

Block's Response Still Relevant in Today's Politics

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As the political season heats up, an art exhibit at the HUB Gallery attempts to open a conversation about the corrupted nature of contemporary politics. "Response to Machiavelli" presents a series of abstract paintings by Maryland-based artist Tom Block that challenge a style of politics marked by greed, dishonesty and the desire for power.

Niccolo Machiavelli was a 16th-century Italian political philosopher who penned a manual for aspiring rulers titled "The Prince." Because of the amoral political counsel he gives in that book, Machiavelli has permanently been associated with the most depraved and manipulative forms of politics. Block uses his art to respond to Machiavelli's ideas and to those who abide by them in the present.

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The paintings on display at the HUB Gallery explore alternate visions of politics written about by thinkers such as Confucius, Martin Luther King Jr. and Gandhi. "Each painting is based on a saying from one of these thinkers that I think are trying to have a social world that works for the people instead of for the people in power," Block said.

The paintings are composed of a variety of abstract images, cartoon sketches and printed pictures laid over broken and weathered wooden frames. "The broken structure of the canvas represents the broken political system that we live in, and overlaid are these ideals that these people have thought about, talked about and in some cases put into practice," Block said.

This unusual mixture of three-dimensional and two-dimensional elements in the works is part of the reason Block's work was chosen for the HUB Gallery, according to Faye Kendall, communications assistant for the gallery. Kendall said that she hopes that the political themes of the art will appeal to a broad audience, given the excitement surrounding the upcoming presidential election.

"(Block) talks about changes that need to be made, about comparing the past to the present," Kendall said.

Block created "Response to Machiavelli" around the time of the 2004 election, and he said he thinks many of the problems he addresses in these works are still present in this election. "The Machiavellian attitude toward the accrual of power, and the specific manner in which you lie and cheat and twist the truth, were very much on display in 2004, and I think it's very much a part of our system."

Jared Hibbard Swanson, State College, PA, October 3, 2008