

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR | LETTERS
THIS STORY APPEARED IN

The Boston Globe

July 15, 2012

Harvard's explanations for preventing display of Agassiz photos don't hold up to scrutiny

THE MORE Harvard authorities try to argue themselves out of the embarrassment caused by denying permission to my team of Swiss exhibition makers to reproduce racially degrading photographs commissioned by 19th century Harvard professor Louis Agassiz in South Carolina and Brazil, the more they pile up contradictions ("Harvard should openly discuss Agassiz's racial experiments," Editorial, July 5).

In their January e-mail, the only reason Harvard gave for denying the reproduction rights for four of the South Carolina daguerreotypes was the fact that allegedly the photographs in question had been designated "sensitive" by Harvard.

Later, in response to Globe reporter Mary Carmichael's questions, Harvard spoke of a "blanket policy against the display of exploitative images of naked people," although permission for reproduction of South Carolina daguerreotypes and Brazilian pictures had already been granted to the authors and editors of "Eternal Tour" (2009), "Rentyhorn Book" (2010), "(T)races of Louis Agassiz" and "Delia's Tears" (2010). This "blanket policy" has never been mentioned to us by Harvard.

The Harvard spokeswoman quoted in the Globe's editorial said that Harvard feared the Swiss exhibition makers "wished to blow up the sensitive images and print them on a large banner." This is far from the truth. In our January email, we had merely spoke of planning to "print on one roll-up banner four of the Louis Agassiz slave daguerreotypes."

Exhibition makers all over the world know "roll-up banners" as convenient tools to display texts and images on a surface about the size of a human figure. The question of "large" formats of reproduction has never been mentioned to us by Harvard.

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