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## **“Art, Money and Truth walk into a bar...”**

What? You'd like a punch line with that?

*If you want to be poor, be an artist. It's better than one of those wacky, invention-patent schemes advertised on late late night television, it's a guaranteed financial sinkhole. But, hey, if you've got a pile of cash that you need to lose quickly—give it to me. I'm a bonafide, paint-smudged artist.*

Honestly, when I was young and living the La Boheme lifestyle, I would have considered myself well off had I had the income then that I have today. Now, however, with inflation and the price of radicchio being what it is, I'm so-so.

I'm an artist with the paint under my fingernails to prove it. And let me tell you, the overarching cultural umbrella that we call “the arts” is an important but under-recognized economic driver in communities nationwide. If you don't believe me, fine. But, do believe the US Bureau of Economic Analysis that, along with the National Endowment for the Arts, recently released data from 2016 that turns upside the popular notion that art is *not* an integral part of a healthy and vibrant economy. However, generating an impressive 4.3 percent of gross national product does not suggest that ongoing and increased public support for the arts isn't necessary. It is.

You don't need sleep-inducing spreadsheets or a pie chart to appreciate the economic and cultural impact of the arts right here at home. Just open your eyes—no, really, I want you to open your eyes and see the remarkable images that are sprouting up in Eugene's urban landscape through the efforts of the

20x21EUG Mural Project, an initiative of the City of Eugene Cultural Service's Public Art Program. 20X21's mission is to create twenty-plus outdoor murals between now and the 2021 International Association of Athletics Federation (IAAF) World Championships when thousands of visitors will enjoy world-class track and field competitions *and* outstanding public art while they're infusing millions of dollars into our community. Local artist, Kari Johnson, joins several international artists and New York photographer, Martha Cooper to create this year's 20X21 projects between July 27 and August 2, so keep an eye out for new work this summer.

The arts are a dynamic sector that increases competition and productivity, and promotes sustainable economic growth. Sustainability is key and is what separates that which barely registers as a blip on our over-loaded radar and that which becomes embedded in our cultural DNA. Even if you're not an artist or art aficionado you benefit from the side effects of art. Just imagine what your life would be like without the products, services, and experiences that are connected to and a part of what is art. Bland, empty and boring come to mind.

Art involves individual agency, community and dialog. It allows for meaningful exchange between divergent groups of people through shared stories, images, sound and form. It is a full-body, whole-brain experience that has the unique ability to propose a different perspective that bridges time, space and any differences we may believe we have with one another. Art provides us with the opportunity to step out of our old familiar shoes and into another's, and to exercise that most valuable human ability—empathy.

Oh, and about that punch line—if you want one, pay me more.

*(550 words without bolded headline, 558 words with bolded headline)*