

1989

# Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 18

Rose M. DiNapoli

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## Recommended Citation

DiNapoli, Rose M., "Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 18" (1989). *Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989)*. Paper 30.  
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NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
FOR  
THE ARTS

WASHINGTON  
D.C. 20506



A Federal agency advised by the  
National Council on the Arts

May 9, 1989

Dear :

This letter is in response to your inquiry regarding the work of Andres Serrano.

Mr. Serrano received a fellowship under the "Awards in the Visual Arts Program 7" (AVA 7), administered by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Since 1981, the "Awards in the Visual Arts Program" has been jointly funded by grants to SECCA from the Equitable and Rockefeller Foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts.

The Endowment made its decision to fund SECCA for AVA 7 on the basis of a panel review of application materials related to the SECCA's past history of successfully administering the AVA program. The Endowment's award to SECCA for AVA 7 was made after the review and recommendation of the Endowment's Visual Arts panel and the National Council on the Arts, the Endowment's presidentially-appointed advisory body. SECCA's selection of artists was made, by their jury, after the Endowment's grant was made. The Endowment's panel review was not based on an evaluation of the work of the artists who eventually were selected for the AVA 7 (e.g. - Mr. Serrano), as the selection of those artists was made by a jury convened by SECCA after the Endowment grant was awarded to it.

It may be of interest to know the process that SECCA employed to make awards under the "Awards in the Visual Arts Program". SECCA receives nominations of as many as 500 artists from a national network of approximately 100 professionals in American art. Of these nominees, ten artists are selected by a five-member jury of artists and curators to receive fellowships. In addition, each artist's work is subsequently featured in a catalogue and travelling exhibition organized by

SECCA. In 1987, Mr. Serrano, along with nine other artists, was selected by this jury on the basis of the quality of a submission of past work. The AVA 7 exhibition appeared at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, at the Carnegie-Mellon University Art Gallery in Pittsburgh and at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond, where it closed January 29, 1989.

While the Endowment is sympathetic to the concern that some people find Mr. Serrano's work inappropriate or offensive, the Endowment is forbidden in its authorizing legislation from interfering with the artistic choices made by its grantees. This limitation reflects the concern that Federal funding for the arts would result in government intervention in the substance of artistic projects and in the creation of officially sanctioned artistic styles.

Please be assured that we at the Endowment deeply regret any offense that this has caused. Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention and giving us an opportunity to respond.

Sincerely,

Rose M. DiNapoli  
Director  
Congressional Liaison