

PSH NEWS

PSH Graduate Raises Controversy

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Where should the line be drawn between art and the obscene? And who should make the decision?

As people across America debate these questions, the controversy hit Central Pennsylvania this summer when the Harrisburg center of Temple University removed three photographs taken by Cecil Brooks, a 1980 Penn State Harrisburg graduate. Complaints lodged by Temple students who felt the photographs were obscene and exploited women prompted the decision.

Although eventually rehung after a panel of art experts ruled they are not obscene, the removal of the photographs caused a considerable reaction in the local art community.

Louise Hoffman, professor and coordinator of the PSH Humanities graduate program, wrote a letter to the editor of the Harrisburg *Patriot-News* reminding the public that "censorship of speech and expression is all too common, but it's especially unfortunate to see it practiced by a university."

Brooks said the objection that his work victimized women really hurt. "It appalled me that people thought I was exploiting women," he said.

As a *Spina Bifida* victim confined to a wheelchair, Brooks is no stranger to public insensitivity. Describing himself as sympathetic to the feminist

percentage of his work. While many of his photographs portray sensual qualities in its subject, the bulk of his work consists of architectural abstractions, still-lives, portraits, and abstract and representational photographs.

One still-life of a potted cactus plant in front of a window shows the artist's concern with craft as well as subject. Brooks explained that it took several attempts to develop the photograph to get the backlighting to appear as though it was enveloping, almost caressing, the cactus.

This attention to the effect of light playing on various surfaces in the same composition and the contrast produced between light and shadow can be seen in all his photography including the nudes.

One of the censored photographs depicts a close-up of the model from her own point of view. The camera's eye scans down the model's body, across the pubic hair, and uplifted thighs. Brooks, as a photographer, said he was drawn by the interesting contrast between the way the light reflects off the smooth contours of the model's upper thighs and the way it glistens through the texture of the pubic hair.

Detail and close-ups play an important part in much of Brook's work. Just as he is able to capture the character of an old musician by simply showing his hand, so too Brooks portrays sensuous qualities in one photograph through a high-contrast horizontal



Photo by John Rudy

Cecil Brooks, a 1980 PSH graduate, had his photography banned this summer at Temple University Harrisburg Center.

movement, Brooks said his photography celebrates, not subjugates, the female body.

Obscenity is in the eye of the beholder, Brooks said.

"I don't really know what obscene means," he said, sitting in his Harrisburg apartment. "It's different for

different people. There is an aesthetic distinction between good art and bad art, but obscenity is a moral judgment that must be made by the individual."

His own definition of obscene is the depiction of "violence, brutal exploitation, and using people for profit." This kind of obscenity is not reflected in his work nor is it limited to just the art world, he said.

Ironically, despite the amount of attention Brook's nudes have drawn, these studies make up only a small profile of a single breast.

Brooks said it's unfortunate, but typical, as in the Mapplethorpe controversy, that critics concentrate on a few controversial examples of an artist's work and blow it out of proportion.

"It's frustrating when the public can't view all the work together."

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Alumni Fellow Returns to PSH

Ralph Papa, president and chief executive officer of Mellon Bank Central, returned to Penn State Harrisburg to hold a number of open forums and panel discussions for students and faculty on career choices.

Papa, who completed a bachelor of social science degree at Penn State Harrisburg in 1969, was selected for the honor of Alumni Fellow, a permanent and lifelong designation. The honor is given to alumni who have accomplished a high level of professionalism in a given field and accept an invitation to return to the school to share their expertise.

Papa visited PSH on October 24, 25 and 26. There were forums, classroom visits and panel discussions planned for each day.

On October 24, Papa held an open forum with social science students titled, "Career Options for Social Science Graduates," in the Gallery Lounge. "Managing in the 1990's," a panel discussion and reception with Papa, was held at 7 p.m.

On October 25, Papa hosted another open forum, "Money, Jobs, and Business: An Informal Discussion," in the Gallery Lounge.

And "Career Planning for Liberal Arts Majors," another open forum, was held October 26.

PSH Dedicates Computer Lab

The Helen F. and U.A. Whitaker Computer Laboratory at PSH was dedicated on Wednesday, October 17. The lab was made possible by a \$200,000 gift from the Whitaker Foundation, a grant from IBM, and Engineering Division and PSH funds.

According to Joseph Cecere, associate professor of engineering, "In the design and construction industry, microcomputers are being utilized more than ever. Now computers are used in almost every aspect of construction and design areas. Students need to be prepared for that when they graduate."

The Whitaker lab will give engineering technology students the opportunity to apply the latest computer technology to their studies at PSH.

The lab contains 24 stations plus an individual work station where an instructor can monitor each student's work. The entire system is networked to the faculty offices.

The lab also contains plotters, which enable details to be drawn on projects including colors, pictures, and different sizes and a professional digitizing board which indicates the amount of material needed to complete a project.

"This advanced computer technology will be a valuable tool in teaching students the skills they need to survive in today's engineering market," said Cecere.

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