

# Democratize Art!

## Why Art Matters:

To start, I think it's important to consider what art is and who makes it. Art is most simply some sort of creative human output. This may come in the form of something tangible or a performance of some sort that may be more temporary. For the purpose of this vision statement we will refer to art in tangible form. Now we must consider the makers of art. It's easy to imagine the stereotypical artist. This image is often one of a person on the social outskirts, romantically pursuing some masterpiece. However, like all stereotypes this is not often the case. Artists are representative of all culture, age, religion, and background. They occupy pivotal roles that determine architecture, fashion, advertising, music, or anything that requires someone experienced in understanding human emotional response to senses.

Why does art matter to people who are not artists or collectors? The simplest answer is that art makes people happy and comfortable. Society *would* survive without that sculpture in the park or that drawing hung on the wall of someones apartment. Society would also survive if we all exclusively ate a gray, flavorless, nutritional beverage indefinitely. But its proven that pizza makes people happy and so does that prized band t-shirt, or poster, or sculpture. Even if you never set foot in a fine art gallery, you are surrounded by art nearly everywhere you go. Art matters because it is an ancient and instinctive human practice, allowing people to make others comfortable with the things they create.

## The Problem

### The Problem for the Artist:

I believe a major problem in art is the difficulty artists have to survive and share their work at the beginning of their career. The concept of the starving artist is very familiar in our culture and even more familiar to the artists in this position. My proposed solution will be targeting mostly those people deemed emerging artists. This may be a person with an educational background in art or design, or someone with experience in a craft that seeks to pursue it as a vocation. Generally this artist has less than 20 years experience or is relatively new to the art market. The problem lies in the limited markets available for these artists to present their work and the significant inflation these markets impose on the consumer. My perspective is of someone that is an active participant in the arts as a glass, metal, and ceramics sculptor. I received a Bachelors Degree in Fine Arts from a university with a strong reputation. Contrary to probable opinion of art school, it is actually an extremely rigorous and technical program. It is a profession that requires knowledge of literature, science, entrepreneurship and an intense devotion to craft and personal expression. The hours are long and the work can be very difficult. Unfortunately with the exception of tiny handful of artists, the return on investment is extremely small. This is where the problem with an inefficient market comes in. To demonstrate this I'll

present an example sale for a piece of art on the higher end for an emerging artist. This was a piece I was fortunate enough to sell though admittedly these sales are few and far between. The gallery this was shown in displays all types of work, from skateboard decks to bronze sculpture. Here is the sale price with itemized cost deductions. I lived in Montana at the time and shipped the piece to Colorado.

Sale Price:	3000\$
Gallery	
Commission:	-1500\$
Materials:	-300\$
Shipping:	-200\$
Studio	
Expenses:	-150\$
Marketing:	-40\$
<u>Net Profit:</u>	<u>810\$</u>

This is an example of an actual cost breakdown for a piece which sold at a relatively small gallery. Though the final profit of about 27% doesn't seem too bad from a business perspective, it is important to consider cost of labor and frequency of sales. A piece like this may take 40+ hours to make and a sale like this is infrequent at best. Now if you factor in taxes and living expenses the concept of the starving artist becomes very real. I've had friends, colleagues, and professors that are immensely talented individuals that sell their work for thousands of dollars and have to pick up side jobs just to practice their craft. I myself am changing careers due to the lack of sustainability for a career in art. I still practice my work but living on that education alone is next to impossible considering the extremely limiting market. I believe there is a way artists may find a market that is supportive of the community of artists themselves without cost to society as a whole. I will discuss this solution further in another section.

### **The Problem for the Consumer:**

The problem for the consumer is no different than any consumer business. There are inefficiencies in our current market that make art an expensive and bourgeoisie commodity. Many of us are not art collectors. We may appreciate a painting or sculpture but to purchase often means paying hundreds if not thousands of dollars. Often half of the cost of a piece of art goes directly to a gallery. And because of contracts with the gallery the artist is often prohibited from selling the piece without the gallery taking this large commission. This forces the artist to price a piece much higher in a gallery than they might selling it directly to the consumer. The consequences are that art becomes something for those with a lot of expendable money. Art becomes something more relatable to it's stereotype; a hobby of the wealthy and privileged.

I believe there is a solution that could change the cost and exposure of artwork, making it more approachable to consumers and more profitable to artists.

## **The Solution**

### **Interface:**

The solution to this problem would be in the form of a web application. The application would present artists and their work to consumers. The consumers can learn about artist's and their recent activity as well as explore and purchase their work in an online gallery. Information about finding and viewing an artist's work in person would also be provided. An artist must become a member of the application to present their information and display their gallery of work. A very small commission would be assessed on sale of artwork to maintain the application. The artist would have access to update their gallery as they please. The application would also serve as a communication network for it's artists. This would provide a means to collaborate and exchange ideas outside of the local community. The advantage a web space has over the traditional gallery market is direct sale between consumers and artists. The consumer would get a chance to learn more about an artist and receive updates on their current work or exhibitions. The artist would benefit from displaying their work to a much larger market. Both the consumer and the artist would benefit from direct sales. The artist would see more profit for a piece and thus be able to sell a piece for a more marketable price. The consumer would have access to art that was initially not affordable. The fundamental idea of this application is to increase the art in people's lives and making the art community a more social and supportive place. I believe a web application is the ideal interface for this.

### **What makes it different:**

It's true that there already exist online marketplaces where art is sold. *Ebay* sell's a massive diversity of goods in an auction format for private sellers. The problem with this is the lack of specification. Artists are not apt to sell their work on a page that also sells baseball cards. The marketplace is too large and doesn't allow for careful consideration that art requires.

*Etsy* sells art and craft through an online marketplace for private sellers. This is also an issue of specification. There is a fine line between art and craft. A wooden sculpture is no different in concept than a garden gnome but to the artist and to the consumer these products exist in different categories. The way the application could solve this would be implementing exclusivity. To be an artist of the application you would need to be invited by either the application or an existing member. Those with a degree or experience in creative arts may apply to host a gallery on the application. This small amount of exclusivity serves as a curatorial attribute of the application. It would allow the application to be a reliable source of art instead of a site that sold art and craft as well as mass produced goods.

There are several specifically art marketplaces that exist online as well. The problem with these sites is they exist to sell work that is for very well established or famous artists. Art on these sites is inaccessible in price to the average consumer often exceeding tens of thousands of

dollars. These sites are also mostly representative of galleries who want their pieces to reach larger markets while still charging very heavy commissions. In general these sites are a continuation of the established exclusivity of art. The solution to this is creating an application that is more approachable yet still selective in quality.

### **Benefits:**

I believe the benefits of such an application would be significant. It would act as a hub for both art enthusiasts and artists. It would provide a way for artists to look at each other's work and create professional relationships in the community. It would be a place to present their work and manage their business. The application would have the interest of making the artists business simpler and providing a way to build their reputation. An artist might update their inventory with their latest artwork or provide biographic information and images of their studio and process. There would be a greater opportunity for an artist to connect with other makers in the community and collaborate on artwork or exhibitions. Most importantly it would provide more opportunity for the artist to receive the appropriate pay for their work and emerging artists access to a market. A young or less experienced artists would have a space that displayed their work to a large audience and that space would have the reputation of art curated and sold by artists. The artist could then price their work at more marketable costs because they would be receiving a greater percentage of the sale price.

The benefits to the consumer are also extensive. The consumer might find art they never would have seen in their local art community. They could then learn about the artist and follow updates on their recent work and exhibitions. The application could help find new artwork that is consistent with their taste, scale, medium, or price range. The consumer may then purchase or make an offer on a particular piece and have direct contact with an artist. The application would arrange shipping and handling of the item or allow pickup. This would insure the item and make sure the item was delivered professionally. The consumer would have confidence that when visiting this site they would be looking at artwork that is new and reputable. They would have greater access to support and follow a favorite artist in one convenient environment. The art would also be more affordable as the cost of a piece would not include massive gallery commissions. In general the market would be more accessible and more affordable.

The benefits to the big picture would be a benefit to everyone. If art was more affordable, and more accessible there would be more of it. If art was more profitable for artists there would be more of it. The nature of art is that it makes a more interesting and more enjoyable life. It allows people to enjoy their environments and express themselves more thoroughly. The same way that art changes through time so must the way in which we make and sell art. I believe this software could be the solution in getting more art in the hands of people.

