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Controversy in 20th Century Museum Exhibits: A 21st Century Perspective

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Controversy in 20th Century Museum Exhibits: A 21st Century Perspective

A Thesis in
Museum Studies

by

Jennifer Weber

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of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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Abstract

This paper examines how museums can be impacted by public responses to their exhibits. This is accomplished by studying two specific contexts from the late 20th century: first, observing the changes and influences that occurred over a relatively short period of time involving the National Endowment for the Arts funding in the late 1980s, and another compares the social responses to the same exhibition, "Sensation" as shown in two different countries. The social and political responses to museum exhibits can play a huge role in how the exhibits, the museums, and the artists are viewed. This can have long-lasting consequences for those involved. Twenty-first century museums have a different approach to controversial exhibits than museums of the past had. Instead of remaining neutral or avoiding controversy, twenty-first century museums use some exhibits to ensure that social issues remain a topic of discussion.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

People love a good controversy. The bigger the better. Controversy sparks interest, conversation, and people normally have strongly held beliefs at stake; beliefs that in their defense fuel the social reactions, the interest, and conversation. We allow ourselves to be wrapped up in those events, we allow them to consume our thoughts for a period of time and then normally they fade back into the distant past and not thought about again. The fact that controversies often fade into relative obscurity means that it is easy to overlook the impact that social context plays in what we see as controversial.

Social context can be very subjective and dependent on time period. Continuing that train of thought, it should be of no surprise that things that were deemed socially acceptable at one point within one social context might not be seen as acceptable within another. Certain dynamics including what political party is in power, the state of the economy, and the social movements occurring at a particular time all play a huge role in how people react to the world and events around them, often without people even realizing the source of their reaction to a certain trigger. People will react differently based on their experiences even if something is happening at the same time. So, while one person might react really positively to a piece of artwork, someone else might react really poorly due to their individual experiences within the larger social context.

Museums are the preservers and presenters of material culture; as community institutions museums often receive public scrutiny and responses to their programming and exhibits. Whether displaying ancient cultures for modern audiences or displaying and interpreting modern material culture —including art— for a wider audience, museums are open to public perceptions and reactions. Museums are not immune to controversy and the public's changing viewpoints.

In fact, museums, can easily find themselves at the heart of a controversy. Therefore, it is something that museums need to be aware of and prepared for. Knowing the controversies that have plagued museums in the past and understanding their genesis including their social contexts, can help museum professionals in identifying potential issues for the future and will help them prepare for the potential fallout that may come from a publicly generated controversy at their institution.

Museums are often dependent on charitable foundations and individual donors to help cover their everyday costs. Public controversy can act as a threat to that funding. It can also spark new interest, bringing awareness to the organization and its mission. There is a fine line that the organization needs to walk in order to protect its future and remain true to their mission. Knowing the factors that have impacted museums in the late 20th century, the debates and controversy that have shaped museums' interactions with the public can help shape future decisions. Funding is always a concern for museums and is probably the item that is most vulnerable to controversy.

Controversy is defined as "a prolonged public dispute, debate, or contention; disputation concerning a matter of opinion." In terms of controversial exhibitions though, this dictionary definition isn't necessarily sufficient. Controversial exhibitions tend to evoke strong emotions and often spirited conversation. They can include strong subject matter or be seen as exploitative. Finally, some controversial exhibitions are frank, even confrontational.

Responses to controversy can also come in many forms. It can be as simple as a bad review from a visitor to an exhibition or it can be a national or international news story. The size of the controversy depends on a number of factors, often depending on the social climate and the persons involved. This is not to say that there is not a level of predictability that can be found in

many museum controversies, but often this prediction is far easier to see after the fact. There can be times when museums adapt to changing societal norms in a way that is preemptive to any serious controversy and, of course, that would always be ideal for an institution, but this relies on the institution to recognize the cultural changes that are headed their way with enough time to prepare and adapt.

Using examples from the late 20th century, it is possible to track the social factors that lead to museum controversies and the impact that these controversies had on all that were involved. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) controversy of the late 1980s and early 1990s is one such moment where a changing society clashed with the more conservative political establishment. In that particular case, because of the way that the NEA is funded, as well as the social and political issues at play, this controversy reached congressional debate, becoming dubbed by the media as a 'Culture War'. This is an example of cultural context blowing a situation out of proportion. Another controversy surrounds the "Sensation: Young British Artists of the Saatchi Collection" exhibition, which was shown in London's Royal Academy in 1997 and then later in New York City's Brooklyn Museum in 1999. In this case, there is one exhibition that was shown in two different cultural contexts. In each, it drew controversy, but for different reasons. Both examples had an impact on both the lives of the artists involved and the institutions involved.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

National Endowment for the Arts "Culture War"

With the NEA controversy, there was a lot that needs to be unpacked. There are political and religious pressures, a changing level of acceptance for certain individuals in society, and a renewed focus on how the arts were being funded and what those artists were making. The understanding of those cultural factors has changed over time as American society has gained perspective in the years since.

The broader scope surrounding controversy in American art is well represented in the literature. The first is entitled *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture* by Michael Kammen. Kammen is the Newton C. Farr Professor of American History and Culture at Cornell University. He is also the past president of the Organization of American Historians and an author and editor; and a Pulitzer Prize winning author. This book is focused on the controversies of the art world in the U.S. throughout its history. It gives a broad range of examples and has a great amount of discussion about why a particular exhibition or piece of art would have been considered controversial at any given time. Everything from the Vietnam War Memorial to public murals were covered with each example described in its social context and greater place in American history. Some examples were shown in terms of a time range, since there were certain times in American history where art controversy was more common. Others were grouped by topic; so, if a researcher is looking for a certain controversy, it is easily found. Kammen points out that the role of art has changed in American society by becoming increasingly public and diverse. He shows that the role of public monuments and art has changed from the traditions of honoring the past with relatively non-confrontational images to more modern incarnations where the artists and funders took greater risks. It is also shown that

regardless of the images and placement, there is always some level of controversy that is found with public art. Generally, this book is a good introduction to the controversy in the art world and a good place to start.[1]

The book *Suspended License: Censorship and the Visual Arts* edited by Dr. Elizabeth Childs also looked at a wide range of examples. Childs teaches Art History at Washington University in St. Louis. The articles complied in this book are from a session Dr. Childs' chaired at the 1991 annual meeting of the College Art Association in hopes to generate discussion and provide a brief overview of the issue of censorship throughout history. With this range of topics reaching all the way back to the reformation, there is a wide range of information available. However, in terms of this thesis, the last article written by Steven C. Dubin, an associate professor of sociology at SUNY Purchase College, is the one that is the most relevant, since it was the only article that focused on even a part of the NEA controversy. With the focus of this book being on censorship over controversy, it is relevant to define the difference between those terms. Controversy is the reaction to an event that results in two or more sides that are both public and prolonged. Censorship has the goal of preventing something from being seen, read, or heard; which is often a part of controversy as one side of the issue pushes for that goal.[2]

In terms of controversies related specifically to the NEA in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there is a distinct bias in the literature toward one artist in particular: Robert Mapplethorpe. There is a huge focus on the Mapplethorpe part of that controversy, quite possibly because his posthumous exhibition "The Perfect Moment" was brought to court along with the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati during the larger NEA controversy.

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[1] Michael G. Kammen, *Visual Shock: A History of Art Controversies in American Culture*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2007.

[2] Elizabeth C. Childs, *Suspended License: Censorship and the Visual Arts*. (Seattle: A Samuel & Althea Stroum Book, 1998.), 366-385

That is not to say that there isn't other research to be found surrounding the other artists such as Andres Serrano; and the NEA Four: Karen Finley, Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, and John Fleck and the controversy as a whole; but this research is harder to find online. There are a few new articles that could be found online, but overall there is much less research easily available for these topics. In terms of a timeline for the NEA controversy and its artists, Andres Serrano was the artist that sparked the NEA controversy with "The Perfect Moment" and the debate followed with Mapplethorpe and the NEA Four acting as the capstones to this particular controversy.

The book *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Places* as a whole is an amazing book and was really helpful in providing some of the social context needed for understanding the controversies that developed around most of the artists involved in the NEA controversy. The controversy itself was never mentioned in this book, but the social issues that these artists lived with and dealt with were present. Much of the NEA controversy had a LGBTQA[3] influence either through the artistic subject matter or the artists' particular sexual identities and this book was able to provide some much needed historical context surrounding the events leading up to and including this controversy.[4]

Leaving Town Alive: Confessions of an Arts Warrior by John Frohnmayer had a great personal perspective on the NEA controversies and gave a great history into the NEA. Seeing all of this through the eyes of the man who was used as a scapegoat for these controversies was a very interesting perspective because it showed quite clearly the impact of politics on this event. It also has the feel of a person who is trying to save their reputation by publishing their memoirs.

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[3] LQBTQA = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Asexual/Aromantic/Ally

[4] Susan Ferentinos, "Chapter 6: We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used to It: Mid-1960s to United States v. Windsor (2013)." In *Interpreting LGBT History at Museums and Historic Sites*, (Interpreting History. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.), 75-98.

This is telling in and of itself, suggesting that the controversy had such staying power and made a deep impact on those involved in it.[5]

The usefulness of Richard Bolton's *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the* Arts, published in 1992 cannot be overstated. Bolton is an artist, writer, and associate professor and chairperson of the Department of Art Studio at the University of California, Santa Barbra. His work addresses social issues including mass media, popular culture, democratic participation and the social functions of art. It was a collection of documents from both sides of the argument displaying the NEA controversy in a comprehensive and mostly unbiased way. He did fall on one side of the argument that he mentioned in the introduction, but he also explained that he was going to be sure to include the other argument as much as possible to ensure that the reader got the full story. Bolton's work makes everything easier because it places the arguments in temporal order and allows for a great amount of information to be found in one place. This book also included a timeline which was extremely helpful in putting all of these events into order; something that would have been extremely difficult without this source.[6] The legal dictionary was extremely useful to find the Congressional legal statues that were referenced, but were not found in Bolton's book.[7]

The book *Federalizing the Muse* while in theory was very helpful with its history of the NEA, in reality was far from it. It had only the barest information about the controversy that surrounded the NEA and even less on the modern implications on the endowment. The focus of this book was more on the early years of the NEA and the founding of the organization, losing its

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[5] John Frohnmayer, *Leaving Town Alive: Confessions of an Arts Warrior*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.)

[6] Richard Bolton, *Culture Wars: Documents from the Recent Controversies in the Arts*. (New York: New Press, 1997.)

[7] "Miller v. California," *The Free Dictionary*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Miller v. California.

detail when it reached the events of the 1980s, which is odd for a book published in 2004. The author of this book was Donna M. Binkiewicz a professor of history at California State University, Long Beach. According to her, she does not follow the history into the controversies because her focus is on the political and social reasoning for creating the NEA in response to the Cold War and President Ronald Reagan's cuts in 1980 at the end of the Cold War that mark a change in the reasoning behind the endowment and a change in the federal support for the arts. Her tone in this section alludes to another section of the NEA history starting at that point, thus concluding her historical focus.[8]

Andres Serrano was the first artist whose work came under fire during the late 1980s. Even though it was his work that sparked this controversy and he is still an active artist today there is very limited information available surrounding his place at the start of the 'Culture War.' Serrano's early history was hard to find and even finding some articles about his current work was difficult. There were some biographies about him available online, mostly as previews for his more modern exhibits. Artnet's biography was rather short focusing primarily on the pieces that had drawn the most attention throughout Serrano's career.[9] The International Center of Photography had more detail about Serrano's career, but still focuses over half of the rather short biography on *Piss Christ.* [10] The RoGallery had the most detailed version of Serrano's biography, with this being the only version to address Serrano's early life, which had a large influence on his later works. [11] His website had a biography which showed that he was active in

[8]Donna M. Binkiewicz, *Federalizing the Muse: United States Arts Policy and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1965-1980*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.) Page 5

[9] "Andres Serrano," *Andres Serrano Biography* – Andres Serrano on artnet. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.artnet.com/artists/andres-serrano/biography.

[10] "Andres Serrano," *International Center of Photography*. (March 02, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/andres-serrano?all%2Fall%2Fall%2Fall%2F0.

[11] "Andres Serrano – Biography," *RoGallery*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://rogallery.com/Serrano_Andres/Andres_Serrano-Biography.html.

the art world after this exhibition, but there was little anywhere about his opinion surrounding the controversy. Unlike "The Perfect Moment," his piece *Piss Christ* did not generate books upon books, and countless articles on the topic.[12] He seemed to have put the NEA controversy behind him and chose not to comment on it during future interviews.

Robert Mapplethorpe overall has drawn much attention from art critics and historians. In terms of looking at the exhibition "The Perfect Moment" and Robert Mapplethorpe in particular, the work of Deborah A. Levinson is a good place to start. While she was a student at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) at the time, graduating in 1991 with her degree in creative writing,[13] her article, "Robert Mapplethorpe's Extraordinary Vision," held a very complete description of the exhibition and it was well written. Most of the articles written by other authors only focused or mentioned the photographs that later became the center of the controversy. It was rather surprising to realize that the most complete list would not be found in the books on the controversy. Levinson also provided a context for the Washington Project for the Arts in context of Washington, D.C. which is something that was very useful, especially if one is not familiar with the D.C. art scene.[14]

Playing with the Edge: The Photographic Achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe by Arthur C. Danto originally was just an article on the artist and the show *The Perfect Moment*; however, this article ended up becoming a book about his work that analyzed the influences

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[12] "ANDRES SERRANO," *ANDRES SERRANO*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://andresserrano.org/Bio.htm.

[13]Deborah Levinson, "Goodbye, MIT. Hello, World. - The Tech," *The Tech - Online Edition.* (June 1, 1992). Accessed April 30, 2017. http://tech.mit.edu/V112/N27/levinson.27o.html.

[14]Deborah A. Levinson, "Robert Mapplethorpe's extraordinary vision," *The Tech- Online Edition*, (August 6, 1989). http://tech.mit.edu/V110/N31/mapple.31a.html.

behind the work and its effects on the greater community.[15] Finally, there were a number of articles that were found that will be used to look at the continued posthumous exhibits of Mapplethorpe and how he and his work is currently perceived in the United States.

The NEA Four were the last group of artists involved in the 'Culture Wars,' but information about them in relation to the controversy was difficult to find. Holly Hughes, Karen Finley, Tim Miller and John Fleck were each vocal before the controversy about their topics of choice. Tim Miller and Holly Hughes were extremely active during the controversy, but information about the others was sparser. This continued after the controversy as well with biographical information primarily focused on the work that they had created in recent years, which made finding their perspectives on the controversy difficult.

"Sensation"

Another aspect of this paper examines the Young British Artists from the Charles Saatchi Collection's exhibition "Sensation." The phrase "Young British Artists" refers to the artists involved in this controversy, but more broadly to a group of artists from Britain that were known for their shocking subjects, entrepreneurial attitude toward art, and their openness to different materials and processes. This term was used not only to describe them, but as a title and a way to market them and their art.[16] This exhibition drew ire on both sides of the Atlantic for completely different reasons. It exemplifies the notion that social context has an impact on whether and why an exhibition is perceived as controversial. Even after it was controversial in the U.K. the Brooklyn Museum of Art still brought the exhibition to the U.S. In fact, the museum almost

[15]Arthur C. Danto, and Robert Mapplethorpe, *Playing with the edge: the photographic achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.)

[16] Tate, "Young British Artists (YBAs) – Art Term," *Tate*.. http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/y/young-british-artists-ybas. Accessed April 30, 2017

encouraged the possibility of controversy via their marketing.[17] As with the NEA exhibition, there is a bias in the research available on this topic. There is more research available focusing on the Brooklyn Museum and the controversy that developed there, especially in terms of books, than there is surrounding the London controversy. This search had to extend pretty deeply into newspaper archives to find the articles that were published during the exhibition.

The first book used for this section is the exhibition book aptly titled *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection* published as an exhibition catalog when the exhibition opened in the UK in 1997. The authors involved with this book were Norman Rosenthal, Richard Shone, Martin Maloney, Brooks Adams, and Lisa Jardine. Norman Rosenthal is the Exhibitions Secretary of the Royal Academy of Arts and had been since 1974. Richard Shone is an author and associate editor of *The Burlington Magazine* and was on the jury for the Turner Prize in1987 and the purchasing committee for the Arts Council Collection between 1994 and 1996. Martin Maloney is an artist, critic and curator. He writes for *Art Forum* and *Flash Art* and lectures in fine art at Goldsmiths College, University of London. Brooks Adams is a Contributing Editor of *Art in America.* Lisa Jardine is a professor of Renaissance Studies at Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, and an Honorary Fellow of King's College, Cambridge. The vast majority of this work was focused on the images from the exhibition, but there was a section with articles in the first section of the book. These articles explained how they were hoping the exhibition would be seen; but overall, they lacked much substance in terms of debate and discussion of the possibly different views surrounding the exhibition. The authors did not seem concerned about the works and the exhibition being seen in a different light than the relatively positive views that they proposed. With artwork that was being marketed as being nontraditional

[17] Lawrence Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation: Arts-Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001)

and shocking, it should have been assumed that there could be some who would not see the exhibition in such a positive light.[18]

Art & Outrage: Provocation, Controversy and the Visual Arts written by John A. Walker in 1999 gives some sense of the context behind the British side of the "Sensation" controversy. Walker is Reader in Art and Design History at Middlesex University and an author of numerous books on art and popular culture. This book is focused on British art controversies from the late 1940s until the 1990s so it covers a large amount of history. It has articles in it about three of the Young British Artists or their works; Damien Hirst, Dinos and Jack Chapman, and Marcus Harvey's *Myra*. Since most of the other articles or books that can be found about this exhibition are primarily focused on the United States' side of the controversy, Walker's volume was a valuable resource to convey another, greatly needed perspective.[19]

Unsettling Sensation: Arts-Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy edited by Lawrence Rothfield and published in 2001 centers on the United States. It gives only a cursory mention of the controversy in England, as reflected in the title. It is a compilation of different articles written for the "Taking Funds, Giving Offense, Making Money" Conference in Chicago on February 12, 2000 organized by the Cultural Policy Program at the University of Chicago. The contributors included: Carol Becker, Homi K. Bhabha, John Brewer, James Cuno, Gilbert S. Edelson Esq. Teri J. Edelstein, Richard A. Epstein, David Halle, D. Carroll Joynes, W.J.T. Mitchell, Stephen B. Presser, Kimberly Rorschach, David A. Ross, Lawrence Rothfield, J. Mark Schuster, Geoffrey R. Stone, David A. Strauss, Cass R. Sunstein, András Szántó,

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[18] Brooks Adams, Johnnie Shand Kydd, and Norman Rosenthal, *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection ; Junge Britische Künstler aus der Sammlung Saatchi. Brooks Adams, Lisa Jardine, Martin Maloney, Norman Rosenthal, Richard Shone* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1998.)

[19] John A Walker, *Art & Outrage: Provocation, Controversy and the Visual Arts*. (London: Pluto Press, 1999.)

Elisabeth Tiso, and Gihon Yi. This list is overwhelmingly comprised of college professors with some museum professionals or former museum professionals further rounding it out. Some articles were very clear and easy to understand the argument that they were attempting to explain. Other articles were hard to understand; the authors talked in circles, making their points hard to find or comprehend. The most useful articles were Carol Becker's "The Brooklyn Controversy: A View from the Bridge," J. Mark Schuster's "Who Should Pay (for the Arts and Culture)? Who Should Decide? And What Difference Should it Make?," David A. Ross's "An All-Too-Predictable Sensation," Teri J. Edelstein's "Sensational or Status Quo: Museums and Public Perception," David Halle, Elisabeth Tiso, and Gihong Yi's "The Attitude of the Audience for 'Sensation' and of the General Public toward Controversial Works of Art," and James Cuno's "Sensation' and the Ethics of Funding Exhibitions." Overall, most of the authors have a rather similar point of view. Most felt that there was far too much media attention given to this, the governor should not be able to remove the state funding after it had already been promised, and the BMA mishandled how they went about funding this exhibition and the media. The vast majority stood behind the BMA, despite some feeling that the museum had made some mistakes. This work is acceptable if one is researching the U.S. perspective, but it is not the most well-rounded discussion of the controversy. [20]

Each of the Young British Artists, at least those that had drawn controversy and debate, have a presence online. There are interviews, biographies, modern works, and websites all that helped provide information about their current projects and work since the "Sensation" exhibition. As a whole they have been very forthcoming with their history, helping give some

[20]Lawrence Rothfield, *Unsettling "Sensation": Arts-Policy Lessons from the Brooklyn Museum of Art Controversy*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001.)

context as to how and why they create the art that they do and their opinions about the media attention that “Sensation” gave them.

Chapter 3: The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA)

The arts and funding for the arts have never been an easy discussion in America. Most of the country believes that there should be funding for the arts, but they often have very specific ideas as to what the arts are and which arts and artists should be funded.[21] There is also the question as to where the funding should be coming from, whether it should solely be through private donations and commissions, or if there should be a government funding source. This discussion then morphs into the question of what types of influence should the government have on the artists and organizations that it funds.

American politics has a huge impact on the lives of its citizens, including the funding for the arts. Those politics also gets intertwined with other aspects of American life such as religious ideas and is influenced by public opinion which in turn has its own set of influences including the media. In the late 1980s and early 1990s all of these influences combined to create a storm that is dubbed by the media a "Culture War" and results in a drastic change in how America funds the arts.

NEA Background

The National Endowment for the Arts has found itself at the heart of a lot of controversy throughout its existence, primarily because it is a government funded organization that is not under direct control of a governmental body like Congress and is focused on the arts. The NEA was established in 1965 along with the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), in response to the Red Scare. Politicians saw the rise of Communism and what they perceived as the rising Communist sentiment in modern art as a threat to American ideals so they wanted to

[21] Kammen, *Visual Shock* 348-349, 383.

use these organizations to promote American ideals in the arts.[22] The National Endowment for the Arts did this in two ways by creating policies to promote the arts and by funding grants to ensure that those policies were followed. Their support was not limited to one form of art or school; it was only based on artistic excellence. This support could be directed at individual artists, arts organizations, and communities as long as they were promoting art in some way and they met the criteria of excellence.[23] Their determination of what was considered excellence had nothing to do with the government though. Once they created the organization, politicians did not make the decisions on who or what to fund; those decisions were made by the NEA itself, as the American government was only involved to provide the funding. This funding has been invaluable to hundreds of artists across the U.S. and gave many people the support that they needed to start their careers.[24] Thanks to the NEA the art world was thriving and individuals who might not have been funded through traditional means were being supported. Gay, straight, black, white, men, and women creating all different art forms were being supported and making names for themselves on a national stage. They were funded as long as it could be argued that they were the best, that their work had meaning, and it was important, they were funded.[25] This means that the NEA wasn't immune to controversy though. Over time the NEA has funded works and artists that the public did not agree should have been funded and it had always weathered the storm, but in the 1980s that changed. In the late 1980s a controversy developed that would become known as a "Culture War," between Congress and the NEA and it would shake the NEA to its core.

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[22] Binkiewicz, *Federalizing the Muse*, 1-75, 162.
[23] *Ibid.*, 157.
[24] Frohnmayer, *Leaving Town Alive*, 10-11.
[25] Binkiewicz, *Federalizing the Muse*, 192.

Cultural Context

The time period leading up to the NEA controversy was filled with huge changes in the cultural landscape of America. New voices were being heard and this was creating rising tensions. That combined with the new changes in societal values created a perfect storm for controversy as the opinions of the old culture clashed with the ideals of the new culture. These controversies started in 1989 and the end of this part of the NEA's history was in 1993 with the NEA Four settling out of court. The context leading up to these events had a major impact on the causes of the NEA controversy.

During the lead up to 1989, there was a sexual revolution, the arts reached a new high in America, the homosexual rights movements gained traction as did the "Save Our Children" campaign did too, and the AIDS crisis cost thousands of lives. America also reached a new height in open-mindedness, for some topics. For example, in 1990 surveys asking if "sexual poses in art are pornographic" only received a 36% agreement rate. Another inquiring if, "nudity in art is usually pornographic" got a low 18% agreement rate.[26] These numbers would suggest that there was a broadmindedness directed to art that displayed the nude form, but it would quickly be refuted. As the events of 1989 and beyond gained traction it became obvious that the numbers seen in these surveys are not the whole story.

The art world leading up to the events of 1989 not only featured more diverse voices; artists no longer shied away from making political statements. These were people who had lived through a very tumultuous and politically chaotic time period. They saw how well protests worked for the Civil Rights movement and made their opinions known about the Vietnam War. These were individuals who were unafraid to let their opinions be known, many times through

[26] Kammen, *Visual Shock*, 78,83.

their artwork, using new techniques, and expressing new ideas. These were all increasingly prevalent in the art world of the 1980s while being supported both publicly through the NEA and privately through collectors. This truly was creating a unique art scene leading up to 1989.[27]

Contiguously, the sexual revolution sparked in the 1960s by the population growth of baby boomers reaching college age and flying the nest, consisted of many who bucked against the traditions of their parents and made their own way in the world by becoming socially active. The baby boomers leaving home helped spark a change in the American moral culture, bringing countercultures and grassroots political activism to the forefront. People took to the streets, raising their voices in protest against the injustice that they saw in the world around them. They protested the Vietnam War and marched with Civil Rights leaders and they discussed these issues on college campuses and in the streets. Activism was very much alive and present among this age group. This activism wasn't limited to politics though, it also was taking on social issues. During the '60's the homophile movement, was gaining momentum. This movement was focused on promoting the fair treatment of homosexual peoples and increasing awareness of the discrimination that the group was facing and was a precursor to what is seen now as the LGBTQA movement. Across the country activism was gaining more and more of a foothold in the American culture.[28]

Before 1969 the homophile movement's main focus was to maintain privacy and to free what are now called LGBT individuals from the harassment that they face every day.[29] It gave a sense of community to a group of people who had to hide a significant part of themselves in order to make it through the day. These individuals, if revealed, faced police harassment, being

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[27] Kammen, *Visual Shock*, 170-180.
[28] Ferentinos, *Chapter 6: We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used to It*, 76.
[29] Ferentinos, *Chapter 5: Creating Communities*, 66-70.

kicked out from their homes, losing their jobs, and general hatred. If not out, a person always feared the chance that someone could expose you, so many had to hide a part of themselves. This was an exceptionally difficult existence, but the movement as well as the few bars that catered to these individuals helped make it more bearable. The homophile movement also was slowly helping raise awareness of those individuals; but this was far from mainstream, far from something that everyone knew about. That changed rather suddenly in 1969 as the dam finally broke. The Stonewall Riot or the "unorganized protests against police harassment"[30] were sparked by the community fed up with the police harassment of LGBT-friendly establishments. This was not the first riot, but it was the one that gained the most publicity. It helped unite the different communities under one banner helping to create a louder voice for reform. The homophile movement's goal changed as well because of this. No longer were they working on maintaining privacy; now the focus was to help create a sense of pride in their orientation and to start to challenge the traditional view of sexual morality. These changes to the goal continued long after the homophile movement disbanded and were taken up in the new movements and groups that formed. Over the years this continued to gain traction and more and more visibility, but this progress was not linear.

The "Save Our Children" campaign and the AIDS crisis that followed set back the progress that these LGBT movements had gained in many ways. The "Save Our Children" campaign had been sparked by a law that was implemented in 1977, in Dade County, Florida, to prevent gay and lesbian discrimination. The "Save Our Children" campaign with their organizer, singer and spokesperson Anita Bryant, were working to get this law repealed. She was opposed to LGBT persons gaining protections and having positive representation. This antigay

[30] Ferentinos, *Chapter 6: We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used to It*, 79.

organization equated homosexuality with childhood molestation and used this incorrect association to lobby against the LGBT community. This organization gained traction with the religious right and helped launch a discourse that reached into the 1980s that promoted conservative Christian morals as opposition to the LGBT community. This event helped solidify the issues of sex and sexuality as problems that polarized American politics.[31]

The AIDS crisis of the 1980s did not help this discussion in the slightest. With the disease disproportionally affecting gay men, it helped strengthen the hatred, fear, and revulsion that the "Save Our Children" campaign was promoting. This, combined with the glacial response by the government, even going as far as mocking those who would bring it up in press conferences at a presidential level; resulted in a colossal amount of misinformation. This in turn allowed for a stereotype to be born that AIDS was a "gay" disease helping lead to widespread victim blaming. There were many people who would say that if those infected had not been gay or been taking part in 'amoral' behaviors, they would not have died from this disease. They equated it with suicide. "By 1990, 31,129 people had died from AIDS in the United States."[32] This exponentially high number included Robert Mapplethorpe, an openly gay artist who died of AIDS in March of 1989, whose work would soon find itself in the middle of the "Culture War" being waged against the NEA. The arts, however, did not stay silent when it came to this tragedy. Instead the lives and fates of those affected by the disease were becoming inspiration for plenty of artworks done both out of mourning and out of protest. These artworks and their artists would find themselves facing their own level of controversy separate from that faced by the artists involved in the NEA controversy.

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[31] Ferentinos, *Chapter 6: We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used to It,* 84 – 86.
[32] Ferentinos, 86-87.

All of this was exacerbated by a more conservative government, both in Congress and in the White House. As American politics were rolling back toward a more conservative stance, this meant that the individuals who were funded by NEA grants that did not fit conservative ideals were going to be under more scrutiny. So would the NEA itself. Conservatives both in Washington D.C. and around the country were not afraid to make their voices heard and they knew how to do it. Letters to national newspapers, boycotts, protest marches, and finally bringing artwork and artists to the attention of Congress were all tools that were used to incite outrage against whatever did not fit the conservative ideal. They were questioning what their taxpayer money was being used for and argued that the arts were not necessarily a priority anymore. This came a head on April 5th 1989 when Andres Serrano's work was brought before Congress by Senator Alfonse D'Amato and Senator Jesse Helms as an example of what is wrong with the NEA; thereby starting what was dubbed in the media as a "Culture War."[33]

The Controversies

The controversy that sparked a "Culture War" against the NEA and what artists were funded was a centered on the artist Andres Serrano and his work titled *Piss Christ.* (Figure 1) Serrano was a photographer working mainly out of New York. He was born in 1950 in New York City, an only child of a Honduran immigrant father and Afro-Cuban

Figure 1 Piss Christ Andres Serrano (1987)

[33] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 343.

mother. His family, as well as his surrounding community were primarily Catholic. This had a lasting impact on his life and career. Andres' father left when he was young and his mother was hospitalized on numerous occasions throughout his youth. He left high school at 15 to pursue art, but later attended the Brooklyn Museum Art School from 1967 until 1969.[34] His art career was put on hold due to drugs; he quit that life at age 28 and worked a variety of odd jobs.[35] During this time, Serrano decided to get involved in art again. Not confident in his painting or sculpting abilities he chose to use photography as his medium. Photography is what made him famous. Serrano is well-known for his large-scale photographs often including religious symbolism, influenced by his childhood. He does not use digital retouching on any of his photographs, instead letting the photographs appear as they were.[36] Serrano is probably best known for the use of bodily fluids in his art including blood, semen, and urine; and combining them with religious imagery. This practice drew some public ire in the past; yet, he was still seen as an accomplished artist and he was awarded an NEA grant in 1987 and then later in 1989.

Having been chosen as a contributing artist by the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art (SECCA) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina as a part of a juried show, Serrano chose to display one of the images titled *Piss Christ*. *Piss Christ* is a photograph of a plastic crucifix said to be submerged in urine. Without the title this work would not have garnered any controversy, but thanks to the inflammatory title, the image was placed in a national spotlight. Serrano had intended the work to be "A statement against commercialized Christianity;" but that was not how

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[34] "ANDRES SERRANO," *ANDRES SERRANO*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://andresserrano.org/Bio.htm.

[35] "Andres Serrano – Biography," *RoGallery*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://rogallery.com/Serrano_Andres/Andres_Serrano-Biography.html.

[36] "Andres Serrano," *Andres Serrano Biography* – Andres Serrano on artnet. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.artnet.com/artists/andres-serrano/biography.

it was seen by a section of the American public, including members of Congress.[37] Led by Reverend Donald Wildmon, the executive director of the American Family Association; Senator Jesse Helms (Republican) from North Carolina; and Senator Alfonse D'Amato (Republican) from New York, this opinion quickly morphed into a media controversy. Their main argument was that this piece and any like it were indecent and should not be supported by the government and the artist should not have been supported by the NEA. They claimed that this was anti-religion, a sign of bigotry and bias against Christians, blasphemous, and both insulting and offensive to the American people whose tax dollars were being used to fund the exhibition. As to why this piece was offensive, they felt that it didn't really need further explanation other than the title and they felt that there was no reason for this piece to have ever been publicly funded or for that matter shown in publicly funded institutions.[38]

Rev. Donald Wildmon was the director of the American Family Association, a religious organization dedicated to a "pro family" stance using a strict interpretation of the bible. Rev. Wildmon founded the organization in 1977 in Mississippi and the organization claims to have "been on the front lines of America's culture war" since then.[39] In a letter written April 5th 1989, he said that there had been a strong anti-Christian sentiment in the media for the decade or more before "Piss Christ" and this was the final straw, alluding to the idea that if this so-called persecution would be allowed to continue it would lead to physical persecution, further inflaming the debate.[40] These debates would use similar language to perpetuate the myth that the NEA was full of immoral persons who were working against the conservative agenda for American

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[37] Frohnmayer, *Leaving Town Alive,* 34.
[38] Bolton, *Culture Wars 27-31.*
[39] "Our Mission," *AFA.net - Our Mission.* https://www.afa.net/who-we-are/our-mission/. Accessed May 02, 2017
[40] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 27.

Culture. Senators Helms and D'Amato on May 18th of that year presented a letter to the Senate and then to Mr. Hugh Southern, the head of the NEA at the time, claiming that this artist should never have been paid $15,000 for the work as a part of the SECCA exhibition and should never have been supported by the NEA They claimed that the work was a mockery of the American taxpayer and used the comments that had been sent to them by some of their constituents to back up their outrage.[41]

Other Senators including Senator Slade Gordon, a Republican from Washington State, backed up Helms and D'Amato, saying that he thought that the museum that supported Serrano should be deprived of funding for five years because while it was Serrano's right to make and display this work, the support given to him through the SECCA and NEA displayed a discrimination against a religion. He felt that regardless of the fact that there is no national religion, the government could not support one faith over others and they could not propose to support the discrimination of a religion.[42] The public began contacting their representatives with support both for and against the NEA and there were continuing circular debates on the Congressional floor around what should be done about this 'rogue' government funded organization.

Between the public backlash fueled by Congressional support, the NEA was already in trouble and the controversy was only just starting. Following *Piss Christ* was an exhibition that continued and strengthened the controversy surrounding the NEA. That exhibition which opened in December of 1988 and gained infamy in 1989 was "The Perfect Moment", a posthumously displayed exhibition of Robert Mapplethorpe's work.

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[41] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 28-31.
[42] *Ibid*, 33-37.

Robert Mapplethorpe was an openly gay artist and photographer, who lived from 1949 until 1989 when he died of complications from HIV/AIDS. Mapplethorpe's photography included celebrity portraits, self-portraits, flowers, sculpture, and portraits of children, women, and men. In theory, nothing on that list would draw the ire of those protesting the NEA there are other factors that need to be considered. Many of his portraits of men and women included at least partial nudity; some works displayed homosexual and/or interracial relationships; some of the images of men focused on the genitals and the most unorthodox were a number of images that unapologetically displayed elements of the BDSM (Bondage and Discipline, Domination and Submission, Sadism and Masochism) lifestyle and culture. Mapplethorpe was an active participant in this kind of sexual activity until his HIV/AIDS diagnosis, so he did not see these pieces as being controversial or problematic. Many people claimed that his work was purely pornographic and lacked any "redeeming social value" that would remove it from that definition, but Mapplethorpe challenged that view by saying: "I think it could be pornography and still have redeeming social value. It can be both, which is my whole point in doing it — to have all the elements of pornography and yet have a structure of lighting that makes it go beyond what it is."[43] Art historian Arthur C. Danto claims that Mapplethorpe was not unaware of the criticisms of his work during his lifetime; he just didn't care about them.[44] While alive, he pushed the envelope, yet avoided any serious controversy. This is probably because Mapplethorpe's photographs were and are technically perfection. The composition and lighting put his work on a level that many other photographers strive to reach. Even today his work is immediately

[43] Arthur C. Danto, and Robert Mapplethorpe, *Playing with the edge: the photographic achievement of Robert Mapplethorpe*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.) 89-90.

[44] *Ibid.*

recognizable; Britt Salvesen, Los Angeles County Museum of Art's head of photography had this to say about Mapplethorpe in 2016:

> "You can't mistake a Mapplethorpe for anyone else, I find that really interesting because you could think about a floral still life or a black-and-white portrait as being quite a generic thing. In a way, it's easier to think about Mapplethorpe in context to the slightly older figures of his time, say, Richard Avedon or Irving Penn."[45]

However, after his death this was not enough to protect it. "The Perfect Moment" supported by a $10,000 National Endowment for the Arts Grant, opened in December of 1988 at the hosting institution, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia. It contained 175 works spanning Mapplethorpe's roughly 24-year career, including his experiments with alternate media early in his career and the soon to be infamous *XYZ Portfolios.* The works found in "The Perfect Moment" included works depicting sensual flowers, portraits that included both the gay and BDSM community, and self-portraits. All of these images were captured at a place in time to convey a fleeting instant. They were not intended to spark debate — at least not debate at the Congressional scale; but they, like all art are not intended to be viewed passively. A description by Deborah A. Levinson, of MIT, explains the exhibition as "a study of the point where sex merges with sensuality, eroticism merges with the edges of pornography, fear of the camera merges with revelation of the inner self. Simply put, it is an extraordinary collection of work by an extraordinary man."[46]

At first the exhibition was a success, with no notable scandal in Philadelphia or Chicago. The potentially controversial images were interspersed with other works in the exhibition which helped place them in a less contentious context because the viewer remained focused on the

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[45] "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium," *British Journal of Photography*. (March 24, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.bjp-online.com/2016/03/robert-mapplethorpe-the-perfect-medium/.

[46] Deborah A. Levinson, "Robert Mapplethorpe's extraordinary vision," *The Tech*, (August 6, 1989.) http://tech.mit.edu/V110/N31/mapple.31a.html.

more artistic aspects. With the relative success of the first two stops on its tour "The Perfect Moment" was expected to move through the last six stops with ease. But on June 8th, Representative Richard Armey of Texas led Congress to take aim at the exhibition by sending a letter to the NEA criticizing their funding of this exhibition. This did not seem to effect the future of the exhibition because most of the focus was still on Serrano; but that would quickly change once they placed Mapplethorpe firmly in the national spotlight. This was because on June 13, 1989, two weeks before it was set to open at the Corcoran Art Gallery in Washington D.C., the third stop in the tour, the exhibition was cancelled. The Corcoran Art Gallery's director Dr. Christina Orr-Cahall decided that, it was in the gallery's best interest to cancel the exhibition, due to the growing controversy surrounding Serrano and the precarious future of the National Endowment for the Arts. She feared that if she allowed the exhibition to be shown at the Corcoran, the gallery would be drawn into this greater controversy and would end up running the risk of losing their NEA funding. The board of trustees and former president agreed with Orr-Cahall. Since the Corcoran was in Washington, DC, they felt that presenting this exhibition in the political climate of the time, when other museums were losing their NEA funding, they would have been taking too great of a risk.[47] Orr-Cahall believed that she was going to prevent controversy by canceling the exhibition ahead of time. This was not the case. This action catapulted "The Perfect Moment," the Corcoran Art Gallery, and Mapplethorpe into the national spotlight and into the Congressional debate sparked by Serrano and *Piss Christ*. The art world couldn't believe that the exhibition was cancelled out of fear or that suddenly the exhibition that had comfortably flown under the radar now was directly in the middle of a national debate over the future of arts and the NEA.

[47] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 46-47.

It took very little time for Congress to take action against the NEA. On June 20th Representative Sidney R. Yates of Illinois proposed an amendment that would prevent organizations from regranting money that they were given via NEA grants. This was passed unanimously and would prevent organizations like the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Arts from passing the grant money down to the artist, which was how Serrano was funded. On June 27th Representative Matthew J. Rinaldo of New Jersey introduced an amendment to the NEA legislation that would prevent "the use of certain grants for a project which desecrates or denigrates a religious or national symbol." The national symbol reference included here was due to another controversy that was occurring around the same time surrounding an exhibition by Scott Tyler called *What is the Proper Way to Display a U.S. Flag?* that included a flag that was placed on the ground, thereby manipulating visitors to step on or over it.[48]

Mapplethorpe and his exhibition were soon the main focus of a Congressional debate as Helms, D'Amato, and their supporters claimed that "The Perfect Moment" was an example of the NEA encouraging the corruption of the American people. They rallied against the new head of the NEA John Frohnmayer, who was appointed by President George H.W. Bush on July 7th, for funding what they considered to be despicable works; completely ignoring the fact that the decision to fund "The Perfect Moment" had been made well before Frohnmayer was in charge of the NEA. They railed against Mapplethorpe, heedless of his death, and the debate grew more and more virulent as it continued. Mapplethorpe was called a pervert, pedophile, abusive, and some insinuated that he caused his own death and deserved it due to his sexuality and actions.

On July 7th, Judith Reisman, the associate director of research for the American Family Association, in an article appearing in the *Washington Times,* equated some of Mapplethorpe's

[48] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 344-345.

photographs to child pornography and claimed that his very act of taking those photographs, particularly "Jesse McBride" and "Rosie" (or "Honey"), was "an act of molestation." Reisman completely ignored the fact that the mothers of both children had given their permission for the images to be taken and used, as well as the fact that similar photographs could be found country wide in family photo albums. She went on to claim that Mapplethorpe was a racist. Her argument was focused around one image, "Man in a Polyester Suit," where an African American man was shown in an opened suit, but cropped to show his torso and top of his thighs with a focus on his exposed penis. Reisman claimed that since there was no name or face associated with this image, Mapplethorpe was reducing this man to the racist portrayal of his genitals. Once again the artist's intention was misunderstood, since Mapplethorpe followed his models' wishes as to whether or not they wanted their names attached to each image.[49]

Judith Reisman only added fuel to the arguments being presented by Helms and his followers. They felt that the works in "The Perfect Moment" were obscene and therefore should never have been supported by the American people's tax dollars. Much like their argument against Serrano and *Piss Christ*, they felt that the offensive nature of these works spoke for itself and made it clear that they should never have even been considered for support or display in publicly funded venues. One quote from the art critic, Grace Glueck, writing for the New York Times summed up the opposing argument beautifully. She wrote "although some Congressmen have argued that taxpayer's money should not be used to support exhibitions containing material that many might find offensive, what some consider offensive is not regarded as such by all."[50] This quote displays what is probably the clearest argument against Helms; but it is far from the

[49] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 56-58.
[50] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 62.

only argument against him. There were others who argued that Congress could not dictate to the art world and they have no place trying to define art.

On July 12th the House of Representatives blocked a proposal to defund the NEA completely; but instead implemented a cut of $45,000, a symbolic number that equaled the amount that was used to fund both the Serrano exhibition and "The Perfect Moment."[51] Frohnmayer and the NEA were finding themselves more and more in front of the firing squad, as the public added their voices to the debate placing the future of the National Endowment for the Arts further in question. Reisman, while not a member of Congress, soon had her argument adopted by them. Helms pushed for either a complete defunding of the NEA or strong sanctions on what the NEA could fund to prevent obscene works from being funded again. He proposed on July 26th an amendment that became known as the "Helms Amendment." This had strict limits as to what the National Endowment for the Arts funds could be used for and rang very much like censorship, stating:

> None of the funds authorized to be appropriated pursuant to this Act may be used to promote, disseminate, or produce- 1) obscene or indecent materials, including but not limited to depictions of sadomasochism, homoeroticism, the exploitation of children, or individuals engaged in sex acts; or 2) material which denigrates the objects or beliefs of the adherents of a particular religion or non-religion; or 3) material which denigrates, debases, or reviles a person, group, or class of citizens on the basis of race, creed, sex, handicap, age, or national origin.[52]

On September 13th the House of Representatives voted not to include the Helms Amendment and Helms' push to limit the funding to the arts was defeated in the Senate on September 28th. That was not the end of this fight though and a compromise passed the House on October 3rd which was then approved by the Senate and passed to President Bush to sign on October 7th.

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[51] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 346.
[52] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 347.

This compromise created a 12-member commission that would study the NEA to determine if new standards for funding were needed and prohibited the funding for any project that could be considered obscene based on the 1973 Supreme Court case *Miller* v. *California*. It also gave the chairperson of the NEA the final say on whether "the merits of an application outweigh the agency's concerns over any sexually explicit content."[53] *Miller* v. *California* then became a very important case; the result of this case would mean that obscene material was not protected under the First Amendment and that the definition of obscene material was:

> a) Whether the average person, applying contemporary community standards, would find the work, taken as a whole appeals to the prurient interest, b) whether the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct specifically defined by the applicable state law; and c) whether the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious, literary, artistic, political, or scientific value [54]

This definition would play an extremely important role in the later parts of "The Perfect Moment" debate. Also, as of March 9, 1990 all recipients of NEA grants must sign a clause that stated that they agreed with this anti-obscenity requirement.

Throughout the Congressional debate, "The Perfect Moment" was still on tour. When the Corcoran Art Gallery cancelled their show, the Washington Project for the Arts (WPA), another art museum in DC focused on contemporary artists during all stages of their career,[55] announced on June 26th that they had chosen to host the exhibition instead from July 21 to August 13, 1990. They were one of the many groups that were appalled by the Corcoran's actions and acted to ensure that the exhibition would still be displayed. The mission of the WPA is to focus on being for and by artists, acting as an alternative artist-run space that has brought together many of DC

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[53] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 348.

[54] "Miller v. California," *The Free Dictionary*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Miller v. California.

[55] "About WPA," About WPA | Washington Project for the Arts. Accessed May 03, 2017. https://www.wpadc.org/about.

artists since its founding in 1975. Even with the controversy that was being fought in Congress and possibly due to that fight, the exhibition opening raised $125000 for the Design Industries Foundation Fighting AIDS. The exhibition had a record high attendance figure of 49,000; about 30 times the normal rate, with donations over $40,000. The Washington Project for the Arts also sold out the catalogue. For the installation they separated the XYZ portfolios into another room thereby allowing their patrons to make the decision whether or not to view the potentially offensive works. All of those images were not necessarily overtly sexual in nature though; at least one of his flower images was moved into that room as well.[56] Overall, there was very little protest surrounding the continued display of "The Perfect Moment" and the Washington Project for the Arts director of programs surprisingly had this to say: "We wouldn't normally show [Mapplethorpe's] work. It's too safe, too well known."[57]

The Corcoran, however, did face protests. Local artists forming a group called the National Committee Against Censorship picketed the gallery in a few ways, including projecting slides of Mapplethorpe's artwork onto a nearby building and distributing petitions.[58] Orr-Cahall ended up stepping down from her position of director on December 18, 1989. The exhibition left Washington and moved onto its next two stops in Hartford and Berkeley with little fanfare. That was not the case with Cincinnati, Ohio where a new NEA controversy was sparked.

On March 3, 1990 Representative Dana Rohrabacher of California announced that he planned to submit an amendment that would cut all funding for the arts; just in time for "The Perfect Moment" to be thrust back into the spotlight, adding more fuel to the bonfire against the

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[56] Deborah A. Levinson, "Robert Mapplethorpe's extraordinary vision," *The Tech*, (August 6, 1989). http://tech.mit.edu/V110/N31/mapple.31a.html.

[57] "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment," *Catalyst RSS*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://catalyst.wpadc.org/?p=2845.

[58] "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Moment," *Catalyst RSS*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://catalyst.wpadc.org/?p=2845.

NEA. On March 7th Citizens for Community Values sent a letter to their members detailing ways to prevent "The Perfect Moment" from opening in Cincinnati. On March 21st the Contemporary Arts Center (CAC) in Cincinnati announced that they planned on moving forward regardless. This sparked Senator Helms to ask the General Accounting Office to look into whether the NEA was spending taxpayer funds wisely. Photographs of the controversial works were to be labeled with a special warning to ensure that their women associates were not exposed to the works. They agree to do so three days later.

With the CAC's assertion that they were still going to display the exhibition, the Citizens for Community Values claimed that the works were criminally obscene; thereby forcing the police to announce that they will look into the matter. The Citizens for Community Values protested, condemning the museum for even considering displaying something that they thought was so evidently offensive, so against their morals, and so sexual that it was unbelievable that it could possibly be shown to the general public. Others disagreed with this attempt at censorship. They wanted either to see it or have the choice to see it. These groups took to the streets to protest the opposite side, turning the streets of Cincinnati into the latest battleground of the already vicious culture war.

The Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati did make some concessions to the protestors and the police. On March 27th they, along with the Mapplethorpe Foundation and estate asked for a judge to determine whether these images were considered criminally offensive. However, on April 6th an Ohio judge rejected the request. The CAC still moved forward with presenting the exhibition not knowing whether they were going to be brought up on charges for displaying the images or not.[59] The CAC tried to ensure that there would be as little national controversy as

[59] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 352.

possible by limiting admission only to people aged eighteen and over, and sectioning off the most controversial section, the *X Portfolio,* into another part of the space. They tried to avoid a funding debate by increasing ticket prices and getting local businesses to be sponsors; thereby avoiding some of the issues Washington faced. They placed warning signs that some of the images were not appropriate for all visitors.[60] In preparation for a fight, Dennis Barrie, the director of the CAC, also hired a lawyer, H. Louis Skinner whose focus was First Amendment defense cases. Skinner also submitted an action to the local Ohio court that said that "a legitimate museum such as the CAC could not be charged with obscenity."[61] This failed the day before the exhibition was set to open.

On April 6th, the exhibition opened to thousands of members peacefully and Barrie said, "I thought we dodged a bullet."[62] However, when the exhibition opened to the general public the next day, it was met not only by record crowds, but also by the police. The police said was that there were photographs involved that were by a legal definition inappropriate to be included in an exhibition that was open to the public, and that Dennis Barrie was to be arrested for two misdemeanor accounts of pandering obscenity and illegal use of a child in nudity related material; the CAC was also included in these charges. The 20 law enforcement personnel kicked out the visitors and videotaped the exhibition as evidence for the future court case. Once they were done, they reopened the doors. Out of 175 photographs, 7 were brought before court as being obscene and inappropriate for museum audiences. That is only four percent of the images

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[60] Childs, *Suspended License*, 375-376.

[61] Grace Dobush, "25 Years Later: Cincinnati and the Obscenity Trial over Mapplethorpe Art," *The Washington Post*, (October 23, 2015). Accessed February 1, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/25-years-later-cincinnati-and-the-obscenity-trial-over-mapplethorpe-art/2015/10/22/07c6aba2-6dcb-11e5-9bfe-e59f5e244f92_story.html?utm_term=.6e1aa7bda46b.

[62] Alex Palmer, "When Art Fought the Law and the Art Won," *Smithsonian.com*. (October 02, 2015). Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-art-fought-law-and-art-won-180956810/?no-ist.

found in the exhibition. Four percent — that was all it took for the CAC to be the first museum charged with criminal obscenity. This decision caught Representative Rohrabacher's attention, but he was not agreeing with the court in this case. He felt that this decision was a violation of the CAC's First Amendment rights, claiming that he wanted federal control, not local.

These were the same photographs that caused the controversy in Washington and that had led to such a public outcry to Congress. Those seven photographs included two images of children and five that fell under the gay S&M banner. The two images of children were "Jesse McBride" and "Rosie," also described as "Honey" in some articles. "Jesse McBride" depicts a little boy somewhere around five to seven years old, sitting on the back of a living room chair spread-legged to support himself, next to a refrigerator, naked, staring at the camera. "Rosie" is a little girl younger looking than Jesse, described by many as being about three years old. She is sitting outside on what looks to be a stone bench staring at the camera, one hand on the arm of the bench, the other on her foot which is pulled up under her. Her other leg is bent and perpendicular to the seat; her dress is pulled up and one can see that she is not wearing any underwear or a diaper.[63]

As mentioned earlier, there are some like Judith Reisman who felt that these works were inappropriate and overly sexual; therefore, perpetuating the child pornography industry. That was not the opinion of everyone who saw the exhibition by a long shot. There also was a response that proposed that these images were a "spoof of the intensely commercial market for illicit 'kiddie porn' being sold by mail."[64] Since Mapplethorpe made it clear that he was uncomfortable photographing children and personally was coerced as a child to be photographed in a state of undress against his will, it is conceivable to believe he had not intended these works

[63] Danto, *Playing with the edge*, 66,62.
[64] Kammen, *Visual Shock*, 79.

to be explicit or sexual.[65] In fact, there were a number of people who did not see anything explicit at all in these photographs. They would maintain that these photographs were just children being children and that there would be few mothers in the country who would not have similar photographs. In the end, it did not even matter that the police had pulled these photographs for one very important reason: parental approval. "Both mothers were not only present during the shoots, but delighted with the outcomes; they express their dismay over the whole controversy and their personal affection for Mapplethorpe." [66] They gave permission. This fact altered the case in Mapplethorpe's favor. It was ruled that those two photographs could not be used in the legal case since the mothers had given permission for them to be taken and to be included in this exhibition.

This fact left the court with the five S&M based images. These included "Self-portrait" 1978, which depicted Mapplethorpe standing hunched over, turned to the right to look at the camera wearing leather chaps, boots and vest, with his left leg supported up on a step and a bullwhip inserted into his anus.[67] Another was "Jim and Tom, Sausalito," 1977, which depicted one man (Jim) standing, wearing only leather pants, boots and mask/hood, and leaning slightly back from another (Tom), who was fully clothed in leather jacket and jeans, kneeling in a concrete room with a ladder to the left; the standing man is urinating into the mouth of the kneeling man.[68] The court described the other photographs in this case as "a man shoving his arm and fist up another man's rectum…a man with a cylindrical object inserted into his rectal

[65] Danto, *Playing with the edge*, 61.
[66] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 280.
[67] Danto, *Playing with the edge*, 58.
[68] Danto, *Playing with the edge*, 84.

area…. [and] a man with a finger inserted into the head of his penis."[69] All of these photographs were in black and white, most of them were from the *X Portfolio*.

As all of this took place debate and protest reigned in the streets. The police who were taking the images away and arresting Barrie were called "Gestapo." Chants echoed in the streets: "Not the church, not the state, we decide what art is great." People flooded the museum hall in many cases wanting to know what all the fuss was about.[70] It did not seem to matter if they had seen the exhibition or not, in reality, many protestors on either side mainly wanted their side heard.[71] The LGBT and anti-AIDS groups took to the streets as anti-gay rhetoric was being used more and more against Mapplethorpe and "The Perfect Moment." Many saw these arguments against Mapplethorpe as governmental censorship and they felt that the government had no right to tell them what they could or couldn't see within a museum. Many others who saw this exhibition as a sign of the moral corruption of the American society, were very anti-gay and religiously conservative in their leanings. This created a lot of tension between the ideas of censorship and 'moral corruption' which continued to be played out in the final iteration of the NEA controversy, as reported by Bolton[72] and Faherty and Motsinger.[73]

There were many factors that influenced the case's final conclusion. The prosecutor, Frank H. Prouty Jr. fully believed that there was nothing beneficial to this exhibition and made sure that certain criteria were met. "He said the jury should only see the seven controversial

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[69] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 275.

[70] John Faherty, and Carol Motsinger, "Pornography or art? Cincinnati decided," Cincinnati.com. (March 29, 2015). Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.cincinnati.com/story/news/2015/03/28/pornography-art-cincinnati-decided-robert-mapplethorpe-trial-25-year/70591342/.

[71] Alex Palmer, "When Art Fought the Law and the Art Won," Smithsonian.com. (October 02, 2015). Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-art-fought-law-and-art-won-180956810/?no-ist.

[72] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 269-282.

[73] John Faherty and Carol Motsinger, "Pornography or art? Cincinnati decided," Cincinnati.com

photographs and not the entire show… He said the CAC was a gallery, and not a museum, which meant it would not have many free speech protections. The judge agreed."[74] These criteria would make it more difficult for the defense because without the entire exhibition, one lost some of the context which softened the impact of these images. The entire argument was based on free speech and the argument that the public should have a chance to make decisions for themselves on whether they want to see certain artwork.

Prouty also had a rather interesting approach. He believed that the photographs were able to speak for themselves. He showed them to the jury, had police officers corroborate that those images were on display, and then he sat back. He felt that "The obscenity issue, the pictures must speak for themselves. The jury is the community…They set the standard. Let them make the decision."[75] The definition of obscenity was the definition that had been decided in *Miller* v. *California,* the same standard that the NEA grant applicants had to reach. This jury was made up of eight people, four men and four women, with only one college graduate, most without much experience with museums, and none of whom had been to the CAC or the exhibition. It took four days of detailed questioning to get these eight people together and it was rather difficult for the lawyers to build an impartial jury in this case, with everyone taking sides in the community.[76]

Skinner, on the other hand, and his coworker Marc D. Mezibov who represented the CAC, also focused on the photographs; however, they argued that Mapplethorpe was an artist and therefore these pieces were art. Working in their favor was their witness's ability to explain that pornography and obscenity are not the same thing; that there is value in art even if it is not pretty; and that in order for something to be defined as obscene based, the three criteria

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[74] *Ibid*

[75] *Ibid*

[76] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 269-282.

determined on a congressional level had to be met. The criteria are as follows: there is no serious artistic value, the average person using modern community standards would find the work as a whole having or encouraging excessive interest in sexual matters, and the work depicts in an offensive way sexual conduct as defined by the state law. When the jury went into deliberation, many thought that this was going to be not only the first time a museum was brought up on charges, but also the first time that a museum was convicted. On October 5, 1990, it took the jury two hours to reach a decision and it was a verdict of not guilty on all counts. That did not mean that they liked the images. In fact, none of them did; but they also felt that no one should dictate what art could be seen.[77]

This was the end of "The Perfect Moment's" role in the NEA controversy. At this point, the controversy as a whole was starting to wind down by October. The exhibition's last stop was Boston, the same city where the artist had died just a year prior. The tour finished quietly. It faced only minor civil protest and nothing to the extent that it had faced in Washington or in Cincinnati.[78] "The Perfect Moment" would still be held up as an example of the depravity that the NEA was allowed to fund; however, once it closed there were other artists for Congress to hold up as examples.

The final addition to the NEA controversies was a group of performance artists that became known as the NEA Four. This controversy began while the Cincinnati case against "The Perfect Moment" was ongoing. Unlike the earlier controversies, this was not focused on a single artist, but four different performance artists: Karen Finley, John Fleck, Tim Miller, and Holly Hughes. Unlike Serrano and Mapplethorpe, they did not become controversial because

[77] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 269-282.
[78] Childs, *Suspended License* 380.

they were funded. Congress, and Jesse Helms in particular, felt that they shouldn't be. Instead, they were drawn into the controversy because in 1990 they were denied funding by NEA Chairman John Frohnmayer who went against the peer review panel to make that decision. The artists took the NEA to court.[79]

Karen Finley was born in 1956 outside of Chicago. She grew up interested in performances. She took to the media far more seriously after her father's suicide in 1978. She received her master's degree in Fine Arts from the San Francisco Art Institute in 1982 and a year later was awarded her first NEA grant when she moved to New York City. Her work focused on the oppression of women, feelings of rage and self-loathing, domestic abuse, homosexuality, and sexual repression. She was confrontational and provocative. Finley's work was recorded on an album in 1988.[80]

John Fleck grew up Roman Catholic, with five siblings and an alcoholic father. The family moved around a lot. Fleck traveled to California in 1973 to attended acting school and to get away from his family. He worked as both a performance artist and an actor in California. His performance pieces include stories about his life as a gay man and can be rather provocative.[81]

Tim Miller was born in September of 1958, the youngest of four children in California. His mother worked in a department store and his father was a traveling salesman. Miller realized that he was gay rather young and his family was supportive. He took classes in theater and dance while in high school. This passion carried into adulthood and he traveled to NYC to study dance. In 1980, Miller helped open a space for performance art in NYC and then after seven

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[79] Childs, *Suspended License*, 383.

[80] Steve Huey, "Karen Finley | Biography & History," *AllMusic*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.allmusic.com/artist/karen-finley-mn0000302661/biography.

[81] JAN BRESLAUER, "INTERVIEW : John Fleck's Radical Shtick," *Los Angeles Times*. (November 18, 1990.) Accessed April 8, 2017. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-11-18/entertainment/ca-7066_1_fleck-john-worked.

years in New York, he returned to California where he opened another performance space. [82]Throughout all of this Miller was an active member of ACT UP, AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, one of the most vocal and successful AIDS activist groups, and he worked as a vocal activist for the LGBTQ community throughout his career. [83]

Holly Hughes was born in 1955 in Michigan. She resented living in the Midwest and two years after graduating from Kalamazoo College in 1977 she moved to NYC where she worked as a painter. She joined Women's One World Café (WoW) which was a small lesbian feminist art collective. This is where Hughes took off as a performance artist. She created performances focused on women's and LGBTQ issues. She incorporated stereotypes and other tongue in cheek jokes, mocking those that mocked her community.[84]

On the political side of this controversy, members of Congress took actions against the National Endowment for the Arts. On May 16, 1990 Representatives Steve Gunderson of Wisconsin and Tom Coleman of Missouri proposed a change to the NEA which would alter the types of grants that they could bestow and would set aside sixty percent of their budget directly to state art agencies to be redistributed from there.

On May 23, the New School for Social Research with their lawyer Floyd Adams filed in New York federal court against the NEA and John Frohnmayer asking for the organization to stop requiring its obscenity pledge. They had been forced to turn down a $45,000 grant for a redesign of the school's courtyard. The requirement of this pledge was making things very difficult for organizations that wanted to receive NEA grants, yet still felt that the pledge was a

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[82] Linda Rapp, "Miller, Tim (b.1958)," *glbtq*. 2005. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.glbtq.com.

[83] "Tim Miller," *Tim Miller*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.timmillerperformer.com/about.html.

[84] "Holly Hughes | Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan." Holly Hughes | Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://stamps.umich.edu/people/detail/holly_hughes.

form of censorship.[85] On June 6th, the White House asked Congress to reauthorize the NEA for a year without any restrictions while the Independent Commission investigated the organization and hoped the noise would die down. Also, the General Accounting Office had its report as requested by Senator Jesse Helms, stating that the NEA had not violated federal law. Days afterwards became busy for the NEA in Congress because on June 12th a Senate Subcommittee agreed to send on the NEA reauthorization bill without restrictions for 5 years.[86]

On June 13th Representative Paul B Henry from Michigan and Senator Orrin Hatch from Utah circulated two different proposals; one to ban funding for art that deliberately denigrates "the cultural heritage of the United States, its religious tradition, or racial or ethnic groups…. or violates prevailing standards of obscenity or indecency" and the other to prevent artists who produce obscene works from being able to receive federal funding for up to ten years, respectfully. On the 19th the reauthorization was put off until there was a meeting of the full House in July, just in time for the NEA Four controversy to gain ground.[87]

On June 9, 1990 John Frohnmayer vetoed the NEA Theater Program grants for the NEA Four. Frohnmayer may have been the one to make the decision not to fund these artists; but according to his autobiography, he said, it was not a decision that he had made lightly. The National Council meeting was in Helms' backyard. The applicants for the theater division — the group that would become the NEA Four — were all vocal about social issues that were a part of the prevailing social debate. The fact that Helms and his supporters were openly homophobic, combined with other factors, placed Frohnmayer in the position that no matter what decision he chose, it would cause debate.[88]

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[85] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 355.
[86] *Ibid, 356.*
[87] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 355-356.
[88] Frohnmayer, *Confessions of an Arts Warrior,* 151-152.

He was well aware that the future of the NEA was in jeopardy, and every choice that the organization made was going to be analyzed and debated to death, both in the eyes of the public and in the halls of Congress. In the end, Frohnmayer made the decision not to fund them hoping that his justification (which in his own words was shallow), would be a middle ground that everyone could live with. He had hoped to appease the conservatives and to preserve the NEA, stating, "I didn't want to be the one to take the Endowment down in flames."[89] He also claimed that some art was too confrontational or offensive to receive public funding or be exhibited in public places. To make his point, he used an image of Holocaust victims as an example, saying that it would be inappropriate to be shown in a museum entrance where all are required to see it.[90] Many of the museums that showed "The Perfect Moment" moved to have the controversial images separated from the rest of the exhibition; however, the NEA Four were all performance artists and there is nothing forcing a person to go to their performances. The latter statement seems at odds to Frohnmayer's intent, both to preserve the arts and the NEA.

By July 6th members of the NEA Theater panel had asked Frohnmayer to reconsider his decision. Perhaps they were aware of how much frustration was already being felt in the art world at the time; perhaps they realized that by turning down these particular artists was painting the National Endowment for the Arts in a rather homophobic light; or perhaps they merely felt that these artists were worth funding regardless of the potential risks. In 1990, the NEA was being sued by other artists and institutions, mostly due to the obscenity clause that the NEA was forcing them to sign. This clause would eventually be deemed unconstitutional in January of 1991.

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[89] *Ibid,* 176.
[90] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 348.

On September 11, 1991, the Independent Commission, recommended in its report that the obscenity pledge be removed and that the grant-making procedures be overhauled. This report was accepted the next day in the Senate along with a proposal for a five-year reauthorization without content restrictions. It also allowed the NEA to take back the money given via grants if the artist violates local obscenity and pornography laws, and it increased power to both the NEA chairman and the Council for the Arts. This plan was passed in the House with a 3-year reauthorization. The Senate passed their version on October 24th with the addition by Helms that would deny funds to any work that denigrates religion. The legislation was completely passed three days later and two days after that the NEA removed the requirement for the obscenity pledge. It was not until December 14th that Frohnmayer announced that he would not reject any panel—approved grants on the grounds of decency.[91]

This may have been the end of the Congressional influence on the NEA controversy, but it was not the end of the legal battles. The NEA Four sued the NEA on September 27th, claiming that they were turned down from funding because of political reasons, not because of their merits as artists.[92] Karen Finley, known to be a vocal feminist, did not shy away from topics that would offend some of the more conservative members of Congress. She had been funded by the NEA before and she claimed that her performance was being taken out of context and sensationalized to ensure that it would not be funded as a part of the "witch-hunt of the arts." Her performance that Frohnmayer chose not to fund had three acts; in the first she was fully clothed and spoke about the rule of the patriarchy and the effect that this has on women; in the second she spoke about the oppression of minorities including women and AIDS patients; and in the third she is in a white sheet near a death bed speaking about those who survive the AIDS

[91] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 360-363.
[92] Frohnmayer, *Confessions of an Arts Warrior*,186.

crisis.[93] The time period surrounding this controversy meant that speaking about the AIDS crisis in this way could be very contentious. She also was openly critical of Helms and his fellow anti-art congressmen. Finley wrote a piece called "It's Only Art" that described what would happen if all art that could be considered offensive to someone were removed resulting in a world where creativity was punished severely.[94]

John Fleck is an openly gay man whose performances explored what that meant both personally and as a part of a larger experience. He is not shy about using religious symbolism, nudity, and body fluids in his work as a performance artist. With all of this combined, it is not surprising that he was wrapped into this greater dispute.

Tim Miller is an openly gay man and an AIDS activist with ACT UP, who was quick to point out that his socially relevant art was seen as extremely political at the time. He was very vocal during the court cases. He used each media opportunity as best he could to further his causes. In fact, Miller wrote a statement on July 4, 1990 called "An Artist's Declaration of Independence to Congress" that called out the government for trying to control what people thought and trying to silence the voices of the LGBT community.[95] Much like the case of John Fleck, it is not a surprise that he was a part of this public debate.

Holly Hughes is a lesbian, out and proud. She too did not shy away from using the press that came with these court cases to make her point. Hughes used this event as a platform to bring the issues facing LGBT artists to the forefront, pointing out that the censorship that was applied early in the controversy was fervently directed against homosexuals. She pointed out how often homophobia was influencing the decisions in these cases and remained an ongoing issue.

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[93] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 208-210.
[94] *Ibid,* 282-284.
[95] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 244.

Hughes was not shy in pointing out that since the controversy surrounding the NEA had begun and the media had covered the crusade against the arts, there had been a 128% increase in anti-gay incidents – hardly just a coincidence.[96]

In 1991, Holly Hughes and Tim Miller would receive $8,000 grants from the NEA. This too drew the attention of some Congresspersons. Those who objected claimed they did so based on the homosexuality of the supported artists and the notion that the American people did not want such works supported. Frohnmayer disagreed and managed to prevent further controversy in this case.[97] The NEA Four case took eight years to make its way through all levels of the judicial system. First, a ruling in 1992 favored the group, saying that the anti-obscenity clause in the NEA guidelines was not clear enough to prevent them from receiving funding. Then this was backtracked by the Supreme Court in 1998 as they decided that the decency clause was constitutional as a criterion for federal funding. In the long run, it didn't matter, they had still received the funding, but it did lengthen the conversation and continue the debate on what and how the NEA should handle their funding.

The Fallout

After these events and all of this controversy, President George H.W. Bush highly encouraged John Frohnmayer to step down from his post as the head of the National Endowment for the Arts. He did so in 1992, after only two and a half years in the position. He ended up leaving before his last project was completed and, on paper, said that it was due to a desire to return to private life. In reality this decision was due to political pressure from people higher in

[96] Bolton, *Culture Wars,* 254.
[97] Frohnmayer, *Confessions of an Arts Warrior,* 307-312.

the political hierarchy who wanted the stain of this scandal to disappear.[98] Ironically, Frohnmayer was punished for decisions that were made by his predecessors since he was the acting face of the organization throughout the scandal. He returned to Oregon and wrote two books, became a professor of history at Oregon State University, and in 2007 ran for Senate.[99]

The NEA ended up implementing a decency clause in an attempt to avoid future controversies. While not as intense as the decency clause that Helms' had proposed, it did create limits on what the NEA could fund. The Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Philadelphia, that had originally planned both the Mapplethorpe and Serrano exhibits, were each fined and lost NEA funding for a few years thanks to Congress's decision. This was described in *Federalizing the Muse* "thus, Congress expressed not only fiscal conservativism, but also cultural conservatism — criticizing the NEA first as elitist, then, during the Mapplethorpe and Serrano controversies, as corrupt."[100]

Fortunately, the NEA did weather this storm and as of 2016 celebrated its 50th year. Helms' attempts to close down the NEA had failed, but his actions still significantly effected the future of the organization and how it works today. The organization no longer supports artists directly; instead, it will only work through partnerships with "state art agencies, local leaders, other federal agencies, and the philanthropic sector."[101] It still focuses on equal access to the arts, but it now faces limitations as to how it does that. Most destructively, the NEA faced a major budget cut, primarily as a result of the bad press that it faced. Since this controversy, the NEA has overwhelmingly continued to play it safe with its funding for museum exhibits.

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[98] *Ibid*, 1-6.

[99] Andrew Theen, "John Frohnmayer Joins Senate Race," *Oregon Public Broadcasting*. (September 12, 2007). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.opb.org/news/article/john-frohnmayer-joins-senate-race/.

[100] Binkiewicz, *Federalizing the Muse*, 225.

[101] "National Endowment for the Arts," NEA. Accessed February 1, 2017. https://www.arts.gov/about-nea.

Looking over the exhibits that have been funded since 1990, at least those that can be found online, there seems to be an avoidance of topics or exhibits that could possibly be seen as controversial.[102]

The art community pushed back throughout all of this turmoil. Many artists and their supporters felt that the actions being taken by Congress against the NEA were acts of censorship. Many found themselves and their artwork under the microscope as well. They wrote to Congress and newspapers, and stood at protests defending their fellow artists and themselves. They argued that not everything that included nudity was sexual, and pointed out that the artists being attacked were disproportionally gay. They explained that a work by a gay artist did not suddenly make it worthless. The art community and its supporters argued that these attacks were perpetuating homophobia under the guise of preserving moral values in art. There also were some people who reconsidered the value of the NEA grants, in particular when looking at art that was focused on the LGBT community. Author Sarah Schulman was one such person questioning whether token grants were being awarded to gay artists so the endowment could claim that they fund diverse groups by pointing to a few rare examples. She felt that there needed to be a greater focus on the problem of homophobia as a whole instead of focusing solely on whether the NEA was going to continue to receive funding. Her overarching theme was that the controversies were caused by Helms and his supporters trying to take control of the art world, which was something that was out of their realm to control.[103] Helms wanted artists not to take risks, an act of self-censorship which could easily spill over into education, limiting both self-expression and knowledge.[104] Helms did win reelection twice after these events.

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[102]"NEA Online Grant Search," NEA Online Grant Search, accessed May 18, 2017, https://apps.nea.gov/grantsearch/SearchMain.aspx.

[103] Bolton, *Culture Wars*, 230-239.

[104] *Ibid*, 93.

Modern Point of View of Each Artist

Andres Serrano is a well-regarded contemporary artist, though he still is not without his controversy. Some of his art draws the ire of those who are more religious; but there has never been a controversy due to his art on the same scale again. Since the NEA controversy, he has shown his work all over the world and did not shy away from creating and displaying religious themed artwork. [105] However, Serrano has moved beyond these themes to create works covering violence, race, and poverty. Portraits of homeless people, members of the Catholic clergy, members of the KKK, and dead bodies have all been featured as topics of his art in more recent years, according to the International Center for Photography[106] and the RoGallery's biographies.[107] Serrano's art has been featured in many different galleries and on album covers. Recently, he has also branched out into music and video.[108] Some of Serrano's more modern works draw criticism; while others are seen as being less confrontational. His show "Shit" in 2008 drew plenty of criticism, primarily due to the subject matter.[109] Yet other series like "America" [110] caused little if any negative criticism. He has not avoided the religious aspect of his work; in fact, it remains a driving force in his artwork. In 2012, he created a series dedicated as "Holy Works" to that topic.[111] His most recent exhibition in 2017 is focused on torture and

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[105] "ANDRES SERRANO," *ANDRES SERRANO*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://andresserrano.org/Bio.htm.

[106] "Andres Serrano," *International Center of Photography*. (March 02, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.icp.org/browse/archive/constituents/andres-serrano?all%2Fall%2Fall%2Fall%2F0.

[107] "Andres Serrano – Biography," *RoGallery*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://rogallery.com/Serrano_Andres/Andres_Serrano-Biography.html.

[108] "Andres Serrano," *Andres Serrano Biography – Andres Serrano on artnet*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.artnet.com/artists/andres-serrano/biography.

[109]Jerry Saltz, "Looking Out for No. 2," *NYMag.com*. (September 12, 2008). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://nymag.com/arts/art/reviews/50479/.

[110]Ken Johnson, "Andres Serrano -- 'America,'" *The New York Times*. (December 18, 2003). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/19/arts/art-in-review-andres-serrano-america.html.

[111]Selina Ting, "Interview : Andres SERRANO," *Initiartmagazine*. (April 5, 2012). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.initiartmagazine.com/interview.php?IVarchive=87.

bares that as its title. Here Serrano has once again attracted critics who claim that the exhibition is "an unseemly aestheticization of heinous crimes." Serrano counters that argument by pointing out that these crimes have been part of human history for millennia and are therefore fair game for artists to work with.[112]

Robert Mapplethorpe is still seen as a notable artist. His works are displayed countrywide, including works from the now infamous *XYZ Portfolios*. However, it is worth noting that no record of the seven photographs that were brought before a judge in Cincinnati, being shown currently in an exhibition can be found. The *XYZ Portfolios* that include these images are owned by the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, and were jointly acquired by the J. Paul Getty Trust and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Those seven images were accessioned into their collection and information can be found on each image through their collection search, although the image itself cannot be seen.[113] A complete list of all 175 images from "The Perfect Moment" does not exist online. It is only in the exhibition catalog that can be purchased through the Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation or from Amazon.[114] In 2000, a docudrama titled "Dirty Pictures" was directed by Frank Pierson based on the teleplay by Ilene Chaiken about the 1990 coverage of the Cincinnati trial [115] Inspired by this movie the Santa Monica Museum of Art recreated "The Perfect Moment" in 2000, and described it as "an almost photograph by photography reconstruction." Since there was no online record of the images

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[112]Michael Kurcfeld, "(Photographer Spotlight) An Art of Uncomfortable Truths: Michael Kurcfeld On Andres Serrano [Video]," *Los Angeles Review of Books*. (February 22, 2017). Accessed May 03, 2017. https://lareviewofbooks.org/av/photographer-spotlight-art-uncomfortable-truths-michael-kurcfeld-andres-serrano-video/.

[113] "Robert Mapplethorpe (American, 1946 - 1989) (Getty Museum)," *The J. Paul Getty in Los Angeles*. Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/artists/2928/robert-mapplethorpe-american-1946-1989/.

[114] Exhibition-E.com, *The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation*. Accessed March 03, 2016. http://www.mapplethorpe.org/.

[115] "Dirty Pictures (TV Movie 2000)," *IMDb*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0217363/.

used, there was no way to verify if changing retrospective mentalities resulted in those seven photographs being shown again. In 2012, the *X Portfolio* was displayed with the *Y* and *Z Portfolios* at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. This was mirrored by a gallery show at the Getty with its own focus on Mapplethorpe.[116]

There has been a resurgence of interest in the life and works of Mapplethorpe in recent years. Authors and filmmakers are being far more honest about his character than they had been in the past. They are now admitting the obvious — that Mapplethorpe had a fascination with darkness, a fascination that blended over into his work. Mapplethorpe cultivated this persona of creepiness that helped act as a brand for him, something that he was able to market very well.[117] He helped force curators into acknowledging that photography was an art form as legitimate as painting or sculpture through his benefactor Sam Wagstaff .[118] Mapplethorpe was one of the first to use African American figure models in his photographs and brought up the question of race in his photographs in very direct ways, according to Holland Cotter[119] and Jack Fritscher.[120]

While his traditional portraits had been acknowledged as beautiful during his lifetime, after his death and events surrounding "The Perfect Moment" exhibition, the focus was on his more sexualized work. At the end of his life, he created series with themes of flowers and

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[116]Edgar Arceneaux, Brian Droitcour, Carrie Rickey, and Colin Westerbeck, "Putting Mapplethorpe in his Place," Putting Mapplethorpe in his Place - *Magazine - Art in America*. (March 1, 2016). Accessed February 1, 2017.http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/magazine/putting-mapplethorpe-in-his-place/.

[117]Tim Murphy, "Mapplethorpe, Prince of Darkness," *The Nation*. (April 04, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.thenation.com/article/mapplethorpe-prince-of-darkness/.

[118]Jack Fritscher, "'He was a sexual outlaw': my love affair with Robert Mapplethorpe," *The Guardian*. (March 09, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/09/robert-mapplethorpe-photography-jack-fritscher-look-at-the-pictures.

[119]Holland Cotter, "Why Mapplethorpe Still Matters," *The New York Times*. (March 31, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/01/arts/design/why-mapplethorpe-still-matters.html.

[120]Jack Fritscher, "'He was a sexual outlaw': my love affair with Robert Mapplethorpe," *The Guardian*. (March 09, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/09/robert-mapplethorpe-photography-jack-fritscher-look-at-the-pictures.

statues. He had made great strides in pushing the art form forward, yet most of the writing about him remains focused on his themes of sex and sexuality.[121] Today, even many of the images found in the X portfolio have lost some of their offensiveness, so Mapplethorpe is now seen as less of a rebel and more of a classic artist.[122]

The NEA Four have probably had the most varied lives since the NEA "Culture War" erupted. Holly Hughes reached international acclaim for her performance artwork, presented all over the world. She published two books: *Clit Notes: A Sapphic Sampler* and *O Solo Homo: The New Queer Performance* and received numerous awards. She is now teaching at the University of Michigan as a professor in the School of Art and Design, is co-editing another book and is working on a new solo piece, according to her bio from the University of Michigan[123] and her own words.[124]

Karen Finley is still working as a performance artist and is the author of eight books.[125] She has worked as an actress and has received a number of awards and grants for her art over the years, including a Guggenheim Fellowship.[126] In 2016, she turned the political candidates into pieces of performance art so she clearly has not 'mellowed' with time. [127] Finley also works as an art professor for the Tisch School of the Arts in New York City.

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[121] "Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium," *British Journal of Photography*, (March 24, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.bjp-online.com/2016/03/robert-mapplethorpe-the-perfect-medium/.

[122]Cotter, 2016.

[123] "Holly Hughes | Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan," Holly Hughes | Penny W. Stamps School of Art & Design at the University of Michigan. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://stamps.umich.edu/people/detail/holly_hughes.

[124]Holly Hughes, "Reverberations of the NEA Four Affair," *The Harvard Gay & Lesbian Review* 3, no. 3 (July 31, 1996): 33.

[125] "Karen Finley," *Karen Finley.* Accessed February 1, 2017. http://karenfinley.com/events.php.

[126] "High School Programs," *Karen Finley*. Accessed April 8, 2017. https://tisch.nyu.edu/about/directory/app/101925210.

[127] Anthony Haden-Guest, "How Karen Finley Turned Trump and Hillary Into Brilliant Performance Art," *The Daily Beast*. (August 21, 2016). Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/08/21/how-karen-finley-turned-trump-and-hillary-into-brilliant-performance-art.html.

As for the men, Tim Miller is now an internationally acclaimed performance artist and a writer. His works have received multiple rewards and he has taught performance at various colleges throughout the country. Miller is also the co-founder of two very influential performances spaces in the U.S. on opposite coasts. He still works on promoting LGBT rights from his home in California with his partner.[128] He is very vocal both online and in the greater community.[129]

Finally, John Fleck, is still a performance artist, who also worked as an actor in "Star Trek: Enterprise," "Carnivale," "Waterworld," "True Blood," and "Weeds" according to his IMDb record[130] and Reed Johnson's article.[131] He said that after the events surrounding the NEA controversy, he did not want to apply for another grant again. Unlike his contemporaries, he was not an activist by nature; so all of the attention focused on him due to these events was apparently rather draining.[132] He is still performing, receiving rave reviews from the New York Times and has received a number of awards for outstanding performance.[133] In 2015, Fleck, was the subject of a documentary, *John Fleck is Who You Want Him to Be.*[134] All in all, the events of the National Endowment for the Arts controversy had very little long term negative consequences for the artists involved. These events made these artists household names, at least

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[128] "Tim Miller," Tim Miller. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.timmillerperformer.com/about.html.

[129]Tim Miller, Tim Miller Queer Performer. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://timmillerperfomer.blogspot.com/.

[130] "John Fleck Biography," *IMDb*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0281387/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm.

[131]Reed Johnson, "John Fleck dons a distinctive garland," *Los Angeles Times*, (May 15, 2011). http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/15/entertainment/la-ca-john-fleck-20110515.

[132] JAN BRESLAUER and "INTERVIEW: John Fleck's Radical Shtick," *Los Angeles Times*. (November 18, 1990). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-11-18/entertainment/ca-7066_1_fleck-john-worked.

[133] "Bio," *John Fleck*. (December 31, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://johnfleck.net.cp-38.webhostbox.net/bio/.

[134]Lisa Derrick, "Controversial John Fleck Documentary Screens July 18 at Brand Library," *The Huffington Post.* (July 17, 2015). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/lisa-derrick/controversial-john-fleck-_b_7814978.html.

for a short time. They also drew attention for the role of the government funding the arts, if not for the artists' causes themselves. This history shows that political conservatism and publicly funded art do not tend to mix well, especially when controversial content is at stake. Yet, this does not necessarily result negatively for the artists involved. Yes, the controversy can bring about inflammatory, critical press and even the denial or removal of grant money. It also ensures that there can be positive, supportive publicity for both the artists and their work. The NEA controversy made national news and was debated in Congress for years. While one would be hesitant to say that all publicity can be positive because there certainly are both risks and benefits, it appears that it helps, especially in the art world where so much of an artist's success relies on having a recognizable name.

How the Modern Point of View Displays that Changing Culture Changes One's Views on Controversies

With the turn of the century and the increased social acceptance of LGBTQA+ individuals, many of the types of exhibits and performances that drew controversy solely for being works by LGBTQA+ individuals no longer draw the same level of discussion. This has been proven by the many subsequent exhibits of Mapplethorpe's works that have been presented since the initial controversy without any major discussion. Mapplethorpe's art including works from the *XYZ Portfolio*s, tend not to be publicized. Nevertheless, some of those seven photographs are the easiest to find online while searching for images from "The Perfect Moment." It is actually quite hard to figure out which of Mapplethorpe's other works were included in more current exhibitions, without the paper exhibition catalog, which is rather ironic because the formerly censored images are now even more accessible in books, exhibition

catalogues, and on line. There are no warnings surrounding the images; merely the context of the text. If one is searching for "The Perfect Moment" in Google images, the censored images do not necessarily show up; although if one continues to scroll down, the results may appear where there is no context.

As a whole, the goal of many regarding contemporary Mapplethorpe exhibitions is to bring these works back into discussion under a different political climate that is more LGBTQA+ friendly so it will allow for a more in-depth conversation about the artist and his influence. In 2015, the Contemporary Arts Center had an exhibition of forty-two artists[135] whose artworks were influenced by the Mapplethorpe controversy and his work, as well as a two-day symposium on Mapplethorpe's work and censorship, with one panel focusing on the trial.[136] The artists were tasked with creating pieces that displayed what Mapplethorpe, controversy, and censorship meant to them. [137] Four of the artists were supposed to have exhibits at the CAC around the same time as "The Perfect Moment." Thanks to that controversy, they felt that they had to change the proposals they were submitting to the CAC, so they would be asked to take part in this exhibition.[138] Perhaps most interesting, HBO released a documentary on Mapplethorpe

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[135] The artists were: Terry Berlier, Michael Bill Smith, Mary Carothers, Barbara Crawford, Alison Crocetta, Matthew Dayler, Molly Donnermeyer, Anita Douthat, Jenny Fine, Jesse Fox, Rosalind Fox Solomon, Mark Harris, Laura Hartford, Stephen Irwin, Mark Flanigan and Joseph Winterhalter, Kevin T. Kelly, Cal Kowal, Anthony Luensman, Merrilee Luke-Ebbeler, Leslie Lyons, Sally Mann, Maurice Mattei, Joel McDonald, William Messer, Emily Hanako Momohara, Todd Pavlisko, Arno Rafael Minkinnen, Kristin Rogers, Katy Rucker, Mark Sawrie, Brad Austin Smith, Sheida Soleimani, Tim Stegmaier, Jordan Tate, Diana Duncan Holmes and Timothy Riordan, Peter Huttinger and Tony Walsh, Joey Versoza, Joel Whitaker, Michael Wilson, Joel-Peter Witkin, Jeffrey Wolin, Anna Wu

[136] Grace Dobush "25 Years Later: Cincinnati and the Obscenity Trial over Mapplethorpe Art," *The Washington Post*, (October 23, 2015). Accessed February 1, 2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/museums/25-years-later-cincinnati-and- the-obscenity-trial-over-mapplethorpe-art/2015/10/22/07c6aba2-6dcb-11e5-9bfe-e59f5e244f92_story.html?utm_term=.6e1aa7bda46b.

[137] BWW News Desk, "Robert Mapplethorpe Exhibition Opens 11/6 at Contemporary Arts Center," *Broadway World* (October 30, 2015). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.broadwayworld.com/bwwart/article/Robert-Mapplethorpe-Exhibition-Opens-116-at-Contemporary-Arts-Center-20151030.

[138] "After The Moment," *Contemporary Arts Center*. Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.contemporaryartscenter.org/exhibitions/2015/11/after-the-moment.

starting in April 2016. Preceding this documentary, there was a callback to the protests that surrounded "The Perfect Moment." During the protests that occurred around the Corcoran Art Gallery and the CAC, in 1989 and 1990, people were projecting images of Mapplethorpe's artwork onto sides of buildings. Partly as advertisement for the documentary, a pop-up installation featured a series of larger-than-life projections of some of Mapplethorpe's famous and lesser known works, with commentary from the artist himself. It debuted in Miami, then moved to New York, and then went on to San Francisco.[139] Another exhibition that chose to follow the documentary series, *Robert Mapplethorpe: The Perfect Medium* opened at the Getty and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art until July 2016.[140] This exhibition did not avoid the controversial images including works from the *X Portfolio*, such as the now infamous bullwhip photograph. On one level, this resurgence in Mapplethorpe's popularity proves that attempts at censorship and persecution of art do not work. Artists and museums alike remain inspired by Mapplethorpe, his work and his life. The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation keeps his legacy alive both in terms of his artwork and to support medical research surrounding HIV/AIDS.[141] Probably thanks to the renewed interest in his life, those who were closest to Mapplethorpe — models, lovers, and friends — are telling their stories of the man and the artist. Jack Fritscher spoke about being in a relationship with Mapplethorpe, his obsession with his art and sending letters back and forth.[142] Tim Murphy looks at how Mapplethorpe was being portrayed in that

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[139]Curtis M Wong, "A Larger-Than-Life Celebration of Robert Mapplethorpe Comes To New York," *The Huffington Post.* (March 18, 2016). Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/mapplethorpe-new-york-exhibition_us_56ec2d79e4b03a640a6a4be2.

[140]Tanja M Laden, "Penises and Parrot Tulips: Robert Mapplethorpe's Most Iconic Works," *Creators.* (March 17, 2016). Accessed February 1, 2017. https://creators.vice.com/en_us/article/robert-mapplethorpe-most-iconic-works-exhibition?utm_source=tcpfbus.

[141] Exhibition-E.com, *The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation.* Accessed March 03, 2016. http://www.mapplethorpe.org/.

[142] Jack Fritscher, "'He was a sexual outlaw': my love affair with Robert Mapplethorpe." *The Guardian.* (March 09, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/mar/09/robert-mapplethorpe-photography-jack-fritscher-look-at-the-pictures.

HBO documentary and explores how Mapplethorpe knew that his work was going to draw the attention that it did.[143] Finally, Dominick Dunne writes about interviewing a dying man and the end of the artist's life, having interviewed and sat for a photograph by Mapplethorpe not long before his death from AIDS in 1989.[144]

With 27 years of distance and social change, some of what stimulated the majority of the controversy in 1989 would not generate the same reaction in 2017. Sex and nudity will draw interest when displayed in museums and might draw the ire of some communities; but as a whole, there have not been attempts to censor the photographs or the language used surrounding Mapplethorpe and his images. Even the more taboo topics such as BDSM have become almost mainstream with the popularity of films such as "50 Shades of Grey." Its immediate shock and awe factor widespread in the early '90s has diminished.

However, despite this evolution, during the past year in America, an observable rise in behaviors, speech, and ideology have challenged these trends of acceptance and open-mindedness. Instead there is a distinct rise in hate groups and crimes, a growing level of focus on conservatism, and a devaluing of the arts at a national level. With the election of President Donald J. Trump leading a majority Republican Congress, the NEA is under threat again. Trump's proposed budget would cut the NEA funding in its entirety.[145] Hate crimes against minorities including LGBTQA+ persons have increased and there are threats to remove

[143]Tim Murphy, "Mapplethorpe, Prince of Darkness," *The Nation*. (April 04, 2016). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.thenation.com/article/mapplethorpe-prince-of-darkness/.

[144]Dominick Dunne, "Robert Mapplethorpe's Finale: The AIDS-Stricken Photographer's Last Interview," *Vanity Fair*. (January 30, 2015). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.vanityfair.com/culture/1989/02/robert-mapplethorpe-aids-dominick-dunne.

[145] United States, Office of Management and Budget, America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again.

discrimination protections for those groups, as reported by NBC News,[146] CNN,[147] and The New York Times.[148] The trends that had placed these works from the 1980s and 1990s as stories of history are being reversed. History has the potential to repeat itself. Artists are among those protesting the current administration; so, with President Trump's ideal budget putting the future of the NEA in jeopardy, this means that the next four years could see very similar debates.

Modern religiously themed artwork still draws attention; people have very strong opinions about it. Recently there has been no controversy that has reached the same scale as the NEA "Culture War," but there was another exhibition in 1999 that included religious works, titled "Sensation," and its controversy shook Brooklyn, New York.

[146] Reuters, "U.S. Hate Crimes Up 20 Percent in 2016, Fueled by Election Campaign: Report," *NBCNews.com*. (March 14, 2017). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/u-s-hate-crimes-20-percent-2016-fueled-election-campaign-n733306.

[147] Elizabeth Landers, and Jeremy Diamond, "Trump expected to sign religious liberty executive order," *CNN*. (May 03, 2017). Accessed May 03, 2017. http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/03/politics/trump-pence-religious-liberty-executive-order/.

[148] Editorial Board, "The L.G.B.T. Trump Fallacy," *The New York Times*. (April 17, 2017). Accessed May 03, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/17/opinion/the-lgbt-trump-fallacy.html.

Chapter 4: "Sensation"

The exhibition "Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection: Sensation," often shortened to "Sensation," was displayed both in London, England and in Brooklyn, New York. "Sensation" opened in the Royal Academy of Art in London during 1997 and in the Brooklyn Museum of Art two years later. The exhibition included the same artists and the same images. Each artist was someone who was seen as a little nontraditional either in their topic of focus or in their media, and all were collected by Charles Saatchi. Yet the identical exhibitions received two extremely distinct and different reactions and responses; each with its own media backlash and implications. A mix of public outcry, media attention, religious beliefs, and funding controversy all combined within the scope of these two controversies creating a fascinating comparison.

"Sensation" Background

Charles Saatchi is a British advertiser turned art collector. Saatchi was the cofounder of one of the world's largest advertising agencies with his brother, Maurice Saatchi. Famous in the British art world, Saatchi, much like many of the artists that he collects, is often found in the public spotlight, stirring the waters of controversy. Saatchi was born on June 9, 1943 in Baghdad and was raised in London.[149] In 1970 Charles and his brother started their first advertising agency, Saatchi & Saatchi, which grew into a superpower, creating campaigns for Margaret Thatcher, British Airways, and more.[150] In 1985 Charles opened the Saatchi Gallery in Chelsea, bringing his marketing prowess to the art world. He had been collecting art ever since 1963, building his collection with his first wife Doris Lockhart. They collected and displayed

[149]Lisa S Wainwright, "Charles Saatchi," *Encyclopædia Britannica*. (June 06, 2008). Accessed April 7, 2017. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Saatchi.

[150] "Charles Saatchi," *Art Bios*. (March 08, 2011). Accessed April 7, 2017. https://artbios.net/2-en.html.

leading artists including Andy Warhol and Cindy Sherman. Starting around 1990 with his second marriage to Kay Hartenstein, Charles Saatchi started focusing on up-and-coming British artists.[151] They traveled around the country amassing a huge collection, and by 1997 they had acquired nine hundred "Young British Artists" works which Saatchi would later resell for greatly increased prices. During this change in his collecting, the Saatchi brothers were forced to restart their advertising business in 1995 as M&C Saatchi, after Maurice was kicked out of the Saatchi & Saatchi and lost his position as chairman of the board.[152]

The Young British Artists weren't a formal group, a specific exhibition, or art form. Instead, it was a term coined in 1992 by Michael Corris in the magazine *Artforum* to describe the works of Damien Hurst and other young artists. It was abbreviated in 1996 to YBA by *Art Monthly,* another magazine. This really defined an era of British art when the artists were taking risks in the form, process, and materials of art. Many of them used found objects or imagery that could be defined as shocking, but that was about the limit of their similarity. Many of them, but not all, had attended Goldsmiths College, which had "been fostering new forms of creativity through its courses which abolished the traditional separation of media into painting, sculpture, printmaking etc." [153] Only some of the artists knew each other, though grouped together by critics. All of them profited greatly from Saatchi's attention. Roughly the same age, they explored a range of skills and choice of media. Few of these artists were particularly well known before "Sensation;" little did they realize this exhibition would become, for many of them, their way to gain greater notoriety in the British art world.

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[151]Elizabeth Day, "Charles Saatchi: Art Supremo with an Image Problem | The Observer profile," *The Guardian*. (June 22, 2013). Accessed April 7, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2013/jun/23/observer-profile-charles-saatchi-nigella-lawson.

[152] "Charles Saatchi," *Art Bios,* (March 08, 2011). Accessed April 7, 2017. https://artbios.net/2-en.html.

[153] Tate, "Young British Artists (YBAs) – Art Term," *Tate*. Accessed April 30, 2017. http://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/y/young-british-artists-ybas.

The artists that drew the greatest attention in "Sensation" were Damien Hirst, Tracy Emin, Marcus Harvey, Chris Ofili, Jack and Dinos Chapman, Matt Collishaw, and Marc Quinn. Each of these artists had a different style and focus. Some of these artists gained more attention than others, with Chris Ofili dominating the media frenzy in America and Marcus Harvey dominating in London.

Each of these artists brought something different to the Saatchi collection in terms of artwork and drama. Damien Hirst was represented by the most pieces in the collection with eight of his works being displayed, many of them including preserved animal remains.[154] *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* (1991) is a tiger shark suspended in a steel and glass box, preserved in formaldehyde. *Argininosuccinic Acid* (1995) is a painting on canvas of multicolored circles in rows. *Isolated Elements Swimming in the Same Direction for the Purpose of Understanding* (1991) is a school of fish suspended in glass and Perspex cases on shelves of steel and wood preserved in formaldehyde, all facing one direction. *A Thousand Years* (1990) is a large steel and glass rectangle divided in half with a white cube with a black dot in the middle of each side. On the other side of the glass partition with four holes is a large metal and light insect trap hanging from the ceiling and a real cow's head on the floor. There also are live flies and maggots in this piece. *Some Comfort Gained from the Acceptance of the Inherent Lies in Everything* (1996) is a cow bisected into twelve sections and placed into glass and steel tanks preserved in formaldehyde. *Away from the Flock* (1994) is a lamb preserved via formaldehyde in a glass and steel case. *This little piggy went to market, this little piggy stayed home* (1996) is a pig that was cut in half vertically and each half was preserved in formaldehyde

[154] Adams, *Sensation*.

in a separate steel and glass case. Finally, *beautiful, kiss my fucking ass painting* (1996) is a multicolor, abstract, round canvas painting with the colors radiating from the center.

Damien Hirst also brought prior personal drama and baggage to the exhibition. He was born June 7, 1965 in Bristol England and spent his childhood in Leeds. His parents split when he was twelve and as a teen he was arrested twice for shoplifting. He came of age in the late 70s early 80s and became interested in the new, emerging, gritty and confrontational punk scene. This interest likely helped to shape his personality in the art world. Hirst attended Goldsmiths, University of London from 1986 to 1989. While there he was extremely involved in the student life around campus and over summer he worked part time at a mortuary in Leeds. This job gave him the technical knowledge and inspiration to create his taxidermy based, provocative works.[155]

While at Goldsmiths, Hirst acted as curator and organizer for a group exhibition titled *Freeze.* In addition to Hirst, it included sixteen other emerging postmodernist artists who would become known for their "take no prisoners" approach to art. Some of them, Mat Collishaw for example, would later be a part of Saatchi's collection of Young British Artists. *Freeze* was held in a warehouse in the London Docklands which was definitely not an art center at the time. This exhibition was as varied as the artists themselves and was presented in three phases. In the first phase, Hirst installed a painted cardboard box piece aptly named, *Boxes* and in the final phase Hirst painted onto the warehouse walls two spot paintings *Edge* and *Row,* which are as the names imply, lines of multicolored dots.[156] One of Hirst's professors persuaded a number of notable influential art people in Britain to attend, including Saatchi. This combined with future

[155] "Damien Hirst Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works," *The Art Story.* Accessed April 4, 2017. http://www.theartstory.org/artist-hirst-damien.htm#biography_header.

[156] Science Ltd,"Freeze - Damien Hirst," *Freeze - Damien Hirst.* Accessed May 04, 2017. http://www.damienhirst.com/exhibitions/group/1988/freeze.

warehouse exhibits helped persuade Saatchi to invest in this new brand of Young British Artists.[157]

Hirst was no stranger to controversy. There were plenty of critics at the time who felt that his work was not worthy of the attention that it was being shown. They claimed it was simplistic bordering on simple-minded, and that Hirst was manipulating the art world into valuing his works. Animal rights activists have numerous problems with many of his works, especially the ones that were shown in *Sensation,* due to their inclusion of animal remains. Over the years, animals have been a constant theme in Hirst's work, resulting in an estimate of 913,450 animals who died as a part of Hirst's work.[158] The larger animals such as the tiger shark, lambs, and pigs were dead before they were found inside of museum halls, but the majority of animal deaths come in the form of much smaller creatures, butterflies, flies, and other insects. Some of these creatures lived their lives and died as a part of the art piece, either from being released inside a museum gallery or from a bug zapper suspended over a rotting cow skull.[159] That isn't even touching some of the other discussions surrounding him in later years. Hirst is very good at marketing himself and ensuring that he remains in the public eye. He was the "pop star" of the British art world and that was not phrased as a compliment by many.[160] He partied hard and worked the media in his favor.[161] His work sometimes sold for high prices set by the artist who

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[157] "Damien Hirst Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works," *The Art Story*. Accessed April 4, 2017. http://www.theartstory.org/artist-hirst-damien.htm#biography_header.

[158]Caroline Goldstein, "How Many Animals Have Died for Damien Hirst's Art to Live? We Counted," *Artnet News*. (April 13, 2017). Accessed May 04, 2017. https://news.artnet.com/art-world/damien-whats-your-beef-916097.

[159]Adrian Hamilton, "Damien Hirst: The maestro of the macabre," *The Independent*. (April 02, 2012). Accessed May 04, 2017. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/damien-hirst-the-maestro-of-the-macabre-7608846.html.

[160]Catherine Mayer, "Damien Hirst: 'What have I done? I've created a monster' | Catherine Mayer," *The Guardian*. (June 30, 2015). Accessed April 5, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jun/30/damien-hirst-what-have-i-done-ive-created-a-monster.

[161] Science Ltd,"Damien Hirst." A Conversation - Damien Hirst. 2004. Accessed April 4, 2017. http://www.damienhirst.com/texts/2004/march--irvine-welsh.

made it clear that he was in the artmaking business for the money. He worked very hard to create his brand and to use it to ensure that his works would sell. A few main types of his early work includes: spin art, 'dot' paintings; (which were often done by one of his assistants), canvases with dead butterflies, and dead animal presentations or sculptures.[162] Death seems to be an ever present theme in his work. Though a long-standing tradition in the art world, Hirst seems to have a unique way to represent it.[163] Hirst forces the viewer to look at death directly. In our modern society, we tend to be disconnected from death and decay which can create a taboo around representing it in a candid manner. Yet many of us benefit from death every day, whenever we eat a piece of bacon or a burger. Hirst takes death, and turns it into something that we want to look at, something that we are curious about. He takes something that is ever present, but avoided and puts it into a large glass box for us to stare at and contemplate. Death is a popular theme in art history, but it rarely is shown as dramatically as a tiger shark staring down at you suspended in a glass box.[164]

For the exhibition, Tracy Emin contributed *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* (1995) which was a tent with a mattress and light. The names of every person that she allegedly had slept with, innocently or otherwise, during that time period were applied to the inside surfaces of the tent.[165]

Tracy Emin at this time was known as the "bad girl of British art" for not falling into line with the traditional British art world. Emin was born in London in 1963. Her father left her and

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[162]Simon Hattenstone, "Damien Hirst: 'Anyone can be Rembrandt,'" *The Guardian*. (November 13, 2009). Accessed April 5, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/nov/14/damien-hirst-interview.

[163]John A Walker, *Art and outrage: Provocation, Controversy and the Visual Arts*. London: Pluto Press, 1999.

[164]Brian Dillon, "Damien Hirst: He laughs in the face of death," *The Telegraph*. (April 04, 2012). Accessed May 04, 2017. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/art-features/9177026/Damien-Hirst-He-laughs-in-the-face-of-death.html.

[165] Adams, *Sensation.*

her mother poor while she was still very young. When she was thirteen, she was raped. The event had a fundamental impact on her art. She studied fashion as an undergrad and received her MA in painting from the Royal Academy in 1989. However, due to an emotionally traumatic experience after graduation, she destroyed all of the artwork that she had created while at the Royal Academy.

Emin did return to art and in 1993 had her first solo exhibition, which was autobiographical and became a recurring theme in her later work. In the mid-90s, she was in a relationship with Carl Freedman, a curator and art world figure, which meant that she also was in contact with Damien Hirst, a friend of Freedman's. Encouraged by Freedman, in 1995 Emin created her most famous work, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*. In 1997 she gained the title of "the bad girl of British art" after she appeared drunk and argumentative on a live television show about the Turner Prize, Britain's most highly publicized art award, given to an artist based on their work from a previous year. Two years later, she was nominated for the prize herself, helping to fuel the discussion about her and her work and acting as a catalyst for her notoriety. Emin is known for using traditionally female techniques like needlework, to raise questions about feminist and sexuality. [166]

There were three paintings by Marcus Harvey in *Sensation*. *Myra* (1995) was a black and white portrait made out of hand prints while *Proud of His Wife* (1994); and *Dudley, Like What You See? Then Call Me* (1996) both depict a nude woman, painted with very sharp, visible brushstrokes, each in a different pose against a floral background. In *Proud of His Wife* (1994) the woman is sitting back on her heels with her legs spread and chest pushed out and in *Dudley*,

[166] "Tracey Emin Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works," *The Art Story*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.theartstory.org/artist-emin-tracey.htm.

Like What You See? Then Call Me (1996) the woman balances one leg and her opposite forearm on a chair pulling aside one of her butt cheeks with her other hand.[167]

Harvey was born in 1963 in Leeds. While growing up when the British economy declined, his father's advertising company went bankrupt and they lost their home. He grew up in a religious family and saw art as a calling. Much like many of the other "Young British Artists" he attended Goldsmiths; but unlike many of his contemporaries he then spent seven years employed as a care worker for people with autism during the day and painting by night. Harvey did not think that he was going to be a popular artist and surely did not see many similarities between himself and the other "Young British Artists" as he was only friends with Hirst. Harvey uses a variety of media not just staying with painting; but also incorporating sculpture and other mixed media elements. [168]

Saatchi added five paintings by Chris Ofili to the collection. *Spaceshit* (1995) has a primarily blue background and is filled with mosaic-like circles. Near the top of the work and supporting it from the bottom are globs of elephant dung. In fact, elephant dung is found in every work by Chris Ofili in this exhibition. *Afrodizzia* (1996) is a psychedelic mix of color and paper images of African American men with afros. This image also painted with names and circles has globs of elephant dung both on the canvas and supporting the canvas from the bottom. *Popcorn Tits* (1996) is red and warm colors in-radiating patterns surrounding the dung, resembling water ripples or the shape of popcorn popping. *Afrobluff* (1996) is a mostly black canvas with a white connecting pattern traveling around the image and four globs of elephant dung are on the canvas in the shape of a cross. *The Holy Virgin Mary* (1996), has a yellow

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[167] Adams, *Sensation.*

[168]Simon Hattenstone, "Simon Hattenstone views Marcus Harvey's new artwork," *The Guardian.* (February 20, 2009). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/21/marcus-harvey-margaret-thatcher.

background and the figure in the center is mostly blue and black. Surrounding the figure and on top of the figure in some places are collaged cutout images of buttocks. Elephant dung is on what would be the abstract figure's breast and it supports the image.[169]

Chris Ofili was born in 1968 in Manchester, England to immigrant parents. His father left, going back to Nigeria, when Ofili was eleven. Chris Ofili grew up as an altar boy and hadn't considered art as a living when he graduated high school. Instead he wanted to focus on furniture design; but in order to do that, he needed to study one year in an art foundation course. That one year changed the trajectory of his life. He chose to focus on painting, at first producing portraits and self-portraits. Ofili continued his education in art in London. At the time, he felt that he had little in common with the "Young British Artists" not knowing that in a few years he would be seen as one of them. He saw the Young British Artists who had talent for self-promotion and used nontraditional materials, but he didn't see the similarities in his work. For him, elephant dung, resin, and oil paints were all equally art materials. Starting in 1992 after visiting Africa, Ofili began using balls of elephant dung in his paintings, which would soon bring him both fame and controversy. He graduated from the Royal College in 1993 with work that was more abstract and rested on balls of dung instead of being hung on the wall. This was his way to connect his paintings back to the earth, instead of leaving them hanging on a wall. People and other recognizable forms started to return in his work with more of a collage form in the mid-1990s. He also warmed up with watercolor and pencil drawings. He had his first solo show in 1996 in London. He received mixed reviews from critics at this time. Some suggested that you had to look deeply at this works, as a quick reading would mean that you would miss the entire point; others saw his art as denigrating, pretentious, and stupid. Despite receiving a wide

[169] Adams, *Sensation.*

variety of reviews for a relatively new artist, Ofili won the Turner prize in 1996, becoming the first black artist to do so.[170]

Four sculptures by Jack and Dinos Chapman were brought to the collection. *Great Deeds Against the Dead* (1994) depicts three bodies tied to a tree with brown earth as a base. One body at the back is upside down, another is tied upright to the tree and is missing his genitals, and the final, partially dismembered, hanging body also is missing his genitals, and is tied to a branch with its arms dangling separately and head impaled. *Ubermensch* (1995) features a replica of Steven Hawking balancing at the edge of a black cliff. *Zygotic acceleration, biogenetic, de-sublimated libidinal model (enlarged x 1000)* (1995) shows naked girls resembling Barbie dolls without real definition, all merged as one into a circle. Some are upside down, others are connected at the waist in odd ways and all wear the same pair of black and white sneakers. *Tragic Anatomies* (1996) varies this model with female forms morphed and connected in increasingly odd ways, like conjoined twins from a mad scientist laboratory in a forest-like setting.[171]

Dinos Chapman was born in London in 1962 and his brother, Jack, was born in Cheltenham in 1966.[172] They both attended the Royal Academy of Art as postgraduates, quickly deciding that the school's traditions were not going to lead them to the fame that they desired. They also were quick to realize that while technique and beauty might eventually lead to fame, they were going to focus on creating pieces that would lead to the most discussion and media

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[170] "Biography for Chris Ofili (Born 1968)," *Chris Ofili Biography*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.chrisofiliprints.info/biography.php?cur=.

[171] Adams, *Sensation.*

[172] John Walsh, "Sibling ribaldry: What next for Britart's notorious duo, Jake and Dinos Chapman?," *The Independen*t. (June 17, 2011). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/sibling-ribaldry-what-next-for-britarts-notorious-duo-jake-and-dinos-chapman-2297785.html.

coverage to give them the fame that they desired. Violence, sex, and mutilations all featured heavily in their work; so it is no surprise that they were seen as controversial.[173]

The brothers also welcomed the commercial aspect of the art world, sold merchandise including t-shirts alongside their sculptures, and accompanied their exhibits with talks covering other taboo topics and welcomed discussion. Much like Hirst, the Chapman brothers decided that in order to be popular in the 90s-art world, they had to be marketable and shocking. The critics had very similar issues with both sets of artists, claiming their works were little more than trash; and yet the artists still remained objects of interest to the viewing public.[174]

Mat Collishaw's image titled *Bullet Hole* (1988-93), is a cibachrome photograph mounted on fifteen light boxes that displays a close-up of an ice pick wound in a person's scalp.[175]

Mat Collishaw was born in 1966 and attended Goldsmith's College. In fact, he was one of the artists who took part in *Freeze*, the exhibition curated by Hirst. He grew up in a highly structured and religious household. This meant that he did not have some things that most people take for granted like access to a television and books. The type of religion that his parents followed also meant that the sacred was everywhere, not limited to the four walls of a church. Those experiences helped shape his work making him more likely to push boundaries and see beauty and value in nontraditional images.[176] During and after college, he worked laying foundations for buildings in the area. When he was 23, he became a father, which was

[173]John A. Walker, *Art and Outrage*.
[174] Walker, *Art & Outrage,* 201
[175] Adams, *Sensation.*
[176] "Mat Collishaw," *Blain|Southern | Mat Collishaw*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.blainsouthern.com/artists/mat-collishaw.

something that many of his other "Young British Artist" companions would not experience for some time.[177]

Marc Quinn was represented by three works in the exhibition. *Self* (1991) is a self-portrait sculpture made out of blood refrigerated so that it maintains its shape. *The Morphology of Specifics* (1996) is a silver sculpture of a head and arm on a silver tadpole-like shape with silver droplets scattered around it. *No Visible Means of Escape* (1996) depicts a man hanging from his feet with his skin appearing flayed off in places and hanging from the hip.[178]

Marc Quinn is the only one of the controversial "Young British Artists" who was not formally trained in art. He did not study at Goldsmiths and he never got a degree in art; instead his degrees from the University of Cambridge were focused on history and art history. Born in London in 1964 to a French mother and a British physicist father, Quinn joined the "Young British Artists" with a slightly different perspective than the others.[179] He had worked as an assistant to a sculptor Barry Flanagan, and with that training gained an appreciation for pushing the limits of what a medium could do, which he then transferred into his art. Quinn's first famous work *Self* (1991) certainly achieved the goal of using unorthodox media. It was composed of blood frozen into the shape Quinn's self-portrait. [180] Such novelty threw the artist into the art world head first and ensured that with his friendship with Hirst. Quinn would also be seen as one of the founders of the British contemporary art movement that the "Young British Artists" exemplified. Both men have a fascination with death and the macabre that they depict in

[177]Jonathan Jones, "Mat Collishaw: still sensational," *The Guardian*. (April 26, 2013). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/apr/26/mat-collishaw-still-sensational.

[178] Adams, *Sensation.*

[179]Elizabeth Fullerton, "Young British Artist Hits Middle Age: Catching up with Marc Quinn," *ARTnews*. (May 12, 2014). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.artnews.com/2014/05/12/marc-quinn-as-middle-aged-young-british-artist/.

[180] "Biography," *Biography*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://marcquinn.com/read/biography.

their work, creating some works even border on nightmarish. For both artists, the works that were showcased in "Sensation" can easily be defined as hard to look at.[181]

Marcus Harvey's *Myra* drew the majority of the ire in London while Chis Ofili's painting *The Holy Virgin Mary* drew the majority of the ire in the United States. That is not to say that the other artists mentioned did not play a role in the controversies that followed; (especially the controversy in the United States); but the main media story were based on these two works. Critics used the other images and artists to show how far from the norm the exhibition was, debated how little of this exhibition was actual 'art', and asserted that this collection was put together for its shock factor rather than to benefit the art world.

Cultural Context

The United States is founded on the ideas of religious freedom, the separation of church and state, and the right of freedom of speech. As ideal as this seems, these principles should protect citizens' freedom and support a country where religion doesn't play a role in political and social arguments. Unfortunately, that is not the case. There is a very strong, unquestioned religious presence in this country. A presidential candidate cannot be elected unless they mention God at least once, they often have to be some form of Christian. Many of the federal holidays are Christian holidays; other faiths have no federal holidays. As well as religious ideas often have an impact on policy decisions for the entire country or at least the arguments surrounding them. Although the country professes that it is based on the separation of church and state, Christian religion is very much a part of the political process. With a 2014 poll stating that "53 percent of Americans said they would be less likely to support a presidential candidate

[181] Widewalls, "Marc Quinn," *WideWalls*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.widewalls.ch/artist/marc-quinn/.

who does not believe in God" and "in 2013, more than half of Americans said religion was "very important" in their lives and that it "can answer all or most of today's problems."[182] It would be naïve to believe that this does not have an influence on our culture and cultural interactions. Religion is both a connecting and divisive force in this country. As can be seen with the National Endowment for the Arts protests, it is often a very powerful force against art in some cases.

New York City, and by extension Brooklyn is a very diverse area of the country, overwhelmingly liberal and full of different generations, cultures, and class groups; it is hard to find a more diverse area of the country in such a small physical footprint. As an international center, it also has an impressive number of museums. The Brooklyn Museum of Art was known as one of the region's least elitist art museums, in part because it served a large racially and ethnically diverse population. No other museum in the United States was open to hosting *Sensation*, suggesting the level of risk that this museum took in its attempts to attract more visitors and make a name for itself.[183]

Although Great Britain is similar to the United States in many ways, it lacks the militaristic support for and defense of religion that can be found in the United States. This is one reason why the controversies took such different paths in the two countries. The organization that displayed "Sensation" in London is called the Royal Academy of the Arts. It is held in high esteem and is lauded as a home of the nations most accomplished artists.[184]

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[182] Julie Butters, "Why America Can't Separate Religion and Politics and What that Means for the 2016 Election," *Arts & Sciences Boston University*, Fall 2015, , accessed May 11, 2017, http://www.bu.edu/cas/magazine/fall15/america/.

[183] Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation.*

[184] Anthony Gardner, "NOT A PICKLED SHARK IN SIGHT; The 1997 Sensation exhibition made controversial multimillionaires....," *Sunday Times* (London, England), November 22, 2009.

The art world surrounding the Saatchi collection in Britain, was thriving. People were collecting more and more art by a wide variety of artists working in different media. In this Saatchi was not alone. Some articles indicate that there was a sense of economic certainty and a love for that arts that was present at the time. The more outrageous or eye-catching artists were gaining popularity as well as challenging the status quo in this prosperous time.

Exhibition in England

When Saatchi decided that it was time to showcase his collection of "Young British Artists" he chose the Royal Academy of the Arts in London. A prestigious institution that is supported solely by its visitors and run by artists, it holds the first British art school and consistently supports a wide range of artists and art forms. Their recent successful shows have included everyone from 19th-century expressionist Vincent van Gogh to contemporary activist Ai Weiwei.[185] Saatchi decided this venue would provide the perfect start for his collection's exhibition, "Sensation."

"Sensation" opened at the Royal Academy of the Arts in London on September 18, 1997 and it immediately drew public ire targeting was one artwork, *Myra*. (Figure 2) This painting, created by Marcus Harvey in

Figure 2 Myra Marcus Harvey (1995)

[185] "About the RA," *Royal Academy of Arts.* Accessed February 1, 2017. https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/about-the-ra.

1995 was an acrylic on canvas measuring 396 cm by 320 cm. The portrait of a British child murderess by the name of Myra Hindley was comprised of child size handprints of various colors. The artist had intended it to stimulate a discussion on child abuse and the media's role in the criminal case; but the public misunderstood his critical stance due to the heinous nature of Hindley's crime.

Myra Hindley was the lover and accomplice to Ian Bradley, a serial torturer and child killer in the 1960s. The bodies of their victims were buried on the moors in Yorkshire and one victim has never been found. In the eyes of the British public, Hindley was worse than her lover because most people believe that all women naturally care for and will always protect children, which is a sexist assumption. Therefore, Hindley was more reviled for her inactions than the actual murderer. [186]

Her crime, 33 years earlier, had shaken the country; so when people learned that this image was going to be displayed at the Royal Academy of the Arts, they were not pleased. Winnie Johnson, a mother of one of the victims joined a protest in front of the museum begging patrons not to enter and support this work. Johnson and others felt that Harvey was wrong to use this event to benefit himself with fame and money. Her plight grabbed national headlines, but ultimately worked against her efforts because this exhibition broke attendance records. While on display, the painting was splattered with ink and eggs; but these actions backfired. [187] The image was not damaged and instead the assaults added to a media frenzy.[188] Rocks were thrown at the advertisements for the exhibition. Even when a member of the Royal Academy explained to

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[186] Walker, *Art and Outrage*.

[187]Tamsin Blanchard, "Arts: Sensation as ink and egg are thrown at Hindley portrait," *The Independent*. (September 18, 1997). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/arts-sensation-as-ink-and-egg-are-thrown-at-hindley-portrait-1239892.html.

[188] Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation*, 107-108.

Johnson that this work was not honoring Myra Hindley and she was welcome to come in and see it for herself, Johnson disagreed and was insulted that they proposed that option. The protest got larger; but so had the line for visitors, proving that controversy can sometimes be very good for business.[189]

A little known fact about the painting was that it wasn't complete. It was a work in progress, a proof of concept that had lived in Harvey's studio for years – unknown and unimportant before it made its way to Saatchi and then "Sensation." Harvey had intended for the painting to be a critique of the media's preoccupation with the Myra Hindley story; but obviously, the controversy steered it in the opposite direction which took on a life of its own. The final version is three-dimensional. Harvey has said that while he was appalled by the public response to this painting, he also feels that is what art is for. It should not be a pleasant distraction; it should confront and make you think.[190]

Curious humans always want to know what is going on and they often want to see something for themselves; especially if it is drawing virulent controversy. This was illustrated in America with the National Endowment for the Arts controversy. The moment a media frenzy started, people flocked to the museums wanting to see the controversial exhibition for themselves and make their own judgements. The similar effect in Britain, especially where people attempted to deface the symbolic image, proves that finding a middle ground on this topic is extremely difficult.[191]

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[189] Louise Jury, "Royal Academy's `Sensation' proves to be a shockingly good crowd- puller," *The Independent*. (December 29, 1997). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.independent.co.uk/news/royal-academys-sensation-proves-to-be-a-shockingly-good-crowd-puller-1291068.html.

[190]Simon Hattenstone, "Simon Hattenstone views Marcus Harvey's new artwork," *The Guardian*. (February 20, 2009). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/21/marcus-harvey-margaret-thatcher.

[191]Hillary Bowker, "Young Artists Making a "Sensation" in London," *CNN*. (October 26, 1997). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/9710/26/brit.shock.art/.

Another level of controversy that can be found here, not nearly as emotionally charged as the *Myra* controversy, surrounds accusations about the presenting institution. There were a number of people who claimed that the Royal Academy intentionally presented "Sensation" to draw outrageous public attention and create controversy. Critics accused the Royal Academy of accepting this exhibition to draw in more visitors; even though it did not reach their typical standards for art. Many other people argued the opposite. They felt that while the art found in "Sensation" might not be as timeless as in some of the previous Royal Academy exhibitions, it reflected the art of the time and therefore deserved to be supported and shown. In their opinion, the record-breaking crowds just happened to be a bonus. The media wasn't universally convinced on either side of "the pond." In Brooklyn, a major part of the controversy surrounded how the exhibition was funded, the source of that money, and whether this was solely a publicity stunt for both the Brooklyn Museum and Saatchi.[192]

The other "Sensation" image that resulted in controversy, *The Holy Virgin Mary* by Chris Ofili, did not raise any alarm in London or in the second stop, Berlin; but in Brooklyn it made the news with just as much ferocity as *Myra* did in London.

Exhibition in Brooklyn

Before the exhibition "Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi collection" even opened in the Brooklyn Museum of Art in September of 1999, a controversy was brewing. This controversy divided itself into two main parts: one was focused on the exhibition and its contents, and the other was focused on how this exhibition was funded. The controversy focused

[192]David Tomas, "Sensations & Dickheads (Sensations: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection,." *Parachute: Contemporary Art Magazine*, (Winter 1998); 28-34.

on the funding drew more attention from academics and museum personnel, and the other drew the attention of the general public. The problem of funding resulted in quite a lot of discussion and made other museums reconsider how they were going to fund their future exhibits. Controversy surrounding the exhibition's contents was almost encouraged by the Brooklyn Museum before and during its run, possibly under the guise of believing "any press is good press." It also resulted in thrown paint and other defacements, as well as mayoral distain, threats of no funding and eviction, protests, and most certainly debate.

When "Sensation" came to the States, it began drawing media attention well before the exhibition was set to open. The Brooklyn Museum of the Art was not as well-known as some of its contemporaries; but with Director Arnold Lehman at the helm, constituents felt that was going to change. He was implementing programs that were proving relevant and interesting to the extremely diverse neighborhood around him. Lehman was interested in the community's concerns and their cultural interests. The Brooklyn Museum of Art had a solid reputation for its standards as a museum and was gaining new and younger audiences - forever a challenge for museums.[193] This challenge was probably the driving force behind bringing "Sensation" to the United States. While educational in nature, museums are not competing with other educational institutions for visitors; but increasingly they do compete with the diverse multibillion dollar entertainment industry. Lehman realized this and made the decision to bring in a very unique exhibition to help his organization stay relevant in these changing times.

New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani hated this exhibition without even having seen it. He wasted no time moving against the Brooklyn Museum of Art. He temporarily took away the museum's operating funds and threatened both to withdraw funding and to evict the museum

[193] Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation*, 97-98.

from city-owned property. He attempted to censor the museum. He rationalized that since the museum was on city land and received city funding, that meant that the museum could not display anything that could possibly offend others. Instead he wanted the exhibition to be censored. Giuliani knew that this ploy was not going to hold up in court legally, but it likely would hold up in the "court of public opinion," which, for this politician, was the court that mattered most. His actions against the museum resulted in examining the Constitution to consider the concepts of Freedom of Speech and censorship.

The growing controversy had many different foci, also including the relationship between religion and blasphemy, ethical issues surrounding museums and art dealers, and the socio-political legality and ethics of a government entity withdrawing and withholding already allocated funds from an institution.

At this point, Giuliani was competing with Hillary Clinton over the New York Senate seat; so by playing the conservative protector of the moral high ground, he hoped to gain support. Pollsters predicted he would beat her, so his anti-arts fight made national news since New York is traditionally liberal and a supporter of the arts.[194] His political conservatism combined with personal ambition resulted in his being against this exhibition. This is a vital point in explaining why he so vehemently opposed this exhibition and why it sparked the discussion that followed. Giuliani's grandstanding, added to the museum's own marketing, made it inevitable that this exhibition would draw major attention.

Marketing plays a huge role in how an exhibition will be received. Everything from the title, to the posters, and the advertising media help shape how the public will respond. Media professionals can take a controversial topic and lessen its sensationalism and they can take a

[194] Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation*, 53.

rather unassuming exhibition and ramp up the interest and discussion. The second approach appears to have been utilized for what happened in Brooklyn. The vast majority of the American public did not have any idea what the Saatchi collection was. They had no idea why they should care about a group of British artists whose work was going on display in a museum that wasn't terribly well known, and the phrase "Young British Artists" seemed a descriptor, not a title. This exhibition had every chance to be unnoticed except for the marketing by the Brooklyn Museum of Art, which emphasized the fact that the art was nontraditional and ran the risk of being controversial. They accentuated the possibility of disturbing reactions, stating that it "may cause shock, vomiting, confusion, panic, euphoria, and anxiety"[195] That language drew attention and curiosity. In a time before widespread internet and well before the social media juggernaut that plays such a major role today; this meant that people either had to visit themselves or wait for the newspaper to publish a review to learn what was on view. As seen with the earlier National Endowment for the Arts exhibitions and the London reaction to this exhibition, the hint of controversy enticed people to want to see it for themselves. The marketing campaign results added to the discussion, increased museum revenue, and eventually added to the controversy.

Universally debatable topics that will spark discussion across the United States include religion. When you add religion to a discussion about art, there is even more of a possibility of controversy. Previously, this was seen with the religious right's debate against the works of Serrano and Mapplethorpe, among other historical examples. So, it should not be a surprise that one of the main controversies surround "Sensation" in the United States was a painting titled *The Virgin Mary*. People objected to several works, but this painting was by far the one that faced the greatest hatred.

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[195] Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation*, 17.

The Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition is revered by many as much as her son, Jesus Christ. For centuries, classical Western European art has been filled with depictions of her as a greatly revered sacred figure. She is often shown as a young beautiful, Caucasian with a serene gentle look, clothed modestly in a blue head cover and dress, sometimes bathed in bright light while holding her son. Chris Ofili's *The Virgin Mary* (Figure 3) does not look like the classical, traditional evocations of this holy figure. Instead, she is a black woman, abstractly rendered with different sized eyes and an amorphous body shape. There is a suggestion that her breast is bared (as in Renaissance paintings), but it is not clear exactly what is what on this body form other than the head. The shape resembling a breast is comprised of elephant dung. Surrounding the figure and partially overlapping the dress are images taken from adult magazines depicting the backsides and genitalia of various individuals. The entire background of Ofili's painting is yellow. Obviously, this does not match the traditional images of Mary. While some people accepted Ofili's image, a vociferous group objected strenuously using actions and words.

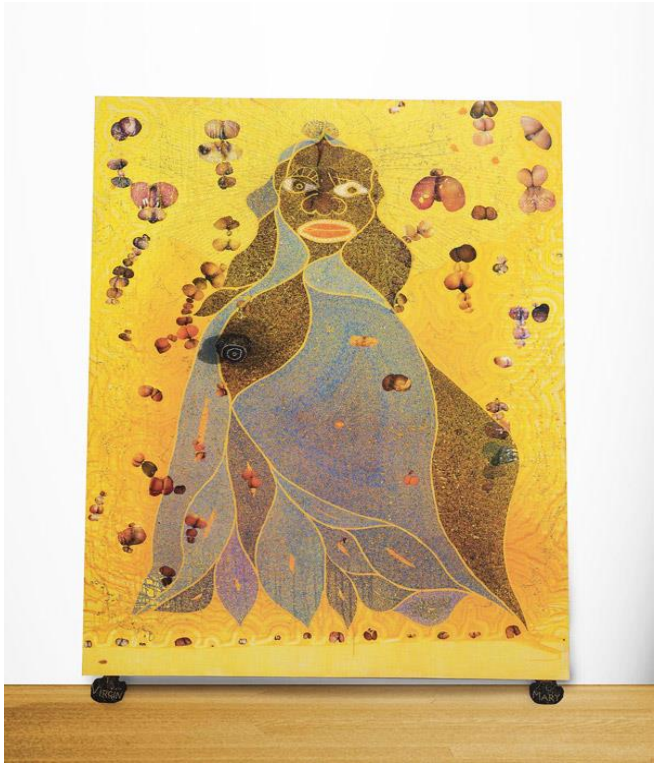

Figure 3 The Holy Virgin Mary Chris Ofili 1996

Much like *Myra* in London, *The Virgin Mary* was vandalized by the public. The Brooklyn Museum of Art had placed a Plexiglass barrier in front the painting to limit vandalism, but it did not stop a 72-year-old man from sneaking around the barrier and covering the painting

with white paint. Dennis Heiner faked an illness so he could lean on the wall near the painting. He waited until the security guard had turned away, then took out a plastic bottle filled with white paint, snuck around the protective shield, and sprayed and smeared the white paint over the image. Meanwhile, someone took a photograph of this little old man painting over an artist's work. When he was arrested, he tried to justify his action by reasoning that the image was "blasphemous" in the eyes of this devout Catholic.[196] This clearly premeditated action shows exactly how powerful this controversy became. In the end the image was restored, reversing the defacer's destructive actions.

The media played this up too, by neglecting to explain the artist's intentions. Ofili used elephant dung in the image because of its value in African culture as a sign of fertility and the nurturing of "Mother Earth" that creates a connection between African and Christian cultures. Instead, the media took this to be insulting or mocking. Subsequent discussions devolved into a class warfare argument by people who were offended by the depiction (after being rallied by Giuliani) and those who considered the artist's intentions and personal symbols.[197] Yet another label was "elitist" — a claim that is often thrown at museums for showing objects that challenge preconceptions about what art should be. It became a running theme of critics who claimed that the Brooklyn Museum of Art was out of touch with its audience, and the artists themselves, and certainly Saatchi, were also culpable. The tired argument that museums are just for the rich and the elites unfortunately prevails, especially for art museums. People ask, if museums are funded by public money, shouldn't they be reflective of the views of the people? That mentality provoked this controversy. A single artwork should not cause the level of media frenzy that erupted. In retrospect, many people felt that the public should have more of a say in how

[196] Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation*, 15.
[197] *Ibid*, 18.

museums make decisions, according to James Cuno.[198] This resulted in increased awareness of a need for a greater transparency in a museum's actions, which in turn would help get people involved. They could help prevent controversies in the future.

Funding exhibitions can be difficult; but the idea of bringing such a controversial exhibition to America posed more obstacles than usual. Add to this the fact that "Sensation" was scheduled to open in September of 1999— just ten years after the National Endowment for the Arts controversy— and the challenge became even greater. When funds did materialize, the Brooklyn Museum of Art made a deal with Charles Saatchi in which he would front a major portion of the funds. Without this initial funding, the exhibition would never have been able to travel to Brooklyn. Once it opened, "Sensation" brought an unexpected number of people into the museum, breaking the institution's records. The media frenzy also helped draw in people, many of whom had never been to the museum before. This also helped solidify the BMA as a notable arts institution. However, Saatchi's personal funding was problematic because of his undisclosed intentions: Saatchi was planning to auction off part of this exhibition, which made the Brooklyn Museum complicit in inflating any work's value by all the media attention it received. Put another way, any advertisement that the museum made for the exhibition also acted as advertisement for the sale of its high-profile art. The American Association of Museums frowns on such unethical practices. Sponsorship of exhibitions must not be used for personal gain.[199] Essentially, Saatchi bought the opportunity to showcase his collection, confident the exhibition would increase the art's value through controversy and free media attention, and then reap personal benefits by the sale of works.[200]

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[198]Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation, 162-170.*

"Code of Ethics for Museums," Code of Ethics for Museums, accessed May 18, 2017, http://aam-us.org/resources/ethics-standards-and-best-practices/code-of-ethics.[199]

[200] Rothfield, *Unsettling Sensation*, 164-168.

Evaluating all of these issues leads to a better understanding of the complex role a museum plays in serving its public, and highlights ways in which the public can take a greater role in shaping a museum's mission and practices.

Effects/Fallout

Both the Royal Academy and the Brooklyn Museum of Art survived these controversies. The sheer irony in all of this was the report that only 4 percent of surveyed visitors to the Brooklyn Museum of Art saw the overall exhibition as being offensive at all.[201] The controversy was blown out of proportion. In fact, even though Chris Ofili's *The Virgin Mary* was the most talked about section of "Sensation," it was not what was seen as the most controversial. That 'honor' fell to the Chapman brother's *Zygotic acceleration, biogenetic, de-sublimated libidinal model* and even then, the majority of those surveyed did not see it as being offensive.[202] The Royal Academy is still a well-regarded institution in England and has since continued to host artists who have been controversial. The Brooklyn Museum of Art has continued its programs with community outreach and obviously never was evicted from its building by Giuliani. They still feature 'adult' exhibits and ask that parents and teachers preview the exhibits before bringing small children to the museum; but this is standard practice.[203] It seems that the events surrounding "Sensation" left no lasting scars on either institution.

In terms of the "Young British Artists" their fate was a little more varied. Some of them achieved art fame, some became Royal Academicians themselves (professor level artists at the Royal Academy), and others, primarily those who did not find themselves at the center of

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[201] Rothfield *Unsettling "Sensation"* 140.
[202] *Ibid*, 141-142.
[203] "FAQ," Brooklyn Museum: *FAQ*. Accessed February 1, 2017. https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/about/faq/.

controversy, fell into relative obscurity. Many of the artists who were the focus of the most media frenzy stayed in the art world, reaching great heights. Damien Hirst had already started to make a name for himself before "Sensation" and only added to his fame through the museum world. Hirst spent some years dealing with drug addiction and his art style changed over the years; although the themes of death, among others, are still found in his newer works. When he was younger, Hirst regularly made the tabloids, and offended people by his actions, normally under the influence. Now in his early 50s, Hirst has seemed to put the majority of that rock star lifestyle behind him.[204] He faced backlash from the public and the art community over the years, partly because of his use of other artists to complete some of his pieces, the exorbitant pricing of his works, and the moral and social issues that arise in his art. His shark and other such projects made the news again in 2016 due to a fear of the formaldehyde used to preserve them that is now leaking through the cases.[205] After taking some time off, he remains an active artist included in exhibitions being shown around the world.[206] Hirst also owns his own gallery where he displays other artists' works alongside his own. Due to the market issues in 2008, his career has been on hold. The high prices of his pieces combined with their size mean that there are few people who are able or willing to invest in them.[207] He briefly dabbled in paint, but plans to make a comeback to the art world in 2017. His newest installation, *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable*, involves huge sculptures and other artifacts, more than 100 in total, created to look

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[204] Science Ltd,"Damien Hirst," A Conversation - Damien Hirst. (2004). Accessed April 4, 2017. http://www.damienhirst.com/texts/2004/march--irvine-welsh.

[205]Agence France-Presse in London, "Damien Hirst's preserved carcasses leaked formaldehyde gas, study claims," *The Guardian.* (April 20, 2016). Accessed May 04, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2016/apr/21/damien-hirsts-preserved-carcasses-leaked-formaldehyde-gas-study-claims.

[206] Science Ltd,"Damien Hirst," *Solo Exhibitions - Damien Hirst.* Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.damienhirst.com/biography/solo-exhibitions.

[207]Mark Hudson, "Damien Hirst's moment has passed," *The Telegraph.* (October 09, 2014). Accessed April 4, 2017. http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/11150706/Damien-Hirst-review.html.

as if they were discovered after years of being on the bottom of the ocean. Expensive to produce, it will be expensive to purchase. Works range in price from $500,000 to $5 million. Even though this installation doesn't include any animals, alive or dead, it has already drawn the ire of animal activists claiming that it is "an insult to a city of REAL art,:" Venice, Italy.[208] Regardless, Hirst again seeks the limelight, especially if that means that his art is going to continue to be sold on a large scale.

Chris Ofili also is extremely well known and has received a number of awards for his work, including the Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, awarded by the Queen of England in 2016. He had his first major solo exhibition in the United States in 2014-2015, titled "Day and Night".[209] It showcased the span of Ofili's career with examples from all of his experimental media in painting, sculpture, and drawings.[210] He weathered the storm caused by "Sensation" in Brooklyn and continued to paint. He branched out with sculpture in 2005 and has not shied away from using religious themes in his work. He also diversified with ballet, where he works for the Royal Ballet painting sets and designing costumes for "Diana and Actaeon." While "Sensation" helped propel his career forward, the controversy that he faced in Brooklyn has faded with time.[211]

Marcus Harvey still lives and works in London, but he has kept a low profile since "Sensation," avoiding any major shows since 2005.[212] He has been married once and has a total

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[208]Carol Vogel, "Damien Hirst Is Back With an Underwater Fantasy. Will Collectors Care?," *The New York Times*. (April 06, 2017). Accessed April 10, 2017. https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/06/arts/design/damien-hirst-francois-pinault-palazzo-grassi.html?_r=1.

[209] "Chris Ofili biography," *David Zwirner*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/chris-ofili/biography/.

[210] "Chris Ofili: Night and Day," *Chris Ofili: Night and Day :: New Museum*. (Fall, 2014). Accessed May 04, 2017. http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/chris-ofili.

[211]Calvin Tomkins, "Chris Ofili Returns," *The New Yorker.* (January 25, 2017). Accessed April 18, 2017. http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/10/06/unknown-6.

[212]Saatchi Gallery, "Marcus Harvey," *Artist's Profile - The Saatchi Gallery.* Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/marcus_harvey.htm.

of three children between that first relationship and his current long term one. Harvey quit his job as a care worker and spent some time as a full-time artist before cutting back to being a part-time art teacher as well. He launched a magazine for painters focusing on art history. He created a number of works as of 2009 that focus on former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, in a variety of art media, including bronzes, paintings, and a mosaic. He wasn't mocking Thatcher in his works; he just started a series that focuses on British history and he sees her as an icon in that history.[213]

The Chapman brothers, remain very active in the art world with exhibitions and movies as well.[214] Their work still has the dark and disturbing tone that they were known for in the 1990s with "Sensation," questioning innocence, death, and other serious topics.[215] In 2010, they released a children's coloring book to go along with their children's exhibition, "Gigantic Fun." Even though it was being marketed for children, the elements had the same disturbing themes of their normal work. When questioned the men merely said that the imaginations of children are just as dark as the images that they have created, pointing to their lives as fathers and their experiences with their own children as the basis for their position.[216] In 2011, they took a break from creating together to work solo for the first time since they started their artistic careers.[217]

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[213]Simon Hattenstone, "Simon Hattenstone views Marcus Harvey's new artwork," *The Guardian*. (February 20, 2009). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/feb/21/marcus-harvey-margaret-thatcher.

[214]Jake & Dinos Chapman, "Jake & Dinos Chapman," *Jake & Dinos Chapman*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://jakeanddinoschapman.com/.

[215]Kate Abbott, "Jake and Dinos Chapman: how we made Hell," *The Guardian.* (June 16, 2015). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/jun/16/jake-and-dinos-chapman-how-we-made-hell.

[216]Stuart Jeffries, "How the Chapman Brothers became the brothers grim," *The Guardian*. (August 03, 2010). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/aug/03/jake-dinos-chapman-childrens-art.

[217]John Walsh, "Sibling ribaldry: What next for Britart's notorious duo, Jake and Dinos Chapman?," *The Independent*. (June 17, 2011). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/sibling-ribaldry-what-next-for-britarts-notorious-duo-jake-and-dinos-chapman-2297785.html.

They pushed the limits of the art world and laughed at their critics; they are as famous as they are infamous.

Marc Quinn is an internationally recognized artist and has been shown all around the world. His most recent exhibition was in London in 2015.[218] His works continue to push boundaries. Quinn has frozen flowers into sculptures, made huge inflatable figures, and forced audiences to confront their ideals of beauty. His body of work focused on the forms of people with disabilities, who have reconfigured themselves via body modification and tattoos, as well as transgender persons. His continued self-portraits made in blood have expanded to paintings of his fingerprints and iris.[219] The British media has dubbed some of his scupltures a "freak show," but that has not diminished either his work or popularity. He is now married with three children and lives and works in London.[220]

Mat Collishaw also is internationally recognized and his most recent solo exhibition was in 2015 as well.[221] He had a five-year relationship with Tracy Emin, but as of 2013 was in a relationship with taxidermist Polly Morgan with whom he was creating an exhibition.[222] His work has been varied since "Sensation," ranging from religious to explicit with almost every alteration in between. Collishaw, though, is more introverted than most of the other "Young British Artists," which means that he missed some of the more extreme fame of his companions,

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[218] "Biography," *Biography*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://marcquinn.com/read/biography.

[219]Elizabeth Fullerton, "Young British Artist Hits Middle Age: Catching up with Marc Quinn," *ARTnews*. (May 12, 2014). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.artnews.com/2014/05/12/marc-quinn-as-middle-aged-young-british-artist/.

[220] Widewalls, "Marc Quinn," *WideWalls*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.widewalls.ch/artist/marc-quinn/.

[221] Shed, "Biography," *Mat Collishaw*. N.p., n.d. Web. 1 Feb. 2017.

[222]Jonathan Jones, "Mat Collishaw: still sensational," *The Guardian*. (April 26, 2013). Accessed April 8, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/apr/26/mat-collishaw-still-sensational.

and, therefore, some of the financial success that they reaped. Four years ago, he was working to change that.[223]

The "Sensation" artist who is the most successful is Tracey Emin. Not only is she internationally acclaimed and exhibiting work, she also has three honorary doctorates. In 2007, Emin was only the second female artist to represent Britain at the 52nd Venice Biennale, and was made a Royal Academician. In 2011, she became a professor of Drawing for the Royal Academy and in 2012 she was awarded Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth.[224] In 2015, she "got married" to a rock in her garden and made a dedicated decision to focus on her work and love.[225] Out of all of the controversial artists, she seems to have been the most awarded after those colorful years.[226]

Charles Saatchi has a varied history with the art world since then too. He gained a reputation for both helping artists and ruining artists. He spends huge amounts of money for artists' works and takes risks acquiring work by up-and-coming artists; yet he also is known for selling these pieces as soon as they are worth more money. In some cases, he flooded the market with one artist; thereby lowering the value of their work for a time. This behavior precipitated a falling out between Saatchi and Hirst in 2003 which has yet to fully heal. His gallery still hosts thousands of visitors a year, although his exhibitions have been hit or miss.[227]

Saatchi was not perturbed by the controversy that *Sensation* drew. In fact in 2010 he put together a second "Sensation" titled "Newspeak: British Art" *Now* which was a two-part

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[223]Hermione Eyre, "Mat Collishaw is art's Mr Nasty," *Evening Standard*. (April 10, 2012). Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.standard.co.uk/lifestyle/mat-collishaw-is-art-s-mr-nasty-6720511.html.

[224]Tracey Emin, "Tracey Emin," *Tracey Emin Studio*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.traceyeminstudio.com/biography/.

[225] "Tracey Emin Biography, Art, and Analysis of Works," *The Art Story*. Accessed April 8, 2017. http://www.theartstory.org/artist-emin-tracey.htm.

[226] Tracey Emin, "Tracey Emin," *Tracey Emin Studio*. Accessed February 1, 2017. http://www.traceyeminstudio.com/biography/.

[227] "Charles Saatchi," *Art Bios*. (March 08, 2011). Accessed April 7, 2017. https://artbios.net/2-en.html.

exhibition. It included a few of the original, but older "Young British Artists" and other artists. Unlike "Sensation," there was no unifying theme or connecting factors among these artists, losing the very branding quality that existed for the original "Young British Artists." Not that the original "Sensation" was seen favorably by all, but this new version lacked the popularity that "Sensation" had. All of the news reports saw this exhibition as unexciting especially when compared to the larger than life media frenzy that *Sensation* sparked. The reviews in British papers claimed that the exhibition was stale,[228] poorly curated, and lackluster.[229] Saatchi is still changing the art world, now going online with his collection and marketing. By removing the external art dealer from equation, the website Saatchi Online makes Saatchi an art dealer himself. Saatchi Online displays artists' works and offers it for sale, with 70% of the sale going back to the artists, and the site displays digital exhibits. As a result, young artists are especially fascinated by Saatchi and are interested in his potential assistance to fame, which has even some of the former "Young British Artists" disappointed.[230]

How this Points Out that Two Cultures See Controversy in Different Factors

The American side of the controversy was very much driven by political conservatism and economic issues surrounding funding the exhibitions. This was then fed by the media who used Giuliani's disapproval to generate interest for the exhibition and their newspapers. Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary* acted as the catalyst for this controversy since Giuliani disapproved of

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[228] Sean O'Hagan, "Newspeak: British Art Now at the Saatchi Gallery | art review," *The Observer*. (June 05, 2010). Accessed May 04, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2010/jun/06/newspeak-british-art-now-saatchi.

[229] Laura McLean-Ferris, "Newspeak: British Art Now, Part 2, Saatchi Gallery, London," *The Independent*. (November 11, 2010). Accessed May 04, 2017. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/reviews/newspeak-british-art-now-part-2-saatchi-gallery-london-2131717.html.

[230] Elizabeth Day, "Charles Saatchi: art supremo with an image problem | The Observer profile," *The Guardian.* (June 22, 2013). Accessed April 7, 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/theobserver/2013/jun/23/observer-profile-charles-saatchi-nigella-lawson.

that piece; but that did not prevent other artists from being seen as disturbing or controversial when the exhibition was viewed as a whole.

There is nothing that would prevent an issue similar to *Myra* from proving to be as much of a media storm if it occurred in the United States. The American audience lacked the historical context to understand and feel connected with that image when it came to the States. (Ironically, they may have understood the artist's true intention.) The controversy in Britain was due to a specific event and the impact that the related murder of children, had on the cultural landscape. That is far different than the controversy in the States. In both cases, there was a level of perceived elitism in museums, perpetrating the question: how dare they show art like this, art that is offensive? However, the reasons behind the offense were completely different. With both images and both controversies, the media, and others pushed other agendas. Mayor Giuliani used controversy for political gain, the BMA used it to attract new visitors and gain attention in the competitive New York art world, the Royal Academy for the Arts used it to enhance its notoriety in Britain, and Charles Saatchi personally profited from it.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Why All of this Matters

Public controversy over art is something that is going to happen regardless of the social context and time period. Changing contexts and shifting social norms, especially when combined with art, are going to provoke debate. Museums as houses of material culture, will be permanently intertwined with public controversy. Museums no longer act as impassionate observers to the world around them; their visitors want to see exhibits about the reality of the modern world and museums are adapting to meet those needs. Social issues play an increasingly volatile role in American society, something that artists reflect in their artwork and in their exhibitions. So, what does that mean for museums? Do they avoid these conversations? Do they play it safe and pretend that these issues do not matter to the museum, the public they are serving, or the artists that are creating? For some museums, taking the risks with potentially controversial exhibits is beyond what they feel comfortable doing. Whenever there is a controversy surrounding an exhibition or museum there is always a potential threat to the museum's funding. One could alienate one's visitors, one's board members, or damage one's reputation. However, by entertaining potentially controversial exhibitions, museums also open their doors for greater diversity and new interest.[231] These controversies were risks for all of those involved; but for the most part, the museums and artists benefited from taking those risks.

These events of the past matter because the issues seen here are not fully resolved; and so, they cannot be ignored. NEA and its sister the NEH are still under threat. There has been a cultural devaluing of the arts and humanities on a national level and there is a credible risk that these organizations will be defunded. This time it would not be because of a controversy, but due to an extremely small cut to the federal budget. The NEA is currently supported by 0.012%

[231]Lonnie Bunch, "Embracing Controversy: Museum Exhibitions and the Politics of Change," *The Public Historian* 14, no. 3 (1992): 63-65. doi:10.2307/3378230.

of the budget. Combined, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services are allocated 0.02% of the budget – that is two hundredths of one percent.[232]

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled that same sex marriage was legal for the entire country. It was a massive and long-awaited step forward for the LGBTQA community. Yet, despite this advance, widespread homophobia pervades America and effects the arts community. For example, there are now treatments for HIV/AIDS; however, they still cost an exorbitant amount of money, which impacts a wide swath of the population. The issue parallels the experiences of the NEA artists who lost their funding decades ago by protesting sexual parity issues. The times haven't changed that much.

Religion and religious difference have always been hot button issues in America. This was easily seen with the attempts to defund both the National Endowment for the Arts and the Brooklyn Museum of Art for their support of artists whose used religion in their artwork in a non-traditional sense. Today, religion continues to be a powerful, often divisive force in American culture, especially when it intersects with politics. Once again, the current political climate has created a distrust of an entire multibillion person religion; a distrust that is so powerful, it is leading a call of isolation by some – although they remain a minority.

These are just some of the social issues that museums encounter. In fact, there is an almost never-ending list of topics that museums can present that could draw controversy. Social context explains why some of these topics might draw strong reactions. It does not forgive or

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[232] Philip Kennicott and Peggy McGlone, "Trump wants to cut the NEA and NEH. This is the worst-case scenario for arts groups," *The Washington Post*, (March 16, 2017), accessed May 11, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/with-elimination-of-nea-and-neh-trumps-budget-is-worst-case-scenario-for-arts-groups/2017/03/15/5291645a-09bb-11e7-a15f-a58d4a988474_story.html?utm_term=.3e4bb7b90548.

render those involved blameless, but it does explain why. It explains why certain topics will create a media firestorm. It explains why books upon books will be written about a part of a larger controversy while the other sections are forgotten. It explains why these themes repeat themselves over generations. The one thing social and cultural context do not explain, though is what to do with this knowledge. It doesn't say that museums have to avoid or have to show potentially controversial exhibits. There is no right or wrong answer to that; it depends on what the museum is willing to risk. History does tell us that museums are taking greater risks in modern years. They are taking on more and more complex exhibitions that cause strong reactions and great discussion.

Twenty-first century museums are redefining their roles as neutral institutions, and becoming more comfortable with controversy in the name of political justice. Some modern museums and galleries are taking the risk to bring up uncomfortable topics like racism, white privilege, child exploitation and more. A Las Vegas art gallery, the Arts Factory displayed artwork of a convicted serial killer, John Wayne Gacey, in "Multiples: The Artwork of John Wayne Gacey." It claimed to reflect the multiple aspects of his life and the works were to be sold to benefit various charities.[233] Erik Ravelo created a digital exhibition, "Los Intocables" (translated to "The Untouchables") featuring a series of photographs of sculptures where a child is being crucified on the back of an adult, with the child's face blurred, and is meant to display situations where children have been exploited by adults.[234] The Gallery Guichard presented a show, "Confronting Truths: Wake Up!" which featured fifty works by Ti-Rock Moore which

[233] CNN Wire Staff, "Controversial serial killer's paintings go on display in Las Vegas," *CNN*, (May 13, 2011), accessed May 11, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2011/US/05/13/serial.killer.art/.

[234] Priscilla Frank, "Controversial Art Project Addressing Violence Against Children Is Censored By Facebook (NSFW PHOTOGRAPHS)," *The Huffington Post*, (September 10, 2013), accessed May 11, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/09/10/erik-ravelo_n_3900061.html.

dealt with racial injustice in America, including a life size sculpture of the Michael Brown shooting. This combined with the fact that Moore is white resulted in a fair amount of media attention.[235] These exhibitions are drawing more media attention than "Sensation," in part accelerated by the internet, and yet museums are persisting. These two events, the NEA controversy and the "Sensation" controversies, are just some of the many events that place museums in the national spotlight. In the twenty first-century, museums are no longer satisfied with playing it safe. Instead, the twenty-first century museums are less concerned with sensationalism for the sake of it; rather they are poised to encourage and support a growing generation of artists that are increasingly connected to real world issues, committed to keeping them front and center of a larger national discourse. In the words of Lisa Phillips, director of the New Museum, "…when people have hostile reactions to things, it is a good sign they might be important."[236]

[235] Steve Johnson, "Michael Brown exhibition sparks controversy," *Chicagotribune.com*, (July 23, 2015) accessed May 11, 2017, http://www.chicagotribune.com/entertainment/museums/ct-michael-brown-art-chicago-gallery-guichard-20150722-column.html.

[236] Randy Kennedy, "Under the Art World Radar," *The New York Times*, May 7, 2017, Arts & Leisure sec.

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Figure 2

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