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Poll Shows World Split by Starving Dog Exhibit

The controversial 'starving dog exhibit' that has dominated internet newsgroups over the last month has split the world into two distinct camps. New online research has provided hard evidence of the extent of this division of opinion and of the depth of feeling about the exhibit.

/24-7PressRelease/ - OXFORD, UK, May 16, 2008 - A new online poll by pet accessories specialist The Pet Extraordinarium has revealed that there is a massive divide in public opinion over the controversial 'starving dog' exhibit, which has generated huge global media coverage. While some two million people have signed an online petition protesting the artist who devised the exhibit, the new poll shows that as many people feel that he did all he could to raise awareness of an important issue as those who would like to see him sanctioned.

The controversy surrounds the work of modern artist Guillermo 'Habacuc' Vargas who, in October 2007, took a starving dog from the streets of Nicaragua and tied it in a gallery allegedly without food, water or bedding to die in front of the gallery's visitors. He later stated that the exhibit was intended to be conceptual art to emphasize the public's hypocrisy in making an issue of the starving dog in a gallery but ignoring the same occurrence on the streets.

Largely unreported at the time, a global storm blew up recently when Vargas was invited to represent his country, Costa Rica, in the Bienal Centroamericana Honduras multinational art exhibition. UK-based online retailer www.thetetextraordinarium.co.uk was one of the first to report a statement from Juanita Bermudez of the Codice Gallery in Nicaragua that the dog was in fact fed, watered and cared for and that it did not die.

The results of the new poll hosted on The Pet Extraordinarium's blog, The Extraordinary Pet Blog (<http://thepetextraordinarium.blogspot.com>) highlight the huge gulf in public opinion surrounding the artwork. While 23% of the respondents agreed that Vargas brought much-needed attention to the plight of street dogs in Central America and did all he could, 22% agreed with the polar opposite statement: "He's evil and should be subjected to the same treatment as the dog".

The full results are as follows:

How do you feel about Guillermo Habacuc Vargas' 'starving dog' exhibit?

He achieved his goal and brought much-needed attention to the issue; he's only an artist and did all that he could.....23%
He could have used the publicity to instigate more action after the event.....15%
He failed to bring attention to the subject as the message was lost among the hysteria.....14%
He did this as a publicity stunt for his own gain, not to assist the plight of street dogs.....11%
Despite the publicity they generated, his actions are in no way justified.....12%
He's evil and should be subjected to the same treatment as the dog.....22%
(876 respondents)

"The depth of feeling over this story has astounded us", said Director of www.ThePetExtraordinarium.co.uk Paul Sutton. "The article reporting the statement from the Codice Gallery has received over 45,000 hits from 127 countries around the entire globe at present, which highlights how animal lovers the world over have taken this story to heart. Comments on the articles we have run on the story have ranged from intelligent and considered comment to vehement anger and abuse."

"The diversity in responses to the poll is also revealing", adds Mr Sutton. "All of the options were taken directly from comments left on the blog, and we didn't expect the deviation to be so great. Particularly with the statement that Vargas is evil, for so many people to agree with this is astonishing. I find it a little disturbing that some quarters seem incapable of rational thought amidst their vitriolic outrage."

Guillermo 'Habacuc' Vargas' exhibit has dominated internet newsgroups, the blogosphere and social networking sites over the last month, with one armchair protest group on Facebook now having over 230,000 members. Vargas himself has reportedly received many death threats. The circumstances surrounding the exhibition remain unclear due to many conflicting media reports, and an investigation by the World Society for the Protection of Animals has so far not uncovered

its true nature, whether the dog was mistreated, whether it suffered or whether it did in fact die. As things stand currently, however, the artist will be representing Costa Rica in the Bienal Centroamericana this year.

The Pet Extraordinarium is a specialist online supplier of high quality pet accessories for dogs, cats, rabbits and small animals. It focuses on collars, beds, bowls and other accessories that are style and design-led and, established by two confirmed animal lovers, promotes animal welfare issues to customers and the general public. The Pet Extraordinarium was included in The Guardian newspaper's directory to the UK's best independent stores in December 2007.