

SOTHEBY'S HOSTS INSULTING ART

Sotheby's, the New York auction house, is hosting an exhibition, "Divine Comedy," that contains some 80 works dating from antiquity to the present that revolve around Dante's famous poem; it starts today and runs to October 19. There is "The Priest," a weird 2010 depiction of a deformed animal's face resting on the torso of a priest by George Condo, and a contribution by Salvador Dali from 1962, "The Vision of Hell," that shows pitchforks and a portrait of Our Blessed Mother.

Prominently displayed is a piece by Martin Kippenberger, *Zuerst die Fuesse (Feet First)*. This work, which first appeared in 1990, substitutes a frog for Jesus on the Cross; the crucified amphibian is holding a mug of beer and an egg.

Catholic League president Bill Donohue addressed this issue today:

The work of Condo is amateurish and Dali's is representative of his usual edginess. But Kippenberger's crosses the line. No wonder Pope Benedict XVI was angry when he learned of it two years ago. On August 7, 2008, he wrote a letter to Franz Pahl, the regional official in Italy where the sculpture was being displayed at a Bolzano museum, saying it "injured the religious feeling of many people who see in the Cross the symbol of the love of God and of our salvation, which deserves recognition and religious devotion." Pahl agreed and went on a hunger strike to protest it.

The pope was too gentle. Kippenberger's art is degrading, insulting and grossly offensive. But the German artist, who died in 1997, is not around to defend himself. However, Lisa Dennison is. It was her idea to organize this exhibition.

Sotheby's needs to explain why they are featuring Kippenberger's assault on Christian sensibilities. Hopefully,

they will spare us the tired refrain that art is in the eye of the beholder. In fact, art is always partly, but never always, in the eye of the beholder. That's why Wagner's compositions are never played in Israel.

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