

~~GENCENSORED~~

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE REFORM
OF THE OBSCENE PUBLICATIONS ACTS

N C R O P A

FIGHTING SEXUAL CENSORSHIP

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NO/DAW/DP

6th March 1998

Dame Barbara Mills, DBE, QC,
Director of Public Prosecutions,
Crown Prosecution Service,
Headquarters,
50 Ludgate Hill,
London,
EC4M 7EX.



Re: Seizure of Photographic Illustrations taken
from book on the Work of Photographer Robert
Mapplethorpe, by West Midlands Constabulary

The National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts (NCROPA) is appalled by the action of officers from the West Midlands Constabulary in seizing photographs taken by a university student of illustrations in a university library book about the work of the late and celebrated United States photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, published by Random Books UK Ltd., and which has been in the public domain and freely available in this country since 1992.

Although we accept that the iniquitous Obscene Publications Act of 1959 is still very much on the Statute Book, and that the UK is still disgracefully subject to the draconian provisions of this archaic and repressively authoritarian piece of State Censorship legislation (which should long since have been repealed, as virtually all other such similar legislation has been repealed in almost all other so-called 'free' western-world countries, certainly European Union Member States), we do not expect idiosyncratic police forces, acting on the whims of individual police officers, to be permitted to set themselves up as the arbiters of what is and what is not legally "obscene", an evaluation which, even when the absurd "deprave and corrupt" test

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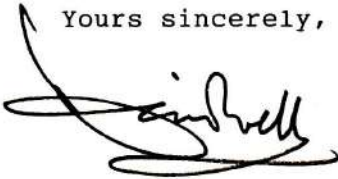
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is applied, can never be anything other than entirely subjective.

We have written to the Chief Constable of the West Midlands Constabulary, Mr. E. Crew, to protest most strongly at the action of his officers and to urge him to stop proceeding any further with this case at once.

According to press and television reports, however, the matter may have already been referred to your Department. If that is indeed so, we likewise urge you not to institute any legal proceedings against either the student involved, the authorities of the University of Central England, or the publishers of the book, or, indeed, anyone else. The chances of any such proceedings succeeding against these or any other parties must certainly be remote. They would constitute a scandalous waste of public money as the result of so futile a pursuit against victimless alleged 'crime', would inflict disgraceful and unwarranted distress on those so unjustly incriminated, would almost certainly contravene the 'freedom of expression' provisions in both the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 19) and the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 10), and would certainly be against the public interest.

Yours sincerely,



David Webb,
Honorary Director,
National Campaign for the Reform of the Obscene Publications Acts

Copies to:- The Chancellor, University of Central England
The Managing Director, Random Books UK Ltd.