

October 5, 2015

Amy Werbel, Associate Professor, History of Art Department

Application for Faculty Development Grant for Research to Aid Book Project: *Lust on Trial: American Art, Law, and Culture during the Reign of Anthony Comstock*

Dear Members of the Faculty Development Committee and Academic Affairs Office,

Near the end of his life, Anthony Comstock boasted in the 1914 Annual Report of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice that his efforts had led to the incarceration of nearly 4,000 perpetrators, who collectively served more than 586 years in prison. During his 42 years of service as Secretary of the Society and as Special Agent for the U.S. Postal Service, Comstock dispatched to incinerators more than 3,000,000 pictures, 106,000 pounds of books, and 88,000 newspapers he personally had judged to be obscene. He clearly took abundant pride in those numbers, but an obvious question arises from the privileged vantage point of hindsight: *to what end?* My forthcoming book, *Lust on Trial: American Art, Law, and Culture during the Reign of Anthony Comstock*, tells the story of how and why Comstock's heartfelt and painstaking campaign to rid America of vice was instead primarily responsible for creating the very forces that would make a mockery of his lifelong endeavors.

Although *Lust on Trial* is not primarily a biography, it will serve as the most comprehensive modern account of Comstock's life and work. In the course of eight years of research in more than 30 public and private institutions, I have unearthed for the first time a wide range of archival materials that document his story. The subtitle of my book, *American Art, Law, and Culture during the Reign of Anthony Comstock*, articulates the larger thematic concerns of the text. Beyond contributing new understanding of Comstock's actions and motivations, *Lust on Trial* also adds fresh insight to several interconnected fields that rarely are studied together, including literary, legal, and American studies, art history, and the theory of cultural regulation.

This past spring, I was fortunate to receive a faculty development grant that enabled me to travel to the Kinsey Institute in Bloomington, Indiana, and the National Archives and Records Administration in Washington, D.C. With those materials, I was able to complete two chapters of text and cross the half-way mark to finishing *Lust on Trial*, which is due at Columbia University Press on September 1, 2017. I currently am writing to request one last round of FDG funding for research on this project at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, November 19-22, 2015. I recently became aware of an important collection of illustrated books and prints held there, which I am eager to consult. My budget also includes some funds for purchase of reproduction rights for the illustrations in Chapter Four, "High Art and *Priapic* Aesthetics in the Courtroom: The *Muller* (1883) and *Knoedler* (1887) Trials. Rights and reproductions fees are a normal part of publication expenses for art history books. Unfortunately, academic presses rarely cover these expenses, and in my case I bear full responsibility for all of these fees. A Faculty Development Grant this fall would allow me to complete Chapter Four by the end of the January term, and Chapter Five in the spring. Chapter Six, the last in my book, already is written.

Please accept my thanks for your consideration of this application, Amy Werbel