

Tekst 2

Artists going public

Since at least the time of Lord Byron there have been artists who felt driven to give their energy, their name and even, in a few cases, their lives to the great causes of their age. This month two more public artists added their names to a roster of honour that already includes figures from Auden to Zola, taking in Havel and Hugo, Robeson and Rostropovich along the way.

Last week the pianist Daniel Barenboim was barred by Israel from crossing into the West Bank to give a recital in Ramallah. Mr Barenboim had played the last three sonatas of Beethoven to an audience in Jerusalem. The Ramallah "recital for peace", in which Mr Barenboim planned to play the same programme, would have been a piece of bridge-building, the latest in a succession of Barenboim initiatives that have brought together young Israeli and Arab musicians. While this was happening in Israel, a panel of judges in India were enforcing their own piece of inartistic authority. In New Delhi the judges imposed a one-day prison term and a 2,000-rupee fine on the writer Arundhati Roy for criticising the court during its deliberations on the Narmada river dam project in Gujarat. The 1997 Booker prize winner has been a fierce campaigner against the human and environmental consequences of the project, and Ms Roy has often attacked the courts for stifling dissent over a plan that could displace more than a quarter of a million people.

Not all public artists get it right. For every Jane Fonda there is a John Wayne. In the end such artists may just be names written in water, of more interest to their admirers than to history. But theirs is a noble tradition all the same, and both Mr Barenboim and Ms Roy are the most recent embodiments of it.

'Guardian Weekly'

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- 1p 2 ■ What is the point made in this editorial?
- A Artists' support to the world's good causes generally deserves approval.
 - B Artists who support good causes do so without bothering about their reputation.
 - C Authorities have enough reason to fear direct action by artists.
 - D Politics and the arts mixed together provide explosive material.