

# Former gallery director rails at meddling

BY MARTIN MORROW, CALGARY

Canadian rock star Bryan Adams is a "quite talented" photographer, but his photographs of fellow celebrities did not belong in an exhibition at the Vancouver Art Gallery, according to its former director.

Alf Bogusky made his comments in Calgary while visiting the city last Saturday to give a lecture titled *Up Against the Wall: The Public Hanging of Gallery Directors in Canada*, at the Art Gallery of Calgary.

It was Bogusky's first public appearance since the spring, when he abruptly left as director of the VAG, citing "health reasons," and ending a stint that had begun in 1995. It remains widely believed that the departure of Bogusky, 53, was the result of ongoing conflicts with the gallery's board of trustees, precipitated by his refusal to show an exhibition of photographs of Pamela Lee, Sarah McLachlan and Shania Twain, among others. The pictures were taken by Adams as a way to raise funds for breast-cancer research, and the show had been previously mounted at Toronto's Royal Ontario Museum and the McCord Museum in Montreal.

Bogusky, who signed an agreement with the VAG board in March that limited discussion of the details of his departure, offered no specific reasons why he turned down the Adams show. However, he did say that he is not automatically averse to public institutions displaying art by celebrity amateurs. The exhibition of paintings by **Joni Mitchell**, held over the summer at Saskatoon's Mendel Gallery, had merit, even though "she doesn't have a tremendous reputation as a visual artist," said Bogusky, adding that "her work has continued over many years and has apparently some relationship to her music. So there is at least an argument for doing that."

Meanwhile, the VAG is continuing to look for a replacement for Bogusky. The interim director of the gallery is Joseph McHugh, a member of the VAG's board.

In his speech, Bogusky also said that gallery and museum boards need to be moved "far away from decisions on specific arts programming and content." The director of an institution, he added, "has to be the final arbiter on artistic value and also of the use of the facilities." As well, he suggested that board members of public institutions should have regular performance evaluations similar to those experienced by gallery employees.

Asked about his health, Bogusky said that his "blood pressure at the moment of [his] departure was 200 over 90. I was about ready to explode. It's back to 120 over 80 now."

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