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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Speech 05

Ted Potter

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Awards in the Visual Arts

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STATEMENT BY TED POTTER
Director of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art

The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) is a nationally known art center located in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. SECCA administers a number of arts programs such as the Southeast Seven and the Awards in the Visual Arts (AVA). The AVA program is a national annual artists awards program that has been in existence for nine years and was jointly funded by The Equitable Foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Since its inception, the program has recognized nearly a hundred artists. They have been selected by a panel of distinguished professionals from the art world. The AVA exhibitions series has been shown in over 23 major art museums.

AVA has received some complaints from people concerning a work in the AVA 7 exhibition. The AVA 7 exhibition began in May of 1988, toured several locations and terminated its run in January of 1989. The work in question was produced by Andres Serrano and is entitled "Piss Christ". The majority of the complaints were received several months after the exhibition had completed its tour. The complaints were that the work expressed bigotry towards Christians. Mr. Serrano has stated that this work was never intended to express anti-Christian sentiments. The concern seems to stem from the title of the photograph which literally describes the medium used in the work. It appears that some people have misconstrued the title to be an anti-Christian statement.

Mr. Serrano is an established artist. Before receiving the Awards in the Visual Arts fellowship, the artist was a recipient of a National Endowment for the Arts artist fellowship and a grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts. Mr. Serrano's work has been exhibited in major museums across the country.

Mr. Potter states, "It was never our intention to insult or embarrass anyone. SECCA respects the right of any individual to object to a work of art. We feel equally as strongly on the issue of the rights of artists and their freedom to express themselves. We also respect the rights of the exhibitors to show works that they deem interesting and noteworthy.

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