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Winner of the 1011 Reva Shiner Comedy Award

# ARTIFICE

by Anne Flanagan



In the hilarious world of art,  
sometimes you're better off  dead

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# ARTIFICE

Winner of the  
Reva Shiner Comedy Award  
McLaren Memorial Comedy Playwriting Award  
Mountain Playhouse International Comedy Playwriting Award

"*Artifice* wastes no time immersing its audience in the world of egotistical artists, conniving dealers and vengeful wealthy patrons. It's the perfect setting for intrigue ... clever ... witty ... fun." —Bloomington *HeraldTimesOnline.com*

**Comedy/Farce.** *By Anne Flanagan.* *Cast: 4m., 4w.* Struggling artist Payne Showers finally gets his Big Break. He dies. Fortunately, Payne's death greatly inflates the value of his work. Unfortunately, his estranged wife, Maggie, must sell it all to avoid bankruptcy. Just days before the auction, Maggie and her high-strung gallery manager, Richard, host a private showing. The guests of honor are influential newspaper maven Judith Fontaine; the fabulously rich real estate mogul Mick Fitzgerald; Trent, a gorgeous but dim-witted soap opera actor; Graciela, a streetwise cocktail waitress; and Emma, a humorless art critic. To Maggie's delight, Mick Fitzgerald buys dozens of paintings. Not only will the deal rescue her financially, but Judith Fontaine is covering the story. The resulting publicity will put Maggie's gallery on the map! At this point, the only thing that could go wrong would be if Payne Showers were to walk through the door. Then Payne Showers walks through the door. *Artifice* is a farcical take on celebrity and success and an affectionate tribute to loyalty and love. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Code: AF3.*

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# ARTIFICE

By

ANNE FLANAGAN



**Dramatic Publishing**

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(ARTIFICE)

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For my father,  
who taught me how to laugh  
in even the most dire circumstances.

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*Artifice* was produced by the Bloomington Playwrights Project, Bloomington, Indiana, in 2010, Chad Rabinovitz, producing artistic director, Gabe Gloden, managing director. The production was directed by Tom Evans and included the following:

## CAST

Maggie La Rue . . . . . Emily Goodson  
Richard . . . . . Daniel J. Pietrie  
Graciela . . . . . Kelsey Sheppard  
Trent Matlock . . . . . Derrick Krober  
Judith Fontaine . . . . . Mary Carol Reardon  
Mick Fitzgerald. . . . . Gerard Pauwels  
Emma. . . . . Margot Morgan  
Payne Showers . . . . . Ethan Yazzie-Mintz

## PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

Stage Manager . . . . . Travis Staley  
Assistant Stage Manager . . . . . Amelia Vanderbilt  
Lighting Design . . . . . Patrick French  
Scenic Design . . . . . Shane Cinal  
Costume Design . . . . . Dede Wroblewski  
Sound Design . . . . . Holly Holbrook  
Technical Director. . . . . Jeff Stone  
Oil Painting Artist. . . . . Marco Zehrung  
Sound Board Operator. . . . . Shannon Walsh

An earlier version of *Artifice* was produced by the Midland Community Theatre of Midland, Texas, May 2008.



# ARTIFICE

## CHARACTERS

MAGGIE LA RUE . . . . . in her 30s-early 40s

RICHARD . . . . . in his 30s-early 40s

GRACIELA . . . . . in her 20s, a Latina with a killer body  
and attitude to match

TRENT MATLOCK . . . . in his 20s, impossibly handsome;  
incredibly dim

JUDITH FONTAINE . . . . . in her late 50s, elegant  
and unflappable

MICK FITZGERALD . . . . . in his late 50s, a burly man  
with a booming voice

EMMA . . . . . in her 30s

PAYNE SHOWERS . . . . . in his 40s, charismatic  
and self-absorbed

**TIME:** Present day.

**PLACE:** A renovated farmhouse in upstate New York.

Struggling artist Payne Showers finally gets his Big Break.

He dies.

Fortunately, Payne's death greatly inflates the value of his work. Unfortunately, his estranged wife, Maggie, must sell it all to avoid bankruptcy. Just days before the auction, Maggie and her high-strung gallery manager, Richard, host a private showing. The guests of honor are influential newspaper maven Judith Fontaine and the fabulously rich real estate mogul Mick Fitzgerald. Also in attendance are Trent, a gorgeous but dim-witted soap opera actor, Graciela, a streetwise cocktail waitress, and Emma, a humorless art critic.

To Maggie's delight, Mick Fitzgerald buys dozens of paintings. Not only will the deal rescue her financially, but Judith Fontaine is covering the story. The resulting publicity will put Maggie's gallery on the map! At this point, the only thing that could go wrong would be if Payne Showers were to walk through the door.

Then Payne Showers walks through the door.

Upon discovering that Payne is very much alive, Richard is speechless and Maggie falls into a dead faint. The following excerpt (from Act I, Scene II) begins just as Maggie regains consciousness.

## SCENE TWO

SETTING: *The same, a few seconds later.*

AT RISE: *MAGGIE lies on the couch, passed out. RICHARD fans her with a sheaf of papers.*

RICHARD. Get me some water. From the bar.

*(PAYNE retrieves some water and sprinkles it on MAGGIE's face. She jolts awake.)*

PAYNE. She's back.

RICHARD. Drink this.

MAGGIE *(sips some water, then gazes at PAYNE)*. You're Payne.

PAYNE. Yes.

MAGGIE. You're alive.

PAYNE. Yes.

MAGGIE. Oh my God.

PAYNE. Somehow, I pictured a more festive homecoming.

MAGGIE. Homecoming?

RICHARD. He's not staying.

PAYNE. What?! Look—I didn't just hop off a bus from Hoboken—I trekked halfway across the globe. What do you mean I'm "not staying"?!

RICHARD. You don't understand—

MAGGIE. They can't see you—

RICHARD. You've got to go—

MAGGIE. Now.

PAYNE. Richard! You're my closest friend. It's as if you're not happy to see me.

RICHARD. I'm not.

PAYNE. As if I'm not wanted—

MAGGIE. You're not.

PAYNE. Maggie?! You're my wife!

MAGGIE. We are separated.

PAYNE. Have you both lost your minds?

RICHARD. Payne, of *course* we're happy to see you. We were devastated by your loss and we are thrilled to learn that you are, in fact, alive. We missed you terribly and we desperately want to hear what happened—on Tuesday.

PAYNE. But—

RICHARD. Wonderful. That's settled. Oh—and while we're at it, can you also remain dead until Tuesday?

PAYNE. Did he go off his meds?

MAGGIE. There's an auction on Monday, Payne. Both the press and a private buyer are here now. They're upstairs, evaluating the collection.

PAYNE. Here? Why aren't they at the gallery?

MAGGIE. I'm not just selling the work hanging there—

RICHARD. It's all up for grabs.

PAYNE. Works in progress?! No—they're not for sale!

MAGGIE. All your work's been appraised—

PAYNE. The "Floating Moon" series? That's nowhere near completion.

MAGGIE. Everything. The assessed value of each painting is—quite high.

PAYNE. Really?

RICHARD. Astronomical.

PAYNE. Be specific. (*RICHARD shoves the sheaf of papers at him.*) Great Buddha! Finally! After all these

years of groveling. You said the press was up there?  
Have I got a story for them!

MAGGIE. Payne, *wait!* The work was appraised after  
your—accident.

PAYNE. So?

MAGGIE. These figures are based on the fact that you are  
deceased.

PAYNE. Deceased.

RICHARD. Dead.

PAYNE. I know what it means.

MAGGIE. We need to sell at these prices.

RICHARD. If it's known you are alive—

MAGGIE. Before the auction—

RICHARD. The price plummets—

MAGGIE. As do we. Understand?

PAYNE. Did it occur to either of you that the appraisal is  
due to my talent? That the price has nothing to do with  
my being dead or alive? (*Beat.*) Obviously not.

RICHARD. Payne, you are incredibly talented—

MAGGIE. Truly gifted—

RICHARD. We're your most ardent fans.

PAYNE. I'd thank you, but you want me dead.

MAGGIE. Don't be an ass.

PAYNE. Me?!

MAGGIE. This may come as a shock since you've never  
bothered yourself with mundane concerns such as fi-  
nances, but I'm drowning financially. I've sold every-  
thing but a kidney to keep the gallery open. Richard has  
taken so many wage cuts, he can barely pay his rent.

RICHARD. And I'm wearing *knock-off* Armani.

MAGGIE. I fully supported you through the fiasco called  
our marriage, financially and emotionally, for precious

little in return. This isn't about your worth as an artist, this is about recouping losses.

PAYNE. At my expense.

MAGGIE. It's time something was.

PAYNE. What do you—

RICHARD. Shhh! They'll hear you. *Sotto voce*, please.

Payne. I'm not going to beg because groveling does not become me. Allow me, however, to say this. If Maggie can't sell this collection, at top dollar, she'll have to close the gallery. Meaning, I'll have to find a job. Meaning, as an unpublished poet with no marketable skills, I'll be forced into the world of retail, meaning minimum wage, time clocks, and polyester uniforms. It's a nightmarish yet very real possibility that I'll end up in the food court of a New Jersey mall, wearing a striped orange tunic and a "Biggie Size It!" button. That, Payne, will be on your shoulders.

PAYNE. Richard.

RICHARD. But don't do anything you aren't comfortable with.

PAYNE. It's fraud.

MAGGIE. Not really. We thought you were dead, honestly, and you weren't around to say otherwise. All we're asking is that you remain "not around." It's not fraud, it's just...not being around.

PAYNE. Have you looked outside?! I was lucky to *get* here—caught the last cab out of the city—it's snowing like mad—hail *this* big—they're blocking off the roads—where do you advise I go so that I'm "not around"?

RICHARD. You were a Boy Scout—can't you build something?

MAGGIE. You can hide in the basement.

PAYNE. I am not going to lurk in the basement like an ogre.

MAGGIE. What else can we do? If they see you, we're screwed. It's not like we can pass you off as Payne Showers' long-lost twin brother, the black sheep of the family whose name was not to be spoken as he disappeared until this fateful day. That stuff works in the movies, but not in real life.

*(TRENT enters.)*

TRENT. Maggie, what are— *(Re: PAYNE.)* Oh. Hello.

PAYNE. Uhh—

RICHARD. Umm—

MAGGIE. Trent! This is Payne Showers' long-lost twin brother, the black sheep of the family whose name was not to be spoken as he disappeared until this fateful day!

TRENT. Payne had a twin?

MAGGIE. Yes. This is Payne's brother...Rayne.

TRENT. Rain?

MAGGIE. Yes.

TRENT. Rain Showers?

MAGGIE. Oh.

PAYNE. Terrific.

RICHARD. His parents were hippies.

TRENT. You said Payne's parents were stuffy conservatives.

MAGGIE. Stuffy, conservative hippies—yes.

TRENT. Are you an artist like your brother?

RICHARD.

Yes... No.

MAGGIE.

No... Yes.

MAGGIE. Some consider it an “art.” Rayne—

RICHARD. —sells life insurance.

TRENT. Selling insurance is an art?

RICHARD. When it’s done well.

TRENT. Honey, why are you so jumpy?

PAYNE. “Honey”?