

Who Fosters Art?



by Armando Simón

I ask you to simply open your mind to this possibility.
It involves a certain effort.

—William Bateson

One of the countless repulsive absurdities that have been repeated down for generations, particularly by the politically motivated, has been that businessmen are too crass and vulgar to appreciate art and that if a person is rich it is implied he is automatically impervious to good taste in art and music. You see this cliché in countless movies and plays (*Amadeus*, *Born Yesterday*, etc.).

According to this idea, such people care only for money and commerce—nothing else—but if the persons who parrot this

cliché would stop and try to think—though it may hurt—they would realize not only how illogical is such an assertion, but also how negated by the facts (and, incidentally, the people who spout this bromide do not actually personally know many rich persons, if any).

This is like saying that because one is rich one cannot appreciate good food, a good film, or a beautiful woman simply because he is rich. If anyone stated that it would be obviously absurd. Now, to be sure, there are individuals whose entire life is dedicated obsessively to one topic and nothing else, be it football, fishing, sexual seduction, travel, mountain climbing, anti-Semitism, hating white people, music, car racing, politics, collecting fossils, painting, hatred of Trump, and so forth. These people have what is called monomania, an obsession, and they are generally in the minority in those fields, although, to be fair, they do tend to be experts at what they do, which is understandable if one spends one's entire lifetime at one thing because of the obsession. But, to claim that people in commerce have a monopoly (pun intended) on obsessiveness is ridiculous and contrary to facts.

Additionally, if we look at the historical record, far from rich people being apathetic towards art we see that the exact opposite is true. Who paid for the works of Michelangelo, Vermeer, Renoir and Rembrandt if not rich people? Facts. Who made it possible for Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Bach to earn a living while composing music, if not the wealthy? Facts. It certainly was not an association of peasants, sailors, blacksmiths, scholars, or shoemakers. Historically, look at the centers of art and you will see that they happen to be concentrated in centers of commerce: Florence, Amsterdam, Madrid, Vienna, Paris, Barcelona, Venice. Facts. And if it is pointed out that some artists like Van Gogh were unrecognized and lived in poverty this was because they were ahead of their time and no one, but no one, appreciated what they had to

offer. Including intellectuals. Including other artists.

Many rich people who have an appreciation for art have had private art collections, including people whom one usually don't associate as being rich, although they are (the actors Vincent Price and Edward G. Robinson were avid art collectors). I do not know how it is in Europe, but in America several wealthy patrons have established art museums (which included their own personal collection) or donated their artwork to already existing art museums.

And here I would like to add a personal note. If you stop to think about it, it makes perfect sense that it is the rich who foster and promote art. My personal finances over decades can best be described as "feast or famine." Periodically, I had either lots of money or I searched between the sofa cushions for any coins that might have slipped out of my pants pocket. When I was poor, I husbanded my money towards food and shelter. That was it. Whenever I had lots money above my living expenses I bought paintings, small sculptures and pottery.

Maslow's hierarchy of values comes to mind—which, by the way, also applies to countries.

Anyway, to conclude: the myth that rich people are too crass to appreciate the arts is a stupid, though long-lasting myth, propagated I suspect by those whose politics dictates that they should hate the rich.

In fact, the reverse is true: if not for the rich, this world's art would be greatly diminished. But you will certainly keep hearing the old cliché being parroted until the end of your days.

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