

Opinion

Art world crossed line, brought limits on self

It was a clash of the Titans — the sanctity of the artist to "paint what he sees" came face to face with the unpredictable demands of government funding. Our own Sen. Helms, in leading the efforts to reduce National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) funding in the amount used to sponsor two sexually explicit and religiously offensive exhibits, stands convicted of violating the ages-old prerogative of the artist.

Because I am going to find for the defendant in this case, let me explain that I am myself an aspiring artist, a writer. I have three unpublished books

and numerous essays at home, if anyone is interested. Furthermore, two years ago I quit my job to write and to study writing. Obviously, I support the prerogative of the artist.

However, as someone who has worked full-time for years and who continues to work to support himself, I also support the rights of the taxpayer. And the most obvious argument for the NEA funding cut is that, while the artist can create whatever he or she chooses, the taxpayer should not be forced to pay for it. While this raises the undesirable specter of our senators deciding which

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art is "worthy" of our patronage, it is nevertheless a legitimate point.

Freedom of expression is merely one of the rights inherent in a government in which the people are the rulers. And if the people are the rulers, they have the right to grant or withhold funding as they please, even if they are doing so because they are uneducated dullards

who cannot see the artistic value in a photograph of a man dressed in full sado-masochistic leather regalia.

I'll admit that I'm not particularly comfortable with the idea of taxpayers exercising this right in a specialized area such as art. But their right to do so sprang from the same rationalist philosophy as did freedom of expression — the philosophy that the individual is supreme. Argue against one right and you undermine the other.

With the two legitimate rights colliding (and with the one holding the purse strings the probable winner), what

can we say about the unsettling prospect of the government controlling art? Does the NEA funding cut mean, as a museum asserted in a full-page ad, that we are letting "politics kill art?"

Of course not. Art does not live or die by government funding. It's ironic that the art world is utilizing the same type of rhetoric for which "moralists" such as Jesse Helms are so often attacked. The art world should be careful: the contention that the power to cut funding is the power to destroy would not lead to more funding, but to a separation of Art and State allowing no

funding at all.

Like it or not, we are stuck with a hybrid. We will support art, and we will attach as few strings as possible, but there are lines that cannot be crossed without awakening even the great silent majority. Those lines are pretty far out on the horizon of good taste, and they are clearly visible. In crossing them, the art world has brought this situation, and the dangerous precedents it sets, on itself.

Dale Berryhill is a graduate student in English from Raleigh.

Equal rights groups need to practice equality

"Call it upward mobility/But you've been sold down the river/Just another form of slavery/And the whole man-made white world is your master," are lyrics of Tracy Chapman's "Material World." Chapman writes powerful, politically-relevant and life-relevant music. That is what first brought me to her, and that is why the lyrics of the "Crossroads" album bother me. They bother me because I, a nonblack person, am excluded from Chapman's message — she is not talking to me. Nor am I her intended audience, "Born to Fight" against the forces which erode at individuality and spiritualism, or as Chapman would have it, make her "into white man's drone."

One must concur with Chapman's picture of a society losing humane values to consumeristic frenzy and greed. One must concur also that a society is largely the product of its empowered class. And yes, if we look at who is most powerful in our society — those few holding the reins of multinational corporations — we see white men. But is it not the case that each of us who neglects his or her humanity to pursue the "Material World" (including the majority of white men not of "the elite" and perhaps especially those who are) has been "sold down the river"? And aren't we all "Born to Fight" against this?

As many of us should know from experience, exclusion is an active form of prejudice. Chapman is guilty of racial exclusion. She has an important message for everyone, but implicit in her song is "I only care enough to say this to you if you are black." I don't believe that this is intentional — but there it is, nonetheless.

Chapman is, of course, not the first individual to take a stand for equality and then falter in this regard. Indeed, this seems the rule rather than the exception for equal rights groups as well. Why is it that the very people who should be most sensitive to discrimination unhesitatingly label their interest group in a manner which isolates themselves and excludes others?

The Black Student Movement, for instance, carries to my ear connotations of "blacks vs. whites for the rights of blacks." Why exclude non-blacks? Why say, "It's us against you, buddy, whether you're against us or not"? Why not "Persons Against Racism" or "Persons for Racial Equality" — aren't these labels which really state the issues? Aren't they titles which will welcome all proponents and will not further distance the prejudiced with militant isolationist overtones?

The objection holds for organiza-

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tions seeking gender equality as well. To attain this goal, we meet in "Women's Forums" and "Women's Groups." Why not simply "Persons for Gender Equality"? A magazine entitled Ms. is the most salient voice for gender equality. The intention is good — but is this a welcoming title for male proponents of gender equality? Does Ms. magazine want you if you happen to be a Mr.?

The immediate goal of all "equal rights" organizations is the legal assurance of basic rights and attainment of economic and political equality. But is it not also the vision to have people approach one another with the mindset: "This is a person whom I will judge on the basis of his or her behavior"? Why then continue to set ourselves apart and define ourselves as "women's groups" or "gay groups" or "racial minority groups," as if some meaningful characteristic prevents us from working with others for the attainment of these goals?

It has been argued that the non-oppressed cannot comprehend what it is to be oppressed, and race/gender/sexual orientation-exclusive groups constitute an opportunity for the oppressed to vent steam against "them." If by "them" we mean the narrow-and-closed-minded, then pre-business "complaint sessions" may be helpful, therapeutic. If by "them," however, we mean men at meetings for gender equality, or straights at meetings for equality across sexual orientation or whites at meetings for racial equality, then it becomes imperative that "they" be included. For when the oppressed meet to slander and stereotype other racial/gender/sexual orientation groups, they not only lose sight of the real forces against which they contend, but they put themselves on equal footing with their oppressors.

We cannot be effective in anti-racist efforts if we are pro-racial minority to the extent that we become anti-white; we cannot be effective in attaining gay and lesbian rights if we are anti-gay to the extent that we become anti-straight; we cannot be effective in the fight for gender equality if we become anti-male. To open an equal rights organization to everyone willing to fight for those rights is not only internally consistent, but effects a more focused, diverse and stronger political entity.

Cynthia Conrad is a graduate student in psychology from Chapel Hill.



CIA undermines our ideals of democracy

Let's explore the big question for a moment. What does it mean to be an American in today's post-industrial world? There are many ideals to which we claim to adhere. Democracy, freedom, and of special interest to all in the University community, the open exchange of ideas. Never has a better system of government been envisioned than one in which the people select their government and the government remains responsible to the people. We also hold it to be true that all people have a right to live free, to decide for themselves how they want to conduct their lives. Naturally this is a restricted right, but only to the point that it maximizes everyone's freedom. And then there's the right to open exchange of ideas. This includes the right to dissent or to agree. This includes freedom of the press. Surely these are some admirable ideals.

I want very much to believe in these ideals and in America. But the ideals ring hollow for me now because the dream of America they once held up has turned sour. What we have now calls itself democracy, freedom and exchange of thought, but scratch the surface and we find it is just not so. But you have to want to

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formation is planted to manipulate Congress into playing into their hands.

America touts itself as a beacon of democracy at the same time that the CIA acts to destroy democratically elected governments. Chile and Guatemala know the pain of having their chosen leaders assassinated only to be replaced by decades of repressive regimes in the name of democracy. U.S. foreign policy is designed to keep the rest of the world poor and unstable so we can exploit them. When socialist countries are targeted it is not because they will invade the United States, but because they want to break this cycle of slavery.

And what of the exchange of ideas? Where the freedom of the press and the CIA collide, it is always to the detriment of the free press. Editors face long-term imprisonment if they break a story on the CIA, even if it's completely verified. And the American public is treated much as is Congress. Information about activity is withheld, and often misinformation is released in its place. All this is done under the categorical excuse of national security. Could it be that if Americans were ever faced with the full truth of what has been done in our

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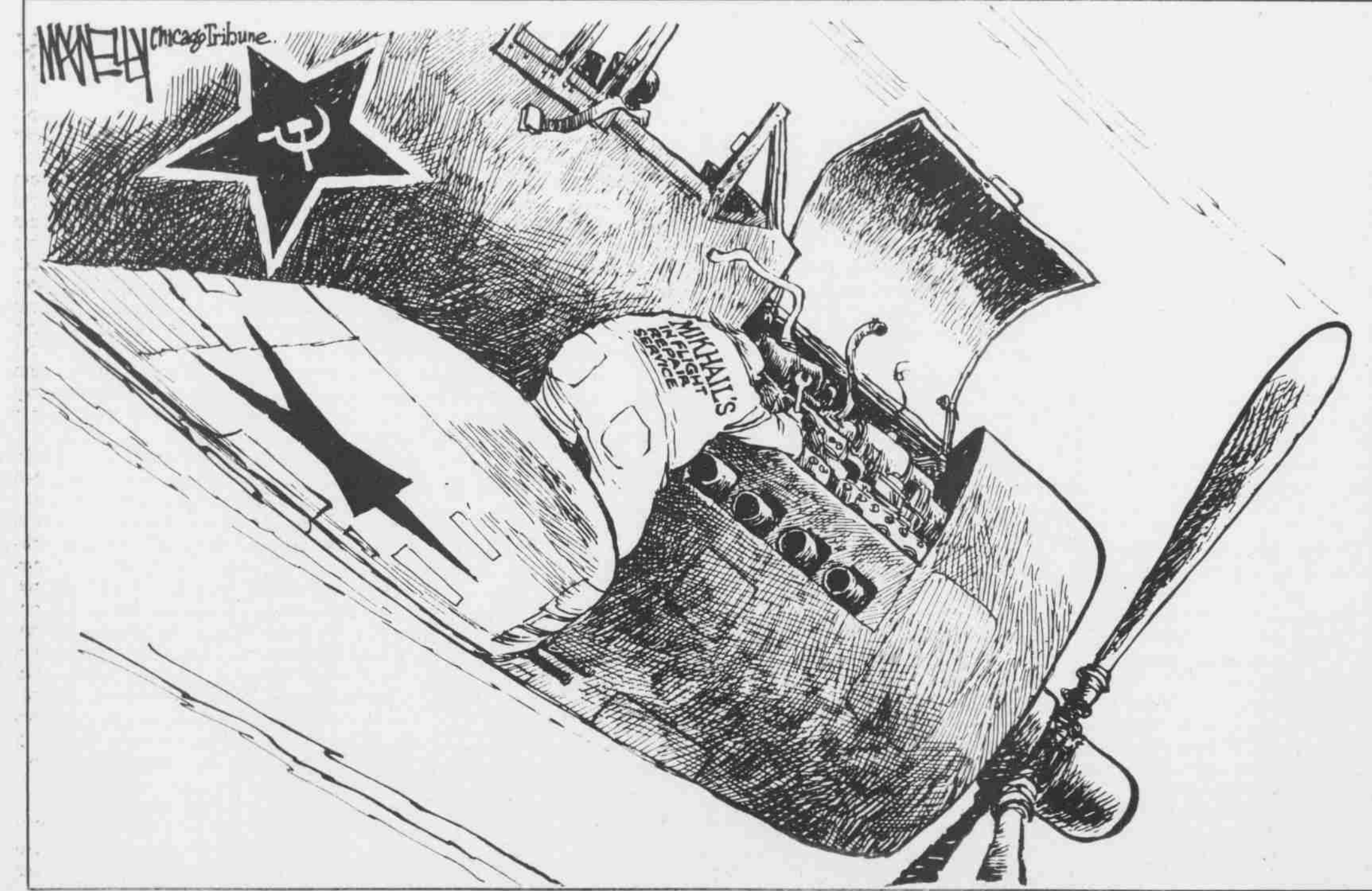
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names, then the existing government would be truly in danger, from within?

It is time to step in and reassert the ideals on which this country was founded and to reinstate them as the primary ideals by which we live. In order to do this we must not shrink back from scratching the surface and honestly facing the mess we have created. Either America will eat itself or the rest of the world will eventually rise up and shake us off.

The following is addressed specifically to Chancellor Hardin: We have made a good faith effort to encourage discussion of these issues on campus. Twice we have presented appeals to you to recognize the benefits of an open debate with the CIA. The one made last winter was never given any response whatsoever. Another made a month ago has yet to receive any reaction from you. We insist that you recognize the precedence for this debate. Our government must be held accountable to the will of the governed, and your silence adds to the barriers between the two.

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Reappointment of Cell shows apathy of administration

The pending reappointment of Gillian Cell as dean of the College of Arts and Sciences raises serious questions regarding this administration's commitment to the minority presence at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Since 1985, six black tenured/tenure track faculty members have been appointed to the College of Arts and Sciences, and six have taken positions at other universities. This net gain of zero black faculty in four years is an abomination which the new administration does not have to tolerate.

Two existing mechanisms which could assist the dean with minority recruitment are the Minority Post-Doctoral Fellowship Program and the Curriculum in African and Afro-American Studies. Since 1984, 32 minority fellows have been associated with the College of Arts and Sciences, yet only two have been hired in tenured/tenure track positions. Meanwhile, the Curriculum in African and Afro-American Studies has three or four vacant faculty lines.

Compounding a dismal record in minority recruitment is Dean Cell's problematic relationship with black

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students. To recommend her for reappointment is to suggest that on this campus administrators are rewarded for poor race relations and for failure to implement a viable affirmative action policy.

Instead of diffusing the responsibility for increasing the minority faculty presence, the administration needs to institute a system of incentives and rewards which department chairs will take seriously. If deans do not monitor such a system, it will not work. Dean Cell's record demonstrates that she is either unwilling and/or unable to hold department chairs accountable to a strong affirmative policy. If the chancellor is genuinely committed to a pluralistic community, he must reconsider reappointing Dean Cell.

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