

It was certainly generous of the likeable Dr. L. Reeves to offer the reclining nude sculpture to East London municipality.

Where possibly he erred was in his decision to put no charge on the Herman Wald sculpture that is worth many thousands of rands.

It is a fact that people everywhere do look a gift horse in the mouth. More people every day are looking more gift horses in the mouth despite the fewer offers coming in because nobody these days gives away anything for nothing.

What is the catch in it, people say, as they studiously avoid the man in the middle of the pavement giving away R20 notes. He might be slightly off-beam, they might be R20 fugitives from the latest hot-off-the-press home money-making device, and, worse, you could end up paying R21 for a R20 note.

Used to watch them at the so-called auctions back in Britain where smart-alec dealers were trying to give away glittering cutlery sets (seconds) but could get no takers. If you were really on the ball you could snap it up before the auctioneer's own man in the second row walked out and around to the back with it but most people sat dumb, acting smart so they would not be caught out. Fair enough. Genuine Persian rugs complete with certificate conceivably could come straight out of Doornfontein. An Iranian refugee from the Khomeini is still smuggling out the family's secret hoard of ancient rugs that are never to be repeated and selling

Looking a gift horse in the mouth

them to shrewd film producers in L.A. For years and years.

Apart from that the Introverted Mermaid is said to have had a crack in it and the mayor, Mr Errol Spring, was worried that it all might fall apart while it was under transport. From a purist's point of view an Introverted Mermaid deservedly should have a physical crack in it, indicating artistically the inner turmoil. A 100 per cent contented Mermaid, no hangups, would be totally smooth, with art emulating life, and the council looking for another excuse not to take the sculpture.

Being council is not merely a matter of representing ratepayers. One has to tread the delicate area of public relations. Clothed Woman or Man on Horse in Uniform may be accepted with alacrity, especially if it is not free; but Nude may bring hordes of fuddy-duddy letters into the citizens' press forum, never mind Introverted Nude with all that that might imply.

There might also be certain sensitivities about accepting anything again, ever. Once bitten



Glyn Williams

twice shy. A cry of "Remember Jackie the bear!" could have rung around the debating chamber, save all here.

An Introverted Nude (whatever that may mean) Fund, specially for the housing, removal and insurance of, could hardly have had the same emotional appeal as a bear fund, though you could have had a bare fund. And it is highly unlikely that a white knight saviour in the shape of a rich, personable woman from Cape Town would speed to the rescue of a stony-hearted, mixed-up,

cracked, half of her species.

Perhaps the council was right to say no and play safe. Supposing the sculpture had disintegrated en route from garden to heavy transporter via crane with poised cameras ready to record the historic event? The headline writers could have had a field day, going schizophrenic themselves with such a wealth of choice, with the municipality perhaps rightfully objecting if the final choice turned out to be: "Council does it again".

Fair is fair. After all, it would be the first time this particular council had been involved in a cracked nude, though not by any means the first time that a council had been involved in such an unfortunate happening.

Long ago a council was offered this superb statue of a woman free and though it was at first declined on the grounds of moral propriety, a more artistic majority eventually prevailed. Unfortunately two of the arms got lopped off accidentally during council transport which had the chisel-wielding



"I told them it would crack if they moved it".

headline writers chipping out "Council does it again" and the dissenting minority shouting: "We told you so. We should never have accepted the Venus de Milo".
