



SARAH HODGES
I AM LEGEND, HEAR ME ROAR
Sarah Hodges is a senior psychology major from Durham.
E-MAIL: SEHODGES@EMAIL.UNC.EDU

The line between artist and amateur

Advances in technology have caused the rampant creation of all kinds of art. This flood of creativity leaves the consumer wading through pages of their next door neighbor's concrete imaginings. Is every sketch or snapshot born out of inspired efforts really art? If the answer is 'yes,' it's time to rethink what we call art.

Photographers have fought long and hard for their craft to be seen as an art form on par with drawing, painting and sculpture. Now that it has finally gained some credit in the art community, the advent of digital methods seems poised to steal away that newfound recognition.

AT-LARGE COLUMNIST The digital age of photography is making both creating and viewing this medium much easier. Teenagers, for example, are knocking off snapshots on their digital cameras like they did crayon drawings of their dogs when they were younger, fostering an interest in the medium at an early age.

Anyone can showcase their talent (or lack thereof) online nowadays, from the professional's Web site that helps advertise his work to the average person with a Facebook album. The Internet has become supersaturated with images of birthdays, holidays, snow days and just any old everyday.

Some sites let us live out our dreams of rewriting a famous book or film by hosting fan fiction about "Star Wars" or "Harry Potter." Others let us show off our Photoshop alterations to famous pieces of art.

Of course, the sheer number of sites like these means that unless you advertise it on your business card or beef up the number of visits yourself to push it up in the search engine ranks, it is unlikely that anyone will ever see your work. This is probably a good thing for the struggling non-existent artist in most of us.

Granted, not everyone needs a degree to be an artist. There are plenty of self-taught people with raw talent, but we are not all destined to become the next Henri Rousseau or Andy Warhol.

Even those who are both talented and lucky enough to profit from their art should not rely too heavily on the Internet to present it, as there is something to be said about physically interacting with a work. The power of something as large as the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, for instance, cannot be conveyed in photos, and I would argue that no amount of pictures from any and every angle can replace the feeling of walking around the "Venus de Milo" in the Ancient Greek gallery of the Louvre.

Some sites, like Threadless.com, do their part to alleviate this lack of interaction by giving the artist and admirer a more tangible satisfaction. Here people vote for their favorite artwork and buy T-shirts with the winning submissions printed on the front, which appeals to the college-age crowd and allows our generation to consume art like never before.

Still, it might be possible that art becomes less inspiring when we are overloaded with everyone's attempt at it.

We don't all have to stick to our day jobs. It is OK to let the creative juices flow, but not everything we produce is worthy of being called "art." The ever-changing definition has already been modified to include photography, and it is time to redefine the word yet again.

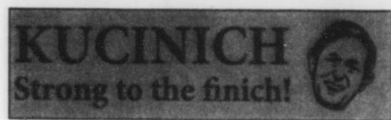
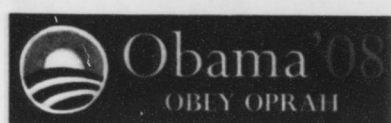
While visiting an art museum in Asheville with a friend, he very seriously told me that he asked himself two questions when deciding if something was art: "Can I tell what it's supposed to be?" and "Could I have done it myself?" This led him to the conclusion that many of the post-modern Jackson Pollock-esque pieces we saw were erroneously hung in the museum.

This definition might be a bit too narrow, but I think my friend is on to something. It's time we pulled out our charcoal or pastels and drew the line between what is art and what is ... well ... just lines.

EDITORIAL CARTOON By Mason Phillips, mphil@email.unc.edu



CAMPAIGN BUMPER STICKERS



Dazed and confused

Old audit system should have been left up for seniors

Trying to graduate — and do so on time — is hard enough as it is, what with convoluted requirements and a lack of class availability, and the University isn't doing juniors and seniors any favors.

The automated degree audit, a Student Central feature that allowed students to check their remaining graduation requirements, was taken offline this semester.

Academic advising and the University Registrar should have done everything in their power to keep that system online for at least the next two years.

The old online tool was replaced by one that only works for the new curriculum, leaving the classes of 2008 and 2009 out in the cold.

The main reason cited for the system's removal was that student information had to be updated manually by advisers, so it wasn't necessarily always

up to date and accurate.

And yet many seniors have said they wish the system was still up. It has apparently worked well enough up to this point, and after running it for so long, an extra year and a half is certainly feasible.

And as for the advisers' reduced workload? We can only hope they're spending their newfound free time making themselves more knowledgeable about requirements and classes — unless, of course, their time is now completely filled seeing students who otherwise would have utilized the audit system for getting answers.

The sad truth is that a computerized system might have known more about the requirements than both the advisers and the students.

A tool like that is invaluable when faced with the tangled web that is UNC's graduation requirements.

After all, who would imagine that a class on pre-1600 practices of taxidermy east of the Southern Hemisphere would count for the non-U.S.-European African-Asiatic zoological preservation and life-time diversity requirement?

That makes about as much sense as parts of the Undergraduate Bulletin. The sudden inflationary course numbering system also hasn't made it any easier on the classes of 2008 and 2009.

With courses taken before the change still showing up under their old numbers on students' transcripts, not only does it require finding what requirement each class fills, it also mandates figuring out the new number for the course.

In the meantime, you had better go schedule that academic advising appointment before all the slots fill up.

A taxing problem

Gas tax increase not solution to infrastructure issues

Things fall apart. Recently, this has become increasingly true of our nation's infrastructure, as evidenced by the bridge collapse in Minneapolis last summer.

That disaster, which killed 13 people and injured nearly 150 others, highlighted the need to ensure the rest of the country's roads and bridges aren't poised for a similar catastrophe.

But as much as our roads need help, raising the gas tax by up to 40 cents over five years, as a government commission suggested, isn't quite the way to do it.

According to a report released by the American Society of Civil Engineers in 2005, U.S. infrastructure is in bad shape.

The report was highly critical, giving the nation an overall D, with roads receiving a grade of D and bridges a C, illustrating the poor condition of our infrastructure even before the bridge collapse.

A study released Tuesday by the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission,

created by Congress in 2005 to study the nation's ground transportation systems, proposed several solutions to alleviate the crisis that would entail spending \$225 billion each year for the next 50 years.

As its main recommendation, the commission argued that the federal gas tax be raised by up to 8 cents per gallon per year over the next five years, for a total of up to 40 cents, to pay for the needed improvements.

The current federal gas tax is 18.4 cents per gallon, set in 1993. Each 8-cent annual increase in the gas tax would bring in about \$15.2 billion in additional revenue to help fix the nation's crumbling infrastructure.

Unfortunately, there are significant problems with this proposed increase.

In the past, politicians have been unable to restrain themselves from spending the additional revenues from gas taxes for measures completely unrelated to infrastructure improvement, instead funding pet projects like Alaska's "Bridge to Nowhere."

While some of the revenues

from the tax increase will undoubtedly be used for its intended purposes, much of it likely will be siphoned off for other things.

Another problem with the tax increase is that it is simply too steep. An increase of 40 cents per gallon in taxes will be a strain on many consumers, especially those with lower incomes.

And with fears of the U.S. economy sliding into a recession abounding, increasing consumers' expenditures on gas would certainly limit consumption in other areas.

In addition, many Americans lack access to public transportation and use their car as their primary means of travel. Before tripling the gas tax, we should make sure alternatives to driving are widely available.

A better solution for fixing our infrastructure would be to use a smaller increase in the federal gas tax to help reduce the costs of maintenance and improvement and rely on private investment for the remainder. Although it's not the perfect fix, it's certainly a fairer one.

Mind your own business

Congress has more pressing issues to worry about

Congressmen write bills. Major League Baseball managers write lineup cards. Congressmen pass legislation. MLB players pass gum around the dugout. Congressmen argue budgets and poverty. MLB players argue balls and strikes.

Despite the fact that Congress is leagues away from the MLB, it has still chosen to spend its time tangled up in MLB's mess of a steroid problem.

Enlisting the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee to umpire the MLB steroid dilemma is a misguided use of government yanked straight out of left field — and it's the second time Congress has wasted its time on the issue.

After 13 years of strikeouts in leadership and accountability

on the steroids issue, MLB Commissioner Bud Selig and Player's Association Executive Director Donald Fehr finally admitted Tuesday to their responsibility in the preponderance of steroid use.

Fehr fought fiercely for the rights of players against invasion of privacy while his counterpart, Selig, could never muster enough strength to stand up and implement stricter drug testing. Both men share the burden of guilt for the rise in juicing among MLB players and both bear the burden of fixing the problem.

As disheartening as these trends are, Congress must realize that America's pastime is one American issue they should stay out of.

After all, asking Congress

to pick up the slack for a private organization's leadership problem is sort of like summoning Tom DeLay to lead a Congressional ethics seminar.

Professional football has it figured out how to deal with steroids; the MLB can too. It could take a page from the International Olympic Committee, which stripped former UNC star Marion Jones of five medals after she admitted to using steroids.

Congress should fix healthcare or social security, which are in much more pressing need of its assistance. Baseball is just a game and should be treated as such.

Take a seat in the bleachers, Congress, and make the game work things out on its own.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"I had never spent so much time, money and effort buying books I never wanted in the first place."

SACHIV SHAH, SOPHOMORE, ON TEXTBOOK SHOPPING

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To read the full-length versions VISIT <http://dailytarheelpublic.wordpress.com> Post your own response to a letter, editorial or story online. VISIT www.dailytarheel.com/feedback

Student Code is far from 'bureaucratic nonsense'

TO THE EDITOR:

Wednesday the Edit Board called the Student Code a "decaying piece of bureaucratic nonsense" ("Extreme Makeover," Jan. 16).

First, I want to invite the Edit Board publicly, as I have begged and pleaded countless times privately, to actually come one time to a Student Congress meeting.

They have not been to a single meeting all year but yet seem to have all the answers.

However, the Edit Board is right that the election rules are complicated. I would add that the rules are burdensome, suffocate free speech and smother the liberty of candidates in contradiction with the First Amendment.

The Edit Board is wrong that we have not addressed online campaigning on Web sites and Facebook. I direct their attention to the Facebook Protection Act, passed by Student Congress and upheld by the Student Supreme Court last year.

Every time a problem has come up in regards to election law, Student Congress had met each challenge with appropriate legislation. The 87th Congress already did a complete overhaul of Title VI (Election law), Title V (Finance) and Title VII (Carolina Athletic Association).

That being said, I do not believe the Code is decaying or nonsense. This is a standard mode of attack when someone simply doesn't agree with the Code.

Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement, and I respect those who feel the Code needs to be revised. That is why earlier this week I announced that Congress will be devoted this semester to a wholesale revision of the entire Code.

The Edit Board is surely welcome to come. Should I hold my breath?

Tyler Younts
Speaker
Student Congress

Paying for supplies only adds stress to the process

TO THE EDITOR:

I spend nothing on coffees, lattes, beer, designer jeans, etc. I occasionally eat out because those are my meal options, with no meal plan.

I'm an English major. This means I normally have to bring at least four blue books to each of my English classes. I'm also doing my math and science requirements this semester, which means I'll be needing scantrons as well.

I personally don't care what it was like when you went to Carolina 50 years ago ("An alumna reminds us how bad it used to be," Jan. 16).

I care about the fact that exams are stressful as heck, and people will always accidentally forget the materials they bought ahead of time and need to wait in line right before an exam, stressing out even more to buy their materials necessary to taking a test.

That is ridiculous. I'll take your "few" dollars. You can find my e-mail listed.

Kellye Murphy
Junior
English

It's not the money that matters; it's the hassle

TO THE EDITOR:

I think (Kathy Morgan) missed the point entirely ("An alumna reminds us how bad it used to be," Jan. 16).

I doubt that any student at UNC would be struggling to come up with the spare change needed to buy a blue book or scantron sheet. The point is that it is an unnecessary expense.

Figuring in tuition, the exorbitant price of books and various other fees required by the University, it seems bureaucratic and unscrupulous to charge students for testing materials, not to mention the congestion it will inevitably cause on exam days.

The image of college students presented by Ms. Morgan was really offensive and stereotypical. Ms. Morgan should think more carefully before making general statements about a large and varied group of people.

Oh, and anyone that wants to pay for my testing materials is more than welcome. Just drop a couple of dollars in the mail.

Joie Emerick
Senior
Art History

Consuming cloned animals is not really that scary

TO THE EDITOR:

Many Americans find themselves in opposition to the cloning of animals for human consumption with very little support for their beliefs, and ("How do I want my steak? Not cloned," Jan. 16) failed to provide readers with the data they need to decide if cloned meat is actually dangerous.

Clones are merely twins of a particularly productive, blue-ribbon cow or sheep. Through cloning, the original animal's DNA can live through another generation, producing more offspring with exceptionally high yields of meat and milk. What would be sold in the supermarket would be the naturally birthed offspring of these clones, not the clones themselves.

As an alternative to cloning, (Nathan) Nyanjom recommends cutting back on consumption, but for the millions of starving individuals across the world that would benefit from meatier livestock, eating less just isn't an option.

By cloning animals who can bring more food to those in need, we can improve the nutrition and survival of individuals in third-world countries, while also lowering food prices here in America for those who struggle to put food on the table.

After rigorous scientific testing, the last barrier to the acceptance of cloned food products will be the American consumer overcoming a case of the uninformed heebie-jeebies and embracing the power of technology to make our lives better.

Trevor Brothers
Sophomore
Psychology

The Daily Tar Heel

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of editorial freedom

ERIN ZUREICK
EDITOR, 962-4086
ZUREICK@EMAIL.UNC.EDU
OFFICE HOURS:
MON, WED, FRI, 1-2 P.M.

ADAM STORCK
OPINION EDITOR, 962-0750
ASTORCK@UNC.EDU

JONATHAN TUGMAN
ASSOCIATE OPINION EDITOR, 962-0750
TUGMAN@UNC.EDU

ANDREW JONES
PUBLIC EDITOR
JONESAW@EMAIL.UNC.EDU

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS
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