



Representing some 15 Atlanta artists, Mrs. Margaret Via, Jim McLean, Tom Lyman and Jim Clover read their letter of protest to art officials about the removal of "Go Go Girl."

Power struggle is seen in 'Go Go Girl' controversy

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sure would kill the show, wouldn't it?"

He nodded again. "Probably."

Tom Lyman, Jim McLean of Georgia State College, Jim Clover of the Atlanta School of Art and the other protesting artists put their demands to Richard Rich, chairman of the board of trustees for the Atlanta Arts Alliance. They said they "strongly urge" the board to apologize to Mr. Rampolla for taking down his painting and to reaffirm Mr. Vigtel's authority over the exhibition.

So purely and simply it seems to be a power struggle between Mr. Patterson on the one hand and 15 or so Atlanta artists on the other. Mr. Vigtel is the man in the middle.

NOW Mr. Vigtel doesn't normally give in to outside pressure the way he did this time. He's refused to take down "objectionable" paintings at the High Museum of Art in the past. There's no question of his courage involved.

So why did he oblige Mr. Patterson's objection this time?

Well, now the problem gets

a little fuzzy. There's no clear-cut head-knocking at this point, no Good Guy vs. Bad Guy nor an issue between Pornography and Art. All that's in the background, perhaps, and it could develop into an artistic schism in Atlanta.

But for the moment, the problem is much more practical than that because, it turns out, the 23rd Southeastern Annual Exhibition wasn't held in the High Museum of Art at all; it was in the Galleria. And though Mr. Vigtel may have all kinds of authority proper to a museum director in the High Museum of Art, he may not have it in the Galleria.

"I assumed that I had the authority when I put the exhibition there," he said, "even though that policy had never been explicitly settled."

"Do you think you made a mistake (to assume that)?"

"I sure do," he said.

Mr. Vigtel said the policy about his authority in the Galleria would be settled "very soon" and that unless he had "full authority" he would never hang another show there.

"This (the banning of 'Go Go

Girl') would not have happened in the High Museum itself," he said. "I would have refused to take it down."

But Mr. Patterson has other ideas about that, too. When he was told of Mr. Vigtel's statement, he said: "It wouldn't matter where it hung. I still would insist that it be taken down."

MR. Beattie, executive director of the Georgia Art Commission, has nothing to do with the policy of the High Museum of Art. He says, however, that his job includes the encouragement and assistance of the freedom of expression for the well-being of the state's artists. Which means, he says, that he's duty-bound to comment on the situation.

One of his best comments is a quote from the English philosopher R. G. Collingwood on art and the function of artists:

"The artist must prophesy not in the sense that he foretells things to come, but in the sense that he tells his audience, at risk of their displeasure, the secrets of their own hearts. His business as an

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artist is to speak out, to make a clean breast. . . . As spokesman of his community, the secrets he must utter are theirs. The reason why they need him is that no community altogether knows its own heart; and by failing in this knowledge a community deceives itself on the one subject concerning which ignorance means death. . . . Art is the community's medicine for the worst disease of the mind, the corruption of consciousness."

So suddenly the problem gets terribly serious indeed. Except that Mr. Colingwood hasn't helped make a clear-cut distinction between artists and pornographers.

Mr. Beattie has a simple method for deciding that problem, however. Though the U.S. Supreme Court can't decide about pornography for us, he says, artists themselves are eminently capable of it. All you have to do, he says, is let qualified art judges decide the difference.

When you consider what artists are doing, though, you realize that this may take time. Artists may be trying to express a "completely new experience," as Mr. Beattie says, and it may be a while before the rest of us catch on to it.

That would include the chap who recently submitted a strip of masking tape on the museum floor as art; another chap who simply wraps things in plastic: trees, trash piles, houses—anything; others who dig holes, cover them up again and call them "buried sculpture"—oh, tomorrow's art will be a ball if we catch on to this sort of thing!

Unless—yes, perhaps even these vain acts of absurdity, futility and self-mockery tell us something about the meaning of today's strange world.

At this point it might be legitimate to question the nature of art itself. Most modern art, or at least the way-out kind, seems to be sociological criticism. The artist is rather prudishly disapproving of the world. Indeed, those who are protesting the removal of Mr. Rampolla's "Go Go Girl," for instance, say they think the carving at Stone Mountain is obscene. Which indicates a serious communication gap between artists and the rest of the world.

But social criticism isn't the only basis for art. Historically, art has been said to be variously an imitation of reality,

the ultimate good of life, pleasure, magic, play, escape, insight into reality or into the nature of the will itself, an intuition into the reality of spirit, empathy, communication, the "quality of experience," expression and the language of feeling, mood and emotion.

So whatever art is, should we leave it up to experts to decide for us? Or to museum sponsors?

Mr. Watson, who is scheduled to moderate today's symposium, heartily disagrees with Mr. Beattie. Though both Mr. Watson and Mr. Beattie agree that Mr. Rampolla's painting should not have been removed, they disagree on their reasons for it.

While Mr. Beattie would leave the question of pornography up to a group of judges—after all, the judges had themselves eliminated several hundred paintings from the show—Mr. Watson says that pornography is a problem for the courts.

"The law is confused on this point, it's true," he said. "It's a confusing subject. The law deals with the legitimacy of censorship and the question is considered from the viewpoint of the first amendment: freedom of speech."

The current law, established by a 1957 ruling, makes these points on the definition of obscenity:

It's what the average person reflecting the community's standards decides it is when he considers that the dominant theme, taken as a whole, appeals only to prurient interests and that there's utterly no redeeming feature in it.

So, like anything else, the word "obscenity" changes with time and place. What is obscene here is not obscene there; what is obscene to one group is not to another.

THERE will always be differences of opinion—one hopes; and therefore no need, really, for censorship.

Mr. Watson quotes Judge Learned Hand in a 1913 decision:

"Should not the word 'obscene' be allowed to indicate the present critical point in the compromise between candor and shame at which the community may have arrived here and now?"

It may seem like using an elastic tape measure at first. But if it helps to understand Mr. Rampolla's "Go Go Girl," then why not?