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BOOKS

# 'Art & Soul: Stars Unite to Celebrate and Support the Arts' by Brian Smith and Robin Bronk

By [Shamontiel L. Vaughn](#)

Chicago Tribune • Last Updated: Sep 26, 2011 at 3:43 pm



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In the new photography book "Art & Soul: Stars Unite to Celebrate and Support the Arts," celebrities are speaking up about arts programs being removed from schools. Conceived by Pulitzer Prize-winning photographer Brian Smith and Robin Bronk, CEO of The Creative Coalition, a nonprofit arts advocacy group, this book shows famous faces giving a thumbs up to arts education.

My first impression of this book: There are some good-looking folks in here. Some photographs made me do a double take because of how beautiful the shots were, specifically Alyssa Milano, Marlon Wayans, Elise Neal, Mo'Nique (my third favorite photo), Ellen Hollman, Ricki Lake and Brian White.

Other celebrities went for humor and charm in their picture, including bubble gum blowing Portia Doubleday, bashful Kelsey Grammer (my favorite photo) and cheerful Tichina

Arnold, who apparently left her shirt at home

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Mazar, who is dancing, and the one of Rick Yune, who is lost in a daydream (my second favorite photo).

While none of these people were too shabby on the eyes, some of their handwritten messages about the importance of the arts were even more memorable than their photos. Here are a few standouts:

"If we replaced guns with guitars, then the world would be a concert" – Thomas Ian Nicholas

"Which came first . . . Music or the dancer. Laughter or the comedian. The writer or the actor. The canvas or the painter. The spirit or the religion." – Eddie Griffin

"Arts education is like taking a class on the subject of possibility." – Stephanie March

"Successful writers, actors, and painters pay taxes . . . The movie of 'Driving Miss Daisy' grossed 500 million dollars. How's that for balance of payments??" – Stephen Collins

"The saddest thing in life is wasted talent." – Chazz Palminteri

"Theatre lets us in the world of the imagination" – Alfred Molina

Others took a firm stand against the United States for slacking off on arts education:

"I live in France, Italy now with my husband and 2 young daughters. I want to fill my children with Art & History. Sadly the U.S.A. is taking it out of our public schools - and that is tragic. I'll come back when they fix that." – Debi Mazar

"It's a shame that of all the civilized countries of the world, the United States supports the arts least of all. For instance the little country of Finland spends \$90 per person for arts support while we spend \$6.00 per person." – Ellen Burstyn

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character, Raja, on "Aliens in America," her son's "peers began realizing that they weren't that different from [the] character Raja." Although Kalyan is not a Muslim in real life, the actor wrote he "felt a genuine sense of pride and privilege to be a part of a television program with a voice, a conscience, with something to say."

These are just some of the anecdotes from actors, musicians and comedians who explained why art was important to them or wrote about the moment that confirmed their love for the arts.

The only downside to this book was the handwriting. Because each message was handwritten (doodles included), we got to see some really rough script from a few, which made me think of the importance of [learning how to write neatly in school](#). Good grief, next in line should be a book on why cursive courses need to stick around, too.

Almost everybody had something interesting to say, minus a flat joke from Adrian Grenier: "Art is fart without the 'f'," which could've been left out of the book altogether. All in all, it was an interesting read.

## **Art & Soul: Stars Unite to Celebrate and Support the Arts**

Photographed by Brian Smith, edited by Robin Bronk

Hearst Communications, Inc., 256 pages, \$40 (hardcover)

Originally Published: Mar 19, 2014 at 8:36 am

2011 > September > 26

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