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ive power — or the Court's view that the case was about political speech — as the justices' attempts to

it. It's a victory for ordered liberty and waving a good name.

NY TIMES
6-23-89
EDITORIAL

Caving In at the Corcoran

"My work is about seeing — seeing things like they haven't been seen before," the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe said several years ago. A Mapplethorpe portrait of a calla lily, then, is not simply exquisite. It is also curiously and remarkably erotic.

Mapplethorpe, who died in March, brought the same elegance and technique to his documentation of a sadomasochistic male homosexual subculture in which he himself was a participant. This is confrontational photography, and more than a few viewers have turned away from it. But if the response to his subject matter is sometimes disdain or disgust, the response to the way Mapplethorpe explored it is usually respect. The photographer was an artist.

Certainly Washington's Corcoran Gallery of Art thought so: a Mapplethorpe retrospective, partly financed by the National Endowment for the Arts, was to open there next Friday.

Not anymore. Citing "concerns — on both sides of the issue of public funds supporting controversial

art," the Corcoran's director, Dr. Christina Orr-Cahall, announced that the gallery was dropping the show.

Faced with Congressional threats to slash the endowment's budget and restrict its discretion to underwrite works that some legislators think is blasphemous or pornographic, the Corcoran unwisely chose to repudiate its own artistic judgment. Instead of helping to avoid controversy, the gallery's cave-in only attracted it. A laser artist plans to project huge images of Mapplethorpe's photographs on the gallery's facade.

"Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment" has now been picked up — by the Washington Project for the Arts, which, like the Corcoran, gets Federal funds. Unlike the Corcoran, the Washington Project is unwilling to step back because of political intimidation. Would that the Corcoran had been so stout of heart.

The episode also underscores the need to provide the endowment, without a permanent leader since February, with a courageous, committed and knowledgeable new chairman.

Polishing the City's

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