



## **What does it mean “Democratization of the art world”?**

By DHAdmann

The use and misuse of the term “Democratization of art” have created a lot of confusion between the participants of the art world, and the people who want to feel integrated and accepted in it. The lack of a formal definition has resulted in some individuals, institutions, and companies using the term as a slogan to touch the emotional fiber of their public in order to build an image of bringing justice to the art world, being fair, and selling products.

The misunderstanding of this term has its origins in the history of the democratization of art. It dates all the way back to 1793 during the French Revolution which included the notion of making art more accessible to the public, reaffirmed by the founding of the Louvre Museum which offered free admission to the public. The idea of art becoming more accessible to the public spread throughout Europe to the point where almost all major cities offered some sort of museum exhibition free of charge. New access to museums helped to solve the issue of the public’s need for education despite the pre-existing social and economic class differences.

With this reference, we can see that the concept of the democratization of art started with the idea of allowing a bigger number of people to enter museums and see the artworks exhibited there. This idea is still current because, on the one side, the ticket entry price of many museums is still very much expensive for many people, while for others the “most important” artworks of the world are centralized in “prestige” museums of the most economically powerful countries of the world. So the access to artworks is still restricted to a big part of the population.

### **What do we think it is?**

When we hear or read the term “Democratization of Art” in the news or in publications, we don’t realize that it provides a partial and manipulated perspective of the meaning. There are a couple of ideas that are mostly associated with this term and are just wrong or provide a partial perspective of what it is, for example: “To offer affordable or cheap artworks” or “that any artist can show in any museum or art gallery”. Regarding the former, it is something that already occurs despite not having achieved full “Democratization of the art”. Regarding the latter, this is a reality that cannot be achieved as all prospective artists (within the vast majority) would like to be exhibited in the same, limited, prestigious institutions.

On the other hand, museums define the democratization of the art world as reaching a wider, numerous, and more diverse audience. But offering cheap artworks and letting more people assist the museums will not democratize the art world. If we observe closely what has been intended to democratize, those are mechanisms of the art world machine. And this machine is composed of many gears that work together like a watch. The trouble begins because some key gears that make the machine function in one way or in another, are controlled by an elite group of people (mostly powerful art collectors) that shift and bend the machine so it can work in their convenience and wishes.

## **What is it?**

To understand the real meaning of the “Democratization of the art”, we have to go in the first place to the meaning of Democracy. According to Wikipedia: “*Democracy is a form of government in which the people have the authority to deliberate and decide legislation (“direct democracy”), or to choose governing officials to do so (“representative democracy”)*”. And of course, there are many kinds of democracy, but most of the countries of the world, live in a “representative democracy” and as we can observe the purpose of being a representative of the people’s interests and benefits has been twisted to represent their own, their family, their friends and some other more.

The same has happened in the art world, museums, for example, have been our representatives, but the directors and committee of the museums have changed their focus on the interests of some collectors forgotten their purpose. So the kind of “democracy” that the current art world rules, have to be changed because it is subjected to corruption and manipulation. The search for the meaning of art is currently hidden behind the system and interest created by this representative democracy.

Democracy can be translated into finding an answer to the question: who will make the decisions? In a government, these decisions are mainly related to the distribution of money/wealth. But in the art world, are slightly different. In order for the Democratization of the Art World to succeed, key decisions have to be made by a wider number of people or participants of the art world. Those are related to what is considered art for the present and

future generations and are in direct relation with what is conceived as the “prestige” or “importance” of the artist’s name in the art world and the “value” or “price” of their artworks. In the first place the decisions of which artworks are considered “important” or “transcendent”, second the selection of the artists in the institutions of the art world (starting with the main ones like museums), and third setting rules concerning the prices of the artworks like cap-prices.

But then, what does “Democratization of Art” mean? “Democratization of Art” can be understood as providing a wider and more diverse group of people with the ability to decide what can be defined and considered as ART for the current and next generations.

In the Organization for the Democratization of the Visual Arts (ODBK, e.V.), we create and support mechanisms, projects, ideas, and initiatives that democratize those decisions that affect and define the art world. If you are interested in creating an art world more equal, democratic, and diverse, join us at [www.odbk.tk](http://www.odbk.tk) !

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