

Style

Catholics decry crucified Santa

Painter's work raps commercialism

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — A painting depicting the crucifixion of Santa Claus drew angry complaints from a Catholic group, while the artist stood by his jab at Christmastime commercialism.

The painting in the front window of the Art Students League in midtown Manhattan shows St. Nick on a cross with brightly colored Christmas packages at his feet. Santa's red suit is unbuttoned to reveal a pale and sagging belly. His head hangs, and his bushy, white beard covers his chest.

It has been on display for a week.

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights sent a letter to the school Friday demanding that the painting be moved to a less-conspicuous place.

The group has complained in the past about magazine covers, films and music that it deems offensive.

Artist Robert Cenedella, who has taught at the students league

for 10 years, said the work satirizes holiday commercialism.

"I was not responsible for replacing Christ with Santa Claus. You can point the finger at capitalism," he said.

"Why use a sacred symbol to make that point?" asked William Donohue, the Catholic League president.

Cenedella said the school won't move the painting, which he painted in 1988 for an art show at the Saatchi & Saatchi advertising agency.

The symbol of the cross does not belong exclusively to the Catholic Church, said Cenedella, who is Catholic.

Andrew Lariviere, 33, a tourist from Providence, R.I., was taken aback by the painting. He said he agreed with Cenedella's message but not the method.

But Alberto Depaulitte, a 30-year-old editor who was at the arts school to sign up for sculpting classes, said the painting should stay where it is: "Christmas is synonymous with money. That is offensive."



Artist Robert Cenedella's painting of a crucified Santa Claus hangs in the window of New York's Art Students League on Sunday. (AP Photo)