

Readers respond to Outlook recent cover stories

I am writing in response to the Sept. 26 Outlook ("Why the Arts Matter"). As an artist and museum professional, this topic is close to my heart. It comes on the heels of the Florida Association of Museums conference hosted by Palm Beach County last week. I want to thank the authors, first, for thoroughly and succinctly stating the merits of the arts in the economy. Only by rallying financially – an ongoing necessity – will we exist, with the economic ripples that benefit our communities and our place in the national and international market.

The arts are jewels that must be taken out and worn to be fully appreciated.

But there are deeper reasons to ensure the life of the arts. People have created and valued the arts for all of documented existence. We know that because communication is the cornerstone of all visual, written and performing arts. More than any other means, art forms have chronicled our lives, giving us expanding knowledge and insight about our ancestors. We take steps every day to set our own footprints on that path through time, saying, "We were here. This is what we loved, who we were, what we valued." We have developed new techniques, many electronics using photography, television, films and computers, and those new tools are another medium in the hands of our artists. For forward-thinking explorers, like DaVinci, imagine how strong are the messages that are being sent to our future selves.

But as we cut the arts out of our everyday lives and those of our children, what message are we sending? We are essentially nurturing a soul of economy, but impoverishing the rest of our soul. We create things for purchase, not expression. We are rapidly losing skills, like painting, that put someone in touch with a mysterious, quiet place within. That takes time to explore, develop and bring to light that doesn't happen on a fast-paced day. It is contemplative, like religion, and it is slow, often gentle, in the way it communicates. But paintings have spoken volumes to the souls of people young and old for centuries.

With our preoccupation with economics and manufactured goods, we lose sight of the arts as something other than a commodity. What we don't realize is that art still surrounds us, but we are forcing it underground. It's hidden in plain sight. Because every item you shop for, every package of food that you deem essential, every car, every shirt, every TV commercial, every football jersey and advertisement – all have been designed and produced with the care, quality and insight provided by artists. They design, draw, sculpt, illustrate, paint, write – all those "nonart" items you buy and support. Commercial art has its own name now, but it is born of a shift in our values. We can't lose the arts, but I hope that we can look more clearly at what our society is saying about how we value them, and bring them back out in their purest forms, directly, to feed our souls and bedazzle each other once more.

One artist, one child, one institution at a time. Please join us in enjoying and supporting the arts. They are by us, about us and belong to us all.

– Pamela A. Mendelsohn