

## Church of Body Modification Creates First Amendment Debate in Johnston County

Emily Gamiel, Staff Writer

After the fourth suspension of 14 year old female freshman student Ariana Lacono at Clayton High School, many questions were raised about the reasoning for her suspension: her religion. The young woman is one of many that belong to the Church of Body Modification, also referred to as the C.o.B.M. The church respects and encourages different types of body modification, whether it is piercings, tattoos, and/or other forms of alteration. In the church's mission statement, the church promises to "always grow as individuals through body modification and what it can teach us about who we are and what we can do." It also states that they respect all forms of body modification, as well as respect those who choose not to alter their bodies. In their statement of faith, they say, "We believe our bodies belong only to ourselves and are a whole and integrated entity: mind, body, and soul."

The nose piercing that resided on the young girl's face was against Clayton High School's dress code policy. However, as an article of faith, Lacono believes her nose ring should be protected by her Constitutional rights and allowed in the school. The student argues that the institution in which she belongs is one credible enough to

be considered a "religion." School administrators have a different point of view on the piercing. The American Civil Liberties Union has taken action in aiding the girl to file an appeal against her suspension. The appeal was made and quickly denied. The Johnston County school system is holding strong on their decision to suspend the student for breaking the rules. They do not deem the religion that this student claims to have as a credible one.

Rather than focusing on a religious symbol or an almighty ruler, such as the Virgin Mary or God, the Church of Body Modification is based solely on the individual. Different forms of body modification include, but are not limited to: tattoos, piercings and scarification, as well as reconstructive and cosmetic surgery. Another practice that the church performs is body manipulation. According to the church's website, this includes "body suspension, hook pulling, play piercing, fasting, binding, corsetry, fire-walking, and other rituals that test and push the limits of the flesh and spirit." The congregation strives to achieve their own personal goals and dreams rather than worship a god, making it a questionable "religion" to school officials. The belief that modifications to the body create a sense of unity for people of this religion is very firm in the church and a large portion of what they stand for. This reason-



Nikki Lacono left and her daughter Ariana Lacono, 14  
<http://hotbuzz.bloguez.com/hotbuzz/page118/images>

ing was given by the student subsequent to her being suspended. She claimed that her nose piercing gave her a sense of wholeness. School officials, however, disagreed that the piercing was solely an expression of religion, and the high school freshman will serve her suspension in full.

The church's website, [www.uscobm.com](http://www.uscobm.com), provides information on the beliefs, practices, and faith of the church for any interested parties.

## Sao Paulo Art Biennial: Freedom of Expression or Just Too Far?

Joy Close, Staff Writer

At this year's Sao Paulo Art Biennial one of the big questions was: Is there a point when art goes too far? According to Heidi Blake of the Telegraph, charcoal artist Gil Vicente caused more than a little stir with his exhibit on Saturday, September 25. Vicente's charcoal drawings depicted various national leaders being executed by gun or knife. Among the leaders drawn were Queen Elizabeth II, Pope Benedict XVI, and United States former president, George W. Bush. Perhaps the most unnerving aspect to the drawings was that the murder weapon was sketched into the hands of Vicente himself.

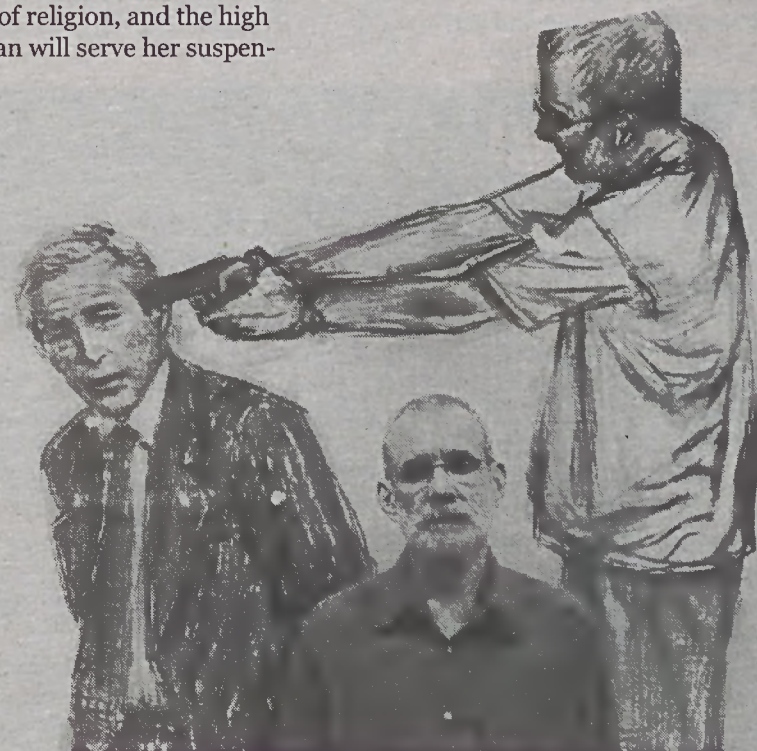
In an article in the Daily Star written by Marc Burleigh about Vicente's charcoal exhibit at Sao Paula,

Burleigh discusses the controversy concerning Vicente's exhibit. He quotes the Lawyers of Brazil Association's response to the exhibit, "Even though a work of art freely expresses the creativity of its maker, without limits, there have to be limits to exhibiting it publicly." Burleigh goes on to quote Vicente's defense about his drawings, "Because they kill so many other people, it would be a favor to kill them, understand? Why don't people in power and in the elite die?"

In a comment on Blake's article posted on the Telegraph website a reviewer known as Suicide Notes posted his admiration of Vicente's exhibit and said, "This work is amazing and rich in intellect, courage, and expression of free speech. Look at a bunch of good for nothing Americans trying to comment

and belittle the artist... You will never have as much courage, intellect, or talent to comprehend, let alone express anything as true, important and vital as he [Vicente] just did."

Cameron Johnson, Assistant Professor of Art who teaches charcoal at Meredith College is of the opinion that "because we have freedom of speech, it is debatable whether Vicente's work went too far, but as an artist we must ask ourselves what is our intent in mak-



Gil Vicente with one of his works, <http://www.mid-day.com/imagagedata/2010/sep/bush.jpg>

ing our work and what is the appropriate way to depict that intent. Art is a powerful instrument which can be used to uplift and inspire, but also to corrupt and destroy. Each artist has to make that decision; however, the viewer has a decision as well."