

Controversy over 'obscene' art attracts more attention

The United States seems to finally have begun humming about one of its most precious resources that has often been ignored — its artists.

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) has come under such fire from some citizens that the general public is really beginning to pay real attention to the artists in their country.

Sure, not all the attention is good, but it's still attention.

It has gotten to the point at which it is tough to find a national news magazine that doesn't include an update on the controversy of "art or obscenity."

Stories about the NEA appear weekly, at least, in most urban newspapers.



Ellen Hobbs
Columnist

And, as a result, quite a few members of the American public have been exposed to and have learned about what Jesse Helms, the Rev. Donald Wildmon and others with the same views think should be stifled — "obscene" art.

And I, for one, get a kick out of it.

The big controversy here is that some people believe the NEA should quit giving funds to artists that offend some U.S. taxpayers.

Others say that by asking all artists who need funding (and that's a lot) to sign an agreement to limit the scope of what they can produce, they will be limiting the artists potential and make them afraid to create the art they really want to create.

According to Newsweek, a Gallup Poll showed that though 71 percent of people in the United States believe obscenity in the arts has increased, more people are now going to arts events than to live sporting events. Obviously, a large number of

Americans aren't all that offended by the arts.

And if that great a number of people are interested in the arts, the small number who are offended have no right to change the NEA's policies.

A number of people think that the idea of tampering with genes was bad, but if they got together and threw a big fit about it, would the U.S. government consider pulling all tax money used for college scholarships and loans for genetics majors?

No way. The government would laugh at the idea of taking away the opportunity from those who want to be a part of the field of genetics.

The majority of Americans are not speaking out against art in the United States. Still, the government officials in charge of the NEA are willing to take away, or at least limit severely the types of people who could receive, what amounts to scholarships for people trying to make a career in that field.

And that money comes from the same taxpayers as the ones who are paying unwillingly for genetics majors.

But what the public really needs to worry about is this: The people working against the NEA are promoting the idea that the art we are funding that they are offended by is *obscene*.

But those people are lumping obscenity and offensiveness together.

The courts have yet to define of obscenity, and therefore, laws limiting obscenity have always been dangerous to creative people or groups because they could eventually allow people to censor ideas they find offensive, not just pictures or individual pieces of art.

Ideas that some of the people attacking the NEA seem to find offensive are ideas about religion, sexual equality and sexual orientation — ideas promoted by subordinate groups in our society who are trying to fight for their rights as U.S. citizens.

We cannot start limiting our freedom to express our ideas.

If we are offended by something, we should tell people we are offended. We should speak out. We should protest.

But if we keep making policies and laws that limit other people's freedom to express their ideas, those policies and laws could be turned around on us and used to keep us from expressing our own ideas.

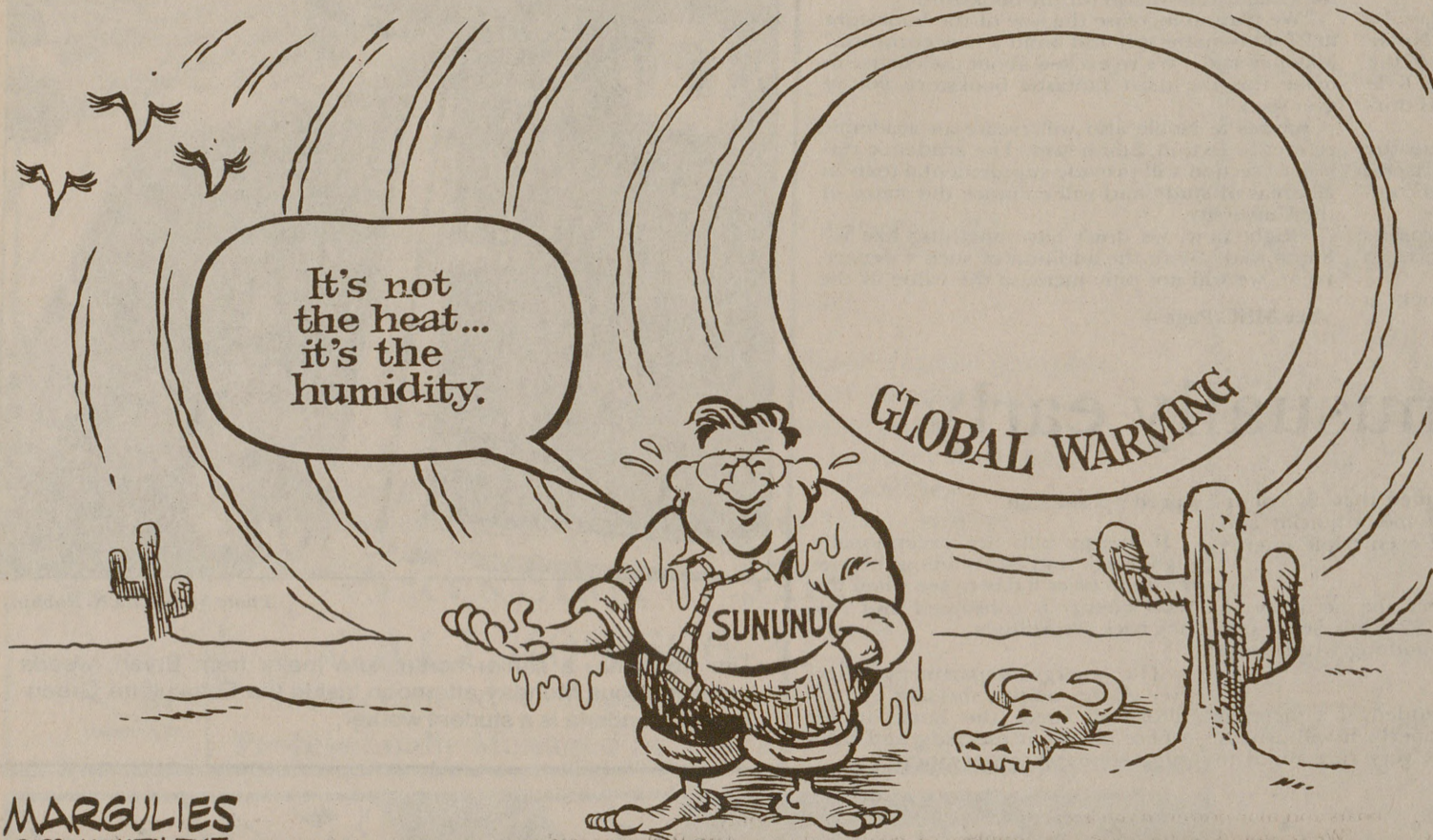
I have little faith that the leaders of the movement against the NEA and "obscenity" in art will ever think that

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what they do to the artists could backfire on them or those that come after them. People in favor of censorship rarely think about the long-term consequences, it seems, that their need to shape the moral integrity of others is immediately satisfied.

But it still makes me smile a bit when I think that now, because of their hard work, the art that offends them so is now being viewed more than ever.

Ellen Hobbs is a senior journalism major.



MARGULIES
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Mail Call

Chapter seeks veterans

EDITOR:

Former participants in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), 1933-42, are being sought by a CCC alumni group which is planning to honor the hundreds of thousands of men who built parks and so many other projects during the Depression.

Karl E. Busch, program director of a branch chapter of the National Association of Civilian Conservation Corps Alumni, is seeking contact with CCC veterans as part of this effort.

Send your name, address, CCC camp number and state (along with a large, self-addressed stamped envelope) to CCC museum, 3623 Rendale Dr., Jacksonville, Fla. 32210.

Busch hopes to encourage state and federal agencies to construct CCC museums in locations where the corps worked.

The idea is to honor these men and preserve the works of the CCC for future generations.

Carl Gidlund
Public affairs officer
U.S. Forest Service

View of poor distorted

EDITOR:

Rudy Cordova composed a misleading column in which reality was oversimplified to the point of distortion ("Poor don't deserve our handouts, pity," The Battalion, July 13).

His focus was so scattered as to render his piece incoherent.

He conflates the issue of economic aid for development of Third World economies with welfare assistance for the poor in the United States.

Aid for international development must be channeled properly so it builds an infrastructure for further economic development.

To label countries' requests for such aid a demand for a "handout," conjuring up the notion of beggars, is misleading.

Cordova then makes a cutting comment on Rev. Jackson's ubiquitousness and appearance at the Poorest People's Summit.

The truth is that there are millions of people living in poverty in our own country. But the implied argument that foreign aid should be reduced to help those poverty stricken people in the United States is now channeled by Cordova into a vituperative attack on these poor who just "sit around" and do not take advantage of the many opportunities in education and business that have been open for centuries.

If such grand equality exists, as Cordova believes, why was the Civil Rights Act of 1965 necessary and why do employers in their ads claim they are equal opportunity employers?

And Cordova, in classic manner, blames the victim. "They have no one to blame but themselves for their problems," rather than those responsible for establishing and maintaining an inequitable system.

Cordova in his final statements seems to attempt to link Jesse Jackson's inexperience for the job of president with a poor person's inexperience that might render them unable to get work — an astoundingly false analogy.

In Cordova's dream world, plenty of jobs exist, and matching person to task is easy.

In his final sentence "What a country!" the reader does not know whether he thinks the United States is crazy for permitting the "likes" of Jackson's presidential aspiration, or if it is worthy of praise for being a land of opportunity.

Tom Ahern
Graduate Student

Glossary was incomplete

EDITOR:

Please, Gary Gaither, do elaborate on the connection between the communist government in the Soviet Union and the First Amendment to the United States Constitution (Reader's Opinion, July 10).

And while you're at it, please explain why you failed to include terms such as self-righteous, paranoid, pseudo-moralistic and hypocritical in your glossary.

Could it be because they so aptly describe you and your far-right, conservative ilk?

Laura Bagwell '90

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(USPS 045 360)

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Opinions expressed in The Battalion are those of the editorial board or the author, and do not necessarily represent the opinions of Texas A&M administrators, faculty or the Board of Regents.

The Battalion is published Tuesday through Friday during Texas A&M summer semesters, except for holiday and examination periods.

Mail subscriptions are \$20 per semester, \$40 per school year and \$50 per full year: 845-2611. Advertising rates furnished on request: 845-2696.

Our address: The Battalion, 230 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843-1111. Newsroom: 845-3313.

Second class postage paid at College Station, TX 77843.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Battalion, 216 Reed McDonald, Texas A&M University, College Station TX 77843-4111.

FAX



by Brett Bridgeman