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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 01

Alexander D. Crary

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June 19, 1989

AC

*This is good,
Would like to add
some sort of*

Senator and TH:

FROM: ADC

procedural action

Attached is a very rough draft
of a possible letter to Hugh
Southern.

*that could be
taken*

This follows up on my recommendation
to request an Endowment review of
procedures used in approving grants.

I have not yet seen your response
to my memo of June 14 which set
out some options. This kind of
letter was what I suggested doing.

It is the kind of response which
I believe you can circulate to any
Senate colleagues who contact you
asking for your plan of action.

Continue to develop letter
along this line

Include revisions as marked

Do not like this approach, discuss

ROUGH DRAFT

June , 1989

Mr. Hugh Southern
Acting Chairman
National Endowment for the Arts
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20506

Dear Mr. Southern:

I appreciate your coming to see me to discuss the situation regarding the Endowment's support for the artist Andres Serrano.

As I told you, I am deeply troubled by the fact that the Endowment has funded a program which in turn endorsed and promoted this artist's work which grossly offends me and a large number American citizens. As an agency of the federal government, the Endowment simply does not have the license to spend taxpayers' money in such an irresponsible fashion.

As you know I have long been keenly interested in ensuring the integrity of the Endowment's peer panel review process. This system has served the Endowment and the arts in this country well for almost 25 years. However, I suspect there are flaws in current review procedures which have made it possible for federal funds to be granted for the exhibition of works such as Mr. Serrano's PISS CHRIST.

In order to correct these flaws and restore confidence in Endowment procedures, I ask that you convene a special meeting of past and present members of the National Council on the Arts at which this important matter can be discussed. The Council, as your presidentially-appointed advisory committee, is charged in the Endowment's statute with advising you in respect to policies, programs and procedures and, most importantly, with reviewing applications for financial assistance and making recommendations thereon.

My fear is that the Council has either not had sufficient data to assist them in making the most informed decisions or has not had adequate time to review proposals that are recommended for funding by the peer review panels. Each step in this process must be scrutinized carefully with consideration being given to possible additional review guidelines used by panelists so that fundamental good taste and decency are taken into account as they

|perform their duties. I do not think this would in any way hinder|
|an otherwise open and fair process.

I would expect the Council to draft a resolution or report as a result of this special meeting that would clarify review procedures. I will review this document carefully and share it with my colleagues.

I am certain that through this review, the National Endowment for the Arts can emerge renewed and strengthened.