

Community celebrates art, sunshine at graffiti wall unveiling

By Kylie Gilliams
STAFF WRITER

More than just unusually balmy weather drew the small crowd to the sun-soaked nook near the woods. Dogs splashed in the lake as people gathered to celebrate the official unveiling of the Free Speech Mural Wall on Feb. 8.

The triangular wall, located on the edge of the lake behind the old tennis courts, is the brainchild of senior Sam Sklover, a sculpture major.

"My goal is for it to get much use and for people to explore their creativity," said Sklover. "I want people who have no experience to enjoy it (as well). Graffiti needs practice and you need a place to practice where you can't get a felony."

The wall provides a place for people to hone their spray-painting skills as well as space for tagging without repercussions.

Though this is an important aspect of the project, promoting self-expression is another major

goal.

"The only purpose for it is for people to come express themselves on it," said a recent alum who did not want his name printed. "They can put stuff up for people to see and not worry about consequences, and if someone doesn't like it, they can go over it."

Though the opening was this past Sunday, people had already tagged the wall, including two rival "graffiti crews" who spray painted and whitewashed over each other's designs in an escalating tag war.

"In graffiti, the rule is if you can't do it better, don't cover over," said Sklover. However, he added, "it's considered flattery to have a piece put over yours, if it's good."

The response to the wall was generally positive, although the nature of it drew some criticism.

"I think it's an interesting idea, but I think it removes the illicit nature of spray paint," said first-year Brian Jones. "It makes it less fun and sort of gentrified."

Despite this, Jones was among those who took advantage of the provided spray paint and tagged the 12 1/2-foot-tall wall.

Sklover constructed the wall last semester from pressure-treated wooden boards attached to frames that were nailed to posts which had been sunk into concrete. About 30 people from varied social groups, from artists to athletes, helped with the wall's construction.

"One thing I learned is that the art department can count on the football team," said Sklover.

Members of Senate, which funded the project, expressed concerns about possible profanity and vulgarity on the wall, but so far there is no evidence of offensive tagging. Lynn Grissett, a senior at UNCG, was impressed by the nature of the graffiti.

"Seeing this, it also makes me appreciate graffiti more because most graffiti I've seen in cities is some offensive stuff," said Grissett. "But this stuff seems more positive, so I really do appreciate it."



Sam Sklover, senior, stands in front of the graffiti wall he constructed. Sklover built the wall with the goal of providing a place for students to creatively express themselves.

CLAIRE OOSTERHOUDT/GUILFORDIAN

RUSHDIE

Politics and literature, Sir Salman Rushdie's evening at the Bryan Series

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contested ground, "The moment you live in a society that oppresses you by changing your narrative, there is tyranny."

He pressed on, telling the audience that no one owns the stories of our lives and that nations should not be allowed to silence artistic expression. He spoke of the duty of the writer to tell the stories of their times, referring to the fact that very little was written about British imperialism while that empire was busy consuming countries.

"The voice of the artist belongs to the artist," said Rushdie as he ended his talk. "That is how I see it."

Rushdie then responded to

audience questions that were moderated by Beverly Abel from North Carolina Public Radio-WUNC. The last question was, "what is the best way for the West to respond to terrorism?"

"They are our enemies and they have to be defeated and destroyed," Rushdie responded.

Audience reaction was an admixture of hearty cheers and a stunned silence.

"I was surprised at his encouragement of American aggression against terrorism," said sophomore Andrew Bracken.

Center for Continuing Education Dean Rita Serotkin supported Rushdie's position.

"I agree with his statement. Terrorism needs to be destroyed if we are ever to have world

peace, and its destruction does not have to be violent. The intent of terrorism is to commit violence against civilians and to cause maximum harm and fear," said Serotkin.

"To my mind the deaths that result, no matter where or whose, are murders; and a civilized world should accept no justification for such behavior."

Rushdie hastily added that "we should be friends with our enemies" without further comment, as his time on stage had run out.

He received another round of applause for that declaration; however, the mood of the evening had already taken an abrupt turn.

"I don't think anybody would disagree that terrorism is a bad

thing," said Diya Abdo, assistant professor of English. "Perhaps there are other ways to deal with terrorism that don't involve destruction and violence."

"His statement was too risky; he did not address American foreign policy or why terrorists come into existence," said Abdo, "as if terrorism is just a result of what happened in that country and not what influenced them to be terrorists."

"To ask Rushdie about political security issues that even the countries involved have not figured out yet does not address the rationalization of terrorist organizations," said Abdo. "It implies that terrorism is ahistorical and does not arise from prior conflict."

Amal Khoury, assistant professor of peace and conflict studies, also questioned the accountability of the moderator.

"I think the responsibility lies with whoever chose to ask him that question with no regard to time constraint," said Khoury. "That question could have been the subject of a whole different lecture."

Rushdie ended the evening signing books and posing for pictures in the lobby of the War Memorial auditorium.

As the audience streamed towards the exits, CCE student and first-time Bryan Series attendee Johnny Welch said, "I thought it was brilliant, and I look forward to what the Bryan Series has to offer next."