

Art 1

Name _____

Modern to Contemporary Art

Due Date _____

You earned _____ out of 20 possible points

Worksheet #14

Culture Wars

Read <http://www.bu.edu/today/arts-entertainment/2007/09/16/art-obscenity-and-controversy> and www.publiceye.org/theocrat/Mapplethorpe_Chrono.html to answer the following questions.

Define the word "obscene."

Define the word "blasphemy."

Many critics have denounced Serrano's work by claiming he creates imagery just for its "shock value." Consider what the benefits and consequences of shocking a viewer may be for an artist. Now consider how the artist responds to such attacks. Do you agree that the sole purpose of Serrano's work is to shock? Explain.

Serrano explains that he attempts to establish intimacy with his viewers. What devices does the artist employ to create an intimate atmosphere? Is the work successful in this endeavor? Why or why not?

Serrano's Piss Christ was attacked by viewers twice during a retrospective of the artist's work at the Australian National Gallery of Victoria in 1997. One elderly man attempted to remove the photo from the wall so that he could kick it, and two teenagers later attacked the work with a hammer, injuring museum employees in the malay. This prompted the curator of the museum to close the exhibition on the grounds that the museum could no longer ensure the safety of visitors and staff. Why does this work seem to provoke such aggressive responses? Consider that similar (albeit non-violent) incidences have been reported since the emergence of the avant-garde in the 19th century. Is it possible that such passionate attacks are a reflection of the strength of the work's avant-garde critique?

Explain the basis of Senator Jesse Helms' attack on Serrano's work and the National Endowment for the Arts. In your opinion, did he make a sound legal case for the rejection of Piss Christ, the denouncement of NEA funding to this artist, and the complete dissolution of the government agency?

What outside controversies fueled Senator Helms' debate? What were the results of the controversy? Do you agree that the NEA should not fund works deemed "obscene?"
