

Workers, students speak on plans to sell Detroit Institute of Art masterpieces

A WSWS reporting team
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The proposal advanced by Kevyn Orr, Detroit's unelected emergency manager, to consider selling artwork from the Detroit Institute of Art (DIA) to pay off the city's creditors has sparked outrage and concern in Detroit and nationally.

Orr has set a six-week deadline for determining whether or not to take the city into bankruptcy. According to a spokesman for Orr, Bill Nowling, the city's art collection must be considered an asset if the city files for bankruptcy. Meanwhile, Orr is having the DIA's artworks appraised along with other assets of the city.

The move is rightly seen as a fundamental attack on the cultural and social rights of Detroit's population. The DIA's collection includes priceless masterpieces such as Pieter Breughel's "The Wedding Dance" and Vincent Van Gogh's "Self Portrait." The DIA is also the home of Diego Rivera's acclaimed Detroit Industry Murals.

While the DIA is run by a nonprofit agency, the art itself is owned by the city of Detroit. The DIA has hired an attorney to advise on how to protect the collection. Museum officials say they believe the art is a public trust and, under terms of its operating agreement, the art cannot be sold to generate funds for the city. However, Orr's spokesman said that such an agreement would be invalid in a bankruptcy filing.

A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team spoke to workers and young people visiting the DIA about the proposal to sell the museum's art collection.

Kasey, an art history graduate student from the University of Illinois, Chicago, was visiting the museum with a group of friends Saturday.

"We have been doing a series of trips around the Midwest to visit museums that we haven't seen before. We think this is a great museum," she said. "There

have been rumors about selling the Matisse and Van Gogh paintings."

Her friend Samantha Alfrey added, "This would be a disaster for the community to lose such important art works. "Yes," agreed Kasey. "It would set a dangerous precedent."

"They are saying [Mitt] Romney could fund the entire National Endowment for the Arts budget out of his own pocket", said Samantha. "But that would have been the first thing he would have cut if he had been elected president."

Floyd, a maintenance worker employed near the museum, reacted strongly when the WSWS explained the plans by Detroit's emergency manager to consider selling the DIA's collection. "Art is one of the first things they cut out of the schools. But it is really vital for children to be exposed to."

"As far as the emergency manager is concerned, it was a bad idea from day one," he added. "As for him hiring his own law firm to advise the city, we could do that for ourselves. To pay that law firm all that money to come to the conclusion that we should sell our art works and Belle Isle. That's ridiculous."

"Everyone acts like there are just two parties and you support one or the other," he said. "But the way I see it is that neither party is doing anything for the working people."

K. S. Williams, from Monroe, Michigan, visited the DIA with friends Monday. She said, "It really makes me sad that the emergency manager is considering selling the art," adding that "The politicians are using Detroit coffers as their own piggy bank. No one is going to suffer but the little man."

Kendrah, a student from Eastern Michigan University, said, "I was here last summer. It was really beautiful. They took students here from the high

schools to learn about art and culture. It is one of my favorite things about Detroit. I don't think they should sell it."

A former DIA gallery aide from Grosse Pointe added, "That they should even mention selling the art is sickening. They should sell off the casinos instead. The DIA is one of the city's treasures; one man shouldn't have all that power."



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