

Controversial art highlights worldly problems, evokes passionate debate

A person's right to freedom of speech is parallel to his or her right to create works of art. Consequently, through the years, art has been a divisive and often troublesome component of society. This writer considers the degree of responsibility an artist has for the repercussions of his or her work.

By Holly Sharpless
Staff Writer

Controversial art has sparked conversations for centuries about what an artist's responsibilities are in regard to his potential audience. This debate continues today with more energy than ever. Most notable current examples come from film, but disturbing subject matter is most definitely not limited to cinema; it overpowers music, visual arts, and even literature. This timeless debate transcends all divisions, and a cure-all solution is doubtful.

I am a huge supporter of any individual's, especially an artist's, right to express his idea, regardless of how controversial it may be. However, I have always espoused the belief that with freedom comes responsibility, and this principle is the center of my argument.

Often artists use violence in whatever their art may be to deliver a message. They think that doing so calls more attention to their ideas and influences their

audiences more. However, one must consider the potential consequences of using such weighty negativity to communicate. This obligation applies especially to the plethora of artists who use their talents to portray the horrors of violence in order to highlight problems of society or government or human nature. If they are trying to depict the violence negatively, why do

people not forget such atrocities, it could also be said that by evoking the feelings of disgust and horror in his viewers, Picasso is simply desensitizing them to such pain and, in doing so, making them more accepting of such images.

In light of Mel Gibson's recent film "The Passion of the Christ," this issue seems even more relevant. While Gibson's intentions to show the price Christ

every day, is adding to that pit and further desensitizing them going to make them turn to Christ? Perhaps, but the reason one flocks to Christianity should not lie in his shock at what Christ endured, but rather should lie in a realization of the benefit and decency of Christ's message.

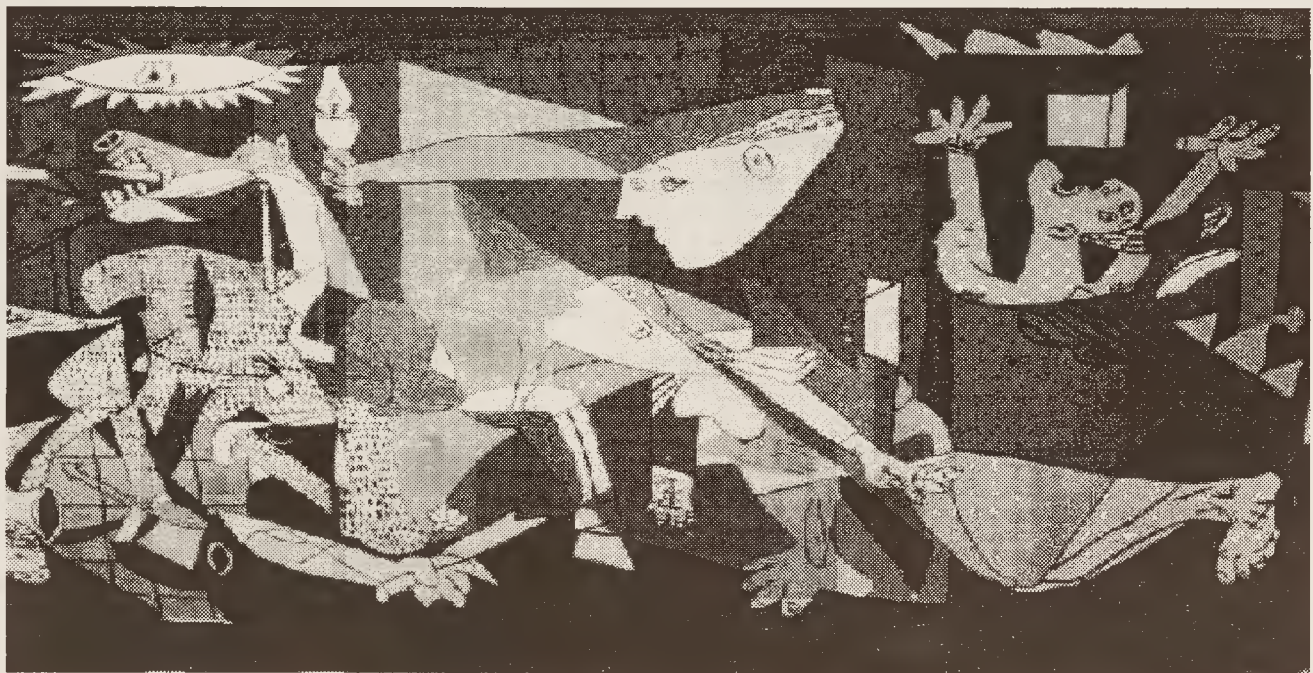
Yet, I would still defend Gibson's right to the death to create and distribute whatever material

liberties and devalues the art. However, the artist choosing to contribute to the overall good in the world, as opposed to the overall violence and hatred, might be more effective in condemning such aspects of our world.

Artists have an invaluable gift in that their art, while based on issues and emotions real and of this world, can depict any world they like. If an artist were to choose

to highlight in his work the positive aspects of the alternatives to violence and hatred, perhaps a utopian ideal, he might be able to inspire people to work positively rather than to build feelings of ill will towards the perpetrators of such violent acts. Thus, the artist would be able to put himself past

the horror of this world and hopefully inspire constructive change and break the cycle of hatred.



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they choose to do so by adding more disturbing and violent ideas to the world?

One could observe, for example, Pablo Picasso's "Guernica." His painting obviously shows a critical view of the atrocities committed in conjunction with the Spanish Civil War. While it is important that

paid for His people may seem noble, subjecting millions of viewers to hours of horrifying violence may not be the best way to spread the ideals of Christianity, especially since the film focuses very little on Christ's teachings. In a world and a country in which people are subjected to violence

he feels compelled to produce. All I ask is that he and other artists consider these concerns before throwing their work into the mainstream market.

Censorship in no way poses a solution to this problem; it merely infringes upon artists', and indirectly society's, most basic

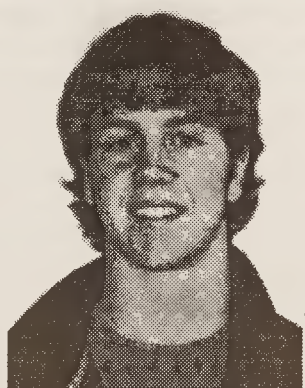
Speak Out: What do you consider an advantage or disadvantage of deferring before entering college?



Leung photo

"An advantage would be that you would have time to think about what you want to do for a career, and a disadvantage would be that you wouldn't be in the same class as your friends."

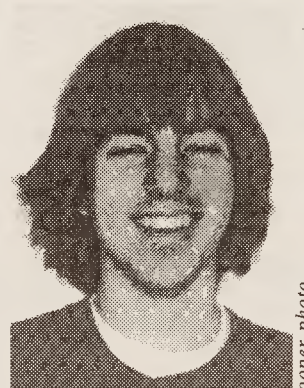
Maggie Frank,
sophomore



Cooper photo

"I think taking a year off allows someone to get his finances in order and allows people to find themselves and discover what they are interested in before pursuing a higher education."

Trace Williams,
junior



Cooper photo

"If [a student] feels like he needs a year to...gain world experience, then he should take a year or two, or join the Peace Corps."

Ryan Dalton,
senior

Importance of self-expression

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It is not just that the arts need more funding, recognition, and attendance in our schools (I realize that is a separate editorial in and of itself, so I will try to restrict myself to one crusade at a time). Basic self-expression, be it through styles of clothing, personal journal writing, activities or any number of other things, is not considered a priority. The problem is that nobody recognizes a problem.

One of the hardest and most important things that one can do when one is young is to "know thyself" and exploring various forms of self-expression is a tremendously satisfying means to that end.

Too many people seem to view extracurricular activities as a troublesome obligation that they must take care of to pad college and scholarship applications. Too many people seem to view clothes as a way to confirm their commonness and to blend in with the crowd.

I am not saying that everyone needs to be a raging anti-conformist in his or her style of dress or that everyone needs to be a singing-dancing-painting-writing Renaissance man. Instead, people should give a little more thought to the ways in which they can be themselves, rather than the ways in which they can be "normal."

What is normal anyway? An accepted standard? A style of dress? Shoulder-length hair parted in the middle and American Eagle clothes?

I think the standard changes so often that it is not worth trying to attain, and that it is really much more interesting and fulfilling to be odd or different.

People would be happier if they examined who they are inside and externalized it in some way, if only for their own benefit. This may not solve the world's problems but it might make the world a more interesting place to live.