

”Art has a long term value which dwarves that of a quick, soon to be forgotten buck”

UK Royal Academy of Arts curator opposes sale of Detroit Institute of Arts artwork

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Adrian Locke is a Curator at the Temporary Exhibitions Programme at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. He curated the recent highly successful exhibition, “Mexico: A Revolution in Art 1910-1940” at the RA.

The 1910 Mexican Revolution not only transformed the economic, political and social situation in Mexico. It gave rise to a flourishing of the arts. One of the main purposes of the exhibition was to reveal the wealth of art produced in Mexico during that period by Mexican and international artists and photographers that included Diego Rivera, whose murals adorn the Detroit Institute of Arts.

As part of the campaign opposing the sale of artwork at the Detroit Institute of Arts, the SEP (Britain) has solicited the following statement from Dr. Locke.

The threat to sell off the collections of the Detroit Institute of Arts is an ill-thought, eye-catching, headline-grabbing proposition designed to reduce discussion on the subject to an overly simplistic binary either/or debate. In other words, either we choose to police our streets or sell off the art. Keeping the art, it implies, means putting people’s lives at risk. Either you are with us or against us; there is no other solution

The threat to sell off the collection presupposes that art has no value other than in purely monetary terms and overlooks the enriching and educating worth of art. Art has a long term value which dwarves that of a quick, soon to be forgotten buck. Art, after all, is part of the fabric of human life and helps illustrate our rich and varied history, through good and bad times. It is a form of expression like no other and has continued to develop as man evolves.

In this respect it has shadowed our shared existence and illuminated our distinct histories.

The mural by Diego Rivera, “Detroit Industry,” a gift of Edsel B. Ford (in other words the Ford Motor Car Company), reflects exactly that principle—capturing the role that art has played in the history of the city and is, like the entire collection, a unique asset. To sell these works and dismantle the well-known and much respected collection of the museum would be an enormous disservice to the people of Detroit and those who visit the city, as well as to the dedicated team of the DIA who have worked tirelessly to overcome all the challenges that have confronted them as the city’s financial landscape has changed over the last few years. It is an irreplaceable asset that must be protected at all costs in memory of those that helped establish and develop it as well as for the enrichment of future generations.

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