

SELF-DECEIVING ARTISTS

What is it about artists? Do they really believe their own lies? Consider two recent cases, one from North Carolina, the other from Michigan.

In the October *Catalyst*, we cited an art exhibition at the Ackland Art Museum of the University of North Carolina that merited a Catholic League response. Artist Duane Michals' contribution to art was a depiction of a Christ-like character standing over a woman who had undergone a self-induced abortion. It was advertised as a statement on religious hypocrisy.

In another rendering, one we didn't mention in our article, Michals offered a Christ-figure sitting at a table with a woman; the caption read, "Christ eats dog food with an old Ukranian woman in Brooklyn."

We provided a name and address for members to lodge their complaint. The good news is that the art has been withdrawn. The bad news is that they still don't get it.

The abortion exhibit was explained by the museum's director, Gerald A. Bolas, as a modern-day conflict similar to those in Christ's day when Jesus was criticized for being with tax collectors and talking to a known adulteress. Now why didn't we think of that?

The eating of dog food was understood by Bolas as a statement on Christ's humility as well as his practice of going to people in pain. Guess we're not creative enough to catch that one either.

Perhaps the most foolhardy comment made by Bolas was this: "We know it's impossible to be a museum without having people offended." He may believe that, but what we believe is that it is impossible for Bolas to utter a comment about art without

having people's intelligence offended.

Meanwhile, the art director at the South Haven Center for the Arts in South Haven, Michigan, Mike Fiedorowicz, was busy defending a collage that showed Jesus holding a condom. To his critics, Fiedorowicz said, it was impossible for art directors to be judgmental. "What's the line," he asked, arguing that those who criticize such works are engaging in a line of reasoning "that's totally subjective."

Donohue's response to Fiedorowicz, which was printed in the *Herald-Palladium*, said it was "a ruse to say that judgment calls are subjective. Surely they are. But that is not to say that they are inherently random, without rules that are discernible."

"To put it differently," Donohue continued, "figure skating judges, diving judges and boxing referees make decisions all the time. School teachers grade essays with regularity. Art directors aren't disabled from making distinctions either."

And we thought all the spinmeisters lived in Washington, D.C.