

Posted May 25, 2008 - 10:00pm

Thank you, Guggenheim, for elevating arts

To the editor:

It is difficult to summarize the collective good that the Guggenheim Hermitage Museum and, in particular, its managing director, Elizabeth Herridge, brought to our city and the more than 1 million visitors who managed to pass the magnificent Cor-ten steel walls designed by architect Rem Koolhaas on their way into the inner-sanctum of high art ("Goodbye, Guggenheim," May 9 Review-Journal).

Therefore, before it goes silently into the night, it's worth noting that for all of the rhetoric about Las Vegas' cultural cravings/leanings or proclivities, this institution did exist and it was possible, for 61/2 years, to see very important works of art without boarding an airplane to New York or Los Angeles or other cities in between.

Should the closing of the Guggenheim inside The Venetian be seen as a negative reflection on our community? Only to those who don't understand that we have a uniquely vibrant, diverse and dynamic cultural population not traditionally bound by the strict codes of conduct that define and guide older cultural enclaves. It's obvious that even in this slowed economic climate, our city is marching ahead by leaps and bounds. If we can protect our natural resources and pay attention to our historic past, we are destined to be one of the great cities of the world -- propelled by unbridled ingenuity, entrepreneurial spirit and elbow grease.

Unfortunately, the subsequent roiling landscape makes it hard for all cultural institutions to get a toehold here. This is especially true when the focus is two-fold, that of an amenity for hotel guests and tourists, and as a cultural mainstay of the community. But Ms. Herridge knew her charge; she looked beyond the Strip to garner audience support, inviting anyone and everyone to take a peek behind the steel wall. She launched a successful education program that gave our children an intimate experience with real art masterworks and accompanying art history/art ideology. She also started the Young Collectors Council, which reached out to young adults, some returning to the city with diplomas from Ivy League institutions, often with new perspectives and renewed vigor for their hometown. Ms. Herridge stoked this cultural development, and in so doing, she nurtured the future of art and artists in our city.

The Venetian, the Guggenheim Hermitage and, most importantly, Elizabeth Herridge deserve a thank you. Our community is richer than it was.

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