

The Barnes belongs in Merion

By Carmelle Yaari, Lower Merion High School Class of 2010

“The Barnes Foundation is not just an art collection.”

I was taught this the very first time I visited with my class in elementary school, when we learned about the strong connections between art and nature. Dr. Barnes carefully chose the property with an arboretum for this very reason. The art collection is just one element – a vital piece, but just one part of an interconnected design by Dr. and Mrs. Barnes. Thus the artwork cannot be transferred to another place and still be the Barnes. Excising the art collection destroys the symbiotic relationships forever – the very opposite of “saving” it. This crusade in the name of “the avenue of the arts” is comparable to attempting to transplant a heart with a single valve, leaving behind the rest of the organ, and greatly diminishing the usefulness of both components.

Unfortunately, many people, local and otherwise, are unaware of the Barnes Foundation and the immense treasure it contains. Such a treasure should be cherished and shared universally. Dr. Barnes amassed his pieces and carefully placed every detail, all with the intention of imparting this gift to the public. The Barnes is in the book [1,000 Places You Should Visit Before You Die](#), and rightfully so.

The conceptual value of the Barnes is priceless, but the art that it contains is worth upward of six billion dollars. Those who are pushing for the move are doing so with their eyes on the prestige and tourist dollars that they think the art would bring to Philadelphia; however, no thorough study has shown that the economic benefits to the city would outweigh the on-going costs of operation. The current deficit in Merion is, on average, less than one million dollars per year, whereas the deficit projected for running the facility downtown would be more than four million dollars a year. It is clear that the Merion site is in a greater position to thrive than a very costly venture in the city.

Another reason given for the move is that the foundation’s endowment is gone. Montgomery County has offered the Barnes Foundation a purchase/leaseback arrangement that would provide an endowment without using taxpayer funds. The county proposes to purchase and then lease back the Barnes, its buildings, and property for approximately \$50 million. The Barnes would invest this money, providing them with additional operating income and allowing them to repay the county at a moderate rate of interest. At the end of the lease period, the ownership of the property would revert to the Barnes. Yet the Barnes trustees rejected the proposal and their attorney told the judge it sounded very risky. In my opinion, this proposed plan sounds a lot less risky than the moving venture.

Many others recognize the necessity keeping the Barnes intact. “The snatch-and-grab solution of relocating the collection to Philadelphia is no solution at all. It isn’t salvation. It isn’t even euthanasia. It’s death by disembowelment,” wrote Richard Lacayo on the *TIME* magazine blog.

Nicholas Ouroussoff wrote in the *New York Times*, "There are few places in the United States where art and viewer share a closer bond than the beloved old Barnes in suburban Merion, PA. Dismantling it is a crime."

As a resident of the Main Line, I feel embarrassed to read about this situation in a national publication in which we come across as powerless and unable to stop the actions being taken.

We high school students have yet to learn many of the ways of the world. Nevertheless, we can recognize injustice and hypocrisy when we see it. If we know the facts, we will recognize this as an injustice and complete lack of respect for Dr. and Mrs. Barnes, for the artists like Henri Matisse, who said that his mural "La Danse" is "part of the building," for history, and for all the people who would be deprived of the exquisite experience of the Barnes – the original Barnes, the only Barnes. Right now the judge who gave permission for the move is reviewing the situation and will soon decide whether to re-open the hearings. There is still hope to save the Barnes Foundation, if we show we care.