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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989)

Education: National Endowment for the Arts  
and Humanities, Subject Files II (1962-1996)

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5-18-1989

## Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 02

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United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

*Senators  
letter to  
NEA*

May 18, 1989

Mr. Hugh Southern  
Acting Chairman  
National Endowment for the Arts  
Washington, DC 20506

Dear Mr. Southern:

We recently learned of the Endowment's support for a so-called "work of art" by Andres Serrano entitled "Piss Christ." We write to express our outrage and to suggest in the strongest terms that the procedures used by the Endowment to award and support artists be reformed.

The piece in question is a large and vivid photograph of Christ on a crucifix submerged in the artist's urine. This work is shocking, abhorrent and completely undeserving of any recognition whatsoever. Millions of taxpayers are rightfully incensed that their hard-earned dollars were used to honor and support Serrano's work.

There is a clear flaw in the procedures used to select art and artists deserving of taxpayer support. That fact is evidenced by the Serrano work itself. Moreover, after the artist was selected and honored for his "contributions" to the field of art, his work was exhibited at government expense and with the imprimatur of the Endowment.

This matter does not involve freedom of artistic expression--it does involve the question whether American taxpayers should be forced to support such trash.

And finally, simply because the Endowment and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) did not have a direct hand in choosing Serrano's work, does not absolve either of responsibility. The fact that both the Endowment and SECCA with taxpayer dollars promoted this work as part of the Awards in Visual Arts exhibition, is reason enough to be outraged.

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We urge the Endowment to comprehensively review its procedures and determine what steps will be taken to prevent such abuses from recurring in the future.

We await your response.

Sincerely,

<u>John Wood</u>	<u>Paul [unclear]</u>
<u>Ed [unclear]</u>	<u>[unclear]</u>
<u>Wm B. [unclear]</u>	<u>Richard [unclear]</u>
<u>Ruby Roschowitz</u>	<u>[unclear]</u>
<u>Dennis De Concini</u>	<u>Larry [unclear]</u>
<u>Peter [unclear]</u>	<u>[unclear]</u>
<u>[unclear]</u>	<u>Tom [unclear]</u>
<u>Chuck Grassley</u>	<u>Went [unclear]</u>
<u>James A. McClure</u>	<u>Jesse [unclear]</u>
<u>[unclear]</u>	<u>[unclear]</u>
<u>Dwight [unclear]</u>	<u>[unclear]</u>
	<u>Steve Symms</u>

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Stron Thurmond

Robert L. Byrd