



eBay shuts down "Schwarzenegger Shrine"

BY

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Artist Jack Fritscher wanted to "start a dialogue" with fellow Californians about actor Arnold Schwarzenegger's views on gay rights, censorship, and government funding of art, so he gathered nine items from his pop culture collection and auctioned them on eBay.

The 64-year-old author of erotic fiction and San Francisco gay history launched his "Schwarzenegger Shrine" in late September with an opening bid of \$24,000. The menagerie, dedicated to the front-runner in California's October 7 gubernatorial recall election, included a postcard of Schwarzenegger's torso that was photographed and signed by the late Robert Mapplethorpe. The controversial photographer used the postcard to invite friends to a "Hot Dirty Man" party in New York in 1979.

More than 61,000 people visited Fritscher's auction. But on Thursday afternoon, with two days left in the bidding, eBay shuttered the site and took away all references to it in its search engines. The San Jose, Calif.-based auction giant still hasn't offered Fritscher any explanation. "It was taken down because it's gay-themed, period," Fritscher said Friday. "It's censorship of what's gay. There's no nudity or politics here. There might be a political question asked, but it's only because the piece for sale is curious and I was trying to distinguish it from the other Schwarzenegger items for sale."

eBay spokesman Kevin Pursglove said the listing might have been better suited to eBay's "Mature Audiences" division than the general store, which includes listings for teddy bears, Pez dispensers, designer clothes, and other collectibles. The shrine featured suggestive shots of the former Mr. Olympia dressed in something like a loincloth. It

included a hardcover memoir of Fritscher's life with Mapplethorpe as well as an edition of *After Dark* magazine in which Schwarzenegger posed and an original script for the Schwarzenegger film *Conan the Barbarian*.

Pursglove suggested that Fritscher's listing may have caught the attention of customer service representatives because it included a provocative and politically charged essay instead of a standard description of the nine items.

"I was the bicoastal lover of the notoriously gay Robert Mapplethorpe, who photographed Arnold Schwarzenegger," Fritscher's listing began. "In a national scandal in 1989 to 1990, Sen. Jesse Helms denounced Mapplethorpe on the floor of the U.S. Senate and took away government funding of art.... Considering Arnold's posing for Mapplethorpe, one wonders what is the Schwarzenegger position on government taxes paying for uncensored art?"

Pursglove said Fritscher should have initiated such a debate in one of the company's discussion boards. eBay routinely yanks sites that it deems politically motivated or inappropriate, and it has halted auctions on items ranging from Nazi paraphernalia to morbid *Columbia* space shuttle debris. "Quite frequently we have to remove an item if a seller is trying to make a statement beyond helping customers," Pursglove said Friday. "Any individual who believes eBay is a domain to express their political thoughts should call up talk radio instead. eBay is here to do business, to allow people to engage in passions about collectibles and hobbies."

Fritscher, a longtime pop culture enthusiast who has listed his novels on eBay, said the site has evolved into a social phenomenon beyond a simple catalog of goods for sale. It is a platform for people to market not only products but the values that accompany them, he said. "eBay is a public forum," Fritscher said. "If Fox can take a political spin, why can't a seller on eBay pitch political materials any way they want to?"

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