

NOTE: Mapplethorpe - Leis Cincinnati Case

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USA TODAY

March 28, 1990, Wednesday, FINAL EDITION

## Mapplethorpe show fans flames in Ohio

BYLINE: David Zimmerman

SECTION: LIFE; Pg. 1D

LENGTH: 206 words

The controversial Robert Mapplethorpe exhibit has ignited another bonfire - this time in the heartland. The Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center, where the touring exhibit of 150 photos opens April 6, asked a local court Tuesday to declare that the exhibit doesn't violate state obscenity laws.

It's a pre-emptive strike, an attempt to head off law enforcement officials' threats to close the show.

The exhibit - which includes sadomasochistic and homoerotic images - sparked a nationwide flap last summer when a Washington, D.C., gallery got jittery about federal funding and canceled the show.

The conflagration spread to Congress, where debate continues over federal funding of controversial art.

In Cincinnati, "It's been a hot thing in the media," says the art center's Amy Bannister. Officials have attacked the show: Hamilton County Sheriff Simon Leis deemed it "criminally obscene" and said that if city police don't take legal action, "I will do it myself."

The exhibit has appeared without major incident in Philadelphia, Chicago, Hartford, Conn., and Berkeley, Calif. It moves to Boston June 14.

Mapplethorpe, a cult figure in New York's arts community who won national acclaim, died last March of AIDS.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

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