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Can Art Be Separate from the Artist?

Art is a reflection of our society. It takes on many forms as film, television, novels, poetry, painting, sculpture, comic books, poetry and even video games. When all things fall, it is art that will outlive everyone. It is what people preserve. It is what people live for. Art is seen as entertainment and a way to escape the difficulties of life to a brief amount of time. It also serves to challenge the audience and introduce new ideas and to bring critical commentary to the world. Art is not just a reflection of the world, it is also the reflection of those who create it. But in these divisive times, a question has come up about how one should view art, especially art that was either made or allowed to make by someone who has committed sexual assault. How should we judge these people and the art they created, especially when that particular art has been so influential on our culture. Can we separate art from the artist?

With the rise of the MeToo Movement, many people have called out for their past history of sexual harassment and assault from politics to film. Some of these allegations from being creepy, disgusting, criminal and all the above. Known people accused of sexual assault in just the film industry alone include Harvey Weinstein, Bill Cosby, Kevin Spacey, John Lasseter, Dustin Hoffman, Woody Allen, Roman Polanski and recently Bryan Singer just to name a few.

These men have been a part in one way or another in some of the greatest films ever made. Films that have shaped the film industry itself, revitalized dying genres, gave us some of

the best performances on screen and made filmmakers themselves into their own genres. With these particular men being part of films that have shaped culture, it leaves one with the tough question of should art be separate from the artist.

As a lifelong film fan and as someone who loves all film of all generations, I have been struggling with this question since the exposure of Harvey Weinstein. I love all film and I strive not only to watch and study film, but to preserve it as works of art. But with so many people in the industry being accused of sexual assault, it has been difficult revisiting films from these individual people.

Harvey Weinstein, despite being the worst offender and the one who instigated the MeToo Movement is different because he was never involved creatively with the films he was apart of. John Lasseter, one of the leading animators at Pixar is in a similar situation, as he became more of a businessman than a creator as time went on and his accusations are not as severe as Weinstein's.

Bill Cosby, Kevin Spacey and Dustin Hoffman are a little more difficult because they actually appear on the screen. What is worse about this is that their presence takes away from the hard work that others put into the films and television that they are apart of.

Then you have the likes of Woody Allen and Roman Polanski who have become such high-profile filmmakers, that they have become genres of their own. Allen and Polanski even starred in some of their early classic works.

When it comes to an artist dealing with personal issues such as drugs, alcohol or divorce, it is easier to separate the art from the artist because those are usually personal issues that do not necessarily bring harm to others. Sexual assault is a whole other thing and it must be addressed.

Today, people have been living in a society where they do not want to face the consequences for their actions.

While Harvey Weinstein was arrested for a short while, he got out with a million-dollar bail and nothing, but his passport taken away from him and an ankle bracelet to show for it.

Bryan Singer has had a history of pedophilia and calls every accusation homophobic to push away the clear evidence against him and he continues to make millions of dollars off his films and continues to work in the film industry.

John Lasseter an animation pioneer and once one of the leading men at Pixar, quickly took a job at Skydance Media, a little too soon after the allegations against him.

Kevin Spacey denied the accusations against him and tried to change the subject by coming out as gay and making such a personal period in someone's life tainted then denying the accusations playing as his House of Cards character Frank Underwood and made his accusations seem like a joke. Dustin Hoffman denies the allegations against him as well.

Woody Allen has continuously denied the accusations made against by his adopted daughter, all while marrying his other adopted daughter in the process. Roman Polanski ended up fleeing the country after he drugged, sodomized and raped a thirteen-year-old girl.

These men have committed heinous sexual assault crimes and need to be punished for them. Just because they have made great films, does not mean they are free of the consequences of their actions.

One the other hand, people are living in a society where the moment you are accused of something, the immediate reaction from people is “You are guilty, you are a terrible person, you have always been a terrible person, you are going to Hell and also I hate you.” People’s anger goes from zero to a thousand in a second and social media has made it worse. People are living in a world where they are no longer any forgiveness or second chances and this goes beyond sexual harassment. In the judicial system, if a person is accused of something, that person is innocent, until proven guilty. But that logic has been fading away in a cultural sense.

In Aziz Ansari’s case, he just went on a very awkward date and it was immediately labeled as sexual harassment. James Gunn was once known for his provocative style and when he made some offensive jokes about pedophilia, he apologized and continued to grow as it showed through the “Guardians of the Galaxy” films and he was still crucified for them. Just recently, Liam Neeson came out about how he wanted revenge for his friend who was raped by a black man and how that anger and raged blinded him into wanted to kill any black person that provoked him, until he saw how he was wronged and called himself out for it.

If this type of attitude continues, anyone can be called out for anything and they will be click baited to their doom.

In most cases, one can easily separate art from the artist. But with sexual assault it is different. As a society, people cannot just throw away the films that these men have been a part of and pretend that they never happened, but at the same time, we cannot let their behavior go unpunished no matter how great the films are. But people must also be willing to listen and to allow others to grow and seek a second chance.

When it comes to art, artists create their work for an audience. While the artist still has creative control of the art itself, but when it is made, it belongs to the audience. At the end of the day, it all comes down to personal choice.

I wish I had a better solution for everyone. I really wish I did. Maybe we take the films made by these men before their accusations and try to preserve the people they were before. But I do not think that their work should be forgotten about. People need to see their film because no film is made by one person. It is made by many and to allow one person to ruin those great films would be to throw away the astounding work from those other individuals. In a way, this is a similar situation to works like Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" for its use of the N-Word or D.W. Griffith's film "The Birth of a Nation" which depicts the Ku Klux Klan as heroes and portrays African-Americans as racist stereotypes despite its innovations in filmmaking. These works are a part of our culture and need to be shown to people. But the social

context of these flaws needs to be addressed in future conversation. All I can say that there needs to be a massive change as to how we look at these works by these individuals and we need have a careful and intellectual conversation about these issues. The fact that all these sexual assault cases have spent decades not being talked about is why it is blowing up in everyone faces now.

At the end of the day it all comes down to personal choice in when it comes to deciding to see these films made by these people and when there are controversial topics like these, all I can say is be nice to each other and to strive to have intellectual conversations and to just listen and understand each other.