

# GOBER ART DRAWS DEFENDERS AND CRITICS

Last October, the Catholic League sent a letter to the director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and a news release to the media, stating our objections to a piece of art by Robert Gober (see November *Catalyst*). Gober's work showed a phallic culvert pipe piercing Our Blessed Mother, the purpose of which, he said, was to deprive "the Virgin Mary of the womb from which Christ was born."

The Gober has since been defended by Richard Koshalek, the museum's director, the *New York Times* and the *National Catholic Reporter*. Koshalek has said that Gober's work "is intensely personal, and installations he has created have dealt with controversial issues that are important to him, such as sexual identity, racial prejudice, bodily functions and the Catholic faith."

It can also be said that Gober, who is an embittered gay ex-Catholic, is part exhibitionist, otherwise he would have no need to publicize his "intensely personal" work. We just wish he would do it behind closed doors and leave his creations there, preferably next to the garbage can.

The *New York Times* likes this trash so much that it offered a color photo of Gober's masterpiece. But the best part was the story by Roberta Smith. It was so good of her to note that "it is understandable that some people might find the piece upsetting," even if all they saw was a photograph of the subject. Her condescending attitude then burst forth with her comment that "it is depressing to be reminded, once more, that there are always those who know what they don't like, even if they haven't actually experienced it." But it's not half as depressing as knowing that she gets paid to write this stuff.

Smith insists that critics of Gober must be offended first-hand before they can object. "Because the Gober is about the literal and the actual," she opines, "it is profoundly experiential and even interactive, a journey that must be traveled before an informed opinion can be arrived at." Such logic suggests that suffering must be experienced before an informed opinion can be made. But if this is true, then it would be wrong to oppose famine, disease and genocide without first experiencing it. Such a claim would be irrational because it would effectively end all future experiential journeys.

From a writer for the *National Catholic Reporter*, art professor Linda Ekstrom, we get nothing but praise. "In fact," the professor says, "Gober's work is one of the more challenging and profoundly sacred spaces I have ever encountered in an art venue." That gives us some idea where she hangs out. We have a suggestion for her: why not take Gober's phallic culvert pipe and stick it through the head of Moses head and see what happens. Or try Martin Luther King on for size.

The league was delighted to learn that approximately a thousand protesters jammed the sidewalk in front of the museum to let Gober know what they thought of creation; it was led by the American Society for the Defense of Tradition, Family and Property, a traditional Catholic group. The league sent copies of its news release and a letter of support to be read at the rally.