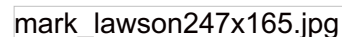


Can News do The Arts?

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2008/01/18/can-news-do-the-arts/

2008-1-18

The Guardian media critic and BBC arts presenter [Mark Lawson](#) has got himself in to an exquisite row over disparaging [comments](#) he made about the flagship BBC Radio 4 [Today](#) Programme's arts coverage. He has now back-tracked, which is a shame for all sorts of reasons.



Everyone is now denying it, but [word](#) is that various BBC editors and top suits were furious with Lawson who now says his remarks were “taken out of context”.

Lawson had the audacity to point out that when [Today](#) presenters interview artists they can rarely have actually seen, heard or read the works in question. (Not true of James Naughtie who really has a love and knowledge of opera and fiction). The result is often shallow and predictable items. But the audience are supposed to enjoy them because at least they are not about politics.

The result is ridiculous items such as this morning when the [Today](#) programme allowed two ‘artists’ to sing a pathetic little protest song about Arts Council funding for three minutes without any cross-examination or factual content. Would they even have dreamt of allowing Greenpeace to sing an anti-nuclear protest song for three minutes? But this is hardly a problem for only the [Today](#) programme. As Lawson pointed out in his original ‘unclarified’ interview, news journalists seem to suspend their normal editorial judgement when it comes to the arts. In my experience this leads to the three case-iron editorial principles for hard news journalists when covering the arts:

1. All arts cuts are BAD
2. “But Is It Art?” is a valid story premise (think about it – would you ever do an item on the premise of “But Is It Politics?”)
3. Pop stars (especially middle-class ones like Radiohead), writers such as David Hare (i.e. Left Wing), and of course, liberal American actors such as George Clooney, know far more about global warming, the Iraq War, and most big global issues than those silly politicians, policy-makers, and professionals who actually spend their time doing the boring and complicated job of running things.

I admire Mark Lawson and I would like to hear more from him about arts journalism. He's one of our most intelligent and perceptive cultural critics.

- Copyright © 2014 London School of Economics and Political Science