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Smithsonian Gives in to the Far Right, Censors the Artist Who “Spoiled Christmas”

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Incoming House Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor called yesterday for the closing of an exhibit at the Smithsonian’s National Portrait Gallery that features work with sexual themes and a video about the AIDS epidemic in Latin American culture that includes 11 seconds of ants crawling on a Christ figure. Museum director Martin Sullivan has announced that the video has been removed from the exhibit because “people were leaping to a conclusion that we were intentionally trying to provoke Christians or spoil the Christmas season.”

Bill Donohue, president of the Catholic League, who has a long history of far-right extremism, is the main force behind the move to censor the privately-funded exhibit.

Michael B. Keegan, President of People For the American Way, issued the following statement:

“There is absolutely no reason for our government to be in the business of censoring art, or cave to pressure from extreme Religious Right organizations just because it’s Christmas. That Bill Donohue and the Catholic League are fighting for censorship is unsurprising. That the GOP leadership is echoing their call is shameful. That the Smithsonian has given into their transparent political bullying is deeply disturbing.

“The United States, like other free nations, has a long history of supporting and embracing art by those of many different values and viewpoints. The Smithsonian museums host art that expresses strong religious devotion and art that expresses atheism and doubt. The museums house art from around the world, from every religion, and allow Americans to make their own decisions about what they like and what they don’t. These museums are an educational resource for the American people, not a political mouthpiece for the majority opinion.

“The new GOP leadership wants a government that stays out of people’s lives when it comes to health care and unemployment benefits, but they show no scruples about using government power to censor the free expression of those they disagree with. The American people must stand up to this blatant attempt to force politics into art and religion into politics. “

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Yesterday GOP leaders called for censoring a privately-funded exhibit at the Smithsonian’s National

Portrait Gallery. Museum director Martin Sullivan has announced that the disputed work has been removed from the exhibit.

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