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Is it trivial, or perhaps even irresponsible, to explore aesthetic themes at a time when the world is engulfed by war, genocide, terrorism, poverty, climate change and financial turmoil? Why indulge in painting, poetry or music when lives and livelihoods are at stake? Can we really afford to entertain questions of taste while concrete political action is urgently required?

This book offers a passionate but systematically sustained defence of an aesthetic engagement with world politics. It argues that aesthetic sources can offer alternative insight: a type of reflective understanding that emerges not from applying the analytical skills that are central to the social sciences, but from cultivating a more open-ended level of creativity and sensibility about the political. We then might be able to appreciate what we otherwise cannot even see: perspectives or people excluded from prevailing purviews, for instance, or the emotional nature and consequences of political events. Drawing on detailed case studies that range from Stalinist Russia to Cold War Germany and contemporary Korea, the author compellingly demonstrates how the poetic imagination can help us understand – and perhaps even shape – some of the most difficult political challenges.

Roland Bleiker is Professor of International Relations at the University of Queensland, Australia. His previous books include *Popular Dissent*, *Human Agency and Global Politics* and *Divided Korea: Toward a Culture of Reconciliation*. He worked as a Swiss diplomat in the Korean DMZ and held visiting fellowships at Harvard, Cambridge, Humboldt, Tampere, Yonsei and Pusan National University as well as the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology and the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague.

The idea behind the *Dona Nobis Pacem* series is, in David Rankin's words, to 'create images of souls in conflict, souls in torment, souls in distress – seeking peace'.
David Rankin, *Dona Nobis Pacem - Night* (2001)
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