

EMU Art Gallery displays once censored art through Oct. 12

Local artists now have a chance to show pieces that were once censored by the 'art police'

By Nicole Krueger
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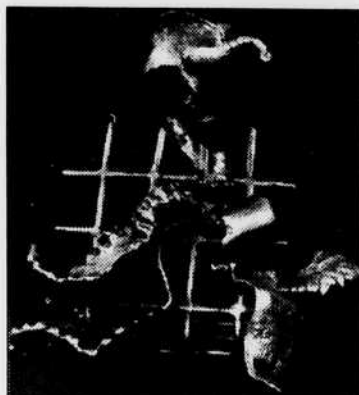
Local artist Mike Randle has faced censorship in Eugene since his days as a graduate student at the University, when other students would cover his work with black plastic. "[They] would tell undergraduates, 'That's not the kind of work we do at the U of O,'" he said.

Since then he has gone on to exhibit his work internationally, but "locally I have a very hard time exhibiting," he said.

His piece "S.O.B. Standing Order of Battle," an exhibit in which dismembered soldiers and their genitals are skewered on black poles, was removed from Portland's "Art Quake" in 1990, where it was installed and was being viewed. "The Art Police of Portland descended upon 'Art Quake' and issued orders to remove ['S.O.B.']," an exhibit plaque reads.

This example of censorship is part of the reason why the piece is currently on display in the EMU.

Black paper blocks the glass on the north entrance to the EMU Art Gallery, and a disclaimer warns students that they may want to choose an alternative route through the building. Anyone who chooses to venture beyond the doors will find "S.O.B." as part of an exhibit of previously censored art.



COURTESY PHOTO
This piece was censored from an exhibit because it accompanied several 'pornographic' pieces.

The exhibit, titled "Art Unveiled," is the EMU Cultural Forum's contribution to the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon's 9th Annual Uncensored Celebration, according to EMU visual arts coordinator Delta Smith. The cultural forum participates annually in this event, which takes place during the month of September.

To create the exhibit, Smith put out a call to artists asking for art that has been censored in the past. "I accepted all of the first ones that came until the gallery was filled," she said.

Each piece in the exhibit has been censored in some way, and each is accompanied by the artist's explanation of the piece and why and how it was censored.

Randle believes his work has been censored because "we don't want to encounter what it is we really are," he said. "Once we swung from trees, and we think that by divine right we have the facilities to do whatever we want to the planet."

Randle said his work challenges people's belief that they are part of "the solution" to the world's problems — a belief he said is especially common in Eugene. "I maintain that everyone is part of the problem," he said.

Kimberly Thornton, another local artist who contributed to the exhibit, said on a plaque that her paintings "Monsters Come Out" and "Bliss," which depict nude female forms, were solicited for an exhibit at a women's center but were removed from the main viewing area within a week.

"Apparently they were creating quite a stir for being 'disturbing,' 'too uncomfortable to look at' and 'a bit obscene,'" she said.



MATT GARTON/Emerald

"On the Couch," one of a series of 10 pieces by Washington artist Janette Hopper, was removed from an exhibit because it was considered pornographic.

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Similarly, Sharon Rupp of Kennewick, Wash., said several of her cast bronze pieces were solicited for an exhibit in the mid-Columbia region. The most explicit of the pieces on display in the EMU, "Working It Out," shows a side view of the bronze form of a nude woman bending over. Rupp said the pieces were removed from the exhibit because they were "pornographic."

Among these "pornographic" pieces is a cast bronze orchid that includes no nudity or sexual themes. This piece was also removed from the exhibit.

Like the orchid, some of the pieces on display in the EMU have caused viewers to wonder why they were censored at all.

"I was really surprised by how tame most of the artwork really is," Smith said. "Seventy-five percent of it I look at and wonder, 'Why was it censored so much?'"

Smith said this observation illustrates the point of the exhibit.

"It shows the wide subjectivity that goes into censorship. You never know what's going to upset somebody," she said.

One viewer, however, had a different idea about the exhibit.

"This show seems innocuous," the viewer wrote in a comment book located in the gallery. "Are you censoring your 'uncensored' exhibit? ... There is plenty of art out there being censored by people like us. Show it to us and challenge us!"

"Art Unveiled" will be on display until October 12.



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