

IENA LV1 2014

I. Version

Don't loot Detroit's art museum to pay the city's creditors

I am not such a romantic that I ascribe to art the mystical status of some of the DIA's defenders. If there really were a one-to-one correspondence between selling off paintings and feeding families, I could become a museum looter myself. But the whole point of a bankruptcy is to solve deep and structural problems in the economic organization of a major city – not to strip-mine everything from the Bellinis at the museum to the baboons at the Detroit Zoo for however much one-time cash you can squeeze out of them. [...] Detroit has serious problems, but the Detroit Institute of Arts is not one of them. It's running very well, actually; the museum is run at no cost to the city, and to disembowel one of its few great institutions for the sake of dysfunctional ones defies not only decency but logic. [...]

Ne pillez pas le musée des Beaux-Arts de Détroit pour rembourser les créanciers de la ville

Je ne suis pas romantique au point d'attribuer à l'art le statut mystique de certains des défenseurs du Musée des Beaux-Arts de Détroit (DIA). S'il y avait vraiment une correspondance terme à terme entre revendre des tableaux et nourrir des familles, je pourrais moi-même devenir un pilleur de musées. Mais tout l'enjeu d'une faillite est de résoudre les problèmes structurels profonds dans la gestion économique d'une ville majeure – et non pas d'exploiter tous les filons, que ce soit les œuvres de Bellini exposées au musée ou les babouins pensionnaires du zoo de Détroit, si important que soit le pactole que vous pourriez en retirer en un seul coup. Détroit connaît des problèmes graves, mais le Musée des Beaux-Arts de Détroit n'en est pas un. Il fonctionne très bien en vérité ; le musée est géré à coût zéro pour la ville, et éviscérer l'une de ses rares grandes institutions pour venir en aide à d'autres institutions à problèmes défie non seulement l'honnêteté/la décence mais aussi la logique.

II. QUESTIONS (sur 40 points)

1. Question de compréhension du texte

Explain what the following sentences mean: "The pitifully simplistic justification for looting the DIA goes like this: Detroit owes money, Detroit owns pricey paintings. Therefore Detroit should sell up to pay its creditors." (lignes 13-14) (100 mots + ou - 10% ; sur 10 points)

2. Question de compréhension du texte

Explain what the following sentence means: “Even putting all that aside: on the barest economic level, raiding the museum will have no meaningful impact on the city’s bottom line.” (lignes 29-30) (100 mots + ou - 10% * ; sur 10 points)

3. Question d’expression personnelle

Is culture a luxury in periods of economic difficulty? (300 mots + ou - 10% ; sur 20 points)

1) Question 1:

The city of Detroit has filed for bankruptcy. The once flourishing Motor City housing the three big US car manufacturers – Ford, Chrysler, General Motors – was hard-hit by the 2008 financial meltdown despite the federal government’s stimulus package. Now Michigan authorities are considering selling valuable works of art owned by the Detroit Institute of Art to pay back its creditors. According to the Guardian’s journalist, such a move vindicated by sheer economic logic is blameworthy judging from the harsh vocabulary he chooses: “pitifully simplistic” and “looting”. It would boil down to robbing the public domain of its riches in the most deplorable manner. (102 words)

2) Question 2:

The anaphoric expression “all that” invites the reader to weigh up the reasons which have been listed so far. The sale of museum exhibits would break federal laws, state regulations and UNESCO treaties. As scarcity creates value, should the market put up for sale major works of art by the dozen, prices would plummet. Philanthropic donors might then recoil at funding institutes of art unable to secure public good. The commodification of works of art is morally unsustainable. To top it all, it is very unlikely that the city coffers would be replenished given the magnitude of its debt. Even from an economic viewpoint such transactions would be nonsensical. (109 words)

3) Is culture a luxury in periods of economic difficulties?

Culture is now within reach of the lower classes of society thanks to new technologies. In theory as any netizen can connect up to the mass of data available online, no one is excluded from culture any longer. However, in practice, the digital divide has not entirely been bridged yet. Moreover, digital culture is not all culture.

The very word “culture” has several meanings. It may refer to lifestyles, civilisation and the arts of course. It often clashes with the word “nature” which defines all the genetic features man inherits from his ancestors, his DNA so to speak, to use modern scientific lexicon. By contrast, “culture” encompasses all the outside influences that are also the building blocks of man: education, social interaction, literature, music, and painting, namely all that elevates man above the status of animal, all that makes man a man, all that nurtures him intellectually and spiritually.

So, are the arts superfluous in times of economic difficulties? Are the arts negligible when one is unsure about what the future holds in store? Can one settle for intellectual “food for thought” when one goes hungry? It depends on the magnitude of our desire. An art lover would rather live with less than put up his artistic works for sale. A speculator, obsessed with greed, regardless of the aesthetic value of works of art, would rather make a quick buck by selling them.

In periods of economic slump, culture is a shelter, a way of escaping hardship, an opportunity to mitigate the vagaries of everyday life. Reading a novel, watching a movie, listening to a concert online, taking a virtual tour of the British Museum are soothing emotional experiences as well as enriching spiritual adventures. Man not only needs to satisfy his physiological needs but he also needs to satisfy his desires; that is why culture, far from being a luxury must not remain the prerogative of the elite. (319 words)

III. THEME (sur 20 points)

Encaissé entre l'océan et l'Irlande du Nord, souffrant d'un manque criant d'infrastructures - pas d'autoroute, ni même de ligne de chemin de fer pour le relier au reste de l'Irlande -, le comté rural de Donegal a souffert, plus que les autres, de l'éclatement de la bulle immobilière en 2008. Lui aussi s'était laissé contaminer par la frénésie de construction pendant les années de boom économique. Quand le rêve s'est écroulé, des milliers d'éleveurs, qui s'étaient reconvertis dans le secteur du bâtiment, se sont retrouvés au chômage. Aujourd'hui, une personne sur quatre est sans emploi dans le Donegal, et un jeune de moins de 30 ans sur deux. Alors que des villes comme Dublin, Cork et Galway renouent avec la croissance parce qu'elles constituent des pôles de développement attractifs pour les multinationales, Letterkenny et ses environs n'intéressent pas grand monde. Bien sûr, il y a un hôpital réputé et un Institut de technologie de qualité, mais pas de quoi séduire les investisseurs étrangers.

D'après Florence Beaugé, Le Monde, 13 octobre 2013

The rural county of Donegal has suffered, more than the others, from the bursting of the housing bubble in 2008 deeply embanked/stuck as it is between the ocean and the rest of Ireland, and suffering from an obvious lack of basic infrastructures - no motorway, not even a railway to link it to the rest of Ireland. It too had let itself get infected by the construction frenzy of the economic boom years. When the dream collapsed, thousands of cattle breeders who had retrained in/turned to the building sector, found themselves unemployed. Today one in four people is jobless in Donegal, as is one under-thirty youngster out of two. Whereas cities such as Dublin, Cork and Galway are enjoying growth again because they form attractive clusters for development in the eyes of multinational corporations, Letterkenny and its surroundings attract few people. Of course, there is a renowned hospital and a top Technology Institute, but not enough to seduce foreign investors.