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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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1-8-1989

## Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 15

Frances D'Souza

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89 AUG -9 AM 9:58

01.08.1989

Senator Clairborne Pell  
S.R. 335 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington DC 20510-3901  
United States of America

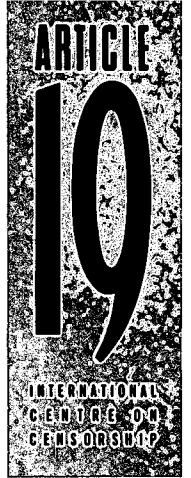
Dear Senator Pell,

Enclosed please find a copy of a letter ARTICLE 19 has sent to Senator Jesse Helms protesting the Senate's recent decision to cut funding to two arts institutions. Similar letters have also been sent to members of the Appropriations Committee, the Secretary of the Interior, and selected Senators.

ARTICLE 19 condemns the Senate's action as a form of artistic censorship.

We urge your support in fighting this proposal.

Frances D'Souza, Frances Stewart  
Frances D'Souza  
Director



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Frances D'Souza

**Article 19 of the  
Universal  
Declaration of  
Human Rights:**

"Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

31.07.1989

Senator Jesse Helms  
Senate Dirksen Building, Room 403  
Washington DC 20510  
United States of America

*Dear Senator Helms,*

ARTICLE 19 is deeply concerned with the Senate's recent decision to restrict National Endowment for the Arts funding. The legislation would bar the use of Federal arts funds to "promote, disseminate or produce obscene or indecent materials.." and specifically prohibits funding for two arts groups for the next five years.

Not only does the action by the Senate indicate a disturbing movement to determine artistic merit on political grounds but it also acts as a punitive measure against art establishments which have supported unpopular works. To the extent that the Institute for Contemporary Art and the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art depend on the NEA funding to mount exhibits, the five-year ban on funding constitutes a form of prior censorship. Other organizations in the future may be more cautious in supporting certain artists in order to maintain federal funding. This denial of expression to these artists is inimical to the spirit of the First Amendment.

The bill would prohibit grants for art that "denigrates, debases or reviles a person, group or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age or national origin." The question this condition immediately raises is who will determine if a work falls into this range? Such a restriction presupposes that there is only one way of classifying art, but anyone who has taken an art history class knows that this is not so.

Democracy is founded on the principle that a vital society is formed by people with different and distinct views, a premise which is increasingly under attack. In England, there is still a common law offense of blasphemy, and it has been used recently to attempt the prevention of publication of Salman Rushdie's book, The Satanic Verses, as offensive to Muslims. I enclose a copy of our report on the Blasphemy Law.



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ARTICLE 19, the International Centre on Censorship, is working to promote freedom of expression and to oppose censorship in all countries. Taking its name and mandate from the nineteenth article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ARTICLE 19 holds that freedom of expression is a universal right, defined and guaranteed by international law.

We urge you to reconsider your support for this measure.

*Yours sincerely, Frances D'Souza*

Frances D'Souza  
Director

cc: Manuel Lujan  
 Senator Robert Byrd  
 Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan  
 Senator John Chaffee  
 Senator Clairborne Pell  
 Senator Howard Metzenbaum  
 Senator Daniel Inouye  
 Senator Ernest Hollings  
 Senator J. Bennett Johnston  
 Senator Quentin Burdick  
 Senator Patrick Leahy  
 Senator Jim Sasser  
 Senator Dennis DeConcini  
 Senator Dale Bumpers  
 Senator Frank Lautenberg  
 Senator Tom Harkin  
 Senator Barbara Mikulski  
 Senator Harry Reid  
 Senator Brock Adams  
 Senator Wyche Fowler  
 Senator Robert Kerrey  
 Senator Mark Hatfield  
 Senator Ted Stevens  
 Senator James McClure  
 Senator Jake Garn  
 Senator Chad Cochran  
 Senator Bob Kasten  
 Senator Alfonse D'Amato  
 Senator Warren Rudman  
 Senator Arlen Specter  
 Senator Pete Domenici  
 Senator Charles Grassley  
 Senator Don Nickels  
 Senator Phil Gramm  
 Hugh Southern