

## Contribution to 'Keywords on Art', *Public Art* (Seoul)

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### **Documentary**

Documentary art continues to be dominant, particularly on the biennial scene. As Mayakovsky put it, in a previous time of vast and speedy transformation, fiction went out of fashion of the pallor of its creations compared to life. Witnessing and the real do battle with neo-conceptual framing across numerous works, especially in video. The global fissures of inequality of races, sexes, classes and nations are revealed, but to what effect?

### **Popular/ Populism**

The very rapid rise of social media place the art world under new pressures, especially since so many of its products are digital and are shared online, free of expert curation and open to comment. New stars gain success in the market based on their popularity rather than the say-so of the traditional guardians of quality. Artists and galleries set out to capture new collectors, who may lack art-historical knowledge, with accessible works that draw on mass culture. Clement Greenberg's nightmare of the swamping of elite culture by mass culture may seem on the verge of realisation, except that what is popular can find its public directly, and not through the mediation of industrial culture.

### **Democracy**

The state of democracy is highlighted by documentary and the popular, and is reinforced by the manifest failure of mainstream politics to deal with the great issues of the day, environmental and economic. 'Actually existing democracy' flaunts its defects and corruptions. Curators have called on the Occupy movement to add political weight to the display of 'critical' works. Perhaps this is because Occupy, like an art work, poses no prospect of actual change, and so can be regarded as a gestural and aesthetic intervention. Yet the old, neoliberal dictat that forbade artistic engagement with the 'political' has been broken, and new forms and actions may emerge from the contact of activism and art, which have long been gingerly approaching one another.