

# MUSEUM OF MODERN ART HOSTS ANTI-NUN FILM

The Museum of Modern Art will host the premiere of "Women In Black" on October 28-29, a one-hour documentary on Catholic nuns produced and directed by Claudia Sherwood. It is described as a "kaleidoscope of baby boomers' memories" that features "childhood experiences of physical and psychological punishment during their education by Catholic nuns, especially in the 1950s and 1960s."

Catholic League president William Donohue offered his thoughts on the subject:

"Much of the Catholic bashing these days comes from adult ex-Catholics who are stuck in their adolescence. Claudia Sherwood is such a person. Stuck in the morass of her Catholic school experience of the late Fifties and early Sixties, she now wants to wallow in it while trying to make a fast buck off of her exploits. It is not surprising that her film gives profile to Christopher Durang and Albert Innaurato, two embittered anti-Catholic playwrights who met at Yale and have yet to move on.

"It was so nice of Ms. Sherwood to flag her little flick for me by sending along a useful packet of information. I was particularly taken by her comment to me that no one in the Church has ever apologized for the Catholic schools of her era, thus suggesting that she might yet get one. The same kind of psychological malady is apparent when she admits that when she was working on her project, she actually 'became ill at times when research required me to contact the archdiocese, a nun or clergy.' Had I known this, I would have provided her with one of our now-famous vomit bags.

"'When I visited the Archdiocese building in New York I was

panic stricken,' she says. Too bad she didn't know at the time that I work there—perhaps we could have met. I could have comforted her by showing compassion and engaging in dialogue, and instead she went home sobbing.”

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## **AMICUS BRIEF FILED AGAINST BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART**

The Catholic League will file an amicus brief today against the Brooklyn Museum of Art. The league's brief is in support of the City of New York's position and will be filed with Brooklyn Federal Judge Nina Gershon. Professor Gerard Bradley of Notre Dame University Law School wrote the brief for the Catholic League; it is signed by New York attorney Robert L. Dougherty. The Summary of Argument reads as follows:

“The Agreements between the City and the Museum set up a partnership for funding and oversight of a community educational resource—the Brooklyn Museum and its exhibits. It is intrinsic to this particular entity, and thus to the partnership, that standards of community decency be observed, and that the Museum respect the diverse beliefs of the people of the City. The ‘Sensation’ exhibit violates those standards. The standards are constitutional beyond question. Indeed, the First Amendment ban on discrimination against people of faith prohibits exclusion of specifically religious sensibilities from the ambit of ‘decency’ and ‘respect for the diverse beliefs of the community.’ If other types of community sensibilities are to be observed by the Museum—and they surely are—then religious sensibilities must be respected, too.”

Catholic League president William Donohue spoke to this issue

today:

“By sponsoring ‘Sensation,’ The Brooklyn Museum of Art broke its partnership with the City of New York. The directors of the museum seem to think that they have a right to public funds without being held publicly accountable for their decisions. It is they who have acted irresponsibly and it is they who are responsible for having this issue wind up in court.”

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## **COLUMBINE RELIGIOUS ART NIXED DUE TO LACK OF DUNG**

Two families of the victims of the Columbine High School massacre have sued the school for declining to install their memorial to their children. The families, which were invited by the school to make a statement on ceramic tile, crafted such religious themes as crosses and biblical verses. But the Jefferson County School District objected, saying that this would violate separation of church and state.

William Donohue, president of the Catholic League, remarked as follows:

“Had the parents plopped some dung on their memorial tribute, school officials would have readily accepted it. That is because it is entirely legal to defame a religion on public property, just so long as someone calls it art. But it is illegal to post work that reveres religion. In short, the original meaning of the First Amendment clause on religion has been stood on its head.

“A spokesman for the Jefferson County School District has said

that if the religious-themed ceramic tile art were posted, it might offend some people. He's quite right about this. What it will take to convince him that many more might be offended by not allowing such art, I do not know. In any event, didn't we just finish hearing in New York that being offended by art is no reason to ban it? And didn't we just finish hearing how wrong it is for public officials to get involved in such matters? And didn't we just finish hearing how awful it is to censor artistic expression? Or do these strictures only have application when art defames religion?

"When this country was founded, blasphemy was punishable by death and there was no funding for the arts. Now we use public funds to promote blasphemy and we ban art—even when it is expressed by private persons at the behest of the state—that glorifies religion. No wonder some think our culture is going to Hell."

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## ART AS SEEN BY THE NEW YORKER AND NEW YORK

In the October 11 editions of *The New Yorker* and *New York*, contrasting perspectives on the Brooklyn Museum of Art controversy are offered. Peter Schjeldahl in *The New Yorker* sees the dung-stained and pornographic-studded "The Holy Virgin Mary" as "gorgeous, sweet, and respectful of its subject"; he is taken by its alleged artistic merit and does not believe that the artist, Chris Ofili, meant his work to be sacrilegious. But Mark Stevens in *New York* sees it differently: he chastises Ofili for not coming up "with something better than elephant dung for a desecration." Stevens suggests, "Wouldn't bat droppings or goat semen be preferable?"

Catholic League president William Donohue made his thoughts known on the two commentaries today:

“If I had been asked a month ago where to find someone who thought it a reverential tribute to throw feces on a religious painting and surround it with pictures of vaginas and anuses, I would have directed him to an asylum. Now I would offer him the option of visiting the offices of *The New Yorker*.

“But if *The New Yorker*’s take on ‘The Holy Virgin Mary’ is bizarre, the position of *New York* is certifiably bigoted. When it is said that Our Blessed Mother is ‘every good boy’s dream,’ no one can understand that without calling it anti-Catholic.

“The comment that ‘bat droppings’ and ‘goat semen’ would be ‘preferable’ to elephant dung on ‘The Holy Virgin Mary’ proves how deep-seated is *New York*’s hatred of Catholicism. That *New York* admits that this painting constitutes ‘desecration’ shows that it is more in touch with reality than *The New Yorker*, but it also shows that *New York* has bigots on its payroll.

“*The New Yorker*’s capacity for self-deception cannot be underrated, but it is still preferable to *New York*’s sponsorship of hate speech.”

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**CATHOLIC LEAGUE AND NEW YORK  
CIVIL LIBERTIES UNION ADDRESS  
ANTI-CATHOLICISM AND ANTI-**

# **SEMITISM AT PRESS CONFERENCE TODAY AT 3:00 p.m.**

William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, and Norman Siegel, executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), will hold a press conference today at 3:00 p.m. in Room 921 of the Catholic Center. The Catholic Center is located at 1011 First Avenue (between 55th and 56th Streets). Donohue will be joined by Bernadette Brady, vice president of the Catholic League; Siegel will be accompanied by Steven Hyman, president, board of directors of the NYCLU.

The purpose of the press conference is to address the bigotry that has surrounded the debate over the Brooklyn Museum of Art exhibit, "Sensation." Donohue and Siegel will discuss the anti-Catholicism and the anti-Semitism that has marked this controversy.