



## Protesters enraged over flag exhibit

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PHOENIX, Arizona (CNN) -- U.S. veterans and others, outraged over an "art" exhibit featuring the American flag stuffed in a toilet and another lying on the ground, stormed the Phoenix Art Museum Sunday.

One protester reached into the toilet where the flag was on display and proudly removed it as a guard wrestled with him to put it back.



"That's my flag and I'm going to defend it. No son of a bitch is going to do that," the man said. ([561K QuickTime movie](#))

Another man picked up the flag [displayed on the ground](#) and [hung it on the wall](#), covering up another exhibit. The man saluted the flag on the wall as people watching cheered. ([891K QuickTime movie](#))

The exhibit "just hurts you because so many people died for this flag," another veteran said, fighting back tears.

### Museum curator 'ran and hid'

Most of those who showed up for the opening of the exhibit "Old Glory, the American Flag in Contemporary Art" were veterans. Museum Curator [David Rubin](#) said he welcomed the protesters' freedom of expression.

But as the demonstrators gathered in the museum's courtyard Sunday calling for the exhibit to be banned from Phoenix, Rubin bolted for the museum door and locked it. Protesters then banged on the door for admittance.

"This was a crowd of very angry people who don't know me at all," Rubin said. "And someone just sort of pointed a finger at whoever was around."

The protesters saw it differently.

"We gave Mr. Rubin the opportunity to defend the museum and he ran and hid," said Ray Martinez, a past department commander of the American Legion.

"The two million members of the American Legion and the 26 million living veterans in our country did not fight and lay their lives on the line in the great wars so that obscenity and desecration of our flag could be provided at public expense," said Jim Phillips of Arizona's Legion organization.

### Two exhibits disturbing

According to museum Director Jim Ballinger, there were two of 81 works of art that people found disturbing.



"Once people have a chance to see the entire exhibit, I think that will help them understand" the content better, Ballinger said. "The artists here are just celebrating their First Amendment rights."

But, protesters removed exhibits they called obscene.

"I didn't want to see anyone stepping it," said 11-year-old Fabian Montoya, who picked up the flag from the ground and folded it. The piece, done by Dread Scott, is called "What Is The Proper Way to Display An American Flag?"

Someone else removed the flag from the toilet in Kate Millett's work. Later, museum officials replaced the flags.

Other works portray a flag with a bleeding baby painted on it and another with a Ku Klux Klan symbol on it. A flag-burning kit is also featured.

The exhibit will be open for the next eight weeks. The museum is holding a forum on freedom of expression in the arts on April 13.

The [Associated Press](#) contributed to this report.

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