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## 'Arts or Crafts'? Director asks the question

by *Laura Bucci*

These are the kinds of questions writer and director Rob Roznowski expects audience members to consider when they see his new play "Arts or Crafts," which makes its world premiere Tuesday in the Wharton Center's Pasant Theatre.

Roznowski, who is head of acting in Michigan State University's Department of Theatre, began writing the show last October to be a signature event for MSU's annual campus-wide initiative, this year's theme being "The Year of Arts and Culture."

"It was just writing about arts, generic arts," Roznowski says. "Then I got to this debate about the difference between arts and crafts, and I knew I was onto something that was an interesting topic that people don't really think about very often."

No form of creative expression is spared in the show, which covers everything from Greek architecture and the Mona Lisa to modern day scrap-booking and Christina Aguilera.

This is the first full-length play by Roznowski, who has previously written screenplays and one-acts. "Arts or Crafts" is a conceptual piece that incorporates a range of genres and emotions while exploring one underlying theme.

"Some of the scenes are really quite serious and touching, and other ones are just slapstick," Roznowski explains. "Getting the actors to understand this kind of style, being truthful in characters and not just creating sketch characterizations, it's really an interesting stylistic challenge."

Roznowski took his script to New York over the summer for a reading with actors in the city where he lived for 20 years before coming to MSU. "It got a lot of great feedback there, and then we just went into rehearsal when we came back to school," he says. "It's been a cool process for the actors, each night getting new lines, new scenes. That's what it's like working on a new show."

As both the writer and director, Roznowski says the biggest challenge for him during the creative process was figuring out how to balance the two roles.

"It's this whole thing of not knowing who to blame in rehearsal," Roznowski says. "You really try to see what the problem is. Is it in the direction, is it in the playwriting, and at what point do you put on the other hat?"

While researching the debate over the definitions of arts and crafts, Roznowski filmed a series of interviews with customers at local hobby and craft stores, asking them to explain the difference. The interviews were turned into a five-minute film, which will be played off of amateur video Web site YouTube.com before the show begins.

"It again shows this whole thing of, 'Is YouTube art?'" Roznowski says.

There is a free preview of the show at 5 p.m. Sunday for arts organizations, which will be followed by a symposium on arts funding and grants. And since his script also explores art criticism, Roznowski is holding a director's talk and critics meeting after the performance on Thursday night.

"They're going to talk about how they are able to criticize and judge something as good or bad," he says. "It's not a known title, and we're hoping there'll be a positive reaction."

Though this is the debut production of "Arts or Crafts," Roznowski says there are already two more schools lined up to perform the show next year, one a college in Kansas and the other a performing arts high school in North Carolina.

"I'm hoping to have the time to see what the reaction of the audience is here, and again synthesize it," he says. "Again, it's so accessible, and at the same time is a real challenge for the actors."

So what does Roznowski call himself?

"I am a craftsman in the classroom when I teach my students to become artists, and I aspire to be an artist when I direct and bring other people's words to life."

### 'Arts or Crafts'

**Nov. 13-18****MSU Department of Theatre****Wharton Center's Pasant Theatre****7:30 p.m. Tuesday – Thursday****8 p.m. Friday****2 p.m. & 8 p.m. Saturday****2 p.m. Sunday****\$10/\$13****1 (800) WHARTON****www.whartoncenter.com**