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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989)

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7-15-1989

## Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 40

Thomas M. Messer

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THOMAS M. MESSER

89 JUL 21 PM 3:05

July 15, 1989

Senator Claiborne Pell  
Room 335, Senate Russell Office Building  
Constitution Avenue  
Washington DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell--

Allow me to address you briefly in my capacity as retired director of the Guggenheim Museum and as a member of the Independent Committee on Arts Policy. Like many of my professional colleagues and fellow trustees in various arts organizations I am deeply concerned about the preservation of artistic freedoms in this Country and in particular about the continued effectiveness of the National Endowment for the Arts.

There is, I must concede, considerable divergence of opinion in our councils as to the distinction of the particular works that have caused such wide ranging offense and I am personally not disposed to exaggerate their validity. This, however, is not the issue.

The issue is whether the prime instrument of our national cultural policy which has brought untold benefits to artists, arts institutions and to the general public for more than two decades should be reduced in effectiveness and authority because it failed to censor isolated offensive expressions. The question of course is rhetorical for I doubt that any responsible legislator could favor such censorship which would stand in contradiction to the aims and purposes of NEA as well as to commonly shared democratic ideals in the United States.

In view of the above, allow me to regret the symbolic reduction in NEA appropriations proposed by the House since, despite its material insignificance, it is intended to punish NEA for no reason at all. More importantly, it is my fervent hope, one widely shared among culturally aware citizens, that the incidence that have given rise to the current problem will be seen for what they are, the price for an enlightened and tolerant governmental attitude without which the arts cannot flourish and the Nation cannot prosper.

Respectfully yours,

