

The art of censorship

American preoccupation with sexuality hinders appreciation of artistic works



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Americans have always been a step or two behind where the subject of art has been concerned. With every movement from classical to modern art, the American art world has crests behind. Despite the American love of everything that is vulgar, sexual and nude, bare bottoms for art's sake have always been a source of Western prudery. Even in today's America men sexual innuendo permeates everything, art is turning Americans into prudish Victorians.

Take for instance the recent censorship tainting exhibit at Brigham Young University's Museum of Art. The exhibit, titled "The Hands of Rodin, A Tribute to B. Gerald Cantor," is a tribute to one of the leading collectors of French artist Auguste Rodin. Rodin is responsible for creating one of the most recognized sculptures in the world, "The Thinker."

However, other pieces of his work are being targeted by BYU bigwigs as not acceptable. One of the "questionable" works is called "The Embrace." The sculpture, one of Rodin's most powerful sculptures, depicts a male and female embracing. Campbell Gray, director of the museum, felt that the nudity of the pair would offend many viewers. The fact that this piece was yanked is not surprising considering the fact that BYU is a Mormon-run school.

However, nudity does not necessarily imply sin. After all, Adam and Eve were nude. Another pulled work was Rodin's "Saint John the Baptist Preaching." Once again, the problem was the prophet's lack of clothing.

The sculpture was intended to capture the prophet's mortality, but according to Gray "this conception of the prophet is made less than what we would regard as reverent or honorable. It doesn't show the prophet side of the man at all."

What Gray seems unable to grasp is that by depicting his robes, Rodin has caught the prophet in his most delicate. He is open, free and humbled. His nudity is merely a tribute to his position. He does not need fine robes, he merely wants to spread the word of his God. The problem with the BYU show, as well as

many Americans' attitudes toward the arts is that they do not understand the symbolism of the nude figure. Nudity captures the whole person; they are not shielded or guarded, but rather, are exposed, leaving their emotions to be the focus of the work.

Perhaps what Gray and other Americans must first understand is that nudity is not always something intended to shock.

It is not always about sex and scandal. Americans have simply made it so.

After ages of prudish eras, Americans have rebelled. They have scoffed at Victorians by bombarding every outlet with sex and skin.

These rebellions have existed with the intention of producing shock. The purpose has been to push the envelope.

However, where art is concerned, nudity does not usually take this position. Art is about aesthetics and leaving people with an image that will haunt them after their vision of it has passed.

For the artist, the human body is a beautiful, fluid entity.

The message is not usually seduction, but instead, contemplation. The viewer is forced to look past the material and look at the beauty, grace and fragility of the person depicted.

For centuries, sculpting figures in the nude was the norm, not considered some deviant act that warrants censorship.

Modern society is the culprit, and it is unfortunate that the Mormon leaders at BYU cannot appreciate the artist's higher meaning.

What is more unfortunate is that American society as a whole has so tainted the idea of nudity that people naturally feel ashamed or disgusted with naked bodies, even their own.

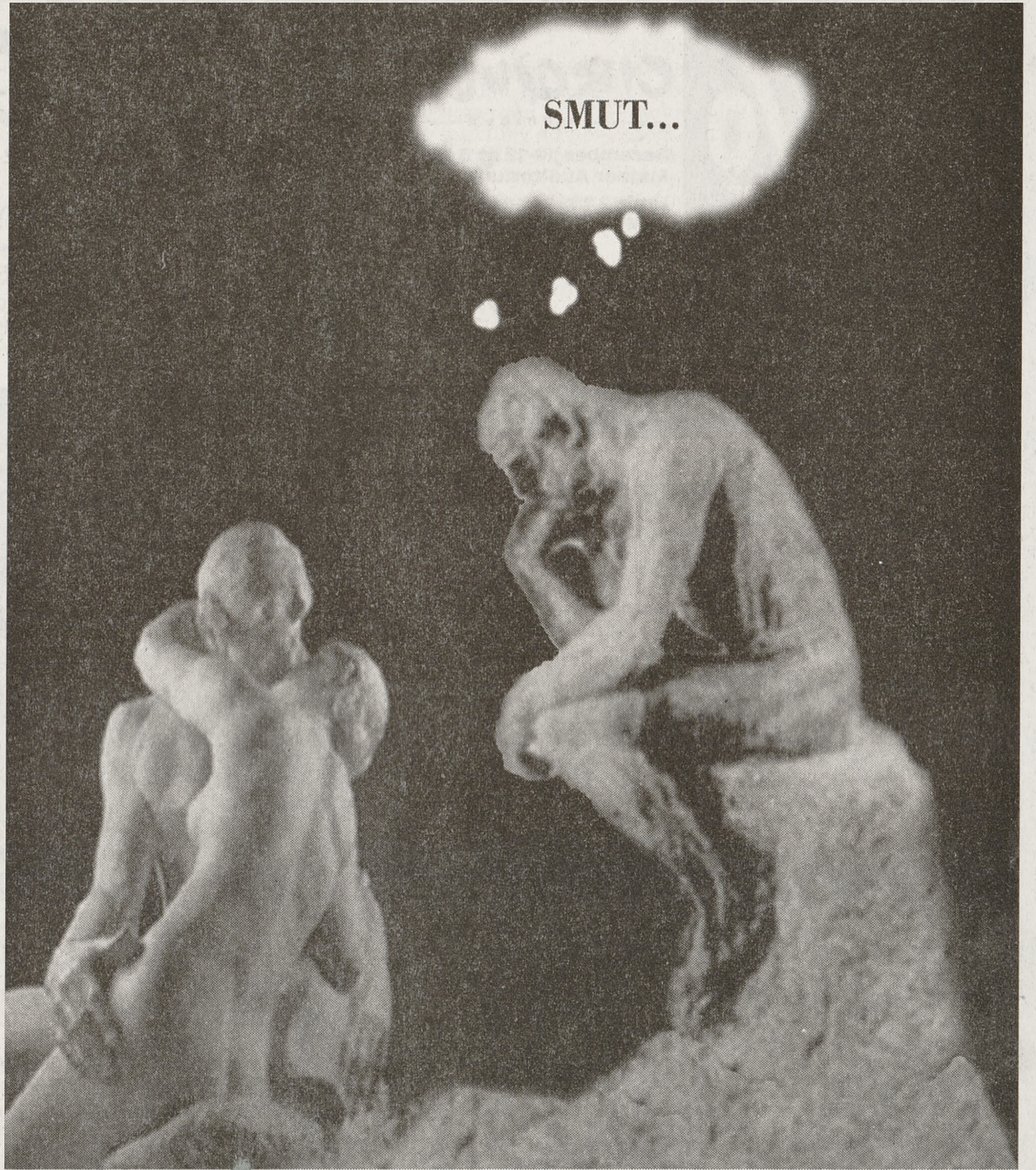
Not only does this attitude impair appreciation of the arts, but also manifests itself in increasing rates of eating disorders, sexually aggressive crimes and pornography.

Rather than censoring moving works, we should instead ask ourselves what it is about nudity that makes us so uncomfortable.

We should try to understand why it is that we cannot even look at a nude form without relegating it to something dirty or obscene.

In the end, the fault lies not with the artist, but with ourselves.

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Greeks, traditionally black fraternities should form united organization



ANNA FOSTER
columnist

Fraternities and sororities are a growing fact of life on the Texas A&M Campus. Members of the Greek system are in every college and many organizations on campus. Over 40 chapters of nationally recognized Greek organizations exist on campus, and the number of participants increases every semester.

Along with the obvious social aspects of Greek life, Greeks also perform service projects and raise money for charities.

Gender lines are blurred in professional and service fraternities, but social fraternities and sororities remain gender specific to men and women.

The fraternities have a governing body, the Inter-Fraternity Council. The sororities have a governing body, the Panhellenic Council.

Anyone looking at the Student Activities page on the A&M home page might think that would cov-

er all of the Greeks on campus, and wonder what the Pan-Hellenic Council was for.

Further investigation would reveal that the Pan-Hellenic Council governs the "historically" black fraternities and sororities, which might cause the observer to pause and say "huh?"

The Pan-Hellenic council was formed to govern the societies that formed when established fraternities would not accept black members.

The fact that it still exists reflects some very serious problems within the Greek system.

No fraternity or sorority would consciously discriminate against someone from another race or background. All of the fraternities and sororities make clear that everyone is welcome to join, regardless of color.

Apparently, one-on-one contact is accepted, but unification of the entire Greek system is distasteful to all involved.

If there is still the sort of racism going on in the Greek system that created the need for a separate board, this situation should be exposed and all leaders of Greek organizations should work towards correcting it.

If the entire Greek system is just complacent, and does not want to be bothered to change, this situation must also be examined and changed by the leaders of these groups.

It can not be denied that there are racial tensions all over campus and the nation.

Remaining separate will not improve the situation. The practice of "separate but equal" was declared unconstitutional in the Supreme Court case Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education, and common sense says the same thing.

Is there still a need for separate governing bodies? The historical differences that created the different organizations are the very things that would make the group's combined efforts impressive.

The possibilities of what the different groups could offer each other if they joined together are endless.

Due to the close-knit nature of fraternities and sororities, the opportunities for cultural sharing are multiplied. (This is part of the more-people-means-better-party theory.) For example, the pride that is fostered by a well-executed step show ("stepping" is an ingrained part of Pan-Hellenic fraternities) would be a bonus to any Greek.

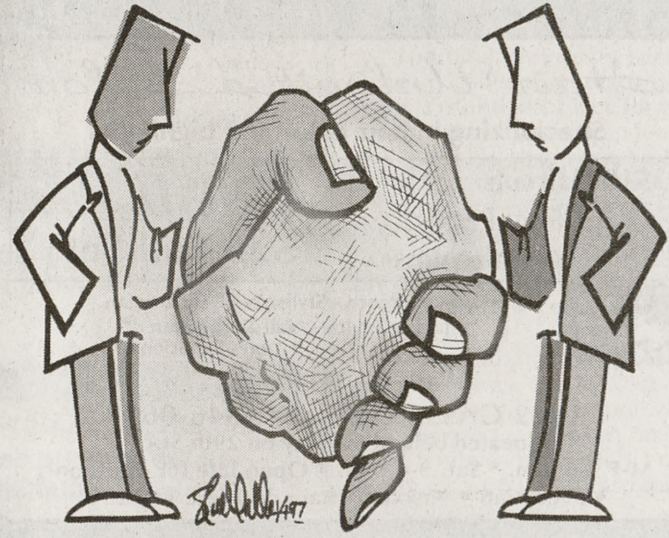
The increased manpower consolidation brings also means that more service projects like the Dance Marathon—a service project the three groups are sponsoring benefiting the Scott & White's Children's Clinic—can be performed.

More importantly, if one governing organization was formed, it would be an open statement that the Greek system is actively working towards racial harmony in the most basic way.

Complacency, or simply not wanting to "play together" is not a valid excuse for remaining separate.

Either all fraternities and sororities are Greek, or they are not.

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EDITORIAL

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QUICK FIX

Bonfire leaders should focus on maintaining success in the future

Time's up. After monitoring the activities at stack site for a week, Bonfire leaders have boasted a complete recovery. It seems that the students have cleaned up their act, and no further intervention is necessary by the University or campus leaders.

However, in making this hasty prognosis after studying the situation for seven days, Bonfire leaders should not forget to address the future. What will happen when the dust settles?

If Malon Southerland, John Gallemore and Kevin Jackson hide behind the security of their assessment, will no progress be made?

Unfortunately, there is no band-aid solution for a mentality that flaunts profane and sexually suggestive language at a cherished University tradition.

This should have been obvious when Bonfire-enthusiasts flooded The Battalion with Mail Call letters defending their behavior.

If the problem was merely a superficial condition, then workers would have gladly removed the slogans without hesitation, instead of launching a personal attack on a Battalion staffer.

This initial defiance should have alerted Bonfire leaders to the extent of the problem. Of course, the trio had immediate concerns which they effectively addressed. For the past week, the atmosphere at stack site has been transformed. Lewd "pots" are nowhere to be found, and spray-paint is kept on hand to cloak any suggestive phrases.

But the effectiveness of Bonfire leadership must stand the test of time. The efforts to preserve the image of this tradition should not stop after this week's progress.

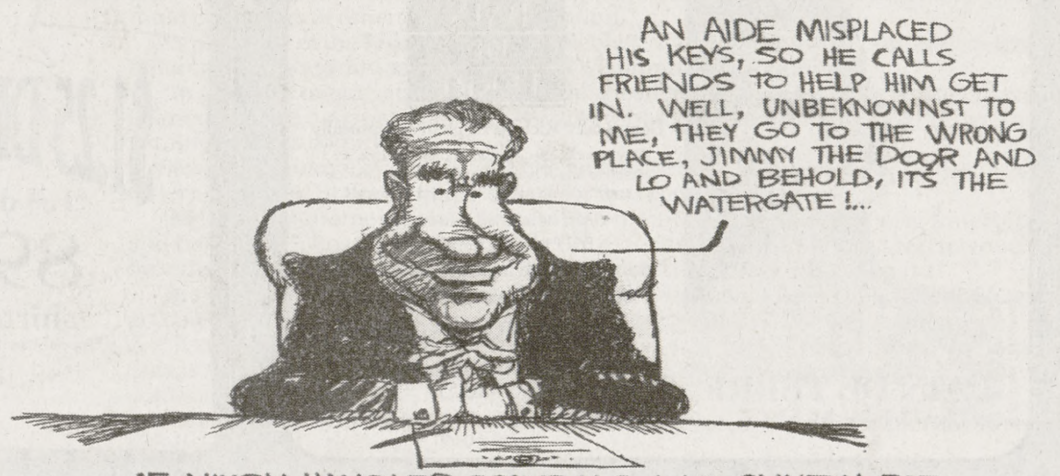
After stories have appeared in the Dallas Morning News and on the Associated Press wire, it is probable that Bonfire is under the scrutiny of outsiders. With this in mind, Bonfire leaders should not abandon their efforts so early in the game.

Southerland, Gallemore and Jackson should continue to "appeal to the common sense" of students, discouraging this kind of behavior.

Judging by the appearance of workers at stack site, the initial efforts have yielded positive results.

However, maintaining this status is more than a one-week project.

MIKE LUCKOVICH ATLANTA CONSTITUTION 1997



IF NIXON HANDLED SCANDALS LIKE CLINTON DOES