



## Art students file lawsuit over closed show

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**NEW YORK** — More than a month after city officials shut down their graduation art show, 18 masters degree students at Brooklyn College have filed a **lawsuit** in a federal district court.

The students, along with Karin Giusti, an art professor who advised the students for the show, filed the lawsuit last week saying that city and school officials violated their First Amendment rights and damaged their property. On May 4, just one day after the opening of their final thesis art show, officials from the city's Department of Parks and Recreation closed down the display because some works were deemed inappropriate for the show's space, a city-owned World War II memorial.

City officials said some of the art, which included a sculpture of a veiled hand holding a penis, violated a verbal agreement made six years ago between the college and the city that the work should remain "family friendly." Students said they were not informed of this stipulation until after the show was shut down.

The lawsuit also alleges that workers at Brooklyn College damaged some of the artwork when they moved it – without the students' consent – from the World War II memorial after the city revoked the college's permit to use the space. The students were barred from accessing their work for five days.

Marni Kotak, one of the artists and also the group's acting spokesperson, said that after a month, the students were glad to have the lawsuit filed.

"We're happy to take this stand, as a class and as a group, against this unlawful violation of our First Amendment rights and damage of our property," she said.

Among the defendants listed in the lawsuit are Brooklyn College, the City of New York, the city's parks department and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Brooklyn College is a member school within the publicly funded City University of New York system.

The students reopened their show May 24 at another location in Brooklyn, which John P. Hamill, communication director for Brooklyn College, referenced in a statement released by the college.

"While City University policy precludes us from discussing the specifics of any pending litigation, we are gratified that the college was able to secure a suitable alternative venue for the exhibit," he said.

The show closed last Friday.

—by *Whitney McFerron, SPLC staff writer*