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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 41

Sherman Clarke

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Sherman Clarke

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30 July 1989

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
United States Senate
335 Russell Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

This letter is in response to the Helms amendment to the Interior appropriation bill.

Personally, I do not think it is the place of the government (either Congress or even the National Endowment for the Arts) to judge a work's artistic merit or ethical character. Mapplethorpe's photographs, as a body of work, are important examples of later 20th-century art. I have not seen Serrano's sculpture, but for centuries artists have been making political and religious statements (both for and against the "norm") through their art.

I respect Senator Helms' desire not to consider Mapplethorpe or Serrano's works worthy of his personal admiration, but I think it is an abuse of a Senator's power to impose his values on a government agency like the National Endowment for the Arts. Personally, I think it is far more obscene that billions of dollars are being spent on the Stealth bomber and other defense programs when people are homeless, without health protection, without proper food, etc.

Sincerely,


Sherman Clarke