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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Memorandum 02

Alexander D. Crary

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Priority

M E M O R A N D U M

June 12, 1989

TO: Senator
FROM: ADC
RE: Meeting today with NEA's Hugh Southern

A few more points in advance of your meeting at 5 today with Hugh Southern....

You should see the attached letter that Jack Neusner has sent Senators D'Amato and Helms. Jack did not share this letter with us. I received it in a packet of material from the Endowment. This letter would seem to needlessly stir an already boiling pot. Jack goes out of his way to separate himself from his colleagues on the Council by openly agreeing with Helms and D'Amato and undermining what Hugh Southern may be trying to do to cool this situation down.

At the end of his first paragraph he says that he would have proposed a resolution at the May Council meeting if the subject had been raised. Council members are free to raise any topic at any time. In fact Jack is absent from the Council table for long periods of time and actually participates very little. He tends to swings into action after getting home to his typewriter.

It is also unfortunate that he provides Helms and D'Amato with ammunition about the Corcoran's Mapplethorpe photo show. Now that the Endowment has supported this show, Jack can say that the staff did not properly inform the Council of the nature of the show. If he is as brilliant a Council member as he thinks he is, he should have known the nature of Mapplethorpe's work and flagged it in his Council book before voting for it. Council members get the book in advance and if they are doing their job properly, they flag grants that they believe should be discussed before a final decision is made. The Endowment has sent a copy of the Mapplethorpe catalog for your information (attached). The Corcoran is proceeding with the exhibition.

Hugh Southern's reply to D'Amato and Helms (page 2) mentions that the Endowment will review procedures in coordination with its oversight committees. Their plan for this has never been made clear to me. I suppose they are assuming that peer review procedures will be part of the reauthorization process. But this is a point which you should clarify with Hugh Southern today. Should Hugh propose a special hearing in our subcommittee, I would urge NOT doing this. It would give the opponents a platform which would be hard for us to control and move the focus of this debate from them to us. Hugh is essentially looking for support from you.

WTC