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Hilda C. Nicolosi

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1166 Middle Road
Portsmouth, Rhode Island 02871
April 17, 1979

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APR 19 1979

The Honorable Claiborne Pell
325 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D. C.

Dear Senator Pell:

The enclosed article is sent to you for your attention. I am making the presumption that the National Endowment for the Arts is a tax-funded organization.

If so, it is appalling to me that our tax dollars are being used for this kind of warped demonstration coming under the heading of "art"! It is a gross insult to the Catholic people of this country.

Are we now picking every reprobate up off the street, handing him a federal grant, and encouraging him to "do your thing"??

Thank you for your consideration of the enclosed material.

Sincerely,

Hilda C. Nicolosi

Hilda C. Nicolosi (Mrs.)

Enclosure

THE WANDERER
APRIL 5
1979

Catholics Protest Anti-Religious Art Exhibit

By CHARLES R. PULVER

SYRACUSE, N.Y. — Like the great winter blizzards which annually beset this historic salt city, a heated controversy has swirled for several weeks around an Hispanic art exhibit. Clergy and laymen alike have protested several of the works, using such words as "blasphemy," "sacrilege," "anti-Catholic," "vulgar," "disgusting" among others. While Auxiliary Bishop Thomas Costello termed it "at least in bad taste," Msgr.

Lawrence Harms of the Old R.C. Church called it "profane and disgusting," and Fr. Francis Nold compared it to "garbage" and suggested that the art gallery itself (the Everson Museum) would serve the city better as a garbage-burning steam plant.

The regional office of Catholics United for the Faith (CUF) issued a statement charging the museum's officers with "insensitivity to the feelings and convictions of thousands of people" and that "the fundamentals of courtesy and good taste are crudely violated." CUF asked that the offending pieces be removed. Mrs. Alice Plavean, a leading Catholic laywoman, told television reporters: "I just feel it's an insult to our Roman Catholic Faith, to all religions. And it's just an insult to the Blessed Mother and to Our Lord" (March 3rd, 1979).

The exhibit, which has been touring the Nation since May, 1977, is titled "Ancient Roots-New Visions" and originated in Washington, D.C. under the sponsorship of Fondo del Sol, an organization which promotes the works of Hispanic-American artists. It contains some 200 separate works executed by 108 artists in a variety of mediums ranging from oils and sculpture through feathers and fiberglass. It has been viewed to date by an estimated 300,000 people in eight U.S. cities. It will open in San Antonio on May 1st and in Chicago on August 24th. Two of

the financial backers of the show are the Xerox Corporation and the National Endowment for the Arts

(Continued on Page 9)

'Eloquent us Habit

"served as a reminder to the professed Religious of their solemn commitment to God, and as a non-verbal but eloquent sermon to all of the primacy of God in Christian life."

Emphasizing the themes of Pope John Paul II in his talk to the International Union of Mothers' General in Rome last Nov. 16th, Cardinal Krol said that the commitment to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience "cannot be relativized by public opinion"; that "every

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Free Respectable

SAN ANTONIO (RNS — The American free enterprise system once beleaguered and friendless on U.S. campuses, has been gaining respectable place lately in academia.

A National Symposium on the Philosophy of Free Enterprise sponsored by St. Mary's Catholic University, drew the active participation of more than 100 students, faculty, and businessmen from across the nation.

Brother Paul Goelz, Society of St. Mary of St. Mary's University said such a symposium may have been impossible in the late 1960s. "The climate on campuses back then was very anti-business," he said. "The war in Vietnam was full swing and student protests were at their zenith.

"In the late 1960s most universities would have had trouble

CATHOLICS PROTEST ANTI-RELIGIOUS ART EXHIBIT

(Continued from Page 1)

Over 90 percent of the artists are said to be Catholics.

The controversial exhibit has been heatedly defended by local art specialists and devotees. Everson Museum director Ron Kuchta sees the issue as merely a clash between cultures. "Images," he said, "even though they are static, still do create emotions . . . depending on one's cultural background. . . ." Jews dislike art portraying the Nazi era; American Indians protest art which shows their past unfavorably (TV interview of March 3rd). Later he told reporters that religious art in a Mexican household is used differently from our conceptions, "but within that cultural context it is not disrespectful at all" (*Syracuse New Times*, March 21st, 1979, p. 6). Nonetheless Kuchta's office has received several letters of protest and many daily phone calls against the exhibit.

Mr. Marc Zuver, principal curator of the exhibit and an officer of Fondo del Sol in Washington, minced no words against critics of the Hispanic art show. "That is complete poppycock," he responded, "I have never in my life heard such nonsense. If some of these dear little ladies in Syracuse have nothing better to do than sit up at night dreaming up fantasies, then I really don't know what to tell them." He suggested that the protestors were "just plain bored, wandering around looking for things to shock them." Only once did he receive a complaint; it came, he said, "from one little old lady in Los Angeles." Every place else, he said, "has brought rave reviews." He clearly inferred that Central New Yorkers knew next to nothing about art; he predicted that Chicago viewers would be more sophisticated — and more receptive to the exhibit.

THIS IS ART? ✕

The most offensive piece in the exhibit is *Oasis* by Larry Fuente. It is a very ornate toilet bowl and tank placed on a dias and backed up by a full length reflecting, glittering slab composed of small pieces of broken mirror glass. Buttons, costume pearls, small hex tiles, and several worn-out shoe heels are worked into the dias and the toilet bowl. And — atop the bejewelled toilet tank, flanked by two large white ceramic swans, is a conspicuous statue of the Blessed Virgin wearing her traditional blue robe, her arms slightly lifted as on the miraculous medal. On her head is affixed a cheap glass ashtray — a mock crown of sorts. On one end of the toilet tank is embedded a small picture of Christ as the Good Shepherd (so dear to Protestants); on the opposite end is a small icon of our Lady of Perpetual Help (so common in Orthodox Churches). On top of the toilet seat is found — amidst many other trivia — a

which he entitles *Tonantzin*, by comparing Our Lady of Guadalupe to the Aztec Goddess of Motherhood (Tonantzin). "A state of metaphor took place after the Spanish 'conquest' of Mexico" by which the Aztec goddess "became" Our Lady of Guadalupe. As part of the "new school" of Mexican artists, Diaz's aim is "to integrate these legends and mythologies into visual concepts. . . ." (exhibit catalogue, p. 15).

Christ is shown in another oil painting in which His face is surrounded by various fruits — a large pineapple, grapes, a strawberry, an apple. In variously juxtaposed photos we see a nude couple partially hidden by a human heart, and mysterious arms leading from Jesus' neck into what some observers claim is an obscene gesture. A young seminarian who viewed the work told me it made Christ "look like a fruit" (a homosexual). The artist admits his own "sensuality" but comments mysteriously "There is a God or there is Church. I have sided with the spiritual" (catalogue, p. 34).

An anti-clerical note is obvious in yet another oil painting — untitled and not even listed in the catalogue for the exhibit. Wrought by R. Diaz (see above) it contains the same skeletal motif. A skull-faced bishop wearing his mitre is pointing a skeletal hand toward a rock upon which rests a human skull. Since there is no explanation one might infer that the dead hierarchy is pointing to a dead pope standing on the rock of Peter.

Close by our Lady's image again suffers, it would seem in an oil titled *Virgin of Charity of Cuba* in which she appears unseemly fat wearing a low-cut dress and holding an equally plump infant in an ornate robe.

Close behind the anti-God and anti-Church themes of these Hispanic artists there is an equally persistent anti-United States theme. Often it is very subtle and hard to detect; other times it is quite explicit as in, for example, a sculpture titled *My Grandmother's Dresser Top* by Louis Leroy. Here the figure of Christ wearing His crown of thorns is overshadowed by what appear to be the wings of an eagle — the symbol of U.S. oppression in Latin America.

As of this writing the exhibit's offensive pieces remain in place. The Museum director has made it a point of honor to not give in despite the heated protests. He defends his actions in the name of "art." The president of the local Spanish community, Nancy Vallarreal, backs him up. A former nun and the product of what she calls a "conservative and a very religious family" she has told outraged Catholics, "You cannot judge a piece of art on the basis of its being moral or immoral, dirty versus clean. Try to judge art as art itself" (*Syracuse Post Standard*, March 7th, 1979).

Syracusans will be happy to see the exhibit depart; they are wondering aloud whether Catholics of San Antonio and Chicago will feel as they do.

ceptive to the exhibit.

THIS IS ART? X

The most offensive piece in the exhibit is *Oasis* by Larry Ruente. It is a very ornate toilet bowl and tank placed on a dias and backed up by a full length reflecting, glittering slab composed of small pieces of broken mirror glass. Buttons, costume pearls, small hex tiles, and several worn-out shoe heels are worked into the dias and the toilet bowl. — atop the bejewelled toilet tank, flanked by two large white ceramic swans, is a conspicuous statue of the Blessed Virgin wearing her traditional blue robe, her arms slightly lifted as on the miraculous medal. On her head is fixed a cheap glass ashtray — a rock crown of sorts. On one end of the toilet tank is embedded a small picture of Christ as the Good Shepherd (so dear to Protestants); at the opposite end is a small icon of our Lady of Perpetual Help (so common in Orthodox Churches). On top of the toilet seat is found — amidst many other trivia — a finely wrought brass set of marijuana leaves.

The other piece which viewers found most insulting to their Catholic Faith was a large oil painting — a composite of several scenes, three of them nude women in obscene poses — to which is attached a smaller, but highly visible, tapestry of the Sacred Heart in which Jesus is wearing a pair of real sunglasses. And very close by — a few feet away — in a work called *Venus and Her Toilet* we find a rear view of the nude goddess as she bemusedly watches a continuous video insert. This film strip — representing her "fantasies" — contains the kinds of pornography one would find in an adult film store. Youngsters accompanying their parents were goggle-eyed as they stood and watched it.

Other pieces showed obvious anti-religious sentiments. In one large oil painting St. Teresa of Avila is depicted as a bloated, repulsive creature surrounded by caricatures of her ritual "castles," cherubs playing violins, and St. John of the Cross looking on benevolently from above. Another piece is named *The Crucified Devil*. It is a sculpture of a devil figure suspended within a crucifix; he is surrounded by wire spikes and rigged to jump and when the operator jabs him with ornate push rods attached to the crucifix. One gets the clear impression that Satan is an invention of the Church — a tool to keep people into compliance; like a puppet on a string he jumps and acts at the behest of an enthroned clergy.

SPHEMOUS

The Lady of Guadalupe fared rather poorly in the exhibit. In one oil painting she is shown in an additional Guadalupe garment and mantle, but her face is that of a skull's head, a skull, not a living woman's. Her hands are bony skeletal fingers. And all around her are occultic symbols. From one arm of a empty cross an evil eye is hanging off part of the moon she is looking upon; from the other arm hangs a skeletal goat's head. At her feet, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lies a human skull with tiny skeletal hands.

The artist, Ricardo R. Diaz, explains this disturbing work,

(Continued) women Religion will and not signify that God which one's freedom Religious should the Church... deeds."

Citing the Religious... continued:

"On the experience, the modification of a Religion never heard substitution of Religious habit, my experience statement of many Christians simple and habit, is that including potential can life, lament Religious habit garb. I am personal opinion, an undeniable Father is ref when he says desire the extent of a simple habit"

Commenting on some Religious discredit the He wear a Religion Krol asked, "Is the Supreme every Christ obedience? Is Christ and is no voice with associated — by — 'He that hear Him who sent"

Noting that Religious comm

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Virginia; Irvin Luce professor of New York Univ

Connally, former

Dr. Alan Gr government private business enterprise and regulations do product quality. died because dru not permitted drugs that may lives." He also extraordinary swi the U.S.

Herbert Stein Carter's human been to "cajole ness rather than that encourage "our President an uncertain tr affairs and wage and pri necessary interf market system.

Irving Krist socialism is dy killing it "is the total misconception and human natu "Capitalism has idealism that w never been ma world," noting