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Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 48

Edwin Wilson

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Recommended Citation

Wilson, Edwin, "Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989): Correspondence 48" (1989). *Obscenity: Andres Serrano Controversy (1989)*. Paper 44.
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EDWIN WILSON
55 CENTRAL PARK WEST
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10023

July 24, 1989

89 JUL 24 PM 3:44

Senator Claiborne Pell
Room 335, Senate Russell Office Building
Constitution Avenue, between Delaware Avenue
and 1st Street NE
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Pell:

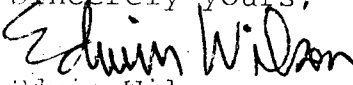
I am writing to express my deep concern over the attacks leveled recently at the National Endowment for the Arts. These attacks bespeak a profound and alarming misunderstanding of the arts in general and the NEA in particular.

The latest assaults result from two exhibitions of photography which received a small sum, in one case quite indirectly, from the NEA. That the photographs in question are offensive to many, including this writer, misses the point entirely. First of all, no system is perfect, neither in the private sector nor in government. In both areas we have seen examples lately of flagrant corruption and abuses of power. These often involve hundreds of millions of dollars, sometimes billions. Yet no one has suggested that we do away with either private enterprise or the federal government. By comparison, the NEA grants in question totaled \$45,000.

At the same time, the contributions of the NEA to the spiritual life of our nation are incalculable. I will cite only four examples. First, never has there been a federal program that has stimulated contributions from the private sector to compare with the matching grant programs of the NEA. For every dollar given, untold additional dollars have come in from individuals, corporations and foundations. Second, state arts agencies throughout the nation have proliferated and become firmly established thanks to their partnership with the NEA.

Third, many art forms - opera, dance, folk arts - owe their astonishing growth in the last two decades in large part to the leadership of the NEA. Fourth, those organizations who have benefitted most from the NEA are not controversial, avant-garde organizations or individuals, but the country's major arts institutions: our great museums, symphonies, and opera companies.

The NEA has suffered enough in the last few years. Its budget in real dollars has been systematically eroded by keeping funding at constant dollar amounts. I beg of you not to add to the further deterioration of this unique program by slashing its funds further.

Sincerely yours,

Edwin Wilson

EW/gwf