

Free Expression: The Wellspring of Art and Entertainment

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Introduction

[2.1] The purpose of art and the role of artists in society varies according to the choices and desires of individual artists. Artists and entertainers often push boundaries. This may be simply for the sake of art or entertainment itself, or may be as social commentary, to protest, as a form of resistance, for profit or some other reason. The limits of free expression are often tested by provocative art and confronting forms of entertainment – such as Andres Serrano’s *Piss Christ*, a photograph of a crucifix immersed in a cup of urine created as a criticism of the so-called ‘billion-dollar Christ-for-profit-industry ... [and] condemnation of those who abuse the teachings of Christ for their ignoble ends’;¹ Spencer Tunick’s ‘art installations’ in which he photographs hundreds or thousands of naked volunteers in public places to ‘create an architecture of flesh, where the masses of human bodies blend with the landscape, or juxtapose with architecture’;² and comedian and musician Tim Minchin’s performance on Channel 10’s *The Project* program in which he described Australia’s highest ranking Catholic cleric as a ‘buffoon’, ‘coward’ and ‘scum’ in the process of calling on him to return to Australia to appear before a Royal Commission into sex abuse of children.³ Perhaps even starker are gangsta rap songs that advocate violence and films and video games that confront by imagery of depravity and violence. As the American jurist Justice Harlan once observed: ‘one man’s vulgarity is another’s lyric’.⁴

- 1 Angelique Chrisafis, ‘Attack on “Blasphemous” Art Work Fires Debate of Role of Religion in France’ *Guardian* 19 April 2011 <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/apr/18/andres-serrano-piss-christ-destroyed-christian-protesters>>.
- 2 Alan Taylor, ‘The Naked World of Spencer Tunick’ *The Atlantic* 31 July 2012 <<http://www.theatlantic.com/photo/2012/07/the-naked-world-of-spencer-tunick/100344/>>.
- 3 Marissa Calligeros and Neelima Choahan, ‘“Come Home”: Tim Minchin’s Lament to Cardinal Pell Packs a Punch, and a Few Abuses’ *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 February 2016 <<http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/come-home-tim-minchins-lament-to-cardinal-pell-packs-a-punch-and-a-few-abuses-20160216-gmvvy9.html>>.
- 4 *Cohen v California* 403 US 15 at 25 (1971).

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.