Spiegelman to draw on forbidden images for Speaker Series speech

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There are few people the Students' Union would allow to speak on the Mary Hunter Thorness Stage—legendary comic artist Art Spiegelman being one of them.

Spiegelman will be at the University of Alberta tomorrow night as part of the SU's Revolutionary Speakers Series, where he's scheduled to discuss forbidden images and freedom of speech.

"It's been interesting to see how [comics have] been rejected and held at arm's length by the mainstream culture," Spiegelman said in a phone interview. "And yet more and more, we're living in a world where comics are somehow permeating the whole culture in the form of cinema, in the form of cartoon art, and that cartoon art occasionally is running up into world events in ways that are creating enormous clashes—the most recent in the Muhammad cartoons that we're living with the hangover of still." Spiegelman is best known as the main storyteller and Jewish artist and the Nazi Germans as cart in the graphic novel, MAID, A Survivor's Tale. The work, which described his parents' experiences as Holocaust concentration camp survivors, won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. However, more recently, some of his work has raised eyebrows and in some cases even faced censorship.

The June 2006 issue of Harper's magazine was pulled from Canadian bookshelves by Indian and Chapters after his article, Drawing Blood: Outrageous Cartoons and the Art of Change," which focused on Spiegelman's ideology of forbidden images, faced political controversy in the wake of the Muhammad cartoons.

"I figure, even if I just have to see the article out loud to people in Canada, I will, if you want to allow discourse to continue," he said.

He argues that freedom of speech is an appropriate reason for printing material that could be considered offensive, as long as it opens up real dialogue and "not when it just bears up people who are already being beaten up." Spiegelman said that he tends to look towards the freedom of speech side of the equation despite the negative consequences it sometimes brings.

"Even when it leads to incense ba- cose denial and speeches or whatever, I just try to have ... faith in the notion that discourse eventually leads to better understanding," he said. "That's why it's even to keep arguing about it until it lands—so long as blood isn't being shed or about to be shed because of something said, then the longer the solu- tion is delayed.

His goal as a comic artist is to try and entertain while at the same time saying something that needs to be said. And since his involvement as one of the founding members of the American underground comics in the '60s and '70s, Spiegelman says he's seen an enormous shift in the way society views the role of comics.

"Things that I thought and was in a minority, often of one, in 1966 or '67 have become the dominant take now that we've moved through a kind of sea change of how comics are being seen," he said. "Which is to say, the notion of comics might be some sort of an absurd valuehallucination anymore.

Spiegelman explained he's been persuaded to come speak at the U of A for much of the same reason that he chose to reach at Columbia University—because of the opportunities for dialogue the experiences offer.

"If this were

1. How do you intend to improve the public profile of students within the larger community?

I believe that the first thing we need to do is engage students a little bit more to get better minded events— advocacy-related events—and then I think that really improves our profile within the community because we'll have a stronger and more visible student voice.

2. What is the biggest challenge you see currently facing the relationship between the U of A and the provincial government?

Funding. No question. The University needs more money in order to be able to do what we're doing. You need to make sure that we're lobbying with the University in a lot of cases and making sure the undergraduate voice is heard. We've seen a lot of the money that the University does receive go to research, and so we need to see a lot more of that go towards the student experience in the classroom. I think the key is to get things funded to support the University in order to see them get more funding so improve education as a whole.

3. The VFX is effectively the lobby voice for students. How do you plan to coordinate national and provincial lobbying efforts?

I think that we need to look into a national lobby group, specifically CASA (Canadian Alliance of Student Associations), and see whether or not we would receive benefits that would warrant the investment. I think that this is important and it's something we haven't looked into in the past few years and we should. I'd definitely give it a thought. At the same time, we need to continue to work with CASA (Council of Alberta University Students) at a provincial level to get our voice heard at that level and at the same time that I think CASA is the only way we can get CASA step up to a national level as well, just as the Alberta student voice was a whole heard at the national level.

4. You could improve focus on any issue within postsecondary education, other than the cost of tuition, what would it be?

That would be housing, for sure. I think it's something the Students' Union needs to do more of—work with the City and work with the provincial government to see things like property taxes on residence and the power of the city to be changed. That's an $840,000-a-year issue for the student voice, and I'd like to see that funnelled back into improved quality and reduced rate.

5. You have five minutes to compose a haiku on why you should be elected.

This year's election
Was for a human to get Realistic results.