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Dear Editor,

The article "Here is the list of art destroyed on UCT" (9 June 2017) presents an unbalanced discussion of the University of Cape Town's decisions regarding art. While the writer takes care to present selected statements from artists David Goldblatt and Breyten Breytenbach, UCT's right of reply is reduced to a hyperlink. The statement by Vice-Chancellor Dr Max Price was submitted to GroundUp with the understanding that the writer would select appropriate responses to the arguments made by the two artists. Dr Price's statement has instead been dismissed in a manner that may leave the reader with an unbalanced view.

It would have been a simple matter, for instance, for your writer to have pulled out the following statements by Dr Price in response to the artists' claims against UCT.

The article states: "One of the main concerns for both artists is what they call the university's disregard for the protection of the freedom of expression guaranteed to all South Africans under the Constitution." Dr Price responded on 9 May 2017 to a similar claim made by Professor Belinda Bozzoli, saying: "UCT reiterates that no artworks have been banned. The 70 or so artworks have only been removed or covered for safekeeping given the protests in February last year in which some 23 artworks and portraits were destroyed. This was necessary in line with the primary custodial responsibilities of the university for works of art in our care."

In response to Goldblatt's claim that selecting certain works for removal and leaving others is censorship, Dr Price said in his open letter to Prof Bozzoli: "Most of the works that have been removed for safe keeping were identified by the Council's Works of Art Committee based on their assessment of the risk to these artworks It is easy to see how removing these works would come across as censorship – but it was always made clear that they were removed temporarily for safe keeping."

UCT has stated publicly, in GroundUp and on other media platforms, that we value the contribution art makes to the public discussion of critical social issues. At the same time, we have explained that we recognise that the context in which some works of art have been presented on campus have served to reinforce, to a

significant number of observers, images of patriarchy and whiteness. For this reason, Dr Price explained that “it was strongly recommended that the university establish a gallery for the secure curation of works of art, particularly those that might be more controversial.... It should be clear that the university is as concerned about censorship and artistic freedom as our critics and the artists themselves, and that we have given careful thought to finding ways to protect that freedom, to use the art collection to educate and stimulate debate, and to address the challenge of transforming the institutional culture as reflected back to students and staff from the walls of the buildings, while also ensuring that we protect the works from damage or destruction.”

Comments attributed to Goldblatt and Breytenbach appear to accuse UCT of treating the burning of artworks on campus lightly. Nothing could be further from the truth. The university obtained a court order to protect property, including artworks, from destructive behaviour. We identified individuals who had participated in the burning and completed a disciplinary process that resulted in serious penalties, including expulsion. These actions provide a solid response to Goldblatt’s description of the “university’s disregard for the protection of the freedom of expression”.

UCT plans to begin engagements with all the artists whose works are in the university’s care. We are also engaging with staff representative bodies, to seek ways to address our curatorship responsibilities in a more inclusive manner. We view this work as an important step in transforming our institution to be truly reflective, in all ways, of our society.

Issued by: UCT Communication and Marketing Department

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