Time To Abolish Federally Financed "Hate Art"

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The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has returned to center stage, insulting our sensibilities, offending our religion, and degrading our public life. The coarsening of our culture has been dominated by the behavior of the Clintons for so long that we had almost forgotten that the NEA is still feeding from the public trough to finance its "hate art" targeting Christians.

The Brooklyn Museum of Art is featuring an exhibit called Sensation. It includes a picture of the Virgin Mary decorated with elephant feces and pictures of women's private parts, a picture of the Last Supper with a naked woman presiding in the role of Christ, a picture glorifying a pedophile, and a sculpture of a man's head filled with frozen blood.

Some people call this "art." It should be called blasphemy, obscenity, bigotry, and intolerable. The Museum even has a warning notice that says the exhibit may cause "shock, vomiting, confusion, panic, and anxiety."

Over the last three years, the Brooklyn Museum of Art has received at least $500,000 of the NEA's federal tax dollars. That's in addition to the $7 to $9 million a year the Brooklyn Museum receives from the New York City taxpayers.

The Brooklyn exhibit shocked even the U.S. Senate, the body that failed to be sufficiently shocked by Clinton's misbehavior with Monica to mete out the appropriate punishment. The U.S. Senate unanimously passed Senator Bob Smith's (I-NH) amendment to withhold future federal funds from the Brooklyn Museum of Art unless it cancelled the exhibit.

Senator Smith's amendment can become effective only if it is adopted by the House-Senate conference committee, now reconciling the Interior Department appropriations bill (H.R. 2466) that includes the NEA budget. Senator Arlen Specter (R-PA) calls this issue very "complex" and predicts Smith's

amendment will never become law.

The Brooklyn Museum travesty has become a hot potato in New York politics. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani is withholding payment of the city's currently due subsidy of $497,000, while the media, the intelligentsia, and potential candidate Hillary Clinton stoutly defend the exhibit.

New York's culturati gathered for a preview of Sensation on Oct. 1 and were delighted to talk to the press between bites of shrimp and baby lobster tails. One of these artsy socialites said he thinks the Virgin Mary atrocity has a "glowing quality of cloisonne or terrazzo."

The Brooklyn exhibit features other items by the same offender, Chris Ofili, executed in his favored medium, elephant dung. The exhibit also includes several pieces by Damien Hirst: a shark in formaldehyde, a cow cut in 12 sections, a bisected pig in formaldehyde- filled cases, and a device in which maggots feed on a dead cow's head and give birth to flies, which are then electrically zapped.

Arnold L. Lehman, the museum's director, asserts that "public funding of the arts is an investment in the values and ideals embodied in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution." The New York Times calls the Brooklyn Museum's position "courageous."

The battle lines are drawn with Giuliani accurately calling it "a disgusting show" and noting that "you don't have a right to government subsidy for desecrating somebody else's religion." The two sides will meet in court and it's anybody's guess what a liberal, activist judge will rule.

If a football team says a prayer before a big game, or if Judge Roy Moore of Alabama hangs a hand-carved plaque of the Ten Commandments on his courtroom wall, anti-religious pressure groups invoke the First Amendment to persecute and prosecute them for their religious expression. But when sensationalists desecrate our most sacred religious symbols, the people whom Giuliani calls "First Amendment hysterics" defend it as "art" and demand that we pay for it!

What is happening to our country? Senator Smith had it right when he told the Senate that the creator of this current travesty needs a psychiatrist, not federal funds.

When the Republicans won their landmark election and took over Congress in 1994, we expected them to

cut Big Government down to size. The National Endowment for the Arts was at the top of everybody's liquidation list.

Abolishing government "art" should have been a no-brainer for the Republican Congress. As early as 1992, even David Brinkley, Sam Donaldson, Cokie Roberts and George Will agreed on their Sunday morning show that it was time for the NEA to go!

Yet every year we've had a budget battle, and every year the NEA lobby has prevailed. It continues to get about $100 million a year of taxpayer funds.

Every time the NEA committed a new travesty, we were told that the controversial NEA has cleaned up its act and all the bad stuff is in the past. No more Mapplethorpe depictions of sadomasochism, we were told, no more crucifixes immersed in urine.

But new federally funded "hate art" keeps cropping up. Tell your U.S. Senators and Representatives that the Brooklyn Museum exhibit is the last straw. Now is the time to abolish the NEA.