

**NATIONAL  
COALITION  
AGAINST  
CENSORSHIP**

**ARTS  
ADVOCACY  
PROGRAM**

July 14, 2022

Samuel Quigley  
Director  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum  
New London, CT

Dear Mr. Quigley,

As a coalition of organizations dedicated to the First Amendment right to free speech, including freedom of artistic expression, we were deeply concerned to learn that the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in New London removed a video piece from a guest-organized exhibition because it was “disturbing audiences” and was considered by the museum to be “inappropriate for children.” This act of censorship flies in the face of the museum’s obligations to its audience, as well as to the artists it exhibits and the curatorial collectives with whom it works.

It is our understanding that The Nasty Women Connecticut organizers held their sixth annual exhibition, *The Will to Change: Gathering as Practice*, at the Lyman Allyn Museum. The organizers invited artists to submit a work for the show through an open call. The video Rebecca Goyette picked, “My Snake is Bigger Than Your Snake,” was put on display, together with all the other work, in the presence of the museum’s head of exhibitions. The exhibition opened on June 18 and will remain up through August 12, 2022. However, three days after it was displayed, Ms. Goyette’s work was taken down at your request, and she was asked to offer a non-video piece instead. At the behest of the organizers, an explanatory statement placed next to the substitute piece acknowledged the censorship and attempted to mitigate it by adding a QR code linking to the video.

While the transparency provided by the explanatory statement is commendable, it does not change the fact that the work was censored. Ms. Goyette’s video does contain humorous and burlesque references to sex, but it is far from obscene or harmful to minors. In removing it the Museum leadership has made an arbitrary decision which silences an artist and deprives the audience of the chance to see the work.

References to sexuality are present in many artworks, both classical and contemporary. Seductive nudes and scenes of violence and rape grace the halls of most museums. Children and school groups visit and emerge unharmed. Contemporary feminist treatments of sexuality are, perhaps, more in your face, but, arguably, present a healthier, often funnier and more equitable viewpoint.

Judging a work unsuitable for the museum solely because it references sexuality is both surprising and disappointing. And, if the reason is that the work’s references to

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ORGANIZATIONS**

Actors’ Equity Association  
AICA-USA  
American Association of  
School Administrators  
American Association of  
University Professors  
American Association of  
University Women  
American Booksellers for Free Expression  
American Civil Liberties Union  
American Ethical Union  
American Federation of Teachers  
American Jewish Committee  
American Library Association  
American Literary Translators Association  
American Society of Journalists & Authors  
Americans United for Separation of Church  
& State  
Association of American Publishers  
Authors Guild  
Catholics for Choice  
Children’s Literature Association  
College Art Association  
Comic Book Legal Defense Fund  
The Creative Coalition  
Directors Guild of America  
The Dramatists Guild of America  
Dramatists Legal Defense Fund  
Educational Book & Media Association  
First Amendment Lawyers Association  
Free Speech Coalition  
Freedom to Read Foundation  
Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and  
Social Justice  
International Literacy Association  
Lambda Legal  
Modern Language Association  
National Center for Science Education  
National Communication Association  
National Council for the Social Studies  
National Council of the Churches  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Council of Teachers of English  
National Education Association  
National Youth Rights Association  
The NewsGuild-CWA  
PEN America  
People For the American Way  
Planned Parenthood Federation  
of America  
Project Censored  
SAG-AFTRA  
Sexuality Information & Education Council  
of the U.S.  
Society of Children’s Book Writers  
& Illustrators  
Student Press Law Center  
Union for Reform Judaism  
Union of Democratic Intellectuals  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
United Church of Christ  
Office of Communication  
United Methodist Church,  
United Methodist Communications  
Women’s American ORT  
Woodhull Sexual Freedom Alliance  
Writers Guild of America, East  
Writers Guild of America, West

sexuality lack the “decorum” of classical paintings, then the problem gets worse: there is a sad irony when a show, which gathers cutting edge work on gender, sexuality and change, is censored because of its flaunting of representational convention.

We urge the Museum to reconsider its decision. There exist a range of other options to address any concerns about underage audiences. There is the option of displaying signage informing audiences that art is often disturbing and that they should use their discretion in bringing their underage children - indeed, it is our understanding that such a sign was put at the entrance of the entire show. The Museum can also work with the organizers to adjust the placement of work to make pieces that some may consider unsuitable for children less prominent. The one option that a cultural institution should always avoid is the outright suppression of work.

With warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Finan". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Christopher Finan  
Executive Director  
National Coalition Against Censorship

CC: Jane LeGrow  
Registrar & Director of Exhibitions  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum

Tanya Pohrt  
Head Curator  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum