

# OPINION PACKAGES

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## OUR VIEW

### Interlude

*Lied Center has hit a dry spell*

If New York has it, we want it too, and we don't want to take our grandparents.

Though the corner of 12th and R streets is not exactly a stone's throw from Broadway, the lack of any high-profile anchor event for the 1996-97 Lied Center for the Performing Arts season doesn't offer any salvation from our Midwestern isolation.

Usually, the Lied Center would bring events to the students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln that would not be typical of a Lincoln Saturday night, such as STOMP, "Cats," "Les Miserables," "Tommy," the Joffrey Ballet of Chicago's "Billboards," The Boys Choir of Harlem, T.S. Monk, Yo-Yo Ma, B.B. King and other headliners.

The 1996-97 season comes up a bit short in its offerings for a big-name, broad-appeal production that would attract students. Most of the programming seems geared toward an older audience.

Though the students are not the high-paying donors who fund the center, we are a mob of 26,000 people looking for an alternative to the black hole of "dinner-and-a-movie." Add those numbers up, and — even with the discount tickets — the students can give the donors a run for their money.

And this picture is starting to look a little too much like the attitude of the Athletic Department, which, in the interest of turning a buck, has raised student ticket prices, has moved the student section and has not made enough tickets available to meet student demand.

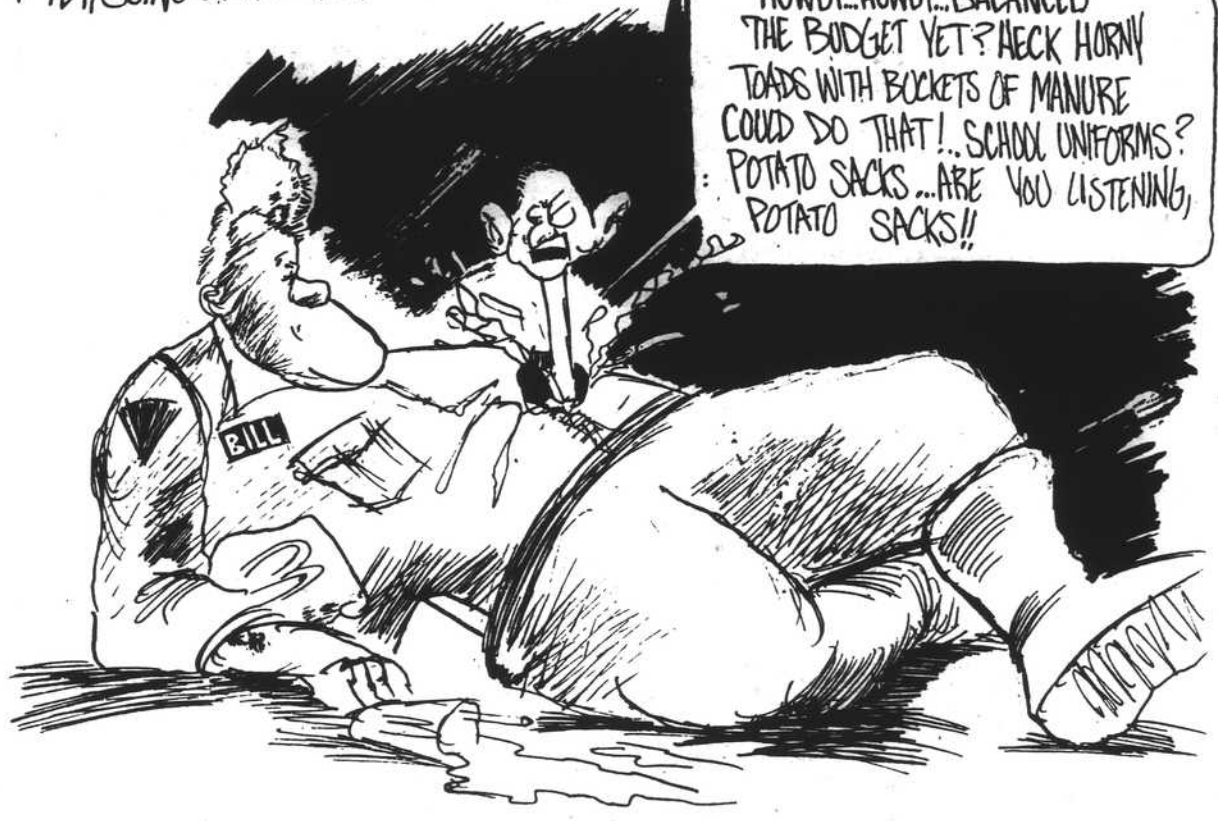
Hopefully, we won't be able to make the comparison of the Lied Center to Memorial Stadium. Maybe this season was a bad one for programming and only a brief interlude in an otherwise quality offering.

The Lied Center has been a force in bringing diversity and new voices to Lincoln. Whoever is hired as the new director should keep that tradition, but also keep in mind the interest of the people who use the university the most — the students.

“We are a mob of 26,000 people looking for an alternative to the black hole of 'dinner-and-a-movie.'”

## MEHSLING'S VIEW

MEHSLING OF THE DAILY NEBRASKAN



## GUEST VIEW

### 'Torn Notebook' doesn't fly as art

**Editor's Note:** This guest column was submitted by **Mohammad Seifkar, who is a graduate student in philosophy, and Polly Seifkar, who studies European history at UNL.**

We came to Lincoln in June to live and to attend the university. When we heard that Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen had collaborated on a sculpture project for the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, we had some fairly good ideas what the piece might look like. For we are familiar with their works. We have seen "the Clothespin," located in Center Square in Philadelphia, and the 74,000-pound "Flashlight," which stands on the University of Nevada campus in Las Vegas. Their philosophy of art and genius is rather simple. They are the masters of small things made bigger. The thrust of their creativity is to "super-size" familiar everyday objects into sagging heaps. "Supersizing" is a fitting description of their artistic outlook, especially because Oldenburg began his career by enlarging and making plaster replicas of hamburgers, sandwiches, sundaes and other fast-food items. (Oldenburg has stated, "I preferred touching food to eating it.")

It's astonishing to us that some are treating Oldenburg and van Bruggen as old masters and their works as modern classics. Oldenburg and van Bruggen seem to think that you can make anything into high art literally by inflating it. It is integrating the once marginal art world into the mainstream of media culture and the upper middle class's voracious enthusiasm for art of almost any kind that have produced the glittery art elites to rival rock stars or TV

personalities and are responsible for the inflation of these minor talents into major ones and into claims on art history. Oldenburg and van Bruggen have intentionally courted mainstream success, and since their style demands little of the artists and no profound thought from the viewers, it is flourishing both here and in Europe and Japan. But beneath their post-modernist veneer is little besides posturing instead of passion. They are still basically wreaking variations on the works of Marcel Duchamp, the French Dadaist who in 1915 expressed his aesthetic nihilism by selecting mass-produced objects such as a bottle rack, a snow shovel and a urinal, designating them as sculpture and calling them "readymades." They can only be called artists in the celebrity sense that almost everybody is called an artist these days. Rock 'n' roll singers and movie stars are artists. So are movie directors, performance artists, makeup artists, tattoo artists, rap artists and con artists.

"Torn Notebook" consists of a structure resembling an open, torn notebook, 22 feet tall and 35 feet long with two additional loose pages blown by the wind. Each piece has handwritten notes that reflect the creators' impressions of Lincoln and its environment encountered on their numerous visits to the area. After three years and close to a million dollars, it is finally in Lincoln. It is expected to be one of UNL's main attractions this fall and is here as part of Sheldon's mission to bring UNL some of the finest works of art that are being produced by American artists today. But "Torn Notebook" is pretentious, profoundly boring and depressingly similar to Oldenburg

and van Bruggen's other works. "Torn Notebook" exploits a well-known artificial object and uses its effects to flatter the spectators, namely the students. It is boring, because it simply lacks novelty. Its pattern is too transparent and its elements are redundant and unimaginative. Oldenburg and van Bruggen have failed to process the known patterns in a new and unpredictable fashion. We have heard people describe it as funny, cute, cool or decorative, but not startlingly beautiful. Beauty tends to surprise us by offering a new unpredictable order. "Torn Notebook" cannot astonish or amaze the way beauty of high degree may do. It resorts to trickery instead of inspiration and contrivance instead of creation.

At best, "Torn Notebook" is a comic monument and a caricature. But Oldenburg and van Bruggen were probably not looking for laughs. Despite what some may think, they are not comedians. Whatever its meaning, "Torn Notebook" is unforgettable; you can't help thinking about it. Perhaps this was the effect they were after. But merely enlarging small and humble things does not endow them with any meaning beyond their corporeal limits. Nor does the sheer presence of "Torn Notebook" out of doors make it public art — no more than placing a tiger in a barnyard would make it a domestic animal. "Torn Notebook" neither satisfies the traditional memorializing criteria of public art nor engages citizens in any but the most superficial social and aesthetic interactions of the public sphere. The monument, in a literal and metaphorical sense, is for the birds.

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