

Nov 04, 2016 by *John Worne*

Taking Turner to China ^[1]

It's been great to get such thoughtful comments on our International Relations Spectrum. One way for me to understand other perspectives would be to take a piece of our work at the British Council and look at how we could frame it. Here's a case study to take views on what it could be for – in terms of intentions - and how we could/should describe it and deliver it to maximize its impact.

I'll deliberately exaggerate for effect, but let's imagine you can take a J.M.W. Turner exhibition to China in three different guises:

A cultural diplomacy (CD) guise; a public diplomacy (PD) guise; a cultural relations (CR) guise.

If you take it in an extreme CD guise, you could be trying to say that our country/civilization is far more advanced than yours; we've had Arts and Crafts for hundreds of years; we are more virile and our world view will prevail. That perhaps is what you might have had in the Cold War in some of the things that were done between East and West in sport and culture and science.

An extreme PD way of doing it, might be to claim (rather spuriously, I think) that Turner was the first climate change painter, because you would only have had Turner's incredible skies with the smog of the industrial revolution. There is a claim that his skies are not hyper-real; however, they are actually what he was seeing because of the “pea-soup” of pollution that was floating over London. So if you were taking Turner in a PD guise you could say, "Here, China, you are on the way to being one of the world's biggest polluters, what are you doing to tackle climate change?"

In taking Turner in a CR guise, I think you could conduct a much richer “shared” conversation about what was being painted in China during Turner's time, what role the landscape has in China's cultural heritage, what is happening to our collective environment here and there etc. You would be having a much richer set of conversations because you would not necessarily tend towards “boasting”, which is the extreme CD frame or “shouting/telling” which is the extreme PD one.

I'd be interested to hear about other real world examples - of how a piece of work can be delivered - with different intentions: CD, PD or CR and how that affects impact and engagement in other practitioners' experience.
