

NEWS OF THE WEIRD

BY CHUCK SHEPHERD

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Great art

At press time, two major pieces of art at galleries in London and New York were basically holes in the floors of the buildings, yet were the subjects of glowing reviews. Doris Salcedo's "Shibboleth," a large crack in the floor of a hall at London's Tate Modern (on which at least 15 people have suffered minor injuries after tripping) is said

to symbolize racial and class divisions in society. Urs Fischer's "You" at New York's Gavin Brown Enterprise is actually just a crater, 38 feet by 30 feet by 8 feet deep, that, according to one reviewer, meshes "themes of transparency, transformation, disruption and destruction." ■

Government in action

- The Portland Young Offenders' Institute (a British prison) in Dorset recently began holding classes, for up to 30 inmates, in pole-vaulting. But officials reassured critics that even the most athletic inmates would only get about 13 feet high, whereas the prison walls are 20 feet tall, topped by razor wire.

- Psychologist Susan Young was paid the equivalent of about \$1,000 a day to counsel convicted murderer Barry George during his recent retrial in London, and among her duties, she said, was to massage his head periodically so that he could concentrate better, to assist his lawyers.

- In January, the town of Herouville, Quebec (pop. 1,300), famously enacted a "code" of expectations for immigrants, seemingly aimed at Islamic laws and rituals. For example, it required gender equality, permitted alcohol, rejected special diets for prisoners and reaffirmed laws against stoning and fe-

male genital mutilation. In October, a town spokesman complained that the code had caused Herouville residents to be called "(m)orons, liars, xenophobes, fascists... dictators, Nazis, racists... idiots... mentally deficient, intolerant, stupid, retarded." Nonetheless, the town said it would campaign to have the code adopted nationally.

- The Army Corps of Engineers announced with great fanfare in June that its repairs and upgrades of levees in the Lakeview neighborhood of New Orleans, following Hurricane Katrina, would allow the system to hold back a future storm's flood waters even if the level rose more than 5 feet beyond the Katrina level. However, in November, the corps announced that because of a mistake in calculation (an engineer had used a "minus" sign when a "plus" sign was called for), the expensive levee repairs would actually protect against flooding only 6 inches above the Katrina level. ■

Least competent Florida police

- Sheriff's deputies arrested Cynthia Hunter, 38, in Brandon, in October, and she remained in jail for 50 days until a lab finally concluded that the "methamphetamine" in her purse was really dried cat urine that she had legally purchased for her son's science project.
- Deputies arrested Andrew Johnson, a

white man, in Ocoee, in November, believing he was Anthony Johnson, a black man wanted on a felony drug charge. Andrew Johnson was allowed to post bond while the case was under investigation, but his driver's license was confiscated, and his mother had to drive him to and from work. ■

The new torture

- When three men stole drugs from a dealer in Edwardsville, Ill., the dealer and a partner allegedly snatched one of the men and roughed him up, seeking payment for the drugs. In November, police arrested the alleged dealers after the roughed-up vic-

tim reported that he had been held down, paddled, had some hair shaved off, and then deliberately burned on the neck and shoulders by having freshly baked cookies taken straight from an oven and held against his skin. ■

Just Can't Stop

In recent incidents, two Wal-Mart customers were arrested for shoplifting after yielding to temptation while walking the aisles of stores in Mukwonago, Wis., and Okaloosa County. The Wisconsin man (reportedly sober for 16 months) impulsively downed seven 12-ounce bottles of Jack Dan-

iel's Lynchburg Lemonade that he saw on a shelf. Florida's Christopher White said "the temptation was too great" when he spotted the White Rain hair spray, and that he removed the nozzles of two containers and drank the contents (and returned the empty containers to the shelf). ■

The continuing crisis

In January, Jerome Felske was fired as a truck driver for the city of Chicago when investigators learned that he had 22 criminal convictions on his record. Felske appealed, and in September, the city's Human Resources Board reinstated him, noting that Felske had actually disclosed six of them on

his original application and, as to the others, the board said, the city had not proved Felske "intentionally" hid them. Felske, his lawyer had argued, had simply forgotten about the other 16 (all of which occurred before 1991): "I challenge anyone ... to recall their grocery list from ... two weeks ago." ■

Least competent criminals

- Francis Rocca, 24, was arrested in Pittsfield, Mass., and charged with robbing a gas station in November after being identified by his victim, who pointed out that Rocca's distinctly pimpled face was easily visible underneath the clear plastic bag he wore as a "disguise."
- Michael Chatman, 35, and two others were arrested in Augusta, Ga., in November after

Chatman, in a Target store, tried to return the laser printer the three had allegedly used for counterfeiting. However, they had accidentally left in the machine not only copies of the counterfeit bills but also the original \$20 bill they had used as a model. Said a deputy, "People get wrapped up in the crime, and they forget things." ■

Recent alarming headlines

- "Policeman Shot in Butt With Own Gun While Battling Porn Vending Machine Bandits" (Mainichi Daily News [Tokyo], October).

- "Man Shoots Goat After Wife Wouldn't Bring Him Beer" (The Northwestern [Oshkosh, Wis.], November). ■



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