

# NUDGING THE NEW YORK TIMES

William A. Donohue

When the Catholic League objects to anti-Catholic art, we are routinely labeled censors by the artistic community, but when some of their liberal colleagues object to art that offends them—such as treating lizards “inhumanely”—there is little outrage, and no name calling.

Where was the outrage by the media, the artistic community, and free speech activists over the Guggenheim’s decision to nix three works from an exhibition that opened on October 6? Animal rights zealots took aim at the Guggenheim for showcasing three works as part of its exhibition, “Art and China After 1989: Theater of the World.”

The first artwork banned by the Guggenheim was a video showing four pairs of pit bulls on nonmotorized treadmills; they were portrayed as charging at each other, though they never touched. There was a second video that showed two pigs copulating in front of a live audience. The third work was an installation—considered the real gem by the *New York Times*—that featured hundreds of live lizards, crickets, and other reptiles and insects racing around eating each other under a warming lamp.

When news of these three exhibits initially broke—before the Guggenheim decided to ban them—the ASPCA and PETA were furious with the Guggenheim, as was entertainer Ricky Gervais. They had no business being so self-righteous.

From 1894 to 1994, the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) in New York City killed virtually all the unadopted pets in its care. More recently, its passion for animal rights led it to smear Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, accusing it of animal cruelty. The charges were false: In 2012 the ASPCA was forced to pay Ringling Bros. \$9.3

million in a settlement.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) kills almost all the cats and dogs in its possession. In fact, it kills 95 percent of adoptable pets in its care. Yet its leader, Ingrid Newkirk, maintains it is unethical to swat mosquitoes. She is also known for cheapening the Holocaust: "Six million Jews died in concentration camps," she told the *Washington Post*, "but six billion broiler chickens will die this year in slaughter houses."

Gervais will go to the mat to protect the life of animals, just so long as they are not human. There is not an animal rights cause he will not champion, nor is there a pro-abortion cause he will not support. For example, when Texas state senator Wendy Davis conducted a filibuster protesting abortion restrictions, Gervais said it secured her place in "the pantheon of American heroes."

Though these big name activists were quite vocal in expressing their displeasure with the Guggenheim, what made the famous museum buckle was not advocacy, it was the threat of violence. "Explicit and repeated threats of violence made our decision necessary," the Guggenheim said.

Worse than all of these people was the editorial board of the *New York Times*; its reaction to the art that was banned by the Guggenheim was non-existent, until we blasted its silence.

When the Catholic League protested a vile video exhibit at the Smithsonian in 2010 that featured large ants crawling over Jesus on a crucifix, an editorial in the *New York Times* said, "The Catholic League is entitled to protest." But it strongly criticized the decision of the museum to pull the video, saying that it was giving into the "bullying" of Rep. John Boehner. It cited its support for "culturally challenging images."

When the Catholic League protested a filthy exhibit at the

Brooklyn Museum of Art in 1999 that featured a huge portrait of Our Blessed Mother adorned with elephant dung and pictures of vaginas and anuses, an editorial in the *New York Times* applauded the decision of the museum to “defend artistic freedom.”

When the Catholic League protested an obscene play at the Manhattan Theatre in 1998 that featured Jesus having sex with the twelve apostles, an editorial in the *New York Times* cheered the performance, saying, “This is not only a land of freedom; it is a land where freedom is always contested.”

But when the Guggenheim decided to ban three exhibits that upset animal rights activists, the *New York Times*, which ran several articles about it, dragged its feet issuing an editorial. So the day the exhibition opened, we slammed the paper for its hypocrisy and asked our email list to contact the editorial page editor (whose email address we supplied).

Exactly one week later, the *Times* finally came through criticizing the museum. Thanks to our troops! As I said in a news release, we may be the leaders, but we cannot do this job without your input.

Why was the Catholic League alone in wondering why the editorial board initially said nothing? Where was the outcry from artists over the decision by the newspaper to ignore the Guggenheim’s censorial approach? Are they so dependent on the *Times* for good reviews that they dare not utter a word of condemnation?

We are proud of our role nudging the *Times* to finally do the right thing.