

SATURDAY LETTER

Not a Cautionary Sign

Times art writer Cathy Curtis ("Cutesy Pieces Pollute Message of Abeles' 'The Smog Collector,'" Calendar, Jan. 28) accuses the Laguna Art Museum of "wimping out," saying we hung a "coy disclaimer" about political art at the entry to Kim Abeles' current exhibition ("The Smog Collector" at the Museum's South Coast Plaza satellite). As Curtis knows very well, the text to which she refers is the museum's introduction to the exhibition—standard practice at most museums—and not a cautionary sign as she implies.

If Curtis chooses to read the introduction (which I wrote, though in keeping with museum tradition did not sign) as "sugarcoating," no one can prevent that. But I think most people who had access to the full text,

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rather than Curtis' . . . reshaping of its meaning, would agree that our introduction—whether a good piece of writing or not—is not designed to soften the blow of Abeles' ideas. To quote the relevant part of the text:

"If Kim Abeles is an artist who deals with pressing political matters—as she certainly does in this exhibition and in past work dealing with AIDS and other subjects—she is not, in currently fashionable sense, a political artist. The installation presented here, commissioned specifically for the Laguna Art Museum, does not lay blame or offer prescriptions. It is, instead, what Abeles calls her 'private retaliation.' "

"These Smog Collectors are reminders of our industrial decisions," she says, "the road we took that seemed so modern. They are, at the same time, warnings."

My hope is that your readers will not put too much stock in either Curtis' words or mine, but will visit the exhibition and reach their own conclusions.

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Desmarais is director of the Laguna Art Museum.