

Why ‘outsider art’ is still on the outside and what needs to change

This document provides an Easy Read introduction to Kate Davey’s PhD research. The research looks at why outsider art is not fully accepted by the art world in the UK.

What’s happening

In the last 10 years, outsider artists have become more visible.

- Some have been in big art shows like the Turner Prize.
- Some have shown work in museums and galleries.

But outsider art is still not fully accepted in the mainstream art world.

My research asked: why not?

I spoke to 35 people - curators, art workers, and artists who face barriers.

Here’s what they said.

Four main problems

1. The name itself - “Outsider Art”

Some people like the name. It helps them feel part of something.

Others don’t like it. They didn’t choose it - someone else gave it to them.

There is no agreement on what the name means.

While people argue about it, real chances for change are missed.

2. The art is pushed to the side

Even when outsider art is shown, it’s often put in hallways, classrooms or community spaces, not main galleries.

It is often talked about as therapy or social work, not as real art.

Community impact is important.

But outsider art also needs to be valued for its creativity and beauty.

3. The gatekeepers

A few people - like curators, collectors, and critics - decide what gets seen.

Many don't know or understand outsider art.

Because of this, outsider artists depend on a small group of supporters.

If funding or staff change, the support can disappear.

4. The system is hard to access

The art world is built for people who already have:

- money
- art school training
- connections

For artists without these things, it's very hard to get in.

It's even harder for artists who live with health problems or low income.

How the problems connect

All these problems feed each other.

Together, they keep outsider art on the margins.

What needs to change

Change will not come from one show or short project.

We need to:

- Rethink what art is
- Value all kinds of creativity
- Share power so more people can make decisions

We must not just invite outsider artists into the room - we must change the room itself.

Bigger than outsider art

These problems don't just affect one group.

Many artists face gatekeeping and exclusion.

We need a system that supports everyone - not one that only fits a few.

How to fix it

To build a fairer art world, we need to make space:

- In galleries and studios - show all artists equally
- In funding - pay artists properly
- In time - give artists time to create
- In our minds - value difference and new ideas

Final thought

If we want a society that truly celebrates diversity, we must see all forms of art and experience as valuable.

Then, we must create the right conditions for everyone to flourish.