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*"Bill Davis Strikes Back at 'These People'"*

by Steve Ramos

Photographer Bill Davis' first statement hangs next to an overturned canvas on the sixth floor of University Hall at the University of Cincinnati. His words read solemnly: "I objectively regret and regretfully object to any distortion of my original intent. The photographs could have been pulled from this show, but I realize that as an artist my obligation to share this work is foremost."

On an early December evening, a few miles from UC's Clifton Campus, Davis removes his second statement, one that he wrote for Gallery 109 in Covington. This time, Davis' words are more upbeat.: "This show testifies that while the experience at UC was devastating, it was not defeating. In the efforts to eradicate photographs I believe UC now knows the sweet taste of self-wrought defeat..."

The Oct. 11-17 issue of CityBeat reported how UC administration removed two of Davis' photographs from the exhibition. "Imaginations: Altered Visual Perceptions", at University Hall. The first controversial image, "Piano II" (2001), shows a female nude stretched alongside a painted radiator. Her body is pale and taut. Her figure is practically sexless. If it weren't for the faint black outline of the pubic hair, you would think that Davis' subject was a porcelain statue. A sea of blackness rests beneath her arched back. Above her pale figure, the radiator's white columns provide a dramatic backdrop. The second, controversial image, "Admonition" (2001), involves a small hand reaching out from between the legs of a nude female.

Davis, 31, was notified of the photograph's removal only 26 hours before the exhibition's opening on Sept. 7th. At that time, he was told that UC's policy on art in public spaces and its terms regarding sexual harassment were the reasons for the photograph's removal. While Davis chose to display his remaining images in the show, he never received an opportunity to defend his work before his UC critics.

Beginning on Nov. 16, visitors to Gallery 109 got to see what UC administrators considered too offensive for public viewing. "Piano II" and "Admonition" were part of a new show of Davis' solo show, *The Figure and The Objekt*, joining some pieces that are variations on images found in the UC exhibit.

Viewing "Piano II" and "Admonition" at Gallery 109, it's difficult to support UC's decision to remove the two photographs. Ironically, the school's actions helped Davis secure the Gallery 109 show. It also got his images in this paper.

"I can't even begin to imagine," Davis says, speaking recently. "Many more people, probably 10 times as many people were exposed to the work as a result of people trying to subordinate it. It's an amazing irony, and I pity the efforts by these people to deny the public of enlightenment. I pity the efforts of the minority."

Asked whom "these people" are, Davis says, "I wish I knew who these people were. I asked the folks at UC, 'Can I explain my work to the offended parties? Can I send an e-mail?'"

A photography instructor at Antonelli college, Davis advocates to his students to bring their art to the people. He urges them to display their work frequently and, when possible,

to show their work in public spaces. Recently, Davis has been talking to art students about his own challenges with being editorialized.

"What I told these students was, whether they like it or not, they're part of the artistic community and it's their responsibility to show photographs," he says. "They owe it to themselves and to each other to show and support exhibitions."

Davis will probably never learn the story behind UC's refusal to show "Piano II" and "Admonition." He'll never have the opportunity to discuss his work in front of "these people" who pushed for the photograph's removal.

For now, his Kafkaesque experience, with UC is over. At the very least, through the efforts of Gallery 109, Davis has struck back at "these people" and displayed his "censored" photographs in front of the Cincinnati community. His victory is impressive.