

Letters from the Editors

<http://www.aristos.org/aris-04/brief-5.htm>

Louis Terros's most recent letter to the *New York Sun* (April 1, 2004) was prompted by a front-page article on a controversial gallery exhibition supported by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs and the National Endowment for the Arts ("City Is Funding Porn Display in Dumbo Show," March 8, 2004). The exhibition featured a 58-minute "video installation," entitled *Bjorn Again*, which simulated a tennis match between the former champion Bjorn Borg (actual footage of Borg was used) and a look-alike (the "video artist," Chris Sollars), dressed in drag. A stack of vintage *Playboy* and *Club* magazines, meant to be browsed through while viewing the video, also formed part of the installation, along with posters of naked women.

Observing that the *Sun*'s reference to *Bjorn Again*'s creator as an "artist" was even more lamentable than the poor judgment exercised by the cultural bureaucracy, your indefatigable co-editor went on to note that a subsequent editorial on the matter ("Taxpayer-Funded Pornography," March 10, 2004)--though well intentioned in its criticism of both the NEA and the city's Cultural Affairs Department--had again "unwittingly supported such work by wrongly implying it was 'art.'" To quote directly from the letter:

If the installation in question was a "pornography den" or a "porn exhibit," as the editorial said it was, then its creator was a pornographer---or something else---not an "artist." Why is this distinction important? Because as long as newspapers like the *Sun* ignore logic (not to mention common sense) and buy into the absurdity that something is art merely because the artworld says it is, government officials will feel little pressure to stop funding work such as "Bjorn Again." The *Sun* might consider broadening its view that "no one is entitled to public money to produce artwork that many taxpayers consider offensive or just plain bad" to include work alleged to be art by city, state, and federal agencies that most ordinary people consider

not art at all.

As an example, the letter cited a recent NEA grant (typical of its kind) for an experimental "documentary film and installation work" entitled *Milk*--which "examine[s] the controversies surrounding the many uses of this fluid food."