

Jeanne Bogardus: Let your inner artist come out

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THIS IS A TIME to recognize and celebrate the critical role that arts and creativity play in Marin and California.

Look around.

In October alone - National Arts and Humanities month- we can enjoy opening night of the Marin Symphony, the Mill Valley Film Festival, open house at the Headlands Center for the Arts, a new play at Marin Theatre Company, exhibits at galleries and community centers around the county, to name only a few of the offerings in our own backyard.

We recently enjoyed the Sausalito and Mill Valley art festivals and the Marin Shakespeare Company season. People from Marin and beyond enjoyed the Mountain Play, Marin Art Festival on the Lagoon, Italian Street Painting Festival, and in May, the Arts Council's own Marin Open Studios.

Nonprofit arts organizations in California employ more than 160,000 people, generate \$5.4 billion in economic activity and provide nearly \$300 million in state and local taxes. The arts improve the education and academic performance of our children, contribute to cross-cultural understanding, boost tourism, promote civic pride, enhance livability, provide an outlet for creative expression and just plain provide joy in our lives.

There is a phrase that was popular in the 1960s: "Art Happens."

Yes, it does. But don't be fooled into thinking that is all it takes. Being creative is one thing. Having the time, the resources, the venues, the encouragement and the incentive to create, present, or publish a "product" that communicates, inspires, provokes thought, insights tears or just makes somebody laugh and have a terrific time is a major challenge faced by artists and the organizations that support them.

Music, painting, photography, sculpture and crafts, dance, theatre, film, literature and poetry - the arts - are part of what is best about the human condition. They help us to be more than we thought we could. They tell us we are not alone.

Those passionate about the arts include more than artists - many are educators, students, patrons, philanthropists and public servants. To keep art alive in our community, we must all be the best of all of these:

- We must all be students, full of curiosity and wonder, willing to learn about the world anew and willing to study and think and do our homework every day.
- We must all be teachers, willing to share our knowledge and experience so that others can provide leadership and carry on our work, willing to assist in teaching others about different perspectives and ways of seeing things.
- We must all be philanthropists, willing to put our money and time where our hearts and our values and our

rhetoric so easily go.

- We must all be public servants, willing to advocate for what we care about, willing to rally others to our cause, willing to vote for those people and issues that affect our lives and our work.

- Finally, we must all be artists, willing to listen to and acknowledge all the voices in our heads; willing to express them on paper and canvas and in the theaters and performance halls and anywhere else we can; willing to take risks and not always be well-received; willing to accept that art, like the humanity it springs from, can be messy, complex and contradictory; noble and beautiful, healing and comforting.

And most of all, we must be willing and able to imagine and create - to imagine more than one idea of culture or religion or country or community, to imagine the past and the future at the same time, and then to create the world we imagine, one tiny dance step, one tiny brush stroke, one tiny musical note, one tiny written word at a time.

Jeanne Bogardus is executive director of the Marin Arts Council, which is celebrating its 25th anniversary. www.marinarts.org.