

1989

Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 46

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July 10, 1989

Honorable Clairborne Pell
United States Senate
513 Senate Hart Building
Washington, DC
20510

Dear Senator Pell,

I am writing with a great sense of urgency in order to offer a clearer perspective on the controversy surrounding the support of projects involving the work of Andres Serrano and Robert Mapplethorpe by the National Endowment for the Arts.

The very nature of any kind of creative pursuit demands that it be challenging and provocative. Artists will sometimes ask us to experience things that are painful or difficult. It is our responsibility to respond to their challenge with our own creative responses and questions. This is the vital and important process by which we all grow, this is an atmosphere where we are all pushed to use our senses and intellect.

To endanger the process by which artists are supported or to block their work from entering into a dialogue with the public cuts off the fundamental freedom of speech that we all hold dear. We cannot overlook the important and vital process of freedom of expression because that freedom encourages viewpoints that are different than our own.

Andres Serrano's work asks that we look at our heroes in more human terms so that we might find the heroic in ourselves and the work of Robert Mapplethorpe asks that we consider our fantasies so that we can be free to understand the nature of desire. It is most troubling that a hispanic artist and a homosexual artist have been censored for trying to foster a greater understanding of the forces that fuel their oppression.

It is vital that the government exhibit courage and commitment for funding the arts. When left to the private sector morality is subject to the bottom line. Slavery was a good business proposition and Edgar Allan Poe was buried in a paupers grave.

The National Endowment for the Arts is a fair and necessary source of support for art of every kind and description. To jeopardize the Endowments' ability to support the arts would be a severe threat to the right of freedom of speech for all of us.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey Hoone
Director