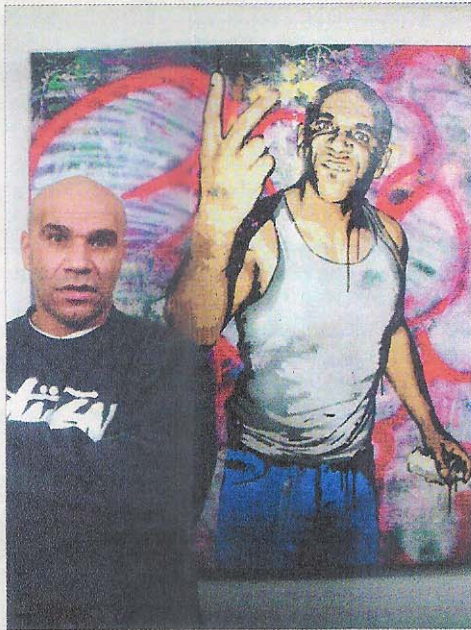


# The way I see it: artists on politics

## Goldie, artist and DJ



**Does art make a difference?**

Yes, of course it does. If there was no art it would be a dire situation. Regardless of what some people might want you to think, art always helps people put their views across.

**Should politics and art mix?**

When art is juxtaposed with a political message, it can put pressure on that situation and bring about change. My work has a social slant, but I wouldn't say I'm ever directly trying to challenge political situations with it. If people want to read into it, fine. I'm just telling it like it is. The whole thing about kids being out of control in this country, that's down to a lack of funding from the government. The places that young people used to go to have an artistic voice, have someone listen to them – the community centres, the art projects – have all gone.

**Is good art a product of inspiration or perspiration?**

You need an idea to make it worth working hard.

**Does money corrupt an artist?**

It hasn't corrupted me. I think when it becomes ridiculous it can corrupt anyone, an artist or anyone else.

**Is your work for the many or the few?**

It's for the few, I guess. I've always been a bit self-indulgent. It's very individual: if people like it, they like it. I've never tried to make art or music for the masses.

**Which artist do you most admire, and why?**

Miles Davis has always been a very major influence for music. In terms of visual art, someone like Futura [the graffiti artist Futura 2000] is an early inspiration. He jumped out of the mould, took graffiti somewhere new.

**Where do you work best?**

At home, I'm 40 now! I paint in the back garden. There will be months where not much happens, and then days like yesterday – I was up at six and doing things all day. But whenever I have the energy to create, I work at home.

**If you weren't an artist, what would you be?**

A piss artist. I can't say I'd be something that I'm not.

**If you were world leader, what would be your first law?**

I'd give people free travel to wherever they want. Bush was responsible for the biggest scandal of our times. I'd say it was satanic to a certain degree – you might say he's the Hitler of our times. Fear spread through pure scaremongering. It's like the Crusades, if you look back at history, populations have been wiped clear off the slate. Now we're worried about 100 of "our" people dying in a bomb – of course it's terrible, but nothing has really happened to the west in 50 years. What Bush got away with in the western world has bred contempt, and if people were free to go where they want, they'd see things as they really are.

**Do you love your country?**

In spite of all the issues, all the problems, yes.

**Are we all doomed?**

Yes. You might see hope looking at the Obama situation, but he's been left a tarred stick. And it's a big hill to climb. ●  
*"The Kids Are All Riot", an exhibition of Goldie's art, opens in April at the Maverick Showroom, London Ez*

► time, a very new sound – traditional acoustic music mixed with western guitar – and everyone was curious to hear it," says Baaba Maal. "Everyone wanted to participate: they gave us histories of their villages and areas, they gave us songs, they gave us advice on how to stand up and play African music in front of African audiences."

The journey turned out to be an exercise in preservation as well as discovery. The villagers told the two artists that changes in society were eroding old customs, and that music was being lost along with them. In the years following independence in 1960, people had begun to leave their communities to travel to the big cities – Dakar, Nouakchott, Bamako – in search of money and opportunity. The stories the friends heard formed their view of African music as a political force: a means of empowering citizens, educating young people and keeping communities together. "I don't think it works for young African people to leave their families," says Baaba Maal. "In an African family, you're all connected – you want to be with them for every occasion. If people choose to go, it's only because the economic situation is so bad."

For him, social activism isn't a western-style add-on to a profitable career. He sees himself as having a double role: on the one hand, during tours such as African Soul Rebels, he is an ambassador for the kinds of music and people he encountered on his long journey through the subregion. "I discovered that African traditional music is not behind: it is as complex and diverse as any western music," he recalls. "I believed that one day I would show people that music from North America really came from Africa."

Even more important to him, however, is his work with young Africans. In 2003, he was appointed a youth emissary by the United Nations Development Programme, and he now spends much of his time performing for young people and working on improving education. He argues that music gives young Africans a connection with the histories of their own communities, self-confidence, and something to be proud of. "They don't get this when they're sitting in the cities thinking about the west," he notes.

Yet although Baaba Maal's values are conservative, his own career is anything but. He has recently contributed vocals to the video game *Far Cry 2*, he has a new, "very electric" album due out in the spring, and his ambition is to return to the film studios of LA, where he worked on the soundtrack for *Black Hawk Down*. He laughs when I ask about this eccentric mix of projects. "I'm someone who loves to travel and try things I've never tried before," he says. "That's what's great about being a musician." ●

*The "African Soul Rebels" tour will be in the UK from 3-14 March. For more information log on to: [www.musicbeyondmainstream.co.uk](http://www.musicbeyondmainstream.co.uk)*