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Abstract:

In North America, censorship is often thought of as inherently opposed to ideas of free speech and free expression, and is therefore deemed unacceptable. Despite this, censorship continues to pervade Canadian society in ways that go undetected by most people. Historically, state and religious concerns were the primary reasons for censoring art, but in recent years these sorts of justifications have become obsolete. They are now often substituted with arguments based on “the protection of children.” This paper considers children as visitors to art galleries (where they are exposed to images they might not normally be permitted to view) and refutes pro-censorship arguments in the name of their wellbeing. Pro-censorship arguments for the sake of children are often based on the faulty premise that children will be harmed or corrupted by viewing sexually-themed artwork, and that nude art is inherently sexual, or indecent. It is not suggested that artwork should never be censored, but rather that it ought to be the responsibility of parents/guardians. The arguments put forth here have been inspired by growing concerns at a number of galleries across Canada about the age of their audience.