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*"Beauty's Loss at the University of Cincinnati"*

by Steve Ramos

Conversation becomes something beautiful when photographer Bill Davis is uttering the words. Davis chooses his sentences carefully. The phrases fall from his lips like delicate whispers. When Davis speaks, the experience is both comforting and enlightening. Listening closely, there is little doubt that you are speaking to a creative person.

It's a Friday afternoon, and there are few customers inside the downtown Cincinnati restaurant where Davis and I meet. Davis hands me two slides and explains his dilemma with the University of Cincinnati.

"I worked very hard for this exhibition," he says speaking wistfully. "I shot these images with the show in mind and I made a commitment to show these images. I decided as a visual artist that my foremost priority is to share the work with public."

Davis is talking about the exhibit, *Imaginations: Altered Visual Perceptions*, located on the fourth and sixth floors of University Hall at the University of Cincinnati (UC). The group show features Davis' work alongside fellow photographers Brad Smith, Randall Sackerson and Randy Ruth. The show offers a wide array of images, from Ruth's miniature, color images to Sackerson's double-exposure landscapes. Davis' black-and-white images are exceptionally beautiful.

In "Self-Portrait" (1996), a T-shirt is tied to an ornate picture frame. The subject is masked beneath rubber bondage wear. The only noticeable shape is an outstretched hand trying to break through the shirt. In "Black Box" (1996), two small hands reach out from a dark space in a concrete wall. There is an eerie beauty that connects these two images with Davis' other displayed work, as well as the other photographs in the show. Davis' images look stunning along University Hall's modern hallways, Davis' grievance is with the two images UC refused to display.

Twenty-six hours before the exhibition's Sept. 7th opening, Davis received UC's policy for art in public places and its terms regarding sexual harassment. He was told by UC administration that this policy was the reason for the photograph's removal.

One image shows a female nude stretched alongside a painted radiator. A sea of blackness rests beneath her arched back. Above her pale figure, the radiator's columns provide a dramatic backdrop. The second controversial image, "Admonition," involves a small hand reaching out from between the legs of a nude female. When viewed from a distance, the photograph is unnerving. You're not sure exactly what you're seeing. It's only upon closer examination when you realize the thought behind Davis' photograph. After a few moments spent with the image, the hand becomes something hopeful, empowering and triumphant.

"Work should be allowed to be seen in its full context," Davis says. "The minority edited the show before the majority got to see it. It's criminal. It's harassment against the invited audience."

In the hours before the exhibition's opening, Davis' friends and colleagues offered to help him take down the remaining photographs in the show. Instead Davis chose to leave

the remaining images on display. His only change was to hang a blank canvas in place of the edited images and a written statement explaining his position. That blank canvas will be on display at University Hall through January 11th, 2002.

Meanwhile, Davis is preparing to show both "censored" images as part of a Nov. 16 exhibition at Gallery 109 in Covington, Ky. Finally, Davis' friends and supporters will have the opportunity to see all of his work- just not at UC.