

 JOHANNESBURG (in year 2008) - A South African court on Friday ordered four white former students to pay fines of nearly \$3,000 each for a video they made that humiliated black university employees and drew global attention to entrenched racism on the campus.

The young men had pleaded guilty to charges of illegally and deliberately injuring another person's dignity. The video, made in 2007, showed the five employees being forced to consume food and drinks that appeared to be tainted with urine. The students later described it instead as a "harmless" liquid.

The Spear, a life-size portrait of Jacob Zuma, by Brett Murray

The furore about the too private and yet not private enough Zuma painting by Brett Murray in the Goodman Gallery has interesting parallels with the past Reitz 4 happening at the Bloemfontein University. Then the four students were found guilty of 'illegally and deliberately injuring another person's dignity', and because of the indications of racism, it even led to the appeasing closure of the Reitz hostel.

The Zuma painting is one of a series of six called "Hail to the Thief II", which have a full go at the ANC for perceived troughing, oppression and criminal activities. They express ancient history, a million times repeated criticisms, and have hit the head lines only because of the inclusion of one picture which, for me, wearing my citizen's hat, obviously 'illegally and deliberately injures another person's dignity'. Giving the picture a title which connects it to a living person, President or not, (and somebody who apparently did not give express permission to the artist, even though the picture may even be considered flattering), transforms it for me from a merely debatable piece of art to a criminally offensive debatable piece of art. Interestingly, while the other five pictures send a clear coherent message, this one does not - except maybe, because it's the President, something to do with the whole nation.

That the picture was reportedly sold for R136 000 is an obvious outcome.

And lastly, do we really need the courts to tell us the difference between 'freedom of expression' and 'injury to another person's dignity', as has been requested by some commentators? But then, on the other hand, a nice juicy court case with sex, artistic political motives, ANC malfeasance and citizens' rights - what fun! It is so lucky we have the media to keep us informed. And at the end, maybe the ANC will find it a bit harder to win the next election?

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