

## **The Lasting Impact of Badiuca's Olympic Artwork**

In the months leading up to the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, the world was rightly focused on the fact that China was unfit to host yet another Olympic Games. It had been awarded the 2008 Summer Olympics amid much concern that its human rights record should disqualify it for such an international honor. The late [Congressman Tom Lantos had warned](#), "China will put on a tremendous pageantry and this sickening police state will bask in the reflected glory of the athletes." Nevertheless, the International Olympic Committee went ahead and gave the Olympics to Beijing. Tom Lantos' prediction proved true. On the other hand, everyone who claimed that hosting the Olympics would encourage the Chinese government to improve its actions in the area of human rights were proven utterly wrong.

By 2022, China's record on human rights had only worsened. From its persecution of religious minorities, including forced organ harvesting of Falun Gong practitioners, to its brutal crackdown on democracy activists in Hong Kong, to its systematic abuse of the Uyghurs – with some activists even calling the Olympics the "Genocide Games" – China seemed uniquely unqualified to be the host.

The [Olympic Charter](#) states that the Games aim "to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity." China was trampling on the very notion of human dignity every single day. Yet, calls to cancel the Games went unheeded and much of the world seemed ready to focus on the athletic prowess of the competitors, rather than the misdeeds of the host country.

Against this backdrop, the Chinese dissident and artist-in-exile Badiuca created a series of [visually stunning and deeply compelling images](#) that took aim directly at the human rights abuses happening in his country of birth.

Although the images (produced in NFT form) could almost pass for Beijing promotional materials at first glance, a closer look uncovers something vastly different:

- A Chinese biathlete stands with their gun poised, ready to shoot...not at a target but at a member of the Uyghur community
- A snowboarder rides atop a closed-circuit TV camera, in a reference to China's sophisticated and invasive surveillance system
- A figure skater slashes across a bauhinia flower, a traditional emblem of Hong Kong
- A hockey player engages in a bloody tussle with a Buddhist monk
- A curler sends a coronavirus cell gliding across the ice

These arresting images, and the accompanying videos, encapsulate the horrific irony of allowing China to host the Winter Olympic Games. Without words, they make a powerful point about the cowardice of the entire Olympic organization in allowing China the honor of hosting the Olympics for a second time, despite its complete disregard for basic human rights.

At the same time, the images urgently force anyone who sees them to ask deep and fundamental questions about their own role in raising their voice against the atrocities China commits daily against its own people. Badiuca's artwork compels each of us to ask, "What can I do – what should I do – to avoid being complicit in these abuses?" It shames the viewer from carrying on blindly, watching athletes accomplish tremendous feats on the Olympic stage without ever giving a thought to the suffering and horror that lies beyond the borders of the tightly controlled Olympic venues.

Speaking about his work, [Badiuca said](#), "As an artist, it's my job to do something that channels this attention on China towards the conversation that the world should be hearing and what the government is trying to hide. This is obviously not what the Chinese government wants to tell the world and would instead prefer to push this idea that everything is fine and everyone is happy." But his art can, he said, "be a way to challenge people and provoke them to pay attention to things that matter."

Badiuca's Beijing Olympic artwork was downloaded and shared throughout the world in 2022. It was printed and proudly displayed – an act which sometimes sparked controversy even in democratic countries like the United States, [as witnessed on the George Washington University campus in DC](#). The images did not singlehandedly halt the Beijing Olympics. They didn't change the Chinese Communist Party's shameful abuse. But they did leave an indelible impression on anyone who saw them; they made it impossible to fully disassociate the pageantry of the Olympics and the glory of the athletes from the atrocities committed by the Chinese government.

The 2022 Olympic Games have come and gone. But Badiuca's artwork endures. This is, after all, the power of activist art: its potential to live much longer and make a much deeper impression than a headline or a 280-character tweet ever could.

