

CENSORSHIP?

This letter was originally sent to Ms. Susan Anderson, coordinator of Protestant Campus Ministry. It was also sent to the Behrend College Collegian for publication.

Dear Ms. Anderson:

This is to register my dissatisfaction with and protest of the juried portion of the 1993 Wintergarden Art Show, and your and Protestant Campus Ministry's handling of it.

Let me say that although I don't know you, I know several artists, some who worked on the show, who do seem to know you fairly well.

Their consensus, stated in a number of ways, is that you have a very narrow view of what is appropriate in art which colored the outcome of the show; and further that you did not do the show for the love of art, but for the dollar value that it potentially meant.

That the show hosted on the campus of an institution of higher learning, where the students should be exposed to and challenged by different ideas, would be censored on the basis of content: i.e. conflicting religious or anti-religious content and perceived sexual or violent content, is appalling in my view.

One artist was told in advance by a member of the committee that one of his pieces would be judged anti-Christian and therefore should not be submitted.

Another was actually accepted and hung, but was removed on the pretext of it being violent, even though my informant, who was there, could not see anything violent no matter how the imagination was stretched.

Although the photograph by Tom Lee (one of the strongest images in the show) was accepted, it should be noted it is the only nude that was.

Further, the genitalia happened to be in shadow, and it was hung in the place most likely to be overlooked by the viewing public.

Coincidentally, its placement was in the location most likely to be damaged by sunlight or an unseen vandal. There is no doubt that if Mr. Lee had submitted two other works that they would have been accepted, and the nude excluded from the show. The argument that this was not an anti-figure show is not convincing.

Regarding my work, the painting that was the weakest of the three, in my estimation, was accepted while the figure studies were not.

For that matter, the rejected pieces were considerably stronger than a good deal of what was accepted into the show.

If I remember correctly the application form cautioned that work could be declined without comment.

Your call to me, however, was anything but a no-comment. It was "your work 'Mistletoe #1,' and 'Man in the Moon #2' are unacceptable to the show." That and the tone of voice spoke volumes.

What is particularly alarming is that one of the committee members told me that there would be no discrimination against the figure.

This individual also told me that she went so far as to give you a detailed description of "Mistletoe #1" which I originally decided against in favor of another piece which I thought would be "less wild" for you to deal with; and came back with the statement that such a piece would not be discriminated against on the basis of content.

Nor would there be a problem with frontal male nudity in general.

Anti-religious and violent content is extremely unlikely in my work, and a sexually explicit interpretation of either piece requires more imagination than I have.

Let me note that I have had figure studies appear in shows on the campuses of Villa Maria and Gannon University.

The rejection of these pieces after such affirmations seems to me to constitute falsehood and violation of trust, and the accepting the funds for them theft by fraud. This was more appalling because it was done by a religious organization.

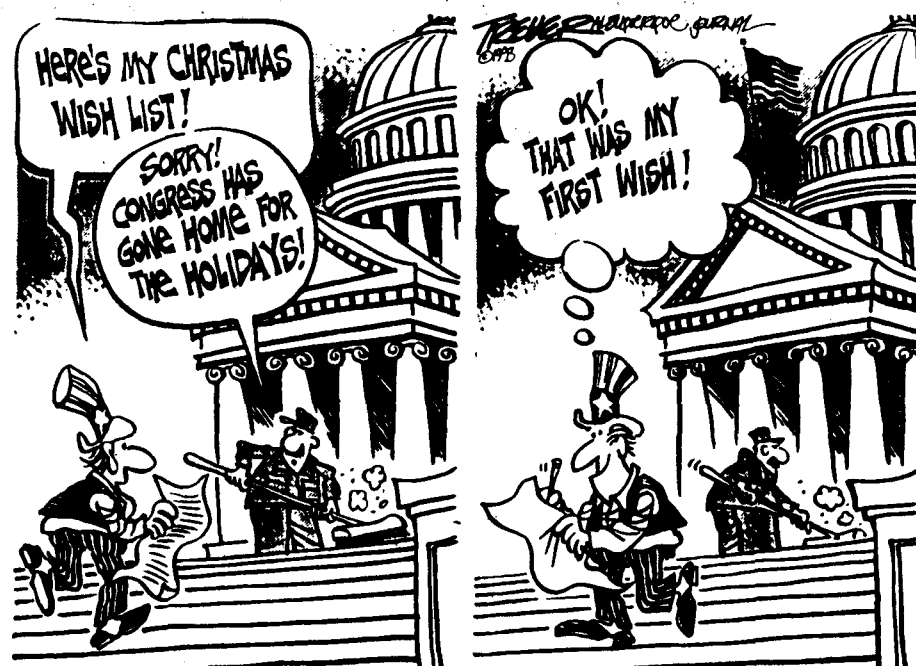
It would appear that Michelangelo's "Risen Christ" and Bosch's "The Garden of earthly Delights" would be rejected as religiously objectionable; Donatello's "David" and Cadmus' "Two Boys on a Beach #1" as sexually explicit; Goy's "The Third of May, 1808" and Grunwald's "Crucifixion" as violent and therefore "unacceptable" to your show.

Yet all are where children, not to say college students, can study the issues presented in them.

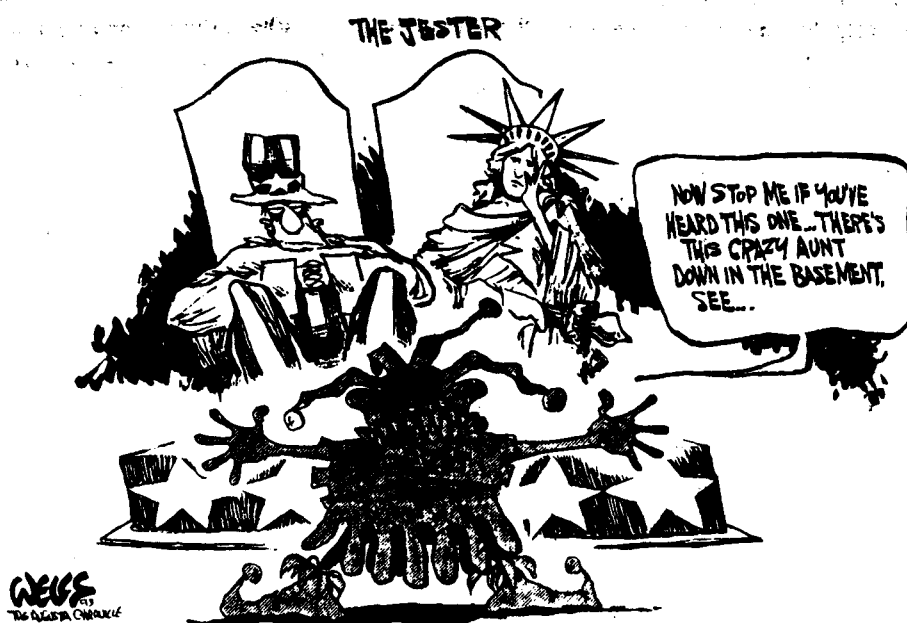
Personally I find the above mentioned religious works at variance with my spiritual understanding, but I would find exclusion of such works unacceptable.

I'm sure that the defense is that this show is hosted by Protestant Campus Ministry. If, however, Campus Ministry finds it difficult to deal with artistic issues, it seems to me that means excluding art shows as fundraisers in the future. Or the exhibition should be run by some other organization.

Luke Gehring



Editorial Cartoons



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