

Pop culture, fine art revolutionaries examined in NETV documentaries

By Jason Hardy
Staff writer

The history of American pop culture is, for the most part, relative to who's telling about it.

For millions of young people, watching Elvis shake his hips on national television was one of the greatest moments of their lives. For millions of older people, it was a sure sign that the United States of America was specifically pinpointed for oblivion.

"Culture Shock," a two-part series of documentaries on the Nebraska Educational Television Network, takes an in-depth look at some of America's proudest and most despised moments in pop-culture history.

The series started Sunday, Jan. 30, with "Born to Trouble: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" and "The Shock of the Nude: Manet's Olympia." The series continues this Sunday with "Hollywood Censored: Movies, Morality and the Hollywood Production Code" and "The Devil's Music: 1930s Jazz."

Each episode is one hour long and addresses the social acceptance and implications of these artistic endeavors.

Ronald Hull, special advisor to Nebraska Educational Telecommunications and a professor of broadcasting at the

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said it was important for people today to see how the arts have struggled for acceptance in the past and the present.

"That's the way it was, and people should know how it was," he said. "It makes a wonderful point about culture and human beings."

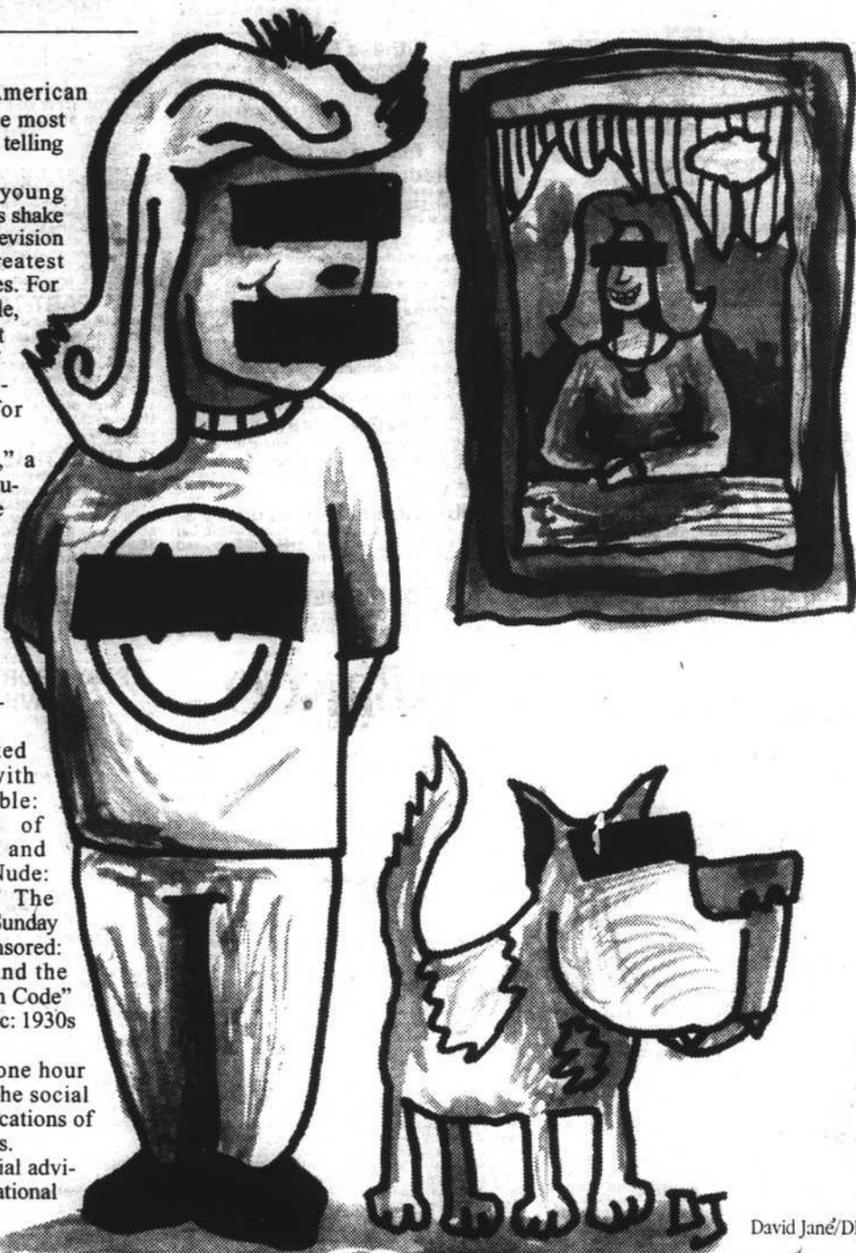
"The arts are there to entertain us. But if they're true art, they enlighten us."

Tom Larson, an instructor in jazz history at UNL, said people today could learn about how to react to art by looking at the past and seeing that not everything feared ends in tragedy.

"Jazz was very closely tied in with the gangster scene," Larson said. "Since this coincided with prohibition, there was a very clear sentiment of jazz being the devil's music. Everywhere it went, it was closely associated with gambling, prostitution, drinking, crime and gangsters."

Like a lot of fads, it wasn't too long before the taboo surrounding jazz gave way to a nationwide frenzy.

"Around the mid- to late '30s, dancing became more popular, and jazz bands started adding more members just because the music was



David Jane/DN

evolving," Larson said. "The bands got bigger and more exciting and, all of the sudden, everything just clicked."

"That became the thing to do, and it just affected everything. It was mainstream America. So at that point, it kind of lost its association with being something negative."

Larson said analyzing the history of pop culture was important "simply because it makes us realize that change is good, and we have to be tolerant to new ideas and new things that come along."

"If there were certain people in charge of this country, there wouldn't be any National Endowment (for the Arts and there wouldn't be any National Public Radio," Larson said. "It takes these people to break down barriers before some things can be accepted."

Hull agreed the social impact of art and pop culture went far beyond the perimeters of entertainment.

"I think we'll see that the countries that succeed are the countries who applaud and recognize diversity and take chances with ideas," Hull said. "Art fixes those things in time

SHOCK treatment

The four-part documentary series explores controversial artistic issues throughout history.

"Born to Trouble: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"

"The Shock of the Nude: Manet's Olympia"

"Hollywood Censored: Movies, Morality & the Hollywood Production Code"

"The Devil's Music: 1930s Jazz"

The entire series will run on EduCable on Wednesday, Feb. 2, at 1:30 p.m. The final two episodes will run on NETV at 5 p.m. on Sunday, Feb. 6.

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