

Art for all to enjoy

The democratisation of the arts enriches not only the public but also artists who get support and recognition



Deserina Sulaeman

The morning of March 26 was not just another sleepy Saturday morning at the Ion Orchard. A rather large crowd gathered outside the Swatch store in the mall's basement for the launch of the much-hyped Moon Swatch, a bio ceramic battery-powered version of Omega's collectable Moon Watches.

Priced at less than one-tenth of the cheapest version of the Moon Watches, the Moon Swatch provides an opportunity for many people to own a watch that closely resembles the famed Moon Watches at a fraction of their price.

While many people would attribute the huge gatherings outside Swatch stores across the globe to the fear of missing out and the potential secondary market for the watches, I view this interesting phenomenon as a reflection of the public's heightened interest in the

democratisation of art and design objects.

While the Moon Swatch's outer appearance may closely resemble the original Moon Watches, the Moon Swatch is built using different materials and equipped with a different engine, enabling Swatch to price the watch at a lower price point. In a way, the enthusiastic buyers of the Moon Watches receive a fraction of the Moon Watch in the form of its original aesthetic design that was previously accessible only to those who could afford the much higher price points.

Objects deemed to possess high aesthetic value are often viewed as reserved only for the upper class and inaccessible to the masses. However, lately, there has been a burgeoning interest in democratising these objects.

One way to achieve this is to do what Swatch and Omega did, which is offering an opportunity for the masses to own a fraction of the highly valued object.

DEGAS AND NFTS

The idea of making works of art and design objects more accessible to the masses is not new though.

During the Golden Age of the Dutch arts in the 17th century, there was a shift from art patronage dominated by the elite to art bought by the middle class. Dutch homes were adorned with prints and copies of original artworks. Rembrandt, a Dutch

artist famous for his etching technique, produced multiple prints from the original unique metal plate. Multiple bronze copies of French artist Edgar Degas' sculpture Little Dancer were cast from the original wax sculpture.

Buying one of Rembrandt's prints or a bronze copy of Degas' Little Dancer can be seen as owning a fraction of the original artworks by their famous creators.

A more recent example is the ownership of one non-fungible token (NFT) of a digital work of art. As there could be more than one copy of an original work of art, each with its own NFT, each owner of the NFT owns merely a fraction of that original artwork. Viewed from this perspective, ownership of a token is akin to owning a print from an original etched metal plate.

Making works of art and design objects accessible does not necessarily mean creating and selling copies of an original work of art or design. Providing public access to works of art and design objects is also a form of art democratisation.

One example of providing such access is through art exhibitions and performances in publicly

accessible spaces such as museums and concert halls. While the public cannot privately own the original objects and enjoy them in their own private spaces, public art provides access for all to enjoy the objects, albeit merely at a fraction of time and at a shared space.

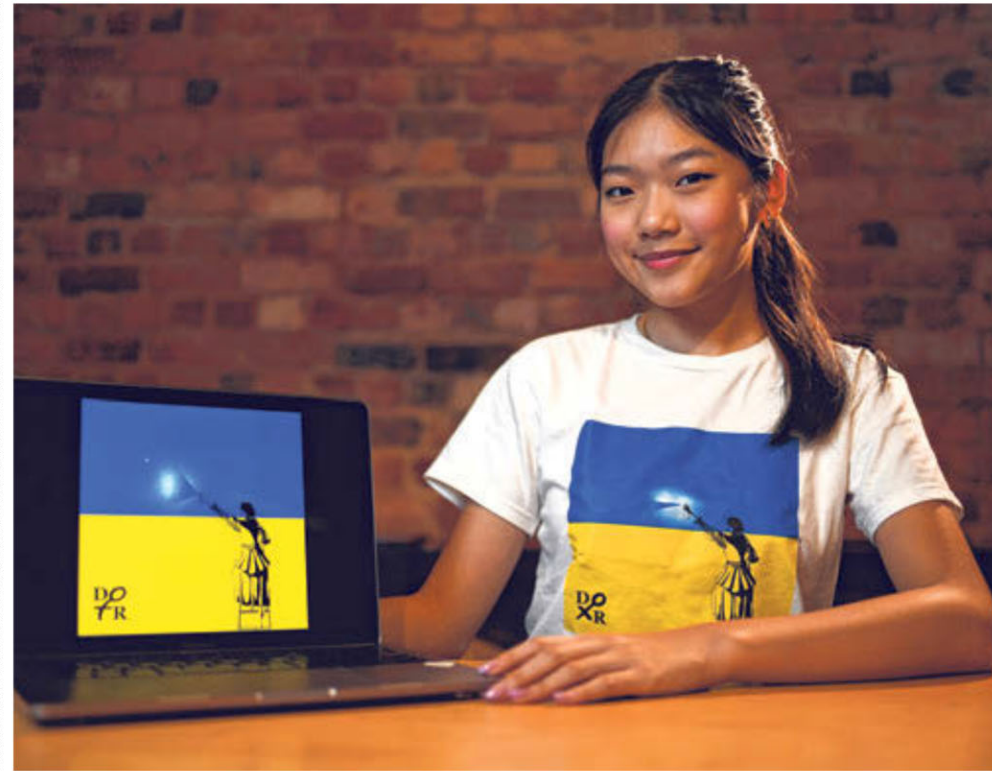
This gives the public partial ownership of the artworks and performances through the shared experience of enjoying them.

ART OUT IN THE OPEN

Providing public access to works of art can also occur outside museums and concert halls. Indeed, in Singapore, there are many opportunities to enjoy the arts throughout the year.

Events such as the Singapore Arts Festival and Singapore Art Week provide a platform for artists to showcase their works to the public and foster conversations with interested audiences through affordable, sometimes free, festival programming. The return of The Substation with an art exhibition opening on Tuesday in the heart of town provides a great opportunity for the public to enjoy the works free of charge.

In Singapore, the beautiful



An avenue for democratising the arts is by providing support to lesser-known local artists like Ava Soh, who created an artwork in support of Ukraine and tokenised it for sale. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wore the designed T-shirt she sent him during his virtual address at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue.
ST PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

own or experience the original, unique works of art they created.

One example was the Candy Garden exhibition at the Esplanade last year. The ceramic installation art by Ahmad Abu Bakar was on display for the public to enjoy free of charge at the Esplanade, and the pieces were available for sale at the end of the exhibition. For less than \$200 per piece, one could not only own an original artwork by a local artist, but also support the Esplanade in its mission to promote the arts to the public.

Another example is Ava Soh, a young local artist who recently created an artwork in support of Ukraine and tokenised it for sale. This highlights the potential of recent technologies like NFTs to accelerate arts democratisation by providing a platform for lesser-known artists to display and market their designs to a global audience.

What does arts democratisation mean to you? There is no right or wrong answer to this question. Perhaps art democratisation means being able to own part of a famous work of art or design object.

I chose to adopt some of the candy-coloured ceramics from the Candy Garden exhibition at the Esplanade for several reasons. Most importantly, to me, art democratisation means supporting independent artists, artisans and performers to develop their craftsmanship to produce exciting works of art for the masses, and allow them to continue to experiment and push the boundaries of the arts.

By adopting from the Esplanade, I am also supporting an organisation that provides accessible art to the masses. Lastly, the whimsical ceramic pieces continue to cheer me up and inspire me to be creative and resourceful in my own work.

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• We welcome contributions to the Sunday Views column. Write to us at stopinion@sph.com.sg