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Should the government fund the arts? [1]

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Should the government fund the arts? No, says Pete Spence [3], the newest addition to the Adam Smith Institute team at The Economist's debate site. Pete makes a strong argument against taxpayer subsidies for the arts, arguing that they should be opposed not because of the cost, but because of the harmful impact of government money on the arts themselves:

> *The unspoken question throughout Mr Davey's piece is who defines what art is. Culture is valuable, but not when dictated to us. It should be organic, its ability to change through time to reflect the zeitgeist of the time being one of its defining features. Government agencies must be careful not to seem to support the party of power to avoid attacks as a propagandist, while not being too radical, for fear of facing cuts to funding. These pressures see funds directed towards the mediocre and the predictable. Government funding is no guarantee of success: for every ?The King?s Speech? there is a ?Sex Lives of the Potato Men?.*

What's more, the nature of government funding means that the system will choose which 'good art' to fund. In other words, if people don't like Tibetan nose flute orchestras enough to pay themselves, they will be forced to do so by their betters at the Arts Council. A bad model, says Pete:

> *To appreciate the arts does not require us to be able to tell a Monet from a Manet. It is up to individuals to decide whether their lives are more enriched by watching a Hollywood film than by attending the opera. Richer people are more likely to go to the sort of ?elite? arts that are funded by the government. When Mr Davey speaks of making prices affordable, he in fact refers to a subsidy to the middle classes. It is unclear why fans of Adele and ?The Dark Knight Rises? should have to pay for my enjoyment of Italian opera.*

Well, indeed. The Economist holds a running vote on the topic. Right now, 42% have voted No to taxpayer funding for the arts. If you agree with Pete that the arts are something government is better left out of, please do go and vote No as well [3].

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[3] http://www.economist.com/debate/days/view/876
[4] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript
[5] http://disqus.com