Art for all to enjoy

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

Deserina Sulaiman

The morning of March 26 was not just another slobby Saturday for Deserina Sulaiman, who runs Omega’s Collectible Moon Watches, a platform that provides an opportunity for independent artists to exhibit their work.

DEAD AS NFTs

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

During the Golden Age of the Dutch arts in the 17th century, art was often created by the middle class for their own use. The accessibility of art was expanded through the definition of art installations. Through continuous efforts and exciting street artworks, such artists have been able to show that their works, which traditionally do not fit the definition of art, can also be viewed as works of art.

Artists have always sought to reach out to the public and foster conversations with interested audiences through affordable, sometimes free, festival programming. The return of The Substation with its new 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, beautiful murals painted on the outside walls of buildings around the island are another public form of art, often referred to as street art. It may often be difficult to manage street art, as some of them straddle the fine line between public art and public nuisance, but street artists should continue to provide sufficient opportunities to display their works.

The impact of the works created by street artists often goes beyond just providing access to art for the masses. Street artists can also help push the boundaries of what is "art." Examples include Banksy, a yet unidentified freehand graffiti artist who has altered public perception of graffiti, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude, whose wrapped buildings have expanded the definition of art installations.

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Another avenue for democratising the arts is through providing support to lesser-known local artists, artisans and performers, who provide affordable access to the public to own or experience the original, unique works of art they created.

One example is the Candy Garden exhibition at the Esplanade last year. The ceramic installation art by Ahmad Abdu 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 $250 per piece, one could only own an original artwork by a local artist, but also support the Esplanade, which was 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. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was the designed T-shirt she sent him during his virtual address at the recent Shangri-La Dialogue.

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