

1984

Entertainment

Exhibit reveals flaws in the fabric

By THOMAS GLADYSZ
Contributing Writer

"If I get safe contraceptives, I can paint romance, not abortion. If you create jobs, I won't paint poverty. If you remove your armies from other people's countries, I won't paint war. If you remove prisons, I won't paint the incarcer-

ated. If you remove your bloody nuclear devices from my garden, I will find time to paint the flowers. . . . Such self-description serves as an introduction to the work of artist Sue Coe, whose black-and-white photo engravings are on exhibit at the 1984 Gallery, 1217 Turner Street in

Lansing. Entering the room filled with the work of Sue Coe is tantamount to entering a nervous breakdown, but the nervous breakdown is not the artist's but rather society's. Coe's art is troubling, predominantly dark in color, never decorative and consumed with brutal im-

ages of rape, torture and violence. Sue Coe's graphics skill delineates our world in its ugly minutes, but these minutes have become nightmarish days and lives for the many victims so starkly portrayed.

Born and raised in London, England, Coe attended art school there and began illustrating for magazines at the age of 16. After some years, she began to sense a shrinking market for her art and in 1972 moved to America.

"I decided I'd try New York. I went straight to the New York Times from getting off the airplane with my portfolio and started working immediately, that same day, for the Op Ed page," Coe said. "I didn't have enough money to even get a hotel room, so I asked to be paid straight away, and I was, so I stayed."

SINCE THEN, Coe's editorial commissions have appeared in a quirky variety of publications including The London Times, Rolling Stone, Esquire, Mother Jones, New Scientist, Village Voice and New Musical Express. Also, her works have been exhibited in small galleries in London and New York as well as the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the San Jose Museum of Contemporary Art. But, her abrasive

style and activist content have often not found her favor with her editors.

One work on display that was censored in publication was "Woman Raped on Pool Table While 20 Men Watched." Commissioned by the Boston Globe, the work accounts the New Bedford Rape, showing men with lowered pants standing in line to rape the terrified woman while other men sit at the bar watching.

Coe's plain (and almost incidental) rendering of the rapist's buttocks however was enough for puritan interests to have the lower half of the drawing omitted. Coe pointed out in an interview Sunday that the Boston Globe nevertheless carried advertisements showing women in a suggestive manner. A different drawing of the rape scene suggests the source of such a double standard, as it is titled "Romance in the Age of Raygun."

Coe's other work deals with equally controversial subjects. "Bobby Sands" depicts the skeletal Sands lying on a table as his guards, one of them Margaret Thatcher, torture and force-feed Sands at the same time. "Nuclear Missiles on German Soil" and "Fallout Too Late" show the agony and horrors-to-be brought on by

nuclear weapons.

Throughout her many original drawings, made with graphite, paint and things collaged from the media are messages to be read and messages to be gotten. Coe said that she believes most art "is too removed from the people," and that is why she so specifically and starkly deals with topical themes. Citing Goya, George Grosz, John Heartfield, and Bertolt Brecht as influences.

One of the exhibit's most frightful pictures is "Woman Tied to a Pole." Based on a true incident, the picture portrays a black woman who had been left tied to a pole after being raped by an entire company of white South African soldiers. When the company's only black soldier had refused to rape the woman, he too was forced at gunpoint to rape her. The underlying meaning of this drawing is a message that is in much of Sue Coe's work — the occurrence of the victim forced to victimize. Through Coe's art, our tragedy is the same as the victims so starkly portrayed.

SUE COE'S WORK will be shown and is for sale at the 1984 Gallery through April 27. Phone 482-3333 for further information.



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