

OUTING ARTISTS

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When someone lies, he is guilty of disinformation, the deliberate dissemination of information known to be untrue. When someone mistakenly provides the wrong information, he is guilty of misinformation. Though in both cases truth is a casualty, only those guilty of the former are properly met with moral outrage. And it is precisely this group—those who knowingly provide false information—that is responsible for much of today's Catholic bashing. This is especially true of artists.

In 1999, we protested the Brooklyn Museum of Art's "Sensation" exhibit that featured a dung-laden portrait of the Our Blessed Mother adorned with cutouts of female genitalia. Our critics told us then, and continue to tell us today, that we got it all wrong. For example, columnist Michael Daly recently noted that Africans use dung as a celebratory statement. That is why we should be pleased with Nigerian artist, Chris Ofili, for putting dung on the Virgin Mary. Now another critic has come forward, this time lecturing us for not recognizing that the dung was "artfully placed" on the Virgin Mary.

Just after "Sensation" closed, I attended a Christmas party in New York. Sitting next to me was an architect whom I had met for the first time; his accent was intriguing. After exchanging some pleasantries, I asked the dark-skinned man what country he was from. Nigeria, he said. You already know what I asked him. But you can only guess what he said: he was livid—the idea that dung is some kind of honorific statement in Nigeria is a lot of bull.

Research I did on this issue confirmed what the architect told me. But none of this matters to our critics who purposely persist in floating this myth about African dung. They also

lie about Ofili: his parents are Nigerian but he was born and raised in England. Ergo, he's an Englishman.

As for the critic who is mesmerized by the "artfully placed" dung, I wonder how he would react to someone who took a shovel full of you-know-what and slopped it all over a picture of his mother. After watching him go ballistic, it would be interesting to see how he would then react to the news that careful steps were taken to "artfully place" the dung on his mom. Finally, our critics add to their disinformation effort when they describe the Ofili portrait without ever mentioning the porn clips.

This issue of *Catalyst* tells the story how the *Sun-Sentinel* accused the Catholic League of "threatening violence" during our 1998 protest of "Corpus Christi." The retraction said it was a "reporting error," which, if true, would make this a case of misinformation. But only a fool would believe this. The guilty reporter knew exactly what he was doing, which is why this was disinformation, clear and simple.

Regarding the play, it was reported over and over again that the Catholic League objected because "Corpus Christi" depicted a gay Jesus. Wrong. We objected because it depicted Christ having sex with his 12 apostles. Indeed, we emphasized that we would have objected just as strongly had Christ been cast as having sex with 12 women. It was the playwright, Terrence McNally, who decided to make this a gay issue, not the Catholic League.

Reka Basu, an essayist at the *Sun-Sentinel*, can always be counted on to defend Catholic bashing. Whether it's the "Sensation" exhibit, or the more recent "Yo Mama's Last Supper" entry featuring a naked woman as Christ in the Last Supper, or "Corpus Christi," Basu offers, "One person's offense is another's enlightenment." Really? In other words, some people object to putting Jews in ovens, others think it's a good idea. But neither position is wrong because all

positions are morally equal. Now even Basu should be able to figure this one out.

Alma Lopez is the offending Santa Fe artist responsible for the bikini-clad Virgin Mary that was displayed in the Museum of International Art (described in this issue). "If my work is removed," she said in a letter to us, "that means I have no right to express myself as an artist and a woman." Wrong. It means she has no right to expect Catholic taxpayers to fund her blasphemy. And what's this business about her being a woman? Or is this another appeal to her alleged victim status?

Lopez continues with her disinformation campaign by saying that if her work is removed, "It means that there must be something wrong and sexually perverted with my female body." But her conclusion doesn't follow from the predicate. On the other hand, we are not in position to disprove her self-perception. Regrettably, she may be right.

It's tempting to say they're all nuts. But to do so is to exculpate them. No, they know what they're doing. And what they're doing is lying. Lying about their work, lying about the Catholic Church. To stop them they must be outed. Which is where we come in.