

More endorsements for DIA campaign against the sale of art

7 October 2013

We publish today another selection of endorsement messages from around the world for the campaign in defense of the Detroit Institute of Arts. On Friday, the Socialist Equality Party and International Youth and Students for Social Equality held a demonstration that attracted hundreds of workers and young people. This was only the beginning of the campaign to oppose the attack on culture and defend all the rights of the workers. All endorsements will be collected and posted at defendthedia.org, where you can also send in your message of support and find out more about the campaign.

Gian Casper Bott, art historian and curator of the 2012 exhibition “Tatlin: New Art for a New World” in Basel, Switzerland

“Alarmed by the news out of Detroit in particular and the US in general, I would like to take the opportunity to formulate some thoughts on the plans to partially liquidate the art collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts. For decades the DIA has cast a brilliant light beyond Detroit and far beyond the shores of America. Thanks to the rich diversity of its collection, built up with care and passion over generations, it is one of the leading addresses among North American museums and a bridge-head for civilized urban culture. Its collection is readily identifiable as a reservoir of collective memory. The removal of individual columns from this ‘temple of art’ will inevitably lead to its collapse.

“The DIA is morally obliged to preserve its collection intact for future generations and resolutely oppose the current financial constraints. It is both painful and irritating to witness masterpieces of local and international renown being reduced to the status of defenseless hostages to be forced into uncertain exile.

“The financial value of this collection, which is no doubt considerable, weighs much less than its enormous ideological, cultural and socio-political significance. A collection of such relevance cannot be placed at the mercy of short-term pecuniary interests. The contemplated sale would constitute a dangerous precedent for other beleaguered cities and institutions and is therefore an absolute non-go. I wish all the best to Detroit in its difficult situation—which I only hope can be resolved with far-sighted assistance from Washington, or the world’s art lovers who so keenly attend biennials and art fairs across the globe.”

Sara Takacs, event planner, Hazel Park, Michigan

“These art treasures are ours. They are not ‘assets.’ They are not ‘collateral.’ These pieces are our heritage, our cultures, our collective pasts, and our future. Hands off.”

Caitlyn, Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan

“The sum of the works of art in the DIA are insurmountable to any material dollar price. It is insulting to the working class to have any of the art sold off to large corporations and to the wealthy... And for what? A ‘solution’ to this mess? No. Selling the artwork of the DIA is equivalent to selling the city’s soul in this heartless and corrupt place we call ‘America.’”

Eva, self-employed, Dearborn, Michigan

“Removal of a city’s art is removal of its culture. To remove a city’s culture is akin to removing a piece of its heart. We cannot rebuild the vibrant community we desire if artists and their investors have no faith the city will respect and protect them, and their works, when the chips are down. Our city is (or at least it should be) better than this.”

Reagan Sova, PhD Student, University of Louisville, Kentucky

“I oppose the cuts to workers’ pensions and health care. I also oppose the rule of the emergency financial manager and cuts to city services. I support workers, students, and residents of Detroit organizing in order to press their demands and challenge power. I believe Detroit and all other cities should decide city policies democratically!”

Lesley, librarian, Ohio

“I support the campaign to defend the art in the Detroit Institute of Arts, and oppose the auction. The interests of the people, and the interests of scholarship, are best served by keeping the art where it is: in the DIA, a publicly accessible art museum.

“The attack on the DIA is part of a much larger assault on arts, culture and intellectual life throughout the country, including the nation’s libraries.

“The Detroit Institute of Arts has an excellent research library, founded in 1905, which is essential to the scholarly work of the museum. As the DIA website makes clear, the DIA is ‘not just a place for looking at art.’ It’s a place to learn about art, researching in books, periodicals and museum publications to help viewers develop an informed, personal

response to the art.

“Libraries have been associated with art museum and cultural complexes, going back to the ancient world. The famous Alexandrian library, with its temple of the muses, was the glory of Hellenistic Egypt. Students of Aristotle were the first librarians. In the ancient world, knowledge had a sacred character.

“Nothing is ‘sacred’ to Financial Manager Kevyn Orr except the almighty dollar. Once working people understand what’s at stake in the defense of the Detroit Institute of Arts, they will be 100 percent behind this campaign. The DIA is worth fighting for!”

Ari Weinstein, Bulgaria

“I want to extend my support to the truly heroic campaign that the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) and the International Youth and Students for Social Equality (IYSSE) are waging against the socially criminal scheme of the Detroit, Lansing and, yes, Washington, DC establishment to sell off the artwork at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

“The planned sale of the art at the DIA is part and parcel of the overarching strategy of the American corporate-financial ruling class to reduce the American working class and the youth to conditions of outright material and spiritual penury. This strategy—which has minimal support from among the people of the US—simply cannot be carried out in a democratic fashion. That explains why the declaration of Detroit’s bankruptcy was made by none other than the city’s unelected “Emergency Manager”—i.e., its financial dictator—Kevyn Orr.

“Orr’s measures, which combine the slashing of pensions and jobs with the sale of the DIA’s artwork, are, in a sense, internally consistent. That is, they are all geared towards making the working-class majority pay—again, both in terms of material living standards and from the cultural-intellectual standpoint—for Detroit’s financial crisis. To pay off the multi-millionaires and billionaires and colossal financial institutions which hold most of Detroit’s debt, Orr, with the backing of Democratic and Republican officials at the municipal, state and national levels, is dead set on pushing the working-class majority of Detroit back to the conditions of utter impoverishment which existed before and during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

“The truth is that there exist sufficient resources to guarantee every single person on this planet a decent standard of living—a job, a secure and adequate pension, top-notch health care, education at the highest levels, leisure and access to culture. These necessities of modern, civilized existence can only be provided to all if capitalism—the economic and, yes, socio-political order in which all key decisions in a society are made in order to maximize the profits of the corporate-financial ruling class—is replaced by socialism, the fundamentally opposed social order in which decisions are made in a genuinely democratic fashion so that the living standards of the great majority can be significantly lifted.

“In short, I wholeheartedly support the just and vitally necessary struggle that the SEP and the IYSSE are waging against the sale of the DIA’s artwork and I fervently hope—and am inclined to believe—that this may prove to be a turning point in the working-class’s struggle against the grievous social ills of inequality, poverty, endless imperialist warmongering, police-statism and environmental destruction that currently plague American society and, indeed, the entire planet.”

Sandy Hopkins, musician, photographer, tour guide, Detroit, Michigan

“It is *our* art, it was gifted to US. It was not gifted as something to pawn, to sell, to exploit. People complain about crime, being stolen from. This is exactly what is happening. They are stealing from us. And it just breaks my heart.”

Elizabeth Urbaniak, retired realtor, Ann Arbor, Michigan

“This collection belongs to Michigan and the nation, not Detroit for liquidation. We must preserve our art.”

Mark Urbaniak, tool & die worker, Ann Arbor, Michigan

“We must protect our art. They are not a possession of Detroit. I do not want to see it used as a bargaining chip.”

Jennifer Horton, general laborer/single mom, Clinton Township, Michigan

“As humans, we must always protect any form of record of our history. Art expresses humanity and tells a story of the individual artist, historical moments or events in time, famous people and cultures. Art feeds the soul and educates our children. We *must* never let it go! My children deserve to see the beautiful art at the DIA. My eldest also loves and supports the DIA, and my toddler deserves to experience the ‘treasures’ that it holds. To me as an artist myself, art is priceless.”

Eugene Craig, transportation worker, San Jose, California

“Art is about the world we live in and is a monument to our creative history. The rich elite not only do not want us to know the world, they want to deprive us of our history. All the art of the world belongs to us the working class. We made the art, we made what is good in the world. Defend the DIA because it belongs to us!”

Audrey Zofchak, painting student, Wayne State University

“The DIA is a beacon of hope for the city of Detroit. It is the reason I stayed in metro Detroit instead of moving elsewhere for more opportunity. I know in my heart that if Detroit could have built such a beautiful place as the DIA that it can be great once again. That art belongs to the people, it belongs to you and I. It is ours and it is not for sale to the bankers, auctioneers and private investors who want to profit from it. Hands off, the art is NOT FOR SALE!”

Penny Wolf, freelance writer, Albuquerque, New Mexico

“I grew up in Detroit and was introduced to the world of art at the Detroit Institute of Art as a child. Our mother took us to the museum regularly whenever a new exhibit came to town. I learned who Leonardo Da Vinci was at the museum. This is a beautiful, important museum, a piece of our history and our future. This is not the way to save Detroit, but destroying it will ensure the destruction of the city.”

Valerie Parks, Beverly Hills, Michigan

“It is a ridiculous notion to sell museum property and artwork to pay for the mistakes of an often corrupt and idiotic city government.”

Dennis Parks, business owner, Franklin, Michigan

“The DIA is a priceless ‘jewel’ that anchors my city. It makes no business sense to sell any part of it for someone else’s debt.”

Caryn Rochfort, Shelby Township, Michigan

“I have frequented the DIA for as long as I can remember; it’s a treasure I am so thankful that Detroit possesses. Ever since I first heard about this outrageous devastation in May about Governor Snyder and Emergency Manager Kevyn Orr wanting to sell and now lease the DIA’s precious irreplaceable assets, I have been utterly sad, heartbroken, angry, and scared for the DIA.

“Whenever there is a financial crisis or simply complications, it’s not fair for officials to automatically target culture/the arts. How dare they! The arts are more important and practical than most people realize. After all, where would we be if it had not been for the arts, without this strong backbone of society? This also applies to other assets in Detroit, including museums, galleries, studios, theaters, and libraries, which can be centers and opportunities for job growth and education.

“There is one question I want to address on this grave matter. Back in May, when Governor Snyder was interviewed by Devin Scillian of Channel 4 News at the Mackinac Policy Conference, at one point during their brief discussion of the DIA Snyder made a reference to when New York City went bankrupt. The question I want to address is: when New York City went bankrupt, did anyone so much as consider selling art assets? Some good and brilliant acquaintances of mine insist that no one did. If this is true, I wonder if Snyder, perhaps even Kevyn Orr himself, is at all aware of this fact. I think the answer to this latter question is obvious, but the sad truth is that those men just don’t care. That is not doing their job.

“Their actions have clearly demonstrated their utter disregard for the people when we do not play by the rules of their own self-representative game. For example, we voted ‘no’ back in November 2012 regarding the EM issue; Snyder did not like our answer. As a result, he went ahead and put Orr in place while giving him a ridiculously enormous salary. Furthermore, their actions of considering/wanting to sell the DIA’s collection and suddenly wanting to rush into filing for bankruptcy (even though they said before that they wanted to avoid it) proves that they cannot be trusted. And I’m sure a visit from someone from a place as prestigious as Christie’s is a privilege, but under these circumstances, I

don’t like it one bit. It smells like a rat. The art is for the people of Detroit as well as the country and the world, not for sale!”

“Long live the DIA! Long live the arts!”

Saul Gonzalez, Eastern Michigan University

“Keep culture alive. Works of art are called ‘priceless’ for a reason.”

Leslie Bradt, account supervisor, Toronto, Canada

“On a very personal note, the DIA was the place that opened my eyes to the wonders of art. Being in its halls, marveling at the brushstrokes and colours and being able to immerse myself in the fantastic worlds of so many brilliant artists was a very special experience and one that needs to stay alive.

“I wholeheartedly support the efforts to keep this important facility intact and in Detroit. In no other city will the stunning murals by Diego Rivera have the same impact. This cultural landmark needs to remain as it is for more people, young and old to walk through its halls and be captivated, spellbound the way I was.”



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