

Resolved: Artists should be attentive to the political ramifications of their work.

Affirmative: Aesop (Molly Stevens) '15

Negative: Ben Osher '15

The "artistic process" is one of our most mystifying and revered constructs. Art is a safe harbor for radicals, druggies, outcasts, and mountain men (see: Iver, Bon). Art can explore the future, create the never could be, depict the illicit, muddy the sacred, and sexualize the man, woman child, absurd, and ostensibly unsexualizable. We can't locate this imaginative space. We may spend hours, days, or years chasing after it and many of us worship at its altar. To rip off from Konstantin Stanislavsky, art (for him, theater) is the expressive arena for "the life of the human spirit." History bears witness to this truth. With great notoriety, art has revealed itself as religion's nonpareil friend or enemy - occasionally both simultaneously (see: Buonarroti, Michelangelo). Art's power to inspire strong spiritual conviction lives in the beauty of Catholic iconography. Its power to challenge the sacred is evident in Judaism's prohibition against all statues and sculptures in and around the home, fearing idolatry.

The elevated and powerful status of art has led to a great debate over what constitutes artistic integrity. This seems intrinsic to artistic creation in that art *can* exist free from the compromises that plague so many other disciplines and media. What, then, does it mean to "sell out?" How much and in what way ought artists be concerned with sincerity over relevance? The purpose of this week's debate is to explore these ideas in terms of the relationship between aesthetics and politics.

Should the incredible power of art ever be wielded politically? Should artists ever concern themselves with the functionality of their creations? How would such a disposition reflect on the integrity of that artist's artistic process? Why shouldn't political inspiration or criticism be a legitimate goal for art? There is no denying that art is often explicitly political (folk music), or that it can be interpreted politically (Bob Dylan). As artists, are we acting irresponsibly or true to our vocation when we deliver a poem, song, or painting to an audience without any concern for the consequences? Does the greatest art stem from the urge to express what is latent within or from the desire to communicate effectively with other humans?

Please join us this Thursday's eve, October 18, at 7:30pm in the Faculty Room of Massachusetts Hall. Dress well.

Sincerely yours,
Maimonides the Bohemian