

How do you solve a problem like Maria?



Tenor Christopher Gillett is incandescent with rage over Culture Secretary Maria Miller's assertion that the arts should be all about making a profit.



How familiar is this scene? You're applying for something online. You've registered with your favourite colour and first pet's name. You've given not only your address but the address where you first lived. You've found and entered your passport number, your mother's maiden name, your bank details and your credit card details. Finally you hit APPLY but your only reward is a page in fierce red: 'YOU MUST ACCEPT THE TERMS AND CONDITIONS!' You hit the Back button to discover all the information you had just entered has completely disappeared, but there, throbbing in red is a tiny box that you had failed to notice or click.

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This is how I imagine the head honchos in the arts feel this week. They have been told by the Culture Secretary that they must stress the economic value, not the artistic value, of the arts in order to secure public funding. Quite apart from the fact that this smacks of advertising spiel (and our Culture Secretary has a background in those dark arts), with its twisted logic that tells me I'll be orgasmically happy if I wash my hair with something that has something loosely to do with fruit in it, I thought that we in the arts have been banging on about the economic benefits of the arts for decades. What did we do wrong? Did we fail to click the box accepting the Terms and Conditions? How many times do we have to keep refreshing the page?

It turns out that I've been stupid, that I thought we were now beyond the idea that the arts represents very good value for money, and that we could accept the idea that the arts was one of the things this country excelled in, that the arts were an essential glue in an ever more disparate society. Aside from the fact that I've yet to meet an artist who didn't want their work to be successful - there's no lack of motivation in the arts world - there is surely something to be said for an approach to life, a responsibility beyond our selfish

selves perhaps, where the first goal isn't merely financial gain. Surely even the greediest capitalist can see that art rarely succeeds where the only motive is profit. In short, do we really want to entrust the arts to accountants? Do we really have to justify the value of the arts with spreadsheets?

My local postwoman in Wiltshire has a boyfriend and he drew up a bucket list. One of the items on the list was 'Go to an opera'. So for his birthday she bought him a CD of *Tosca*, they listened to it a lot, then bought £16 tickets to sit in the amphitheatre at Covent Garden. They were absolutely overwhelmed. They loved it. That, Culture Secretary, is the value of public arts funding.

[christophergillett.co.uk \(http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm\)](http://www.christophergillett.co.uk/index.htm)

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