

Museum Wars

Individual Rights and Aesthetic Freedom

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On October 2, 1999, the Brooklyn Museum of Art opened its doors to both supporters and opponents of the exhibition titled, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*. The artwork exhibited was considered by many to be blasphemous, disgusting, and inappropriate. A lawsuit was filed to shut the exhibition down, and hundreds rallied outside the museum. The museum installed metal detectors and put a Plexiglas shield in front of the by-now infamous painting by Chris Ofili titled, *The Holy Virgin Mary*. Dennis Heiner, a 72-year-old devout Catholic and museum patron, slipped behind the protective plexiglas shield during normal viewing hours and smeared white paint across the artwork's surface. When arrested and asked why he did it, he simply whispered, "it's blasphemous" (McFadden). A little over three years later, on January 18, 2003, a group of six men stormed a small museum on the outskirts of central Moscow where an art exhibition had just opened only four days earlier. The men ransacked the exhibition, defacing many of the 45 works with spray paint and completely destroying others. Words like "Sacrilege," "Damn you" and "You hate Orthodoxy" were sprayed on the walls and artworks. The police quickly arrived on scene and arrested the men.

The events surrounding these two art exhibitions cause serious reflection in regards to freedom of expression and the responsibilities of a museum. Museums have become hotly contested

battlegrounds over freedom of expression in recent years. How can conflicting demands of individual rights and aesthetic freedom be reconciled with public civility and community peace within these spaces? Can critical expression be subdued without jeopardizing rights to speech, press, and assembly? In order to address this question, this paper will take a close look at two exhibitions and the events surrounding them—*Sensation*, exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum in New York City, and *Caution, Religion!*, exhibited at the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Center in Moscow. Museums seem to no longer just provide a nice refuge from ordinary life, nor are they simply repositories of knowledge. Museums are moving to the forefront in contemporary issues, and therefore this paper will argue that it is the responsibility of the art museum to present the artwork in proper context and be true to the artist's intentions. Context and intention is everything. Presenting the work in proper context and being true to the artist's intentions will help limit misunderstanding and misinterpretations of the work that so often can create controversy and feelings of hatred, attack, and sacrilege. Government officials, artists and museum patrons should also seek understanding and respect aesthetic freedoms while remembering that "Freedom of expression is one thing, but usage of your freedom should not be to offend others, advocate hate speech or provoke to violence" (Grenda, 9).

The Brooklyn Museum of Art has been a cultural center for over 100 years. In October 1999 the Brooklyn Museum opened its doors for the exhibition *Sensation*, which originally premiered at The Royal Academy of Art in London in 1997. Two years later in Brooklyn, lines wrapped around the block. It is no wonder why the attendance numbers spiked with a provocative ad campaign (see figure 1) and with gift shop posters that stated, “Health Warning. The contents of this exhibition may cause shock, vomiting, confusion, panic, euphoria, and anxiety. If you suffer from high blood pressure, a nervous disorder, or palpitations, you should consult your doctor before viewing this exhibition” (Jensen).

According to BMA’s website, the exhibition included approximately ninety paintings, sculptures, photographs, and installations by forty-two artists. Among the works were Damien Hirst’s *A Thousand Years*, composed of flies, maggots, a cow’s head, sugar, and water; Marc Quinn’s *Self*, a bust of the artist made from nine pints of his own frozen blood; the Chapman brothers’ *Great Deeds Against the Dead*, showing mutilated body parts hanging from a tree; Jenny Saville’s *Plan*, a distorted nude self-portrait and, most controversial, artist Chris Ofili’s work titled *The Holy Virgin Mary*. Ofili’s painting is a provocative work where a black Madonna is surrounded by what looks from a distance to be fluttering putti or cherubs. On closer inspection, it is apparent that the cherubs actually consist of female genitalia cut from pornographic magazines. The robe of the Madonna is parted to reveal one exposed breast. The breast is a ball of lacquered elephant dung adorned

with glitter and carefully attached to the linen support. Similar lumps of manure provide two ‘feet’ for the painting to stand on (Sooke). (See Figure 2).

When Rudolph Giuliani, then Mayor of New York City, heard about the exhibition and Ofili’s painting, he was outraged. Ten days before *Sensation* was due to open, during one of his daily press conferences, Mayor Giuliani referred to the exhibition as “sick stuff” and singled out *The Holy Virgin Mary*. “It offends me,” Giuliani said, despite the fact that he had not actually seen the painting. “The idea of... a city subsidizing art, so-called works of art, in which people are throwing elephant dung at a picture of the Virgin Mary, is sick,” he continued, before threatening to remove funding from the Brooklyn Museum. unless “the director [came] to his senses” (Sooke). Giuliani blasted the show saying, “You don’t have a right to government subsidy for desecrating somebody else’s religion” (McGuigan).

The museum filed a suit in federal court on First Amendment grounds and the city countered with a suit of its own. The battle was well underway. Many across America may have seen this as simply the latest chapter in a culture war in art, with previous battles being fought in 1989 over a photograph by Andres Serrano called, *Piss Christ* and over the homoerotic work of Robert Mapplethorpe, just to name a couple. But this battle was different. This was New York City, the capital city of the avantgarde. To the art world, it was as if the mayor of Detroit decided to ban cars inside the city limits. Secondly, neither side was backing down (McGuigan).

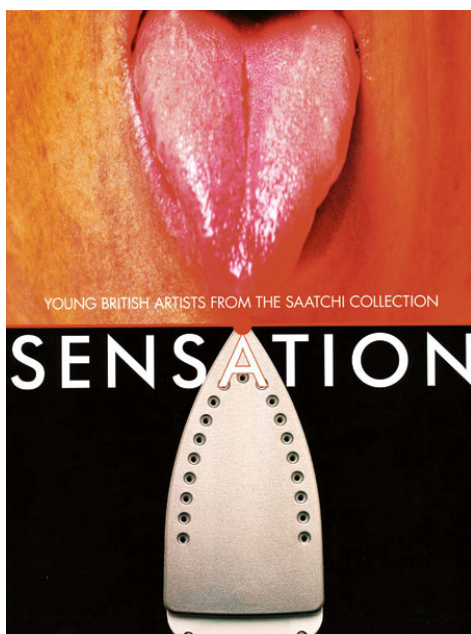


Figure 1 - Exhibition Advertising Poster

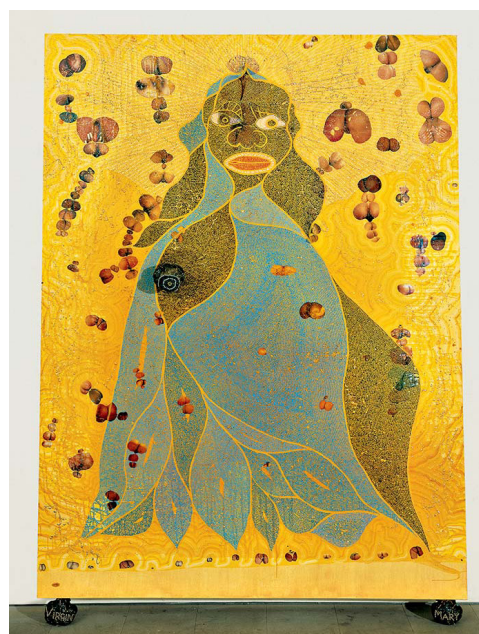


Figure 2 - The Holy Virgin Mary by Chris Ofili

Just after the opening of the exhibition, Arnold Lehman, the director of the Brooklyn Museum, told PBS that “this is a defining exhibition of a decade of the most creative energy that’s come out of Great Britain in a very long time. And that’s why we did it, these works are challenging, and thought provoking, and some are beautiful, some are very difficult to look at.” PBS held an interview with Michael Hess, the city’s corporation counsel, and Floyd Abrams, the famous First Amendment lawyer representing the BMA. In the interview Hess identified the reasons that Giuliani and the city filed a suit.

“For the first time in the course of [the 100 year] lease, the Brooklyn Museum has violated that obligation to put on an exhibit that really is to have open access to the public, to train young people in artistic things, and to really put on an appropriate show for the citizens of the city. Their lease specifically says that the museum should be open to young people and schoolchildren. At the start of this exhibit, one of the strictures put on the exhibit by this museum is that no one under 17 may attend unless accompanied by an adult. That alone violated the lease without getting the mayor’s approval and caused the mayor to react the way he did.”

To avoid litigation, the museum quickly changed their age policy on the exhibition, posted warning signs around the museum and posted advisories for parents. Hess also said that the mayor was not opposed to showing the work in a private gallery, but felt that “because of the nature of the art itself, ...they shouldn’t be supported by taxpayer money.” In response, Abrams said, “The mayor is saying, in effect, if there is a book in the library that we fund, I can take it out if it’s offensive. That is profoundly dangerous... and that’s why we had to go to court” (The Art of Controversy). On March 27th, 2000, the Mayor and the museum settled the lawsuits and city paid the museum a total of \$9.3 million.

Three years later on the other side of the world, the Andrei Sakharov Museum and Public Center in Moscow presented the modest exhibition titled *Ostorozhno: Religiia! (Caution: Religion!)*. The museum, established in 1996, is one of the most vibrant arenas for public discussion in the Russian capital. It was created to record human-rights abuses under past regimes and in modern Russia, and to contribute to the establishment of democratic values in Russia as advocated and exemplified by Andrei Sakharov. Most of its exhibits are documentary in nature, though occasionally the center holds art exhibitions. According to a statement from the exhibition organizers posted on

the Sakharov Center website, the *Caution, Religion!* exhibit “communicates the distinct duality of its conception: this is both a call for a careful, delicate, and respectful treatment of religion, faith, and believers and a sign: ‘Careful, danger!’ when it comes to religious fundamentalism (no matter whether it is Muslim or Russian Orthodox), the fusion of religion with the state, and obscurantism” (Zulumyan).

The exhibition was in part a response to the Orthodox Church’s growing influence in both politics and society at large since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The exhibition questioned the role of the Church. This is seen for example, by a sculpture installation by Alina Gurevich, which depicted a church made of vodka bottles with onions in the place of corks so that they resembled the domes of Orthodox churches, alluding to the tax exemption the church received in the 1990’s to sell alcohol (Myers, 2005). Other works on display were Irina Waldron’s rug that represented the cloned sheep Dolly as the Lamb of God, and Alisa Zrazhevskaya’s piece, *You Shall Not Make for Yourself an Idol*, a lifesize icon with cutouts in place for the viewer’s head, hands and Bible. A camera on a tripod was placed in front of the work, inviting the viewers to participate by placing themselves in the icon and taking a picture. Another piece in the exhibition showed an image of Christ superimposed onto a Coca-Cola advertisement with the words, “This is my blood” in english. (See figure 3)



Figure 3

Offense in response to the exhibit is not wholly unjustified. However, unlike the Brooklyn Museum’s *Sensation, Caution, Religion!* was devoid of nudity, blood, and feces. What incited controversy and an attack on the exhibition was the feeling that the work insulted the Russian Orthodox Church and people’s personal faith. Alexander Zavolokin, former deputy head of contemporary art in the Russian Ministry

of Culture, remarked that “We don’t interfere with exhibits if they don’t promote pornography, racism, violence, and the destruction of state power. All other topics and forms of expression are okay. Of course, some interpret things differently. It’s a subjective evaluation.” Regarding the Sakharov Centre’s exhibit, *Caution: Religion!*, he said, “for some it was fine, for others, it seemed an insult of their faith. This conflict should be settled in the court, that’s normal practice in a civil society” (Wheeler). And settled in court it was.

To no surprise, a lawsuit was filed against the attackers soon after the destruction of the exhibition. However, what was surprising was that a retaliatory suit was filed against the organizers of the exhibit: Yuri V. Samodurov, then director of the Sakharov Museum, Lyudmila V. Vasilovskaya, the Museum’s curator at the time, and Anna Mikhailchuk, one of the artists in the show. “This lawsuit, unlike the one filed against the attackers was based on a much more serious accusation: the organizers and artist were charged with ‘inciting religious hatred’ under article 282 of the Russian Criminal Code” (Bernstein). This article criminalizes “actions aimed at the incitement of hatred or enmity, as well as the humiliation of a person or group of persons on grounds of sex, race, nationality, language, origin, attitude towards religion, and likewise affiliation to any social group” (Code of Russian Federation).

Four of the six attackers were quickly acquitted for lack of evidence, even though they were caught inside the Museum. “Then on August 11 a court threw out the charges against the others, saying they had been unlawfully prosecuted. The court made it clear that an investigation should continue - not against those who attacked the exhibition, but against the museum itself.” (Myers, 2005). The actions of these six men and the ensuing criminal case started a heated debate over both the state of freedom of expression in Russia and the growing influence of the Orthodox Church. A committee was formed to decide whether the exhibit incited interethnic or interreligious hatred. Even though many of the artists were practising Orthodox, Mr. Samodurov feared that the outcome was predetermined due to the complete lack of any art experts appointed to the committee (Myers, 2005).

On March 24, 2005 the court eventually ruled that the exhibition at the Andrei Sakharov museum was “openly insulting and blasphemous” (Myers, 2015). Anna Mikhailchuk was acquitted while Samodurov and Vasilovskaya were fined the equivalent of \$3,600 each, notably a much lighter punishment than the prosecutors were seeking. The court ordered that the artworks be returned to the artists instead of destroying them as the

prosecutors requested.

In their book, *Profane: Sacrilegious Expression in a Multicultural Age*, Grenda, Beneke, and Nash, write in their introduction that “by almost all accounts, we are living through an especially restive era of both irreverent expression and speech regulation” (Grenda, 10). The exhibitions discussed clearly illustrate this point. These fights were more than simply fights between a mayor and a public institution and between a private institution and six members of a church. They were fights about religious tolerance and freedom of expression. Because this controversy is sure to ensue, the question is again, how can conflicting demands of individual rights and aesthetic freedom within an art museum space be reconciled with public civility and community peace? First of all, the museum has a responsibility to give context to the work and exhibition so as to try to prevent misunderstanding. Secondly, government officials, artists and patrons of art must respect aesthetic freedoms while remembering that the artwork should not be used to create offense, advocate hate or provoke to violence.

Regarding *Caution, Religion!*, “The exhibition’s works all addressed religion, but Mr. Samodurov said the theme was not anti-religious, but rather anticlerical. Some of the artists themselves are Orthodox believers, he said, and the exhibition was not meant to offend.” (Myers, 2005). Some could try to argue that the “anticlerical,” as opposed to the anti-religious purpose of the exhibit wasn’t made entirely clear. For example, the title of the exhibition was not, *Caution, Religious Fundamentalism!* or *Caution, Obscurantism!*, both of which would be much more targeted to the intentions of the museum and artists, and more in line with most democratic and secular ideals. The title was *Caution, Religion!*. This title clearly intends a certain provocation. It suggests that one should be cautious of all religion because ‘religion is bad.’ Perhaps the reason for choosing the title *Caution, Religion!* was because its simplicity demands attention and holds a certain appeal that the other two suggested titles lack. However if the exhibition “was not meant to offend” as Samodurov stated, then choosing this provocative and misleading title was the wrong decision to make.

On the other hand, when we attend a museum exhibition, we expect to have a positive experience. However, that experience is dependent upon how we are able to interpret and understand the exhibit for ourselves based upon the information given to us. We almost always have certain expectations when we enter an art museum. For example, we might expect the artworks to be labeled with a title and artist name

or for the exhibition to have a brief statement giving background context to the show. When expectations are thwarted, our way of interpreting the work is distracted or misled, making it easy to place blame on the museum itself. In the case of *Caution, Religion!*, a press release was published before the opening of the show stating the purpose and meaning of the exhibition. All artworks were carefully selected and properly labeled, and at the opening reception there were even a handful of speakers who addressed the related topics and artworks. Never once was religion denounced. Rather, there was a call for the freedom of religion, which includes the freedom to accept no religion. One of the speakers, artist Oksana Sarkisian stated, “Perhaps these artistic gestures may seem blasphemous and ironic in relation to the religious outlook. But this is not so” (Sarkisian). This statement by Sarkisian at the exhibition opening clearly shows that at the very least, the participants were aware that they were walking a very fine line.

As for the Brooklyn exhibition, Sarah Worth, a professor of philosophy at Furman University who attended the *Sensation* exhibition, wrote that the Museum “presented the art in a fashion that was respectful of the artists regarding how their art works should be presented. The show did not pit the ideology of the museum against the ideology of the artist.” (Worth). Respecting an artists’ intentions does not mean that the museum must endorse the ideology of the work, but it does mean that the museum has a responsibility to present the work in a way that does not intentionally degrade the artist or the work. The Brooklyn Museum may have presented the work with respect, but can we truly say that the ideology of the museum, that of simply creating shock in order to put it’s name on the map in this case, wasn’t against the ideologies of the artists? Norman Rosenthal, original co-curator of *Sensation* along with Charles Saatchi, wrote in the 1997 exhibition catalog:

“A visit to this exhibition with an open mind and well-developed antennae for life and art will perceive an uncommonly clear mirror of contemporary problems and obsessions from a perspective of youth. ...these works serve as memorable metaphors of many aspects of our times... In this exhibition, we can witness and engage with metaphors and sensations, positive and negative, that remind us of big issues of our time” (Rosenthal).

If the artwork created by the Young British Artists was truly about engaging the audience with “big issues of our time,” then why such an emphasis from

the museum on the shock value? Why advertise this exhibition as a show that could create “vomiting, confusion, panic, euphoria, and anxiety” as opposed to a show that exhibited “contemporary problems and obsessions from the perspective of youth” or “highlighted a generation of British Art”? The answer is perhaps in large part due to Arnold Lehman, the new museum director, trying to bolster the attendance numbers of a dying museum. As art critic Donald Kuspit wrote, “Controversy guarantees that one will have a certain place in short-term social memory if not in long-term art memory” (Kuspit, 159). Shock and controversy sell, and Lehman knew it.

It seems that there is a conflicting argument to Worth’s statement. Indeed, unless all of the artists wanted to create shock and controversy, then the museum did in fact pit itself against the ideology of the artist. However, in the case of *Caution, Religion!* the Sakharov Museum did not pit itself against the artists which can be seen through the numerous verbal and written statements from the artists and museum organizers that they were in agreement with the purpose, message and presentation of the exhibition.

When *The Holy Virgin Mary* painting was exhibited for the second time in the United States—again in the city of New York, but this time at the New Museum for a retrospective of the artist’s work 15 years later—no controversy arose. The painting was received without any protests or lawsuits. Why the shift? Time obviously plays a factor, for as Rosenthal wrote in the catalog: “in time even such powerful images as these become assimilated, their impact diluted” (Rosenthal). Another factor was of course the court ruling of 15 years prior, which essentially protected the painting. However, there was a third factor—the exhibition context. Chris Ofili’s retrospective displayed *The Holy Virgin Mary* as just one of dozens of works by the artist, thus putting the painting in context with the artist’s larger ideas. In this setting the Virgin was given added light and understanding, softening the shock value and making it easier to process. This aided in keeping community peace. In contrast, *Sensation* contained an assortment of wide social commentary, art-historically referenced figurative work, and gender, class, and race issues. There were works that were witty, body-obsessed, and dysfunctional. Art Critic Richard Stone, in his article printed in the *Sensation* catalogue, wrote that “It is these varieties of approach, intention, and realisation that, paradoxically, bind the artists together. All are connected by new or re-inflected, often radical content” (Shone, 12). By traditional standards, there was absolutely no unifying theme. Each work stood

alone, including *The Virgin*, which was out of context. There was not much for the viewer to grasp other than the “radical content” that created a sensation of shock and disgust. What *Sensation* did convey more than anything was the explosion of energy and ambition coming out of Goldsmith College and other London art schools during the eighties and early nineties as well as one possible picture of British art of the 90’s from the viewpoint of one man, Mr. Saatchi, seeing as how every piece was from his private collection.

Museums have a responsibility to protect the work of the artist, give context to the work by presenting it in the best possible way without going against the artist’s intentions, and standing up for freedom of expression. Not too long ago, “the culture wars primarily focused on specific artists who belonged to marginalized groups or practised new art forms. Artists like Robert Mapplethorpe, Andres Serrano, and Karen Finley. These artists were relatively unprotected by supportive institutions and were therefore extremely susceptible to attack. Museums now have become a principal target as well.” (Dubin). Nowadays, issues revolving around representations and responsibility and the control of expression have entered mainstream establishments, such as museums, places that can embody American society. (Dubin).

When addressing how public civility and community peace can be reconciled with demands for freedom of expression and individual rights within and around an art museum space, we not only have to address the responsibilities of the museum, as have been discussed above, but we also need to address the responsibilities of government officials, artists and patrons of art. It should be noted here that much of the following discussion relies on ethical subjectivity. Arguments will be presented on varying sides in order to shed light on this important issue.

Judge Nina Gershon of the U.S District Court in Brooklyn said, “There is no federal constitutional issue more grave than the effort by government officials to censor works of expression and to threaten the vitality of a major cultural institution, as punishment for failing to abide by governmental demands for orthodoxy” (Cash). Judge Gershon was of course speaking about the actions of Mayor Giuliani. However, in applying this statement to the events in Moscow, one could draw the conclusion that even though Russia is technically a secular nation, the governmental demands for orthodoxy are slowly erasing the separation between church and state. This is an issue that many, like Judge Gershon, believe could not be more grave. In the 12 years from the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union until the *Caution*,

Religion! exhibition in 2003, both artists and religious believers flourished in the new Russia. However, each side accused the other of exploiting Russia’s new freedom to infringe on its rights (Myers, 2005).

“We are losing political freedoms,” Yuri Samodurov said. “How can we fight? We can fight with this exhibit.” Mr. Samodurov made it clear that it’s not a matter of “*who* we are fighting against” but rather “what we are fighting *for*” (Wheeler - italics added). What Mr. Samodurov was fighting for was the right for himself and the artists represented in the exhibition to express their thoughts, discomforts, and disagreements, particularly regarding religious fundamentalism and the Orthodox Church’s political involvement, without facing political attack and punishment.

Aleksandr V. Chuyev, a member of Parliament who played a role in pressing prosecutors to bring criminal charges against the museum, said, “There are acceptable boundaries within which it is possible to express an opinion, as long as it doesn’t affect the rights of Orthodox believers. They should understand that their rights end where the other person’s begin” (Myers, 2005). Even though there may be acceptable boundaries to expressing one’s opinion, doesn’t the Orthodox believer also have the right to *not* see the exhibition and the ability to *not* take offense? To be offended is a choice we make. David A. Bednar, former president of Brigham Young University-Idaho and current Apostle in the LDS Church said, “To believe that someone or something can make us feel offended [and] angry... diminishes our moral agency and transforms us into objects to be acted upon. As agents, however, you and I have the power to act and to choose how we will respond to an offensive or hurtful situation” (Bednar).

In the case of *Sensation*, many of the protesters, and even the Mayor himself, allowed themselves to be offended, in part by not stepping foot into the museum to gain greater understanding. They were protesting images they themselves had never seen in person. No one was forcing them to go inside the museum; rather, it was their religious and moral choice to not place themselves in the *Sensation* exhibition. We can readily apply here the old adage, “Don’t judge a book by it’s cover.” Legally in the United States, individuals have every right to judge a book by it’s cover, though this does not guarantee that doing so is educated, sophisticated, or courteous. It is interesting that *The Holy Virgin Mary* was the flashpoint for the lawsuits and controversy as opposed to any other works, such as Marcus Harvey’s *Dudley, Like What You See? Then Call Me*, where a painted figure spreads her butt cheeks, revealing her vagina, or

Sam Taylor Johnson's *Wrecked*, where a bare chested woman replaces Jesus at the Table of the Last Supper. In this case, Mayor Giuliani based his assumptions of the artwork on the written description in the catalog. This consisted on the title of the piece, the artist name, the material and the dimensions. When Mayor Giuliani saw that a painting titled "The Holy Virgin Mary" was created in part from "elephant dung," he jumped to conclusions. This is evidenced by the press quoting Giuliani as saying the work was "smeared" with dung when, in fact, only one small mound was carefully placed on the painting. Mayor Giuliani and others made discourteous and uneducated conclusions without fully understanding the artist's intentions.

Government officials and patrons of art have a responsibility to refrain from casting stones before understanding the true intentions of both the artwork individually and the exhibition. In a telephone interview just days before the *Sensation* exhibition opened in New York, Chris Ofili told New York Times writer Carol Vogel, "I don't feel as though I have to defend it. The people who are attacking this painting are attacking their own interpretation, not mine. You never know what's going to offend people, and I don't feel it's my place to say any more" (Vogel). Ofili in fact describes himself as a church-going Catholic who believes in God and was even an altar boy in his youth. Vogel tells one story to illustrate Ofili's religiosity:

"Outside the entrance to his London studio..., several teenagers huddled together smoking crack. Above their heads was a sign warning, 'This area is being constantly watched and patrolled by the Lord.' Ofili said he made the sign because he wanted the addicts who regularly used his doorway to think about what they were doing" (Vogel).

Hence we can see that Ofili most likely was not trying to be anti-Catholic or blasphemous, nor was he attempting to incite religious hatred. Based on the above statements, it would seem that this would be counter to his character. However, Mayor Giuliani, Dennis Heiner, The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights and hundreds of others interpreted it that way simply because they judged before they fully understood.

The argument can be made that no one, including those who protested against *Sensation* and *Caution, Religion!*, is justified in speaking out against an exhibition or work of art if they have not seen it and understood its basic intention. On the other hand, one could say that this argument falls flat when compared with the thousands who protest against drugs and yet

have never tried them, or those who protest against spousal abuse and yet have never witnessed or been directly affected by its violence. The point here is that Mayor Giuliani and others felt that the work exhibited was in direct conflict to what they believed was morally right for a society (and therefore what they believed should be supported by taxpayers' money). This is akin to a Christian man not entering an establishment that advertises itself as "Diamond Lounge Dancers XXX." He makes a judgement call based on the appearance from the outside, a judgement that is wholly justified.

Sarah Worth shared a possible solution to this as presented by Mary Devereaux, a philosopher at the UC San Diego. Devereaux has argued that the beautiful aspects of Leni Riefenstahl's film, *Triumph of the Will*, can indeed be separated from the fact that the film's content is about something which the majority of the world considers to be evil. She explains that, without falling into disinterestedness, psychological distance, or simple formalism, "we can distance ourselves from—that is, set aside—the moral dimension of the work's content while still paying attention to that content—that is, the way in which the film's content figures in its expressive task" (Worth). In this way we can consider and appreciate both the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of the work without dismissing it because we believe the content is immoral. Similarly, one might be able to view Alisa Zrazhevskaya's piece, *You Shall Not Make for Yourself an Idol*, or Ofili's painting *The Holy Virgin Mary*, in the Museum setting while "subtracting the context" of the perceived religious intolerance, thus appreciating the artwork for its aesthetic quality and/or religious inspiration. Devereaux is right that the moral and aesthetic might be separable, though probably not in all cases.

It can be difficult to make these kind of distinctions when you have such powerful voices trying to control what is considered to be morally right and what incites religious hatred. Ofili stated in general (not about the Orthodox Church, though it clearly applies) that, "The church is not made up of one person but a whole congregation, and they should be able to interact with art without being told what to think." He continued, "This is all about control. We've seen it before in history. Sadly, I thought we'd moved on." (Vogel). It is clear from the results of the trials in Moscow that we haven't moved on. Many believe that the Orthodox Church is a major player in controlling what type of art the government deems permissible, thus in essence 'telling people what to think'.

In a society where people are granted freedom of religion and freedom of expression, an amount

of sacrilege must be tolerated alongside the sacred, but where do we draw the line? How far is too far? Is it okay for the Brooklyn Museum to exhibit a picture of the Virgin Mary covered with porn and clumps of elephant dung—thus, in the mind of many, trashing Roman Catholicism? How can conflicts over individual rights and freedom of expression be reconciled with civility and peace within and around the museum space? Art museums must do their very best to present the artwork in proper context and be true to the artist's intentions. Governments, artists and museum patrons should seek greater understanding before publicly denouncing a work or issuing legal sentences. And we all must respect aesthetic freedoms while remembering that the freedom that we have should never be used "to offend others, advocate hate speech or provoke to violence" (Grenda, 9). Every freedom, even aesthetic freedom and the freedom of speech, carries a corresponding duty. Moral and aesthetic objections cannot always be answered simply by appealing to the First Amendment, like in the case of the Brooklyn Museum. Regardless of whether the museum is respecting and presenting the artist's intent and ideology, it still plays a critical role in the freedom of expression. As Steven Dubin wrote in his book, *Displays of Power*, "Museums are important venues in which a society can define itself and present itself publicly. Museums solidify culture, endow it with a tangibility, in a way few other things do."

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