

## **Why are the arts deserving of the U.S. Government support?**

The arts have become an irreplaceable part of our everyday life: it brings people together, raises important issues in the world, and helps people share their emotions and views through various art pieces. However, the arts in the United States still do not get enough support, which leads to unfunded programs, extremely low wages for the artists, and a lack of policies that ensure the overall development of the arts. One of the reasons is that most of the time the art is considered as a form of entertainment, so the U.S government does not take it seriously and does not support it enough. In this paper, I argue that to get governmental support, people should stop perceiving arts as means of enjoyment, and consider it as one of the crucial conditions of human life which brings a lot of benefits and by which people can communicate with one another and share their first-person experiences. I will introduce the reasons why exactly the arts deserve U.S. Governmental support, which include: what skills it develops, how it is connected with social change, what part it takes in the country's economy, and how it influences people's brains. Moreover, I will introduce the kind of support the arts should receive, which involves the increase of the federal budget, a bigger focus on direct grants and prizes.

One of the primary goals of the arts is self-expression through different means, such as visual, auditory, or performed. While there is still a huge ambiguity and debate about what can be defined as arts (mostly based on whether something is beautiful or not), it is undeniable that we encounter arts in its variety of forms daily: it includes murals, paintings, videos, music, performances, etc. While taking such a huge place in our society, the arts have a huge influence on us, but in general, it is often considered a form of enjoyment. However, does it have any other value rather than bringing people joy?

First of all, the arts give children the experience of creativity in the broad sense of the word - the generation and embodiment of the ideas that help them understand themselves and

the world around them. At a young age children fastly learn new information and they need some means through which they would be able to communicate their ideas and express their perception of reality. In addition to creativity, it also promotes critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. The study showed that children from the Learning Through Art program demonstrated stronger problem-solving skills in three out of six areas including “flexibility, resource recognition, and connection of ends and aims” (Phillips, 2014). By developing all these skills at a young age, the experience in the arts becomes a necessity for the psychological health of every person throughout their entire life, regardless of future profession, because they will help cope with upcoming problems and unknown situations.

Secondly, contemporary art is directly connected with social change and is willing to influence the ongoing issues in the world. That’s why it should be considered as one of the forms of communication people use to interact with each other to force the changes that challenge the status quo. Since art is all about first-person experience, it is natural if an art piece shows a new perspective that challenges the system and seeks changes in different spheres of life such as justice, equity, violence, etc. For example, homelessness is a huge issue in most countries of the world, and the artists appeal to this issue. According to Dupere, “a British artist wanted to challenge this, creating a glass sculpture of a sleeping body resting on a bed of cardboard, to represent how homeless people struggle to be seen on city streets” (Dupere, 2021). This sculpture which is called “Invisible Homeless” was covered in many media outlets and helped to appeal attention to the 1625 Independent People project, which supports young homeless people.

Thirdly, art is an important part of the U.S. economy that contributes by generating revenue, creating jobs, and developing communities. According to Kinsella, “arts contribute \$763.6 billion to the US economy—4.2 percent of the GDP—more than agriculture, transportation, or warehousing” (Kinsella, 2019). Besides that, research shows that children

even with minimal art education have better social and academic performance in comparison with their peers who have never studied arts in school, so it also indirectly influences the economy of the country. Moreover, while recognizing the important role that the cultural and art industries play in the economy, it is also crucial not to forget that arts form national and individual identities which are indeed one of the fundamental ways of adopting the values of the nation that lead to the development of the country. Consequently, even though the art pieces cannot be treated as traditional goods and material products (because for the most part they are non-reproducible and exist in one version), economics and the arts are interconnected and mutually influential.

Lastly, art has a great influence on our brain and can even lead to better memory. Most people know that both from our music-making process and just from listening to complex music the neural network becomes qualitatively different because of very complex processes going on in the brain of the person who is interacting with music. The same thing is happening when the person looks at a complex painting and tries to analyze/draw connections/evaluate the art piece. According to Mendick, looking at a painting, sculpture, or other artwork increases blood flow to the brain by as much as 10% (Mendick, 2011). Not just looking at the art, but mostly analyzing it is a difficult job for our brain, so it requires training (knowledge) and implementation of non-trivial evaluations to understand the art piece. It trains the neural network so much that it leads to physical changes in our brain, but to be able to understand the art and not just look at it, we need better art education programs in the United States that can teach people how to interact with art. This is going to be my main focus in the next paragraphs.

One of the reasons why art education programs are not getting enough support is because they are considered an expendable part of the curriculum. Relatively recently, “policymakers under the Trump Administration debated eliminating the National Endowment

for the Arts, despite it consisting of only 0.003% of the federal budget” (Gao, 2021). The U. S. government with all understanding of the importance of arts should increase the federal budget to at least 0.008% which is twice as much as it is funding it right now (0.004%). It could be done by reducing the funds allocated to sports because while spending about \$150 million on arts, the U. S. government spends approximately \$100 billion on sports (Kutz, 2017). It will be an almost imperceptible reduction for the sports, but a significant contribution to the arts which can make a change in how the education programs are funded and how the money is distributed among organizations.

In addition to increasing the overall federal budget of the arts, the U. S. government should increase the direct grants, because “they complement other means of funding, fill gaps, enhance arts education, spread new creations, and enable preservation” (Gioia, 2004). The more independent programs and organizations are funded, the more experiments, diversity, and freedom it will bring to the arts. Moreover, the direct grants will improve the overall cultural and social life of the country without putting excessive responsibility for the success of particular programs on the Arts Endowment, which is now in charge of almost everything that’s happening with arts and where the money is distributed. Besides that, a higher level of direct funding will ensure decentralized ways of making decisions, because the bigger variety of organizations and programs will get the chance to plan what exactly they want to do with the grant money.

Lastly, the U. S. government should support the arts by putting more money to fund prizes which will stimulate artists to work in a very specific direction, because prizes are usually given for accomplishing “the goal”. However, I want to highlight that it should not be considered a replacement for the increase of federal budget or direct grants because these two components are crucial to ensure the development of the art programs and the overall well-being of artists. Indeed prizes will be an addition to celebrating talented artists who often

don't get enough public attention, but need to be seen for their future development.

Moreover, the prizes will be a great idea when it comes to important issues such as masks mandate, social movements, or people's rights because all the artists' energy will be allocated to achieve a very specific goal or purpose. Moreover, prizes can also "depoliticize arts funding by focusing attention on what we actually want to achieve rather than how we want to achieve it" (Potts, 2021).

To sum up, art is a crucial part of our everyday life, which should be involved in every stage of the person's development because it promotes creativity, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and improves the neural network. Moreover, art has a beneficial impact on the American economy and it is one of the main means through which people challenge the status quo and demand social change. In this paper, I introduced what kind of support arts should get, which involves the increase of federal budget, more focus on direct grants and prizes. No matter if the steps that are presented in this paper are implemented or not, it is important to remember that civic engagement is still one of the greatest ways to change the situation. One of the videos in our modules said "the world is changed by ordinary people ". We should not wait for the government to contribute while we can start changing the situation with the arts right now!

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