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Hate subsidizing dung-smeared 'art'? Here's the secret to ending that outrage

Surprise: \$500,000 in federal funds went to Virgin Mary/dung museum

WASHINGTON, DC — Want to end the legal and political battles swirling around the Virgin Mary/elephant dung exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art? Stop using tax dollars to subsidize any kind of art, the Libertarian Party suggested today.

"Smearing elephant dung on a painting of the Virgin Mary may be offensive — but it's not as offensive as forcing people to pay for it against their will," said Steve Dasbach, the party's national director. "But that's the inevitable result of giving politicians the power to subsidize art."

This week, a federal court is expected to issue a ruling in a legal battle between New York's Mayor Rudy Giuliani and the Brooklyn Museum of Art. At stake: Whether the city is guilty of "censorship" if it cuts off funding to the museum for the "Sensation" exhibit.

The exhibit, featuring the works of young English artists, includes not only the Virgin Mary spackled with dung and surrounded by photographs of buttocks, but also dead animals in formaldehyde, live maggots, and a translucent bust filled with the artist's blood.

But it's not just New Yorkers who are paying for government-subsidized "artistic" dung, noted Dasbach. *Every* American is — because the National Endowment for the Arts has funneled \$500,000 to the museum over the past three years.

But the problem didn't start with the Brooklyn Museum of Art, said Dasbach — and it won't end by cutting off funds for this *one* exhibit.

"Politicians were smart: They didn't announce they would use your tax dollars to display a feces-smeared Virgin Mary," he said. "Instead, they promised to subsidize operas, museums, theater, and other inoffensive art. The problem is that once politicians get your money, it's out of your hands — and in the control of politicians and bureaucrats."

That's why the solution is to "devolve" art funding back to the individual, he proposed.

"No, we'll never eliminate all offensive art, but we can end most of the legal fighting and political confrontations that offensive art generates. We can do that by simply turning the world of art back over to the private and non-profit sectors," said Dasbach.

"So, if you enjoy a certain kind of art, you could support it with your patronage and contributions. If you are offended by another kind of art, don't try to censor it — simply boycott it. *You* would have control. Museums could go back to being places that display art — instead of being turned into political battlegrounds. And we wouldn't have to worry about politicians turning our money into elephant dung, and calling it art."

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