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## Pennsylvania student hopes gift bestows magic of art to Detroit

LAURA BERMAN 8 COMMENTS



The Detroit Institute of Arts on the auction block is an appalling image to art lovers everywhere. But for all the publicity and angst that has attended the city's bankruptcy filing, that image has inspired one "Save the Art" fire-breathing dragon drive-by event in September — and precious little action from the rest of us.

Enter Emily Zauzmer, high school senior and arts advocate.

Emily, 17, lives in Dresher, Pa., not Michigan. She's never been to Detroit. But she was so moved by a newspaper article she read in June about the city's looming bankruptcy filing and the museum's uncertain future that she decided to print extra copies of the [children's](#) art history book she designed and wrote.

"My goal is to introduce children to the magic of art and art history," she says.

Although she would never express herself in a way that might seem undiplomatic, Emily properly recognized Detroit as a place that could use a touch of magic. Art has inspired her life. "I wanted to pay it forward," she says.

She'd written and designed the book, "Once Upon a Masterpiece: An Art History Adventure," to teach school children in Philadelphia, where budget cuts had slashed arts education.

"I know that the arts are always on the chopping block when there's a crisis," she said. In Detroit, the DIA — newly secure from a tri-county millage passed last year — is now being eyed by Emergency Manager



Emily Zauzmer hopes Detroit students will be inspired by a book she wrote, 'Once Upon a Masterpiece.'

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Kevyn Orr as a potential revenue source. The city hired Christie's, the New York art auction house, to appraise the art for potential sale in September.

In her letter to Kathryn Dimond, the DIA's director of community relations, Emily described the way her own life had been transformed by her kindergarten teacher's introduction of [Van](#) Gogh's "The Starry Night" to her class. At age 5, she asked her parents to take her to see the Van Gogh in New York. They did — and encouraged her continuing passion for art and its story. Are they artists? "They're lawyers," she says.

Last year, she wrote her book to give to Philadelphia school children. She designed the cover, found a publisher and laboriously collected rights to use the images by researching each art work. "It took a while," she said. Her greatest thrill was receiving copyright permission from Norman Rockwell's grandson.

To pay for her publishing project, she applied for — and was awarded — a \$1,000 Nestle grant. The book includes prints of 19 masterpieces. It tells the story of Maribel, a young girl whose adventures are illustrated by art works from Van Gogh to Michelangelo to Warhol, most of them artists whose works are also in the DIA's collection.

Emily didn't receive any high school credit for her book, and she didn't tell her teachers about it.

But she is also a [student](#) who wanted to take advanced placement art history, and when no class was available, found and participated in an online Florida class. She also runs an art history blog, recording her "art history adventures, like baking edible works of art."

"I was amazed when I read her letter," the DIA's Dimond says.

"To have a young person actually take the time to do something concrete like this is unique." Dimond is using the book in the museum's Art Discovery program, an outreach to school districts that have lost art education funding.

Emily has so far sent 20 books to the DIA and is planning to use the remaining \$250 of her grant to print 50 or 75 more copies to go to Detroit.

Emily's project may be small, but it is a powerful reminder of the way art connects and binds people across boundaries. She knows that, even in kindergarten, our lives can be changed forever by experiencing that ineffable power — and that the city's great art museum offers that experience to everyone who walks through its doors.

Try to monetize that.

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Laura Berman's column runs Tuesday and Thursday.

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