

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Offensive art still able to serve educational purpose

To the editor:

I didn't expect to be writing to the *Settler* twice in one semester, period—not to mention on essentially the same subject both times, but reading George Shifflett's letter prompted me to make a few observations.

First, Mr. Shifflett's characterization of the entire art department as having "giggled with glee when they realized the extent to which they had offended students here at Volunteer State" is a hyperbolic generalization which I, having had good working relationships with several members of the department over the years, find personally offensive.

Second, Mr. Shifflett's implied analogy between Sara La's subject matter and the hypothetical scenario of art containing "burning crosses, racial slurs" and so forth is shaky at best, but if one buys into it, one pretty much logically concludes that "all or nothing" is the only approach—no matter how much Mr. Shifflett claims that's not was he's advocating.

What Mr. Shifflett ostensibly advocates is that art should "expose, but not offend." In the best of all possible universes, I would agree.

And I would even go so far to say that any would-be artist whose goal *first and foremost is to offend for the sake of*

offending is irresponsible.

But the line between exposing and offending is not always that sharply or easily drawn.

For example, some people would look at Ms. La's charcoal sketch "Crone" and be offended by the completely open nude depiction of an old Chinese woman.

When I look at it, I'm offended also, but not by the nudity but by the foot binders the old Chinese lady is wearing in adherence to centuries of custom.

Do I blame Ms. La for affronting my sensibilities (as do those who are offended by nudity *per se*)? Or do I recognize that she is exposing me, however unpleasant may be her methodology, to an important truth?

Let's see if we can make a better distinction. Just as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. posited a difference between *violence* and *creative tension*, so can an offensiveness in art which *instructs by getting the viewer/reader/listener out of his or her comfort zone* be differentiated from another kind of offensiveness which *does nothing more than denigrate the human spirit*—such as Shifflett's scenario of a racist art exhibit (or less hypothetical, his *own* stereotype of Volunteer State's art department).

- Elkin Brown
Instructor of English

You can't always make sure people stay happy

To the editor:

In Mr. Shifflett's letter "Who gets to say it is okay to offend others?" he stated, "I'm sure the art department giggled with glee when they realized the extent to which they had offended a great number of students here at Vol state."

Well, I for one was quite offended by this statement. I took George's comment as direct slander and a social-sadist label. What right does he have to publicly offend me?

You may think I should not be offended by his comment. I may think he should not have been offended by Sara La.

We both have that right. The problem we run into when dealing with a large group of people is that, we want a single proclamation that can conform to everyone's standards. That's not possible.

Everyone is different and can not be pleased at the same time. Anything can be interpreted in any way; I could be offended by the way someone dresses

and lobby for a dresscode.

You could be offended by exhibitions in the library and write to the paper. Someone else could be offended by the children's art on display now. Are these examples all of equal merit and/or severity?

Of course, morally, we should all try not to offend people. At what point does our avoiding the offense of others start to hinder ourselves? At what line should compromise be drawn?

Can we expose without being offended? No. Someone can get offended by anything.

The only way to avoid offending somebody is to totally seclude yourself and be completely non-existent. That, of course, may still offend somebody.

It boils down to personal responsibility; If you don't want to be offended, then avoid and filter everything that might offend you. It is not everybody else's responsibility to take care of your feelings.

- David Upton
Vol State student, 20

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www2.volstate.edu/settler

and

www.myspace.com/thesettler

Don't criticize the displays of children's artwork

To the editor:

I am writing this letter in response to the letter published from Jonathan R. Taylor in which he objected to children's art being displayed in the Library.

Mr. Taylor stated that the pictures that children drew were "poorly drawn pictures with no redeeming aesthetic or symbolic qualities" and that "The sooner children (or at least the ones who can't draw) realize this the sooner they can stop fooling themselves"

After reading this letter my first response was "I hope this man never works with or has children" because obviously he does not believe that children can learn.

His idea of telling a child to stop trying something because they can't do

it and further telling them that they will never be any good at it is damaging to thier self esteem and in plain english just wrong.

Now granite, we are all not artist and some of us may never be, but who are you, Mr. Taylor to assume that you can judge the potential of a child by looking at one early piece of art they have created.

Furthermore I would like to question the training you have in the field of art that would make you able to critique it; as you have so harshly done with these children.

I have seen no credentials published by your name and therefore believe that your opinion is not only based on your ignorance of children and thier abilities, but that you have no education in the field of art that would make you

qualified to render a judgement to the public about the value of children's art.

I would like to tell you about the true value placed on the art that is displayed in the library at this time.

It has symbolic value to the child that created it, for it symbolizes thier best work at this time and the pride they have put into thier accomplishment.

It has value of redemption to the art teacher that spent countless hours working with these children helping them learn different art techniques and mediums.

It has asthetic value to any and everyone that has a child or has worked with children because they know the thought and effort that a child places on thier art and can see the beauty in that.

This art also has the value of positive reinforcement because the children can now take pride in thier work being displayed and it may further inspire thier potential.

So in closing I would like Mr. Taylor to know that just because his uneducated eye does not see value in the art that is displayed, that does not mean it is not valuable.

I would also suggest that Mr. Taylor check into the many art classes available at Volunteer State because it may open his eyes to the real value of art and if that does not help him then he could take his own advice and "if you don't like them, just ignore them".

- Barbara Michelle Frederick
Mother of four budding artist, and
Education major