

Thomas Hoving Testimony at John Lennon's Deportation Hearing

Q. Are you personally familiar with John and Yoko Ono and with their artistic work?

A. Yes, I am. I am more familiar with Mr. Lennon's work. I first came across Mr. Lennon in 1966 when as Parks Commissioner of this city I was at least in part responsible for having Mr. Lennon and the other members of the group the Beatles come to New York City and play at Shea Stadium.

I was the landlord of Shea Stadium at that time and went down to the area where the group was dressing and changing to meet them. I had heard a great deal about them and that's a phase which is not the phase of this thing today, that would be Beatlemania phase, and I went down to speak with the members of the group with my young daughter, who I think was worked up to a state of catatonia when she met them.

Mr. Lennon at that time talked to me for some significant moments, and was extremely sweet with my dumbstruck daughter and she began to talk after that. I don't think this is very pertinent part of the record here, but we discussed various things and I found him extremely forthright, intelligent, a man of certain grace and politeness, and was very much impressed with what I saw.

That was a different time and a different period. That's when Mr. Lennon was basically a performer, and I think what I would like to say now is that I do not believe that the basic character which quite clearly seemed apparent then has changed, but I feel that the artistic nature of Mr. Lennon has remarkably changed for the better.

There are few people in the last period of this decade in all of the arts, whether it's painting or sculpture, or architecture, or performing arts, who have contributed so much in an extremely deep and essential manner as Mr. Lennon. And I would say that my basic business in life, sir, is a person who I recognize, exhibit, and teach about artistic qualities.

That is the nature of my business and I believe that Mr. Lennon has achieved and is achieving now is of prime artistic importance and I would consider him a great resource to this city and to the country.

Needless to say, as we all know, artists throughout time have sometimes acted in ways that those of us who were more on the bureaucratic side of life might

consider a little bit strange. I dare say one of the great painters, George Latour whose show opened in the Louvre in Paris just the other day, might not have been able to sustain the inquiry of various well-meaning and very responsible rules which naturalization, after all his own town of Springerville, got together a petition and condemned him for acts of public annoyance which were nothing at his great artistic character were a fundamental part of it and of course his art remains universal.

I don't know that what Mr. Lennon has created is going to become of thing of universal quality, I don't think that is in issue, but I think as far as today's times are concerned, the work has been among the very best created and there has been an awful lot of good people in the last decade or two and he would stand among the top of that. I believe that the basic character of the individual is excellent and I have no doubt about his artistic ability and qualifications.

I would say if he were a painting, he would be hanging in the Metropolitan Museum, benevolently on the wall, and if he were to ever come to give a series of lectures of what have you on the various sides of art, he would certainly welcome to do that.

Of course, in his exhibits and performance makes a great contribution a very important part. The Metropolitan, by the way, has a performing arts section with several auditoriums.

SIO: I am a member of the Museum.

BY WITNESS: Were you able to get in to it? But as far as the work of Mrs. Lennon is concerned, I am not familiar with it, but I feel quite solid in my belief that she is very serious in it. Here is a picture.....

MR. WILDES: Mr. Hoving, I want to thank you very much for coming down here

SIO: You are not planning to deprive your nine year old child of this picture are you? You are just offering it as a view.

MR. HOVING: My Pleasure..Thank you.