



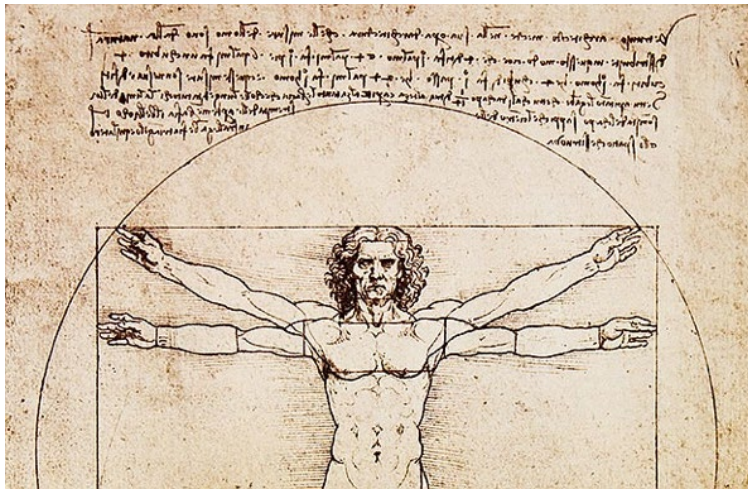
**JRB ART**  
**AT THE ELMS**  
Paseo Arts District

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## LEONARDO'S BRAIN

By Joy Reed Belt

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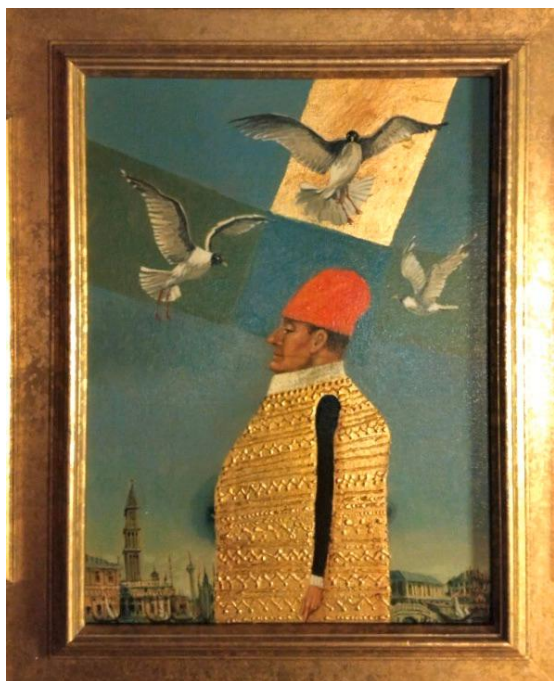


Leonardo Da Vinci, "Vitruvian Man," c. 1490, Pen and Ink with Wash Over Metalpoint on Paper, 13.6 x 10 in.

While searching my home library this past week for something to read that had the perfect blend of escapism, wisdom, and emotion, I came across a book I purchased a few years ago, but had not yet read, "Leonardo's Brain" by Leonard Shlain, a famed author and surgeon. The blurbs on the jacket were compelling: "The life and art of history's most influential mind--the final work of a famed author and surgeon." Arianna Huffington wrote of the book, "By exploring Leonardo da Vinci's brain through the lens of contemporary neuroscience, Leonard Shlain not only celebrates da Vinci's legendary creativity, he shows how we can integrate and strengthen both sides of our minds and tap into the amazing possibilities within ourselves." Albert Brooks touted the book by saying, "A genius explains a genius." I took Leonardo downstairs, curled up in my favorite and most comfortable chair and started to read about something we are all learning, that in order to truly live and function in contemporary society we must train both our right and left brain to coexist.

Children are born creative. It is our responsibility to acknowledge and foster that creativity, to provide them with enriching experiences and opportunities while insuring they are being simultaneously trained in the tough stuff: math and the sciences. Montessori schools were a wonderful start. A decade or two ago we started arts integrated schools as well as

STEAM schools. I think that, overall, we were making a great deal of progress in both public and private education. Then the Virus hit and education, as we know it, has been severely disrupted with too many people being left behind. But I see signs of hope and creativity.



D.J. Lafon, "The Venetian," Oil on Canvas, 16 x 12 in. and a recreation sent to JRB Art at The Elms.

The image above on the right is of a nine-year-old boy who is being homeschooled due to the virus. His ten-year-old brother is also at studying at home. The image on the left is a painting by D.J. Lafon which was given to their mother years ago when she graduated from veterinary school. The boys' teacher, working remotely, asked that they recreate a famous artistic masterpiece and the boys selected this original painting hanging in their home. The nine-year-old gathered up scraps of clothing from around the house and dressed like the subject in Lafon's painting, complete with somber pose. His brother used found materials to simulate the background of the painting and made paper origami birds. This exercise endorsed and strengthened so many skills. If your teacher thinks art is important, then maybe you will too. Analyzing the mood and impact of a work of art is critical to understanding it. The ability to improvise and take ordinary objects and create necessary objects teaches us about discovery. All of these things foster us to be inventive and resourceful.

The Oklahoma Arts Institute at Quartz Mountain is a two-week academy in the literary, visual, and performing arts for Oklahoma's most talented high school students. The students are selected through a competitive statewide audition process, and every accepted student automatically receives a scholarship to attend. I have experienced-based conviction that OAI is one of the best, if not the single best, thing that Oklahoma does for young people. I have hired so many of its alums as installers and gallery assistants over the years and talked to scores of artists who tell me the Oklahoma Arts Institute

literally changed their lives. My own experience as a participant and board member of the organization validates this claim. This year for the first time the summer program had to be canceled, another casualty of the virus. And yet, they are designing a whole new online program, inviting "dream guests" to participate with students through Zoom. Misty Copeland, the first African American principal dancer for the American Ballet Theatre will be their first guest lecturer. Another triumph for the power of artistic creativity.

Harding Fine Arts Charter High School Academy students are being asked to produce videos related to coursework in all subjects including French, Social Studies, and Music. When I was in high school, I didn't exactly love what seemed to me to be a constant demand for essays. But I can imagine how excited I would have been to produce a video and to work with color and sound in documenting my thoughts about a topic. These Harding students will also learn a lot about technology, lighting, and acoustics as well as the assigned subject matter. There is a lot being written in the national press about how the virus will permanently change education. Maybe the majority of those changes will be as positive as producing live videos or virtual summer academies.

The arts alone can't and won't solve our health crises, but the innovation and creativity that the arts generate when integrated with science, medicine to inventing our new world within the landscape of helpful public practices and policies.

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