

“The DIA has really helped educate me”

High school students defend Detroit Institute of Arts

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High school students in Detroit last week spoke out against plans by the city’s emergency manager to sell works from the Detroit Institute of Arts (DIA) to satisfy the demands of the city’s wealthy creditors. The DIA, which regularly hosts school visits and runs outreach programs to area schools and communities, has long had a powerful impact on the cultural level of young people.

Angel Hall is a senior at Cass Technical High School—one of Detroit’s top academic high schools—and intends to study art in college. She opposed the selloff of artwork, saying, “Students need culture. I used to go to the Roeper School before transferring here to Cass Tech. I know a lot of my classmates at Cass don’t have access to art and culture. There are some students in my art classes who have actually said to me ‘I think art is stupid’. They don’t see the point of it. I think it’s because [in society] art isn’t as valued as it should be. It’s not their fault. We need good museums like the DIA, but we also need to have better art education overall. If people don’t know about art and about history, they won’t be able to really appreciate the artwork at the DIA.

“I really like the [DIA’s] European and Egyptian collections. You can’t see artwork like this anywhere else in the area. I’ve visited the DIA lots of times, in middle school and high school. When I go in I usually feel overwhelmed by all the great works. It’s really inspiring to see the amazing things people have created, and it makes me want to challenge myself to create something that can inspire people 50 or 100 years from now.”

Robert and A’Leetzia attend Detroit School of Arts (DSA), a high school that shares its campus with the

Detroit Symphony Orchestra. DSA students can proceed through a number of different curriculum programs specializing in art, music, dance, broadcasting, and other creative disciplines. Speaking on the funding cutbacks for public school arts programs, Robert said because of cuts at DSA “they let go some of my favorite art teachers. They also just had to eliminate the whole music technology department.”

On the DIA, he said, “For me, as someone who is specializing in visual arts, I get inspiration from the DIA. I have actually had my own work on display there.”

A’Leetzia, who has also had prize-winning artwork displayed at the DIA, said, “I especially like the African art section, and the Dutch masters up on the top floor. The point of art is for the artist to get what’s inside their head out to other people.”

Robert added, “America is supposed to be a democracy. It’s very unfair that this outsider [Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr] has come in to make these cuts. I don’t see anything positive that can come from it.”

A’Leetzia concluded, “Taking away the DIA would be taking away what makes Detroit Detroit. And what’s going to happen to the people who work at the museum? We need more jobs, not fewer, to rebuild Detroit.”

Kamryn, a senior at DSA who plays trombone and is a visual artist, said, “Detroit is a very talented city, a very artistic city. It’s horrible to even think of losing the museum. I’ve been going to the DIA for years. It’s really helped educate me. I recently learned about Picasso’s works, the Rose Period and Blue Period. I would hate to see any of it go. A visit to the DIA brings

out togetherness. Artists have displayed their talents for everyone to see. Seeing the paintings is like entering another historic era; it's like being in the room with the artist.”

Lewis Johnson, a DSA junior studying music and composition, said, “I see a touch of history in the art at the DIA. Art is a journey through time. I see what art really is when I'm there. Art is what we see in the world. What's really fascinating to me is being able to read about the artworks and the artists in my textbooks at school and then being able to see the art in person at the DIA. I oppose the selling of the art. It's priceless. The art is for the city, the people. It is not the private property of individuals.”

Adam McQueen, a student at nearby college Center for Creative Studies (CCA) and a recent graduate of DSA, said, “I am very disappointed that they have to sell the artwork. It's such a valuable part of the community. But you know, it's not just the artwork at the DIA. The Detroit School of Arts cut their art program recently and they were going to cut it further but the parents got upset and so they brought back one art teacher. But that barely did anything. I mean, now they have 45 students in a classroom. How can you teach art—or anything—if you're just one person teaching almost 50 people?”



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