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# Art and Community: Do Artists and Museums Have a Social Responsibility?

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Miranda Clark-Binder, La Salle Art Museum

Mey-Yen Moriuchi, Art History



# Art as an Instrument for Social Change

Diego Rivera, *Liberation of the Peon*, 1931

“Art which is not propaganda is not art at all.” -Diego Rivera

Diego Rivera, *Enslavement of the Indians*, 1930

“A work of art ... does not need revolution as its subject in order to be revolutionary.... Art will not create social change, but it can provoke thought and prepare us for change. Art can tell us what we do not see, and sometimes what we do not want to see....”

-Elizabeth Catlett

Elizabeth Catlett, *Female Sharecropper*, 1952

Elizabeth Catlett, *Male Sharecropper*, 1945



Peter Pagast and Jane Golden, *Peace Wall*, 1997

“We believe art ignites change.” -  
Philadelphia Mural Arts Program

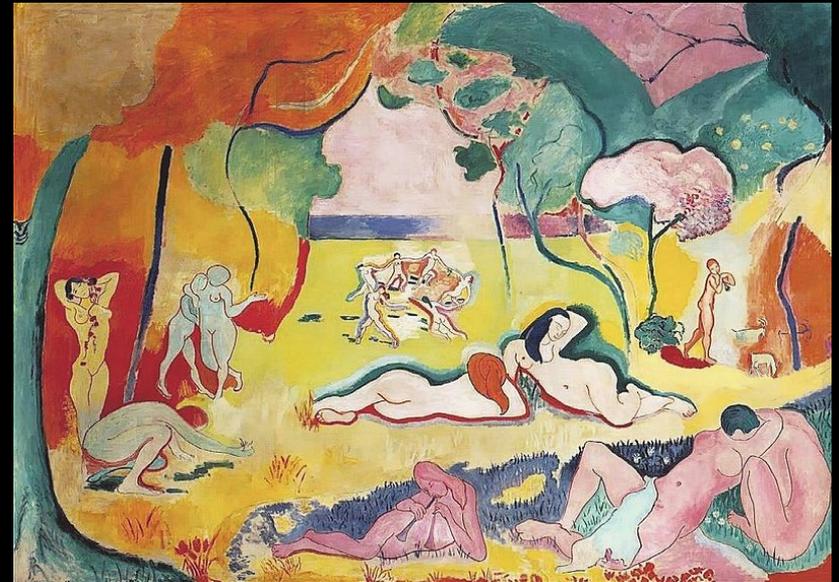
Erik Okdeh, *Family Interrupted*, 2012



# Art for Art's Sake

Henri Matisse, *The Parakeet and the Mermaid*, 1952,  
and *Joy of Life*, 1905

“What I dream of is an art of balance, of purity and serenity, devoid of troubling or depressing subject matter, an art which could be for every mental worker, for the businessman as well as the man of letters, for example, a soothing, calming influence on the mind, something like a good armchair which provides relaxation from physical fatigue.” -Henri Matisse





Paul Cezanne, *Ginger Pot*, c. 1895

“Basically I don’t think of anything when I paint. I see colours. I strive with joy to convey them onto my canvas just as I see them. They arrange themselves as they choose, any old way. Sometimes that makes a picture. I’m a brainless animal...” -Paul Cezanne

Paul Cezanne, *Mont Sainte Victoire*, 1902-04



“...after all, the aim of art is to create space -  
space that is not compromised by  
decoration or illustration, space within  
which the subjects of painting can live.”  
-Frank Stella

Frank Stella, *Abra Variation I*, 1969

Frank Stella, *Zambezi*, 1959

## Discussion

1. Do you think artists have a social obligation/responsibility?
2. What value do you place on aesthetics and an artist's personal vision? Creativity? Originality?
3. Do you think art should be a tool for social change?
4. Can art be impactful if it doesn't come with a socially or politically charged message? In other words, can art just be art?

# Do Museums Have a Social Responsibility?



## Are art museums for someone or about something?

- “All museums...are ripe with possibilities for visitors to find personal meaning and to appreciate other cultures. But the perspectives of mainstream cultures still pervade many museums. By cultivating and expressing a variety of cultural perspectives in the presentation and interpretation of their collections, museums can foster inclusiveness.” -American Association of Museums
- “...the most fundamental change that has affected museums during the (past) half century...is the now almost universal conviction that they exist in order to serve the public. The old-style museum felt itself under no such obligation. It existed, it had a building, and it had collections and a staff to look after them... The museum’s prime responsibility was to its collections, not its visitors.” – Kenneth Hudson, UNESCO magazine Museum International

What do you think?



## What do art museums want?

- “I like to think that by providing and preserving examples of beauty, museums foster a greater sense of caring in the world and urge their visitors to undergo a radical decentering before the work of art.” -Neil MacGregor, Director, British Museum
- “Buildings don’t make museums; art and only art does. It is art, speaking unequivocally for itself, that creates a museum’s imprimatur in the first place. The debt of museums to art and artists down through time cannot be overestimated, can never be repaid; it is an obligation that can only be respected, abided by and learned from.” -Roberta Smith, Art Critic, New York Times



What do you think?



## In conclusion...

- What makes good art?
- What makes a good museum?