

# Yasmina Reza's 'ART' examines value of Modern Art and bonds of friendship



## Stage Page

By Shari Barrett

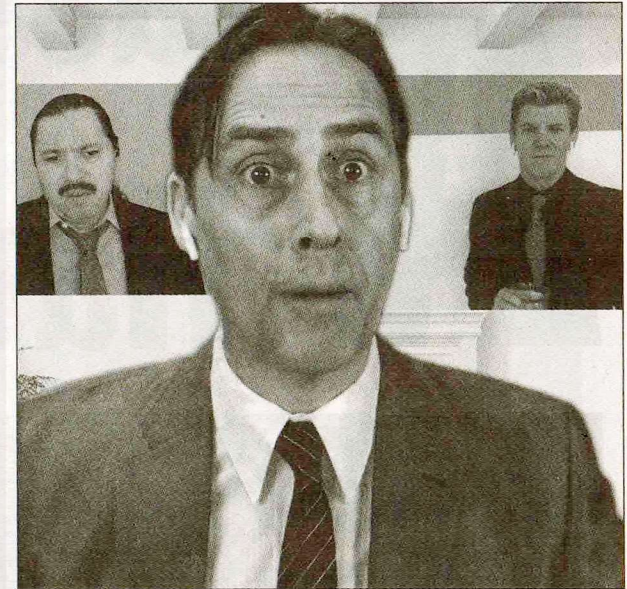


Photo by Mike Bradecich  
Yuan (Brian Stanton, center) finds himself caught between his friends Marc (Michael Uribes, left) and Serge (Brent Schindele) when their opposing opinions on modern art and family challenge his own.

certainly laughs galore, underneath the characters' wit and self-deprecation are basic human yearnings for meaning and connection which we are all greatly missing right now.

International City Theatre's virtual presentation of ART is streaming on demand every Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday through March 7 (dark Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays). Tickets are \$30 per household and available for purchase at [www.InternationalCityTheatre.org](http://www.InternationalCityTheatre.org).



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The well-known phrase "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" certainly applies in the Art world, especially when differences of opinion on "what makes Art" can pull friends to opposite sides of any discussion. Such is the case during International City Theatre's virtual presentation of Yasmina Reza's Tony Award-winning play ART, translated from the French by playwright/screenwriter Christopher Hampton. Creatively directed and produced by Caryn Desai, Artistic Director/Producer of ICT, the virtually presentation offers a heady, often hilarious look at the bonds of friendship viewed through the prism of modern art.

The storyline begins when Serge (Brent Schindele) enthusiastically purchases an all-white painting for \$200,000, which puts his longtime friendship with Marc (Michael Uribes) and Yuan (Brian Stanton) to the test as arguments between them quickly go from theoretical to personal to artistically confrontational about what is "art" and how much is an all-white canvas really worth? And what will Serge's friends really think of him for buying it, and will they be honest enough to tell him the truth?

Thanks to the talents of all three actors, we are allowed to

see into both the souls and minds of these three characters as their emotions overtake both their reason and intelligence. Director Caryn Desai, along with her brilliant technical team including Projections and Sound Design by Dave Mickey and Video Editor Mike Bradecich, move the characters around so it is very clear when they are speaking to each other or breaking the fourth wall sharing directly to the audience about what they are really thinking rather than what they are saying to often appease their friends.

As tempers flare and the men challenge each other not only about art but the women in their lives and career decisions made, no doubt the many compromises most of us make to get along with others is brought into focus. And always remember that even when you believe you are speaking in confidence, nothing is kept a secret when validation of your own worth is on the line.

The play runs about 80 minutes, and no doubt the strength of the actors' performances sharing friends behaving very badly with each other will keep you riveted to their interacting journey together to reach a place of compromise. After all, as Yuan states, "nothing beautiful in the world is ever created by rational argument." So perhaps true

friendship which allows you to be yourself and speak your own truth, even when others don't agree, is perhaps the greatest "art" of all.

French playwright, novelist and actress Yasmina Reza is best known for her satiric plays that speak to contemporary middle-class anxieties, especially her savagely caustic "comedy of bad manners" God of Carnage. In addition to winning two Molière Awards (France's most prestigious drama prize) and Broadway's Tony Award® for best new play, Reza's ART also enjoyed a six-year run in London, where it received a Laurence Olivier award for comedy. Reza was surprised by the category for this award, noting, "I thought I had written a tragedy."

It's precisely this seeming paradox that highlights the play's universal appeal. Theater scholars and critics, nearly unanimous in their praise, continue to analyze and debate what ART is really about - the meaning or value of art, a rejection of modernism, the nature of friendship, the politics of aesthetics, or the creative process itself. I certainly invite you to decide for yourself, for while there are