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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989)

Education: National Endowment for the Arts  
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7-19-1989

## Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 42

Christopher Rouse

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER  
EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
26 GIBBS STREET  
ROCHESTER, N. Y. 14604

89 AUG -1 AM 9:29

July 19, 1989

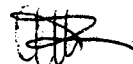
The Honorable Claiborne Pell  
Room 335, Senate Russell Office Building  
Constitution Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Pell,

Enclosed please find a copy of a letter I have just sent to Senator D'Amato. I am greatly distressed about the recent events in the Senate regarding appropriations for the National Endowment for the Arts, and I hope I and the hundreds of thousands of other artists in the United States can count on your support in reversing this disastrous course undertaken by the Congress.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours very truly,



Christopher Rouse

THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER  
EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC  
26 GIBBS STREET  
ROCHESTER, N. Y. 14604

July 28, 1989

The Honorable Alfonse M. D'Amato  
Senate Russell Office Building  
Constitution Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator D'Amato,


I have recently returned from two weeks in Europe on tour with Leonard Bernstein to find that the Senate has apparently approved legislation which would adversely affect the operations of the National Endowment for the Arts.

I am aware of the works of visual art by Messrs. Serrano and Mapplethorpe which triggered this legislation and wish neither to attack nor defend them. I would like to assert in the strongest possible terms, however, that the sort of changes proposed by the Senate bill would have a serious chilling effect on the livelihoods of all artists in the United States, established and emerging, traditionalist and avant garde. The either slash the Endowment's budget or to restructure its grant allocation procedures would make it extremely difficult—if not impossible—for creative artists to continue producing works of the magnitude and quality which have made the United States the world leader for the arts in recent decades. As it is, our nation offers per capita funding for the arts in a smaller amount than any other major Western country, and to effect an even smaller budget for the Endowment would be disastrous.

I will not bore you with an essay on artistic freedom but would only conclude by referring to a statement made by one of your colleagues to the effect that he didn't want to see the government funding "any more of this trash." It is true that some might not wish to see their tax dollars spent to support "offensive" art (although, as you know, what one finds offensive another might find profoundly moving), but there are many uses the government makes of my tax dollars of which I do not approve. I recognize, though, that it is impossible for each taxpayer to designate individually for what his taxes may and may not be spent, and I would hope that the Congress will not attempt to apply such a standard to arts funding when it would not consider such action in other areas.

I do not know whether you will be involved in the Senate-House conference committee which will reach a compromise on this legislation, but I hope you will do whatever you can to restore the fiscal and organizational integrity of the Arts Endowment. Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

  
Christopher Rouse  
Professor of Composition