

# Defense calls Mapplethorpe's photos politically important

By ELLEN UZELAC  
• The Baltimore Sun

CINCINNATI — Defense attorneys for a Cincinnati art museum charged with pandering obscenity told a jury yesterday that Robert Mapplethorpe's photographic exploration of the gay underground was artistic and politically important, no matter how disturbing the homoerotic images might be to them.

Even though the controversial photographs reflect a "world many of us could never conceive of being part of," attorney H. Louis Sirkin said in his opening statement in the landmark trial, they represent an artistic record by a "brilliant photographer" of the gay underground.

Last spring, the Contemporary Arts Center and its director, Dennis Barrie,

were indicted on the opening day of "Robert Mapplethorpe: A Perfect Moment," an exhibition of 175 photographs that has appeared in several U. S. cities.

Seven of the photographs form the basis of the obscenity charges: Five depict homosexual and sadomasochistic images, and two show children with exposed genitals.

City prosecutor Frank Prouty asked the four-man, four-woman jury to "draw the line" at the "lewd exhibition," adding: "You're going to think, 'Isn't there something more? Shouldn't we hear something more?' The pictures are the state's case."

Jurors toured the gallery yesterday just

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a few blocks from the Hamilton County courtroom where they will reconvene Monday to hear testimony in the first obscenity case ever filed against a U. S. art museum. Jurors were permitted only a moment to view the gallery from the front entrance, where they could see several sepia-toned photographs of the Mona Lisa, an image of Christ and a nude.

It was the first time several of the jurors had been inside a museum in years, based on their responses to questioning this week. And it was clear from those responses that art is not an interest, much less a priority, of any of the jurors.

A vice officer with the Cincinnati Police Department testified yesterday that law-enforcement officials received numerous telephone calls and letters last winter to complain about the coming arrival of the exhibition.

Officer James Hicks said those complaints prompted a police investigation, including a videotaping of the show, though police never filed charges. A grand jury later issued an indictment.

Hicks and another police officer recalled that the homoerotic photographs that appeared in the so-called "XYZ Portfolio" were displayed in a glass library case in a room separate from the rest of the exhibit.

Both recalled long lines of people waiting to view the portfolio. "The place was packed," Hicks said.

The exhibition drew record crowds in its Cincinnati run, April 7 to May 26.

Neither officer said he remembered seeing any signs restricting admission to people 18 and older. People under 18 were not permitted to view the exhibition, a concession that museum attorneys said was made to appease those in the community who were critical of the show.