

# *Support the Arts!*

Who remembers what good comes to us through the arts? What purpose has a poem, or a play, or a painting?

A couple hundred years ago, we could have probably answered that question. But how do we answer it today?

Imagine a scenario from the high school English classroom of our collective memories. If we had our old teacher of yore in the room, he/she might say something like this:

“The question is of value, kids. Why are these things valued?”

“For entertainment!” The class says.

“Too true, class. But there is a deeper value to the arts. What might that be?”

“Well class, what might that be?”

If we could stick our heads into that classroom and witness the sea of blank faces staring at poor teacher right now, we would realize something profound; that teacher’s class is representative of a whole lot of us. Not *all* of us mind you, but most—if you know the answer to the question in question, you would be representative of that one smart kid in class who always raised their hand.

The truth is that the deeper value of the arts has been forgotten. But why?

Well, I will tell you, but the answer might make you squirm—as facing uncomfortable situations that we cause usually will. The truth is that we, the gatekeepers of artistic creation, who decide through our vast numbers what sort of art becomes mass entertainment—we the readers, the viewers, the subscribers and purchasers of books and art—we have answered the question already. Do you doubt it? When we buy posters instead of paintings, visit the pub instead of the play house, and buy a bigger cable TV package with four hundred channels—instead of upgrading to literature?

FACT: When we take things for granted, they disappear. Examples range from the passenger pigeon to indignant children, and the arts are no exception. And so, like our endangered species, like the righteous sons of overbearing parents, we are slowly losing the

arts. How do we lose the arts, you ask? Well, we lose them by losing the artists.

Being an artist is noble, yes—but who will pay the bills and put food on the table? Who indeed? They write so that you may think; they paint so that you may see. And what light their talents can shed on the world is lost—to us—every time they are forced to abandon those talents to find more gainful employ. Necessity is sometimes the birth of, but more often the death of creativity.

Keep in mind that I am not just accusing—not I, nor anybody for that matter is innocent of this negligence, and it’s easy to see why.

After a day of exhausting and, more often than not, unfulfilling work, we opt out of those weighty manuscripts that force us to work further, exhausting our minds even after our bodies are through working. In these conditions, we look for the easy reading—the magazines with the shocking celebrity pictures, the ones that peddle the distracting, unnecessary toys we think we need—the ones with the small words and the short narration, whose purpose is to amuse us with sad stories that make us cry, and happy stories that make us feel good, and humiliating stories that make us gloat and feel better about ourselves, when compared to the celebrities we are reading about.

We all have a weakness there; we all work hard and long for our short leisure, and endeavor to make the most of it. But we are missing out on the *really* good stuff—the substance that is, at the very least, a shining light in the cultural fog—and this stuff also makes us cry, and gloat, and feel good—and what is more, this stuff has real value, and we know it. They tried to teach it to us when we were kids. Now adults, now parents and grandparents, we finally understand what they were talking about.

Now, we *know* its value—and we know, we see—in the tabloids, on the TV—that it is also conspicuously absent in our everyday lives. But where has it gone?

Well, when was the last time anybody went to an art gallery? Or read the *good* stuff?

In fact, where is the depth of thought and scream for compassion that has been absent in our daily reading for so long? We need only to look among our periodicals to see that it is true. In any waiting room or lobby, among the candy near the check-out line, where are the magazines that cater to the thoughtful and compassionate people? On any rack, hardly one in five is worth reading. And our books are hardly any better. Eliminate all the self-help volumes, and what is left are stands of the classics, paper-backed and half-priced. These that once served as a cultural education, and thought provoking, mind-enlarging activities, have been lost in the good intentions of academia. Have we no patience for anything more substantial?

I think we do. The tens of thousands who, graduating with a degree in the humanities without the promise of a job, but stay the course still—they have decreed it. They have shown us that there are still those who value the arts. But they are not alone—there are millions more who share their values. If on that rack in the doctor's office there lay only one magazine that appeals to these individuals, it will undoubtedly be a well-worn issue.

The aim for so many is not more than a good living; they want only to be able to give their family a good life—a pursuit as noble as any other. For so many others, they are reduced to that state—working in an office somewhere, going through the motions, remembering how, in a previous life, they once had bigger dreams; to enlighten the world and see its improvement, the alleviation of all the misery and desperation around them.

How many parents have listened to the dreams of their children, who say that they want to give the world beauty—that they want to change the world?

And how many, upon hearing such heartfelt outbursts, have responded with something akin to this:

“That’s nice, dear. But first, finish your homework.”

We support our troops and we feed our poor and we give each week to the collection plate. We spend two dollars on a bottle of water, five on a happy meal, and even more on the rest. We say wholeheartedly that we value the arts, but our words are empty without action to give them life.

So support the artists and sculptors, the writers and poets, the performers, the musicians, and all of those who, despite their poverty, and in the face of everyone who has endeavored to divert attention from their art so that they might take a better paying job, continue to practice and refine their craft, support them—they struggle now, as always—and as always, they struggle for us.

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Bartleby, Magazine for the Arts  
330 W. Irving Park Road  
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