

Art, by Yasmina Reza

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## The Readers' Theatre Gives Audiences a Comedic Lesson in "Art"

The Readers' Theatre is very pleased to bring Ithaca audiences **ART**, by French playwright Yasmina Reza, the humorous and compelling argument of three long-time friends over art, aesthetics, and the complexities of friendship. The English adaptation of this Tony Award-winning play, translated by Christopher Hampton, opened in London in 1996, and opened on Broadway in 1988, starring Alan Alda (as Marc), Victor Garber (as Serge), and Alfred Molina (as Yvan).

The Readers' Theatre performance readings exhibit three local actors, **Erik Bjarnar** (*as Yvan*), **Tony Simione** (*as Serge*), and **Bryan VanCampen** (*as Marc*), as long-time friends whose relationship is suddenly tossed into crisis when one of them, indulging his penchant for modern art, buys an expensive white painting, which creates an ongoing debate over the value of the painting. Emotions run high and the conflict escalates to the point of nearly destroying long-standing friendships.

This witty non-stop barrage is directed by **Anne Marie Cummings**, Artistic Director of The Readers' Theatre, with the **Amina Omari** as assistant director. **ART** will run **Friday, February 17th and Saturday, February 18th at 8 pm, and on Sunday, February 19th at 6:30pm**. Performance readings will take place in the intimate setting of **THE SPACE, 700 West Buffalo Street** (at the corner of Court and Fulton, near the M/V Columbia Dock)—the same location where The Readers' Theatre performed **FROZEN** and **A STEADY RAIN**, the first two plays of their second season.

**ART** is being sponsored by **State of the Art Gallery (SOAG)**, a local organization pleased to support The Readers' Theatre. Paintings and photographs from a number of SOAG members will be at **THE SPACE** for audience members to view and purchase before and after the play.

**John Bunge**, a local banjo player and composer, will enhance the performance readings with **LIVE** banjo music (playing music by William C. Stahl, Claribel Jeffrey, J. L. Le Barge, and Scott Joplin) accompanying the dialogue and between the scenes. John is a performer of the 19th-century plectrum style of banjo playing, a style distinct from the post-WWII bluegrass style. He has performed and recorded many kinds of music, and is the author of the guitar method book "Open Chord Advantage" (Hal Leonard) and various articles and translations in the music press. In addition to playing, he is currently working on a collection of ragtime arrangements, and a suite of his own compositions, for plectrum banjo.

Following all three performance readings of **ART**, **Frank Robinson**, previous director Cornell University's Herbert Johnson Museum of Art, will give a 15-minute lecture entitled, "What is Art?", where he will discuss the major issues raised by this remarkable play. In particular, what is the meaning of that tricky word, art? Can anyone define it in any way they want? Are there any rules in art? If so, who should make them? Why do works of art cost so much? Are they really worth such large amounts of money? What are the moral issues raised by such prices?

Some reviews of the play: *Newsweek* described it as "a nonstop cross-fire of crackling language, serious issues of life and art expressed in out-bursts that sound like Don Rickles with a degree from the Sorbonne... Reza is a fiendishly clever writer... 'ART' sounds like a marriage of Molière and Woody Allen..."; *The New York Post* rates it as "...wildly funny, naughtily provocative..."; *The Independent* of London claims "Anyone looking for a play that is funny, sophisticated, stylish, stimulating, and moving should go to 'ART'."; and the *London Times* states "In October I called it a minor classic. Let's change that to classic comedy, period."

**All tickets are \$12 with a reservation and \$15 without a reservation. Reservations are highly recommended since seating is limited. Reservations can be made by calling 607.217.6272.** The Readers' Theatre will end its 2011–2012 season with the play **UNCLE VANYA**, April 27–April 29 (live music: Hank Roberts on cello). For more details, visit [www.thereaderstheatre.com](http://www.thereaderstheatre.com).

The Readers' Theatre of Ithaca is a not-for-profit ensemble-based organization that focuses on performance readings of current, contemporary, and classic plays. As part of their mission, The Readers' Theatre brings low-cost theater to local audiences, allowing those who might not be able to manage the price of the average theater ticket to affordably experience quality theater. The actors of The Readers' Theatre focus on the written word and perform their characters to the fullest while reading from their scripts and interacting with one another in a black box setting illuminated with theatrical lights.

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