

ART

Moral Censorship And the Visual Arts

Australian Centre For Contemporary Art, The Domain, until October 15
Reviewed by Ronald Millar

IN those Swinging Sixties, and dazzled by glistening nipples, podgy thighs and mad smiles, I was reviewing a big show of Norman Lindsay's nudes. I'd just scribbled the words fourth-form fantasy when some extra thighs detached themselves from the walls of painted flesh and approached me. It was the curator; she'd been told to keep an eye on inflamed male visitors in case they were up to something. "I have to lock up these ladies for the night," she said warily, as if there'd been quite enough naughtiness for one day.

And not long after that, police here were made to seize an innocuous little Lindsay nude from a city gallery, while across town in another gallery, Whiteley's nudes were copulating furiously without hindrance. I thought of these, and similar examples of puritanical idiocy in the visual arts, when the weekend crowd at ACCA was looking at erections, pregnant women in the bath, strange tubular insertions in alternative orifices... Could this be the same city where Michelangelo's *David*, in replica form, was thought too obscene for Myer?

This exhibition is about repressiveness, not erotica. It is not even much about art: too much bad art appears. For example, Rosaleen Norton's "scandalous" work always looked hysterically funny, and still does; and one feels sorry for the Anglican bishop who felt he had to assert in court the "clean, formal quality" of Ron Upton's amusingly macabre but undistinguished *Oops*.

Mr Justice Kirby writes tolerantly (unlike the Rev. Sugden, once a National Gallery Trustee, who spoke of things "reeking with sexuality") about the need for dreams and the danger of treading on them. His catalogue note points out that the law reflects a morality that is basically anti-sexual; and one has only to glance at any video shop to see how the real obscenity of gratuitous violence is given more house-room than normal erotic fancies.

The show is about artistic

Exhibiting the right to choose



Rayner Hoff's *The Crucifixion of Civilisation*, 1914, from the ACCA exhibition.

freedom: to be explicit, titillating, silly or boring; and of course, freedom to look at, accept or reject the product. Curator Alison Carroll documents some of the most obtuse acts of official censorship. If she wants more for a bigger show, I can send them under plain wrapper.