

The Pendulum

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Student voice essential to maintaining liberties

With the controversy and national attention recently devoted to free expression on college campuses throughout the U.S., there has seldom been a better time to propel the issue of censorship to the forefront of students' attentions. Perhaps the issue at Elon should not be a condemnation of silenced voices, but an appreciation of those that are heard.

An Oct. 3 article in USA Today by Mary Beth Marklein discusses accusations of liberal campuses silencing conservative student viewpoints, particularly in media organizations as well as classroom settings.

While stories published in The Pendulum are not always agreeable with all readers, they are designed to represent a spectrum of student views as well as polar opposites. If stories inspire and inform, good. If they spark critical thinking around campus walls and beyond, even better.

The student voice, whether its Republican or Democrat, liberal or conservative, is the most important indicator of what matters most in our campus community. Voices of dissent are just as important as voices of agreement, and both should be heard and tolerated as such.

The scholastic challenge in this ongoing debate is not to place blame in deciding who's right or wrong, but to appreciate the core freedom of opinion and the right to argue otherwise.

The Pendulum

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The Pendulum reserves the right to edit obscene or potentially libelous material. Lengthy letters or columns may have to be trimmed to fit. All submissions become the property of The Pendulum and will not be returned.

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Each individual is entitled to one free copy.

Nude photography pulled from walls

Tim Rosner
 Columnist

In last week's edition of The Pendulum there was an article concerning the recent Tack-Tiles photography display in the Center for the Arts. As the article explained, there was a single e-mail received by the administration that complained of the inclusion of nude works in this public art display. Obviously, this has raised many issues.

The e-mail stated that the nude work was "pornographic" in nature. Sadly, this student does not understand the difference between nude works of art and pornography. Pornography is by nature violent, degrading and exploitative. Pornography lowers the human body to a mere object for sexual arousal. Pornography is not art.

Nude art, on the other hand, is reverent in its treatment of the human body. It asks the viewer to see the human body as a work of art in and of itself. Nude art is not about sexual arousal. It is about aesthetics. In a sense, this is the same as taking a landscape photograph, only instead of appreciating the natural beauty of an expanse of the wild, we are appreciating the natural beauty of the human body.

This is especially important to understand in our day and age, where the body is often objectified for commercial purposes and many individuals are actually made to hate their bodies. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, approximately 5 percent of women and 1 percent of men suffer from some type of eating disorder. Estimates suggest that 10-15 percent of these eating disorders end in fatalities. Many researchers have suggested a connection between this self-hatred of our bodies and the many commercial images that we are bombarded with every day. These include magazine and TV advertisements that feature physiologically abnormal individuals,

as well as products such as Barbie and G.I. Joe.

It seems that many of us have become indoctrinated with this inappropriate objectification of the human body and the self-



Tim Rosner

hatred that our consumer culture promotes. This has led not only to an increase in our being overly body-conscious, but in our misunderstanding of nude art. Nude art is not meant to ask us to compare ourselves to these individuals, as much advertising does, but to simply appreciate the natural beauty of the human body. This is a beauty that can be found in any human body, not just ones that are 6 feet 1 inch tall and 105 pounds (as many fashion magazines would like to have us believe).

A second issue that is raised by this situation is that of censorship. Let me put this bluntly: to censor artists is to stifle creative growth and freedom of speech and is detrimental to the development of culture as a whole. Many people who are not artists do not understand that art is a very difficult process that involves not only an extensive amount of thought, but also an exceptional expenditure of emotion on the part of the artist.

Art is not just about "making a pretty picture," it is about making a statement, impacting the viewer and challenging our society as a whole. By censoring art we prevent the freedom of speech that is guaranteed to us by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Additionally, in the context of an institution of education and higher learning, by censoring student art we are prevented from fully developing as artists. The reason the Tack-Tiles exhibition was created was to help students in the art department to grow as artists and to receive constructive criticism from the community at large. This was an attempt to

expand the education and development of the artists that participated and now it is in threat of being forbidden and thereby eliminating this important developmental opportunity.

Finally, there is a practical issue that arises from this controversy. It has been suggested that perhaps this display would have been better served if it had been in an enclosed gallery space, as opposed to an open hallway. The problem is that the art department has no other gallery space other than the Ward Gallery of which to take advantage. The Isabella Canon Room is used by visiting artists and only displays student art during the Student Juried Exhibition, the Senior Art Exhibitions and special events that must be planned at least a year in advance in order to procure this space.

The administration has offered the art department no other alternative to the Ward Gallery in which to display student work. While Elon continues to expand the facilities available to other academic programs such as the School of Communications, there has been little done to expand the resources available to the art department.

It is very disappointing that at a liberal arts university such as Elon, which prides itself on encouraging student engagement, student work is now facing the possibility of being censored. The study of the nude human body is something that is expected within any reputable art program, so why is this so surprising?

While there are many misconceptions in our society regarding art, this is not a time to sit by and allow them to be reinforced. The possible consequences of this controversy are far-reaching. Will you be censored the next time you create a video or write a research paper that challenges the norm? Let us hope that it does not come to that.

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