

COMMENTARY

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Cultural warfare strategy

Mission to destruct?

The flaw is not with a public that refuses to nourish the arts. Rather, it is with a practice of art that refuses to nourish the public," writes Frederick Hart in the fall issue of Arts Quarterly.

Speaking of the blazing controversy over new funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, Mr. Hart adds, "The public has been so bullied intellectually by the proponents of contemporary art that it has wearily resigned itself to just about any idiocy that is placed before it. . . . But the common man has his limits, and they are reached when some of these things emerge from the sanctuaries of the padded cells of galleries and museums and are put in public places, when the public is forced to live with them and pay for them."

The "limits" of the common man may have been reached with news that NEA, directly, through a \$60,000 grant, and indirectly, through the New York State Council on the Arts, subsidized Chelsea's Kitchen Theatre, whose winter sensation was Annie Sprinkle.

Miss Sprinkle, a veteran of 150 porn films, conducted for the Kitchen 12 live sex shows, at the end of each of which she urinated on stage. Midway in the show, she stopped masturbating with a sex toy to declare, to the hoots of the audience, "Usually I get paid a lot of money for this, but tonight it's government-funded."

Your tax dollars at work.

For most Americans, the natural reaction is: Let the sickos sculpt, paint, print, whatever they please, so long as my dough isn't involved, and I don't have to look at the garbage.

But I'm afraid we're not going to get off that easy.

For, as Mr. Hart adds, there is a hidden agenda. Behind the "baiting and taunting" of a tolerant nation lies the "current philosophy and practice of art, which . . . thrives on a belief system of deliberate contempt for the public. . . . Underneath its outrage, the art world can barely contain its secret delight at this publicity bonanza featuring a heroic scenario of free spirits vs. troglodytes."

In short, they are not going away;

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they are not going to leave us alone. An alienated arts crowd is going to continue to provoke the American people, to get the attention of a public that has ignored it, to force us to react in anger, so it can then cast itself in the self-satisfying role of victim and martyr in a fascist Amerika.

But, we ought not to minimize what is at stake here.

"Cult and culture go hand in hand," writes art critic Hamilton Reed Armstrong. "Just as Indian art reflects its Buddhist or Hindu underpinning, and Romanesque and Gothic art project Christian faith and hope, and Renaissance art reflects the humanism of the day, so also much of 20th-century art reflects underlying currents of what can only be described as the occult worldview."

Art manifests belief; and, before a new faith is established, the old must be torn down. Andreas Ser-

rano's photo of a crucifix dipped in urine, Martin Scorsese's "The Last Temptation of Christ," Madonna's "Like a Prayer," are cut from the same bolt of cloth. Each was done to mock, shock, denigrate.

The arts crowd is after more than our money, more than an end to the congressional ban on funding obscene and blasphemous art. It is engaged in a cultural struggle to root out the old America of family, faith, and flag, and recreate society in a pagan image.

The maneuvering in America's Kulturkampf is over; the forces are now engaged; and, a bewildered defensive Christian society is absorbing one blow after another.

The desecration of churches in Los Angeles, the homo-fascist assault on St. Patrick's Cathedral, the non-negotiable demand that all schoolchildren be instructed in the use of condoms, the drive to downgrade Western culture in college

curricula — all are part of an offensive visible as long ago as the '50s, with the drive to remove all Christian practices, symbols and beliefs from public education.

Hollywood, having successfully defended "The Last Temptation of Christ" as a film of great art, has become more aggressive.

A week ago, The New York Times ran a full-page ad for "The Handmaid's Tale," a new film about an America taken over by fascist and hypocritical Christian fundamentalists. Critic Joseph Farah's depiction of it as "bigoted and inflammatory" is understatement. The same paper ran a two-page ad for "Nuns on the Run," described as "The Funniest Anti-Clerical Transvestite Comedy of the Decade."

With its demand that the NEA be funded at the higher level, that all restrictions on what recipient artists may do with the money be removed, that congressional oversight be ended, America's artists are de-

manding the prerogatives of a new priestly class. Public money without accountability. The right to dictate what is art. The right to bait and taunt with impunity.

The new militancy was on display in this city last week, during Cultural Advocacy Day.

The NEA is under attack by a "homophobic cabal," railed Joseph Papp, as Andreas Serrano signed autographs. "This is no longer a fight about obscenity," declaimed Dr. Mary Schmidt Campbell, New York City commissioner of cultural affairs. "This is about the very principles of democracy and the fundamental values of this country."

The lady is right. This is a war about the fundamental values of this country; and, to see the White House endorse an increase in money for NEA, and removal of any constraints on the recipients is to suggest, that, in the battle for America's soul, the administration plans to be something less than a fighting ally.