

Art for art's sake or something that is vile?

FIRST WORD

I am an artist. I have previously been an admirer of Bill Henson's photography. However I find myself now supporting the actions of the authorities in closing down his exhibition. I have watched the debate with interest and feel that some of the arguments in support of the actions have been sadly askew, muddying what should have been clear waters.

The first of these is Kevin Rudd's. His initial bleating of "revolting" and his persistence in defending such a simplistic and emotional reaction without further explanation, shows a lack of philosophical depth and artistic understanding. He is, in essence, a diplomat and a bureaucrat. Likewise, the reaction to Rudd's comments by the artists present at the 2020 Summit, and their open letter, show a naivety of the politics.

The second opinion creating confusion is the notion that the photographs are exploitative - that either consent was not given or could not be given for such photographs and that children were therefore exploited for the entertainment of adults. This is highly problematic. The reality is that children are used constantly by the entertainment industry - filmed and photographed all the time - and

what's more, they are paid and paid well for it. Are they being exploited? Maintaining an argument based on exploitation would mean prosecuting the makers of half of Hollywood for breaching child labour laws. I do not see this happening in a hurry.

The brutal reality in this case is that Henson, perhaps inadvertently, created child pornography and the gallery chose to show it. Both should be prosecuted.

The only occasions it should be permissible to show naked images of children is when there is a definitive and very tangible educational or journalistic reason. The film clip of a young Vietnamese girl fleeing down a road after being napalmed falls into this category, as do the illustrations in medical textbooks.

The artistic justifications offered by Henson and his supporters have been neither definitive nor tangible enough to justify the creation or exhibition of naked photographs of minors.

Regardless of his intent, Henson has created pornographic images of children that will titillate those of a pedophile's persuasion. To plead ignorance in such a case is to mimic the simplistic and well-known rationale of an arms dealer.

Mark Tybell Coogee

Experience shows where problems lie

I am a head teacher in an extremely disadvantaged state high school. However, I also taught for several years in two "elite" private schools, so I have had the opportunity to observe how the special provisions system works in both situations.

In the private schools, caring is a priority. The wealth of students' families does not mean they are any less needy of these provisions. These schools have in place specially created support departments and give time and resources to their highly qualified staff, often more than one in a school, to carry out the identification, testing, interviews and paperwork required to get the provisions organised.

State schools are also caring. Their support staff are equally well qualified to do this job. What is the difference?

In the state school, only one support teacher is allocated to this job. That teacher is very

likely on a full teaching load with no period allowance, which means preparation and marking time is eaten into trying to organise special provisions for a large number of very needy students.

Factor in high absenteeism, serious behavioural problems and families' lack of English, and the time spent getting this job done increases dramatically. Teaching and learning must be the support teacher's priorities, so not everything will get done.

State schools are supposed to be the ones providing equality for all. Until this is backed up by adequate resources, the private schools will continue to outdo the state schools in taking advantage of special provisions.

Name and suburb withheld

Full rail upgrade needed

At last the figures come out, and we see how ludicrous it was to abandon the plans for a full rail network upgrade ("Petrol crisis fuels bus, train crush", May 30).

Sydney Morning Herald, 31 May - 1 June 2008, p. 34