protected from stuff like this! I shall get a bucket and mop! (Hurries off.) If they won't see it, they won't do it!

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #8.)

PASSERBY #8: (Enters as a five-year-old child, sees the drawing and skips all over it, in its own unaware kiddy world. Exits skipping.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #9.)

PASSERBY #9: (Sees the drawing, shakes fist at it.) I won't stand for this! It is the end of civilization as we know it! Even children are being exposed to it! (Races off.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #10.)

PASSERBY #10: (Sees the drawing, examines it.) I don't get it. What's it mean? I don't know nobody who looks like that! (Wanders off.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #11.)

PASSERBY #11: (Sees the drawing.) Not only is it not obscene, it is the finest example of Babylonian-Greco-Etruscan-Medieval-Flemish-Abstract Expressionistic Pre-Raphaelite-Indigenous Primitive art I have ever seen! And I know art!(Exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #12.)

PASSERBY #12: (Sees the drawing, examines it, pompously with "authentic" pronunciations of the names) To the expert eye, it is a synthesis of superb chalk technique and yet with the painterly self-awareness of an early *Velázquez*, to say nothing of the *chiaroscuro* reminiscent of *Ingres* – in this corner here. (Looks self-important, leaves.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #13.)

PASSERBY #13: (Sees the drawing but does not stop, just keeps looking back at it as the actor moves across the stage.) Notice how the eyes follow you as you move past it. (Shivers. Exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #14.)

PASSERBY #14: (Sees the drawing, checks it out.) I believe that it is an artistic commentary on prostate enlargement in the adult male. Note the bulge in the background there. (Points.) Yes, yes, yes. Obviously a comment on the woeful medical neglect of the elderly in contemporary urban society. (Exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #15.)

PASSERBY #15: (Sees the drawing.) At last! The desperate cry of the oppressed people of the world, given embodiment by an artist of the first rank, but one who is nameless, as befits this tribute to the anonymous, but glorious, common man and woman in their cry for even a crumb of attention! (Exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #16.)

PASSERBY #16: (Goes to the drawing.) What elitist crap!

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #17.)

PASSERBY #17: (Sees the drawing.) Hopelessly racist! (Exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #18.)

PASSERBY #18: (Looks at the drawing) Yes, at last an example of art about women of color! (Checks it carefully, then slowly leaves.) (Returns and examines it even more closely.) But is it *positive*? Hmm. (Suspicious but slowly exits.)

(Re-enters as PASSERBY #19.)

PASSERBY #19: (Sees the drawing, dismissively) I can draw better than that! (Moves on.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #20.)

PASSERBY #20: (Goes to the drawing, mulls it over.) Not bad. I wouldn't have used chalk, though. (Leaves.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #21.)

PASSERBY #21: (Sees the drawing, begins to weep.) Oh, it's so sad! . . . So, so sad. (Weeping more, moves away.) Oh!! Oh!!

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #22.)

PASSERBY #22: (Sees the drawing, examines it, then a big yawn. Smacks lips in a tired way and leaves.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #23.)

PASSERBY #23: (walks past the drawing, then notices it, returns, checks it out carefully) (then thrilled) This chalk drawing on this street corner has absolutely changed my life forever! (Again is thrilled, then leaves slowly, looking back at the art work.) I am – how shall I say this? – thrilled!

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #24.)

PASSERBY #24 (Enters very fast, on an errand, does not notice the drawing at all. Exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #25.)

PASSERBY #25: (Enters stealthily, with an ink marker, looks around, then begins to vandalize the chalk drawing. It can be mimed without using real ink.) There! You a-holes! Take that! (Vandalizes it some more, laughs nastily, and exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #26)

PASSERBY #26: (enters expectantly) Where's that drawing I've heard so much about? (Sees it, wrinkles nose.) Is that it? That?! You're kidding! . . . *That?!* (Leaves unhappy, disappointed.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #27.)

PASSERBY #27: (enters with a guide book) It must be around here somewhere, according to this. (Indicates the guide book.) I don't see it, however. (Looks for it, can't find it.) Maybe it's that other corner we passed? (Looks some more, but can't find the chalk drawing. Exits.)

(Re-enter actor as PASSERBY #28.)

PASSERBY #28: (Enters normally but without seeing the chalk drawing, walks past it, on some other errand.) Didn't there used to be something important near here? (Shrugs, exits.)

(There is a pause before the final PASSERBY (#29) enters.)

PASSERBY #29: (Enters walks across the chalk drawing without even noticing it in any way.)

(Another pause after PASSERBY #29 is gone.)

(Pin spotlight on the chalk drawing, then slow fade.)

BLACKOUT