

# PERSPECTIVES

## Consequences Growing Clearer, But Momentum May Be Too Much

Lisa Pope  
Editorials Editor

We're going to war. We're not going to war. Heads, tails, winners, losers, bluff, counter-bluff, "we're bigger than you are," "Oh yeah?," "Yeah!" Call it diplomacy in the modern age. But as the uneasy balance has continued to teeter and sway, a curious thing has happened. The forces of the Great American Media have moved in, adjusted their weight and launched their own form of the blitz. Flipping through magazines and switching channels, one

might easily think that the battle already started and you just missed the first shot (all that egg nog and fruitcake at Christmas, you know). We've seen soldiers depart, soldiers arrive, soldiers at Thanksgiving, soldiers at Christmas, mothers and fathers leaving their families, gas mask drills, air raid drills... The list could go on and on. Everyone from Doonesbury to "48 Hours" to "Real Life with Jane Pauley" has jumped on the George Bush/Saddam Hussein bandwagon. It's the usual American information overload—you should recognize such past victims as the

Simpsons and Earth Day (now residing somewhere in the slightly dimmer recesses of the mind).

Only now, the symptoms are the same but the consequences more serious. Of course, information is a wonderful thing, and it's nice to know that the media machines won't let a single statement or event pass by unnoticed: Dan Rather and Ted Koppel stand like the New Age Keepers of the Gate. But, ironically, all this attention not only informs us, it dulls us too. Hear the word "war" often enough and it's easy for it to become a fait accompli. Hear the

deadline of January 15 often enough and you'll expect something to happen—you'll want something to happen. In a demented kind of way, you'll be let down if that vague "something" never materializes. Soon, reports of the "soldiers in the Middle East" aren't something to wonder at, but merely facts of life.

And you don't think so much about other options or puzzle over what it's all about. You just get caught up in the momentum—the machinery of war that's been turning its wheels for thousands of years. And you forget to ask why.

## Artists and Art Need NEA

Benjamin J. Kealy  
Guest Writer

Do you trust the government to decide what is offensive to you? Jesse Helms and other ultra-conservative senators recently led an attack on the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA); their goal was to prevent the NEA from supporting so-called offensive art. The controversy has its roots in a case filed in Cincinnati, where a gallery owner was brought up on obscenity charges for displaying the photos of Robert Mapplethorpe. Out of an extensive exhibition, five photos were singled out as the offensive material.

Jesse Helms proposed Congressional control over the NEA including an anti-obscenity pledge that artists would have to sign in order to receive their grant. I oppose Congressional restrictions on how the NEA awards grants.

Would you show your child photos of a man shoving the butt end of a bullwhip into his anus? It is highly unlikely, if at all

likely, that you would. Child pornography is equally unacceptable to most people. These are the type of photos that started the controversy. The existence of these photos is due to the existence of the NEA and the fact that the NEA awarded Robert Mapplethorpe a grant. Without a grant it is hard to say whether Robert Mapplethorpe would have ever taken the photos but the American people would not have paid for them. Why should the American people support artists like Robert Mapplethorpe?

What we don't talk here about are the other photos in the Mapplethorpe exhibit, including extraordinary photos of flower and people. Art critics have described the photos as the work of a genius. So, how we

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## Taxpayers Shouldn't Foot Bill

Joseph Champion  
Guest Writer

Art, as defined by Webster's New World Dictionary, is the "human ability to make things; creativity of man as distinguished from the world of nature." Their definition of obscene is "offensive of one's feelings of modesty or decency; lewd." Combined, these terms lead to controversy.

This happens when artists like Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano produce things labeled as "obscene art." Mapplethorpe has taken several obscene photographs involving homosexuality and Serrano made "Piss Christ," the picture of a crucifix floating in urine. This "art" offends many taxpayers who bear the cost of funding. Using government funding to subsidize obscene art is wrong.

However, others have a different view of art. They say that a government which denies funding for art is abetting censorship. The right to express yourself freely without censorship is granted in the first amendment to the Constitution of the United States. Many believe that the fact that art offends should not be a factor in whether an artist gets government funding. As freshman art major Jessica Poland said, "If it offends, it affects." Arguing her point, she added, "Art should make you question personal beliefs. This will make you a stronger person." Poland also believes that art will never take new directions if the government subsidizes only "pretty pictures." Artists like Mapplethorpe and Serrano have made pictures that may not be "pretty" but are thought-provoking. Funding art encourages self-expression and ingenuity. Therefore, many believe that government funding for all spectrums of art is worthwhile.

However, the people who believe in

government funding for art that's offensive are wrong. They are overlooking the fact that some taxpayers do not want to pay for offensive art. These taxpayers feel that artists like Mapplethorpe and Serrano have a right to express themselves, but not with public monies. These artists have a right to display their art; no one is denying that. Therefore, the idea of art censorship is ludicrous because the art is not censored; it is just not publicly funded. Poland's idea that art will not take new directions if the government subsidizes "pretty pictures" is false. Salvador Dali opened doors for artists without being offensive, thereby defining a new style of art in the 20th century.

Taking the art issue further, Robert Samuelson states that taxpayers should "get government out of the arts." In his Newsweek article "Highbrow Pork Barrel," Samuelson believes that the National Endowment for the Arts, the NEA, should be abolished. He says that "public benefits are meager," and that "the good goes primarily to the artist and his relatively small audience." Samuelson thinks that government money can be spent in other ways that benefit society. After all, in 1989 the NEA was granted \$169 million by the U.S. government. The NEA in turn granted \$15,000 to fund Andres Serrano's infamous "Piss Christ." Funding this exhibit only benefited Serrano and the small amount of people who viewed it. The money could have been used for more legitimate needs: for example, reducing the national debt and homelessness.

Art is a major area of controversy. People have different views of what art is and whether or not it should be publicly funded. I think the government should be taken out of art altogether. I am not aiding censorship—any art has a right to be on display—but I am simply saying to leave art to private funding. Then artists like Mapplethorpe and Serrano can produce art without offending taxpayers who don't support them. Therefore, the tax revenue can be better spent serving the entire population, not just the arts community.

### Head to Head

*The NEA has come under scrutiny lately, primarily for its controversial sponsoring of such artists as Serrano and Mapplethorpe. Here we present two views on the organization and its function in the arts.*

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