

The New Artistes

Wednesday, Dec. 12, 2007

I enjoyed reading the cover story on the demise of French culture [Dec. 3]. But there are plenty of emerging French artists, especially on the pop- and dance-music scene: David Guetta and Bob Sinclar both released international hit songs this year, albeit with Anglo-Saxon singers. Over the past 10 years, electronic groups from France such as Daft Punk (whom Kanye West sampled on his recent hit *Stronger*) and Air have met with similar success. French rap is thriving too — in fact, the rap market in France is the second biggest after the U.S.

Graham Clark, KEIGHLEY, ENGLAND

I was happy to read your assertion that "Nobody takes culture more seriously than the French." That's right. Cultural creativity is alive and well in France — and in French. The architect of the most artistically significant building designed for New York today, Jean Nouvel, is French. Jonathan Littell, a 40-year-old American novelist, wrote his recent, prize-winning novel, *Les Bienveillantes*, in French. The French Culture Ministry spends \$4.4 billion a year on the development and nourishment of culture, and I have never heard a word of complaint about the cost. Businesses and individuals are beginning to support the arts as well. And, of course, the vitality of French culture should be measured by more than just the box-office receipts of the week. France is the world's most popular tourist destination; close to 3 million Americans visited last year alone. The wonderful thing about "culture" — its very essence — is that it doesn't have an expiration date.

Culture is not a competition. The United States and France share a high regard for culture, and for more than two centuries, our respective cultures have been intertwined — and reinforced and challenged by each other. Together, we honor the best of the past, as we work to build our individual and shared stores of culture, which daily enrich the world as a whole. If you don't believe me, come and visit!

Craig R. Stapleton, U.S. Ambassador, PARIS

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The article "In search of lost time" made two points: first, French culture is thriving in France, and second, it lacks commercial success abroad. So what? The former is a good thing, while the latter isn't bad. Art shouldn't be driven by vanity and money. Proust too was in search of lost time, not of the lost dime.

Robert West, INGOLSTADT, GERMANY

Despite all the efforts to unify Europe, it is interesting to note that there's still such a thing as a perfectly distinct French culture, whose decline is to be mourned and struggled against, and whose resurrection is to be sought with great fervor. One can assume that the presence of this immortal French culture means that there also still exist strong Italian, Spanish, Romanian and English cultures. So why do the media refer to African culture but hardly ever to Nigerian culture, distinct from Kenyan or Algerian culture, for instance? Perhaps it's easier to focus on the lowest common denominator of the African experience than on the unique cultural signifiers that every African country possesses as much as does the land of Proust, Monet, Piaf and Truffaut.

Tolu Ogunlesi, ABEOKUTA, NIGERIA

Sizing Up a Fresh Face.

Re "Obama's Iowa Surge" [Dec. 3]: Americans are tired of the same old bait and switch from Hillary Clinton. We need a new beginning, a fresh face with ideas for the future. What makes anyone think she will protect us if she's in the White House? She is transparently phony. People have opened their eyes and see a new beginning with Barack Obama.

Albert Jackson, NEWARK, DEL., U.S.

War: What It's Been Good For

A picture is worth a thousand words, and so it was in the photograph of Cruise, Streep and Redford [Nov. 12]. Cruise's cocky smile and arms thrown chummily around their shoulders said it all. Cruise looks like he's thinking, Hey, if TIME thinks I belong in their presence, maybe the public at large will also buy it. Dream on!

Maarten Reuchlin, RIO DE JANEIRO

In the snooty triple interview, Hollywood's current intellectual superstars generously heap their unique, self-promoting wisdom on us. Never had I seen a more self-absorbed, pretentious and detached-from-reality list of irrelevant observations and pseudointellectual blather. To top it, the interview spanned two pages and included its own laugh track ("Others laugh" ... "More laughing" ... "Everyone laughs").

Miklos Magyar, CRYSTAL LAKE, ILL., U.S.

Cruise is entitled to his opinions, but if he is going to express them publicly, he might care to do so with a bit more clarity. Was he implying that chattel slavery in his own country in the 1860s and the fascism that engulfed Europe in the 1930s were not worth being "solved" with a war?

James Lehmann, NYON, SWITZERLAND

Where to Work?

Re "Getting to the Top," in your Best Countries for Business package [Nov. 26]: I'm fed up with some intellectuals and political élitists who preach that democracy is secondary to economic prosperity for the developing world. Humans have the same desires and feelings wherever they live, and democracy is God's gift to humanity, even though powermongers have

always deprived people of democratic rights. Sustainable development that can benefit all the citizens of a nation, however, can be achieved only through concerted and collective effort by the state and the private sector under the rule of law and good governance. Economic growth and democracy should go hand in hand.

Abebe Areru, ADDIS ABABA

Justin Fox wrote a very good article on Denmark. He noted that the country's per capita income trails that of the U.S., but salaries here tend to be higher than those in Britain. And while it might be easier to fire a worker in Denmark than elsewhere in Europe, companies must follow strict rules that require advance notice of termination. Fox was correct in observing that most workers assume more responsibility than do their fellow Europeans. I have been a resident of Denmark since 1989, and I have no desire to return to Britain.

John Barton, VEJLE, DENMARK

Experience and Foreign Policy

Joe Klein [Dec. 3] claimed that the Middle East has become destabilized because of George W. Bush's "naive support for democracy in countries that aren't ready for it." Wrong! The Iraqi people are more than ready, as shown by their participation in the elections held there. It is the terrorists who aren't ready and have done all they can to block the path to democracy.

Jim Robinson, SHANGHAI

In reading Klein's "The Tone-Deaf Democrats," I couldn't help drawing comparisons to 1976. Then you had a largely inexperienced Democrat — Jimmy Carter — promising change and winning on the back of Republican failures. Carter, while undoubtedly well meaning, did not have a clear agenda and was not re-elected because of doubts about his competence. The 2008 race could be a case of history repeating itself. Obama is also a largely inexperienced but well-meaning candidate who promises change. His strategy might win one term in the White House, but with his stumbling over human rights and national security, will he be able to win again in 2012?

Simon Hill, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

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