

PSH NEWS

PSH Graduate Raises Controversy

Editor's note: Due to a layout error in our Oct. 26 issue we decided to reprint the article on artist Cecil Brooks.

Bob Fellman
Capital Times Staff

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

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 Brooks' nudes have drawn, these studies make up only a small 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

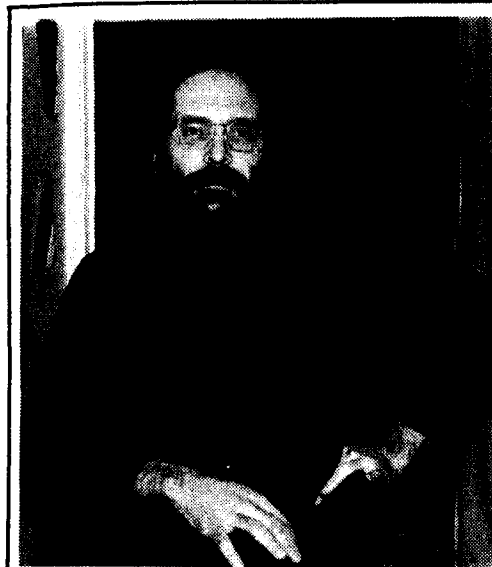


Photo by John Rudy

The art of Cecil Brooks, a 1980 PSH graduate, was banned this summer at Temple University Harrisburg Center.

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 Brooks' 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 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."

Four-Year

"The junior year should be more of a set-up for design work instead of taking courses over again," Structural Design major Vince Seyko said.

Some students like the idea of becoming a four-year school to make college a better social experience.

"A four-year school would offer more of an opportunity to meet people," Communications major Jeff Berrigan said, "instead of being in classes with all the same people."

"There would be more things to do on campus," Paula Styer, another Communications major said. "Right now students have to go to Harrisburg to find things to do."

EET major Qian Yuen likes the idea of attending a four-year school because it would give engineering majors more equipment to work with.

"And it would cut the hassle of transferring schools," he said.

Students Plan Spring Break Trip to Soviet Union

Pat Byers
Capital Times Staff

The Penn State Office of Continuing Education along with Dr.'s Nechemias and Simko of the Public Policy Department are leading separate study tours to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe during spring break 1991.

The Nechemias tour will focus on the reform era in the Soviet Union and will include visits to a Moscow preschool and secondary school in Leningrad along with a visit to Latvia State University.

This is Dr. Nechemias's third year on the tour as she refers to each tour as "an adventure." This year's adventure also involves discussions with Soviet church groups, environmental activists and Latvian nationals.

Dr. Nechemias fondly remembers her visit last year to a Tbilisi, Georgia high school where a group discussion turned into a festive affair.

"They prepared a feast for us," she said, "complete with food, wine, and champagne, but after a few refills they were singing and dancing on the tables. You could feel the fun and warmth of the Georgian people."

She also planned visits to the Hermitage Museum and Kremlin Armory along with evening theatre performances.

The fee for the two week tour

includes busfare to and from Harrisburg, airfare to and from New York, first class double occupancy accommodations, three meals a day, English speaking guides, taxes, tips and visa costs-- \$2250.00. At the time of print 20 seats remain.

The Simko tour of "The Changing Eastern Europe" is his second. This year's 12 day visit between March 1-12 includes stops in Budapest, Hungary, Prague, and Bratislava, in Czechoslovakia. He also plans to visit a controversial hydroelectric project on the Danube and many castles.

Discussions with native folk dancers and musicians further highlight the tour. "I had schoolteachers from Philadelphia and Washington PA participate last year as well as our own Dr.'s Gilpen and Young," he said.

"We also visited an English speaking high school in Budapest last year and were surprised to find the children being served by older waitresses, using china, in a decorum, quiet setting, unlike our country."

The fee for the 12 day trip is \$1790.00 and includes busfare to New York, roundtrip airfare to Eastern Europe, first class double occupancy accommodations, all transportation between cities, daily breakfast and dinner, English speaking guides, and all taxes, tips and visa costs.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Saturday, January 26, 1991

9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Capital Union Building (CUB) Student Center

Guest Facilitator (afternoon)-- Dr. Terrill Joner

All Students Welcome!



Bicycling has become a popular form of alternate transportation at PSH. Engineering student Dave Remley prepares for his ride back to Meade Heights.

Photo by John Rudy