


Creating Opportunities For Public Art: What To Consider





What is public art?



Public art is more than placing a sculpture on a site. Public art demands that works of art be context and site-specific with attention to audience, environmental conditions, cultural history, and urban or natural landscape.

- Town of Wake Forest, NC

Public Art is not an artform. It's a principle, a principle of improving the changing environment through the arts and is a term given to the practice of involving artists in the conception, development and transformation of a public space.

- Public Art Online

“When most people think about public art, they think of a mural on a wall or a building, or perhaps a large sculpture in a park. While murals and sculptures are certainly public art, they are far from the only ways that public art can be expressed. Perhaps a better term for public art would be community art—by, for, and of the community in which it is presented.

-National Endowment for the Arts

Public artworks are presented in more or less discrete ways, affirming their formal, conceptual or temporal characteristics. They can relate or not to their site, adapt harmoniously to their environment or contrast with it, depending on the artist's intention.

-Art Public Montreal

Simply put public art is art in public spaces. The term “public art” may conjure images of historic bronze statues of a soldier on horseback in a park. Today, public art can take a wide range of forms, sizes, and scales—and can be temporary or permanent. It often interprets the history of the place, its people, and perhaps addresses a social or environmental issue. Public art can include murals, sculpture, memorials, integrated architectural or landscape architectural work, community art, digital new media, and even performances and festivals!

-American for The Arts

What To Consider? What To Consider? What To Consider?
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Community
Creatives
Innovation
Stakeholders
Engagement
Criticality

Community

To ensure the success of an art project, it is crucial to thoroughly explore and understand the communities surrounding the chosen site. Take into account the needs, interests, and priorities of these community, and contemplate how these elements can form the objectives of your public art initiative. By actively engaging these communities at the genesis of the project, you are also able to establish community buy-in from the beginning which is crucial for the sustainability of the project. When putting out an artist call or discussing the opportunity with artists, it is important to emphasize the significance of this community connection. Be prepared to assist artists in connecting with these communities by identifying relevant institutions, organizations, or community leaders who can serve as conduits.

Case Study:



Love Letter To Syracuse, Steve Powers, 2013

Building on his Love Letter project in Philadelphia, Steve Powers and his crew moved on to Syracuse to transform what has been a colossal barrier between two disparate neighborhoods into a point of interest, a gathering spot, and a conversation. Powers spent a lot of time in Syracuse listening to neighborhood residents as they described the way they see their hometown. He used these conversations to devise the text found in his “A Love Letter To Syracuse” public artworks.

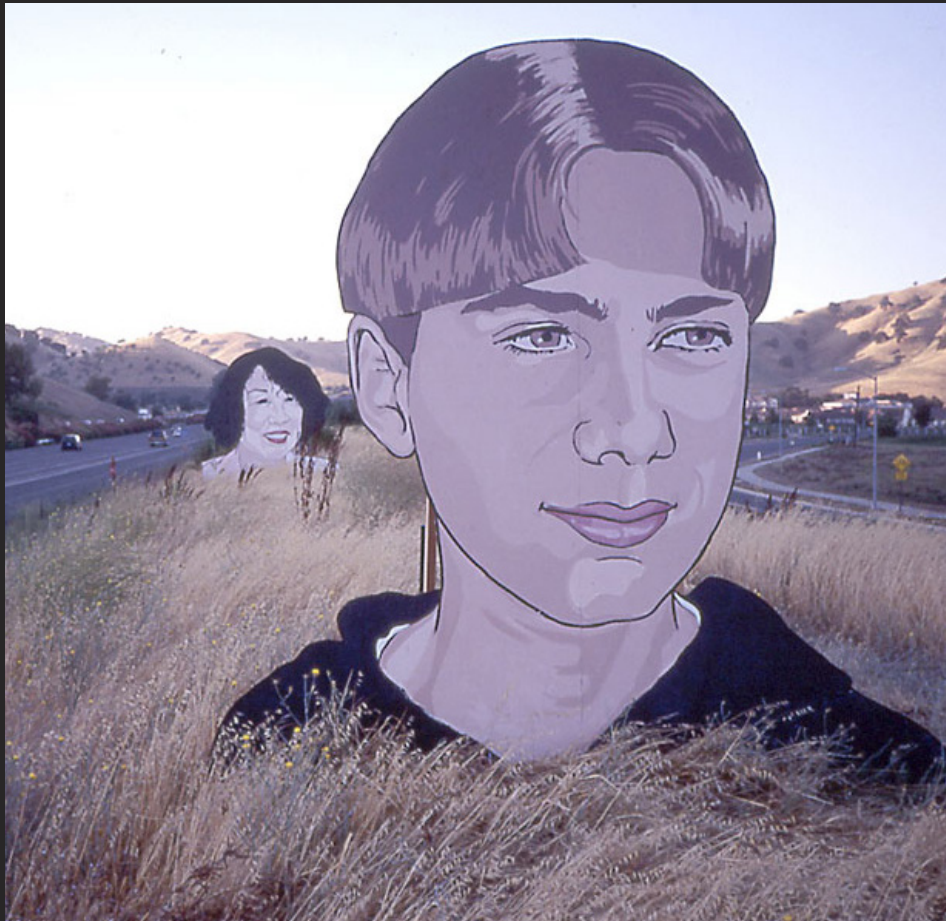
Case Study:



While at a residency to create a public artwork at a sculpture park in France, Fletcher realized quite quickly that the local community had no connection to the park. To mitigate this, he worked with a local 8 year old boy over a few years to devise a sculpture of his choosing, which turned out to be a gold turtle - painted green.

Corentine's Turtle, Harrell Fletcher, 2006

Case Study:



“This temporary project consisted of six 8’x8’ portraits painted on plywood and placed along the I-80 Freeway outside of the City of Fairfield. Highlighting one of many such towns that the freeway runs through, the portraits depicted everyday people from the local community. After several months spent in the town as artists-in-residence, we developed this project to highlight some of the folks we met during our stay. In some ways it was an attempt to look at how towns are experienced through the seemingly random people you meet there. During the three months the project was installed an estimated 10 million people saw it while driving by.”

Some People From Around Here,
Harrell Fletcher, & Jon Rubin, 1997

Case Study:



“You’ve made it” sign on a building in Syracuse, New York, with a rendition of basketball’s famous “shot clock” below. (On the other side of the building is a comparable sign that reads, “Till Next Time”)

You’ve Made It (Shot Clock), John Bocksel, 2016

Project Examples



The Truth Is I See You & In Search of the Truth (The Truth Booth), Hank Willis Thomas and the Cause Collective, 2016

The Truth Is I See You is part of an ongoing series by Brooklyn-based artist Hank Willis Thomas that explores the nature of truth and understanding across cultures. Using the phrases of a poem, the core of the exhibition is a new series of comic book-inspired speech balloon signs that feature universal statements about truth in 22 of the many languages spoken in Brooklyn.

In Search of the Truth (The Truth Booth) is an interactive, mobile video recording booth invites members of the public to complete the statement "The truth is..." from their own perspectives.

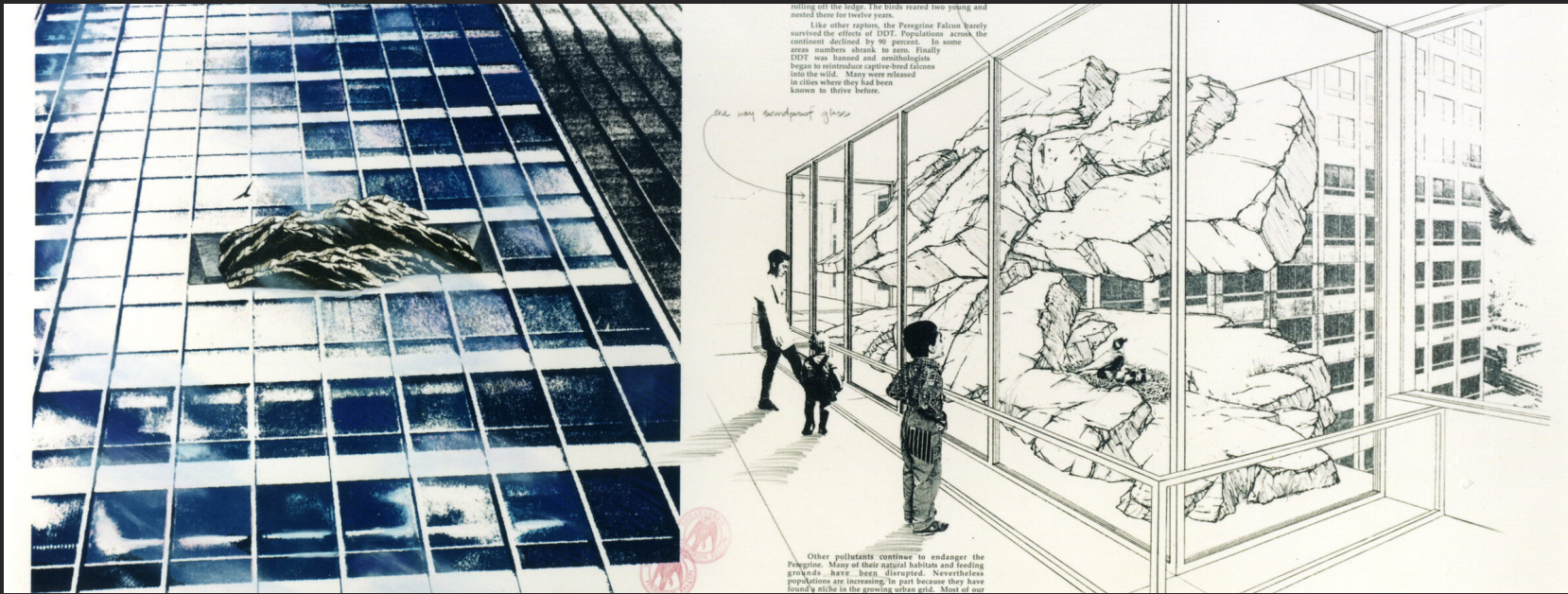
Project Examples



In this monumental work, Paul Ramírez Jonas adopts the language of imperial power traditionally expressed through equestrian statues but omits a human figure, thus shifting the focus from the commemoration of individual leaders to the power of the collective. The artist designed the sculpture out of cork to be adorned by visitors and accumulate messages and keepsakes over time.

The Commons, Paul Ramírez Jonas

Case Study:



Cliff Dwelling, Adam Kuby, 1993

Proposal for a sculpture that provides nesting habitat for peregrine falcons in a skyscraper. A building's skin would be pulled inward to make room for the overhanging ledges of artificial rock. Inside, space is provided for public viewing. Unlike a zoo, the birds are not fed or caged. Here the people are confined. The falcons are free to roam. Peregrine falcons already inhabit the canyon-like cliffs and spaces of most major cities, nesting on buildings, and preying on pigeons and other urban wildlife. The artwork creates a more official residence for these raptors that have become part of our urban ecologies.

Which communities exist adjacent to the site? Identify communities of interest, action, place, practice, and circumstance.

How do you plan on reaching out to these communities? Diversifying your channels diversifies your participants.

What needs or priorities do these communities have? Are they physiological needs such as food and shelter; safety needs such as employment and health; love and belonging needs such as family and a sense of connection; or are they needs related to their desire for strength and freedom?

How do you plan on centering community involvement when seeking artists for your project? Things to consider: the project might include a Request for Proposals, community review sessions, or public voting opportunities.

How can you involve the community throughout the entire project? Break down the different stages of your project and design outlets for these communities to be participate in each of them. Think ideation, design, execution, engagement, documentation, and evaluation.

Creatives

Creating a public art piece for your municipality provides a fantastic opportunity to connect with the local arts community. This includes individuals, communities, and organizations. The economic impact of the arts is robust, and commissioning public art opportunities both recognizes these often overlooked contributions and contributes to the creative economy itself. It's also important to remember that artists are not monolithic. Often different artistic disciplines come with different artist communities. Various demographics also influence how artist communities are formed such as age, class, or institutional affiliation (ie. arts communities associated with colleges or universities). Make sure to adequately advertise your artist call or conduct a thorough search of artists in your city so you allow for maximum access to the opportunities. Local arts organizations can be an incredible resource for this as they are often connected to these creative communities and individuals and can provide a much needed channel to reach them. These arts organization also may have expertise that your staff or team may not. Not only could they contribute to finding and choosing artists but they can provide best practices for as assortment of things such as the budget, shipping and installation of artworks, artwork sustainability, and more.

List of local arts organizations

Organization:
Focus:
Contact:
Email:

Organization:
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List of local arts communities

Community:
Medium or focus:
Contact:

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List of local artist

Professionals in design, architecture, performing arts, landscape designers, curators, filmmakers, authors, etc.

Artist Name:
Medium:
Website/Social:

Artist Name:
Medium:
Website/Social:

Artist Name:
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Website/Social:

Artist Name:
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Artist Name:
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Website/Social:

Innovation

It is crucial to approach the concept of public art with critical thinking, moving beyond the notion of mere beautification. Beauty is subjective, and limiting public art to this perspective overlooks other compelling formal aspects. Sculptural qualities like minimalism, abstraction, conceptualism, and the intention to approach the project in a socially engaged way often surpass the goal of creating something that is merely visually pleasing. Public art also need not be permanent; impermanence can be a valid approach. Moreover, it doesn't have to stem solely from an individual artist's vision; collaborative efforts can lead to co-authored public art whether between artists or between the artist and the community. We often think about murals when enacting public art, but it is important to remember that this is just one approach out of a myriad of methods and mediums. Some of the most innovative public art projects become so through their approach to participation and community involvement.

Case Study:



7000 Oaks, Joseph Beuys, 1982

With the help of volunteers, Beuys planted 7,000 oak trees over five years in Kassel, Germany, each with an accompanying basalt stone. The black stones were initially piled outside the Fridericianum museum, only being removed as each tree was planted. In response to the extensive urbanization of the setting the work was a long-term and large-scale artistic and ecological intervention with the goal of enduringly altering the living space of the city. The project, though at first controversial, has become an important part of Kassel's cityscape.

Case Study:



The outside sculpture Munich Fog (Fogfall) #10865/II was conceived of as a performance in which fog, the space, and the public participate. Nakaya introduces water as both a sculptural element and a metaphor for endless temporal processes to link material realities and media-generated illusions. Her cross-disciplinary approach also becomes evident in the titles of her fog works: the sequence of numbers designates the nearest weather station, whose data informs the preparatory planning of each work.

Munich Fog (Fogfall) #10865/II, Fujiko Nakaya, 2022

Case Study:



A monumental kinetic installation by Los Angeles–based conceptual artist Charles Gaines, *Moving Chains* features nine rows of custom-made steel chains, continuously rolling atop of a wooden structure resembling a ship's hull. Situated on New York's Governors Island, along the waterway of the New York Harbor, the installation is a powerful commentary and critique of the history of slavery and systematic violence inherent within racial capitalism and foundational to the United States.

Moving Chains, Charles Gaines, 2022

Case Study:



It Is What It Is, Jeremy Deller, 2009

It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq was a dynamic and mobile project by Jeremy Deller intended to stimulate unmediated dialogue about the history, present circumstances, and future of Iraq. Deller took a car that was blown up in a book market in Bagdad, Iraq, in 2007 on the road and was joined by Sergeant Jonathan Harvey, an American veteran of the Iraq War; Esam Pasha, an Iraqi citizen; and Nato Thompson, Creative Time Curator. The group traveled aboard a specially outfitted RV and conducted conversations at more than ten public sites across the United States.

Case Study:



Sacrilege, Jeremy Deller, 2012

Jeremy Deller defines himself as an “instigator of social interventions”: his works are often characterized by audience participation, his sculptures are social experiences in which performances, videos, and installations become places of exchange and aggregation. This was also the starting point for *Sacrilege*. With the sense of humour that characterizes many of his projects, Deller transforms the Stonehenge monument into a giant inflatable toy for children, reproducing it in plastic and turning it into a funfair attraction 35 meters in diameter; the public is thus called upon to interact with the installation, to climb onto it, and to jump and play within it. This project explores the notion of access to symbols of national identity.

Stakeholders

Incorporating stakeholders into the project is essential. As highlighted in the 'community' section of this presentation, involving those most affected by these artworks fosters buy-in and collaboration from the outset. However, stakeholder involvement shouldn't be limited to the inception of a public artwork, it should span the entire process. When selecting artists, consider establishing a review committee comprised of community members, city staff, and other community leaders. After artist selection, engage relevant municipality support personnel to provide consultation throughout the project, ensuring maximum support for this initiative.

What stakeholders are part of...

Ideating

What stakeholders are part of...

Planning

What stakeholders are part of...

Creating

What stakeholders are part of...

Sustaining

What stakeholders are part of...

Engaging

What stakeholders are part of...

Evaluating

Engagement

View your public artwork as a catalyst for ongoing engagement. Artworks, on their own, may not be inherently accessible and deliberate efforts are required to establish new avenues of access for diverse communities. Such initiatives serve as a connecting bridge between the artwork and the community. Educational initiatives and public programming around the content of the artworks are some simple ways to create these opportunities for new communities to access your public artwork. Think critically about your marketing and outreach strategies to ensure diverse communities are aware of these opportunities.

Case Study:



In Liepāja, Latvia, on December 15, 1941, thousands of Jewish women and children were taken to the women's prison where they were forced to be stripped and shot dead in groups of 10. Many of the victims were photographed in their final moments by a Nazi photographer. One such photograph serves as the inspiration for the Monument, "She Wouldn't Take Off Her Boots."

The Monument is North Carolina's first Women's Holocaust memorial. This original sculpture by artist Victoria Milstein honors the strength and resilience of all women. It is beautifully situated in Greensboro's LeBauer Park, becoming a "place-making" community experience for all.

She Wouldn't Take Off Her Boots, Victoria Milstein, 2022

Case Study:

SHE WOULDN'T TAKE OFF HER BOOTS

Memorial Tour

<p>SHELLY AND RACHEL'S STORY</p>  <p>http://bit.ly/shellyandrachel</p>		<p>HISTORY OF THE HOLOCAUST</p>  <p>https://bit.ly/sheahistory</p>
<p>RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS</p>  <p>https://bit.ly/righteousamongnations</p>		<p>HANK BRODT'S STORY</p>  <p>https://bit.ly/hankbrodt</p>
<p>THE ARTIST'S PERSPECTIVE</p>  <p>https://bit.ly/artistpov</p>	<p>THE BEAR WITNESS CAMERA</p>  <p>https://bit.ly/bearwitnesscamera</p>	<p>ERICA WEISSBURG'S STORY</p>  <p>https://bit.ly/weissburgstory</p>



QR codes present on-site at the memorial connect visitors to interviews with local Holocaust Survivors, and historical segments on the history of the Holocaust and the women of Liepaja, Latvia.

Digital Tour
She Wouldn't Take Off Her Boots, Victoria Milstein, 2022

Case Study:



This curriculum is created to assist teachers in helping students understand the importance of memorializing the Holocaust and honoring those who suffered during this dark time in history. These classroom-tested lessons were created as a collaborative effort by veteran Holocaust educator and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Teacher Fellow Laurie Schaefer and renowned artist Victoria Milstein, the creator of the “She Wouldn’t Take Off Her Boots” sculpture. The curriculum is approved by the NC Holocaust Educational Council and will play a vital role in fulfilling the mandates of the Never Again Education Act — passed by Congress to require Holocaust education throughout the country.

Middle and High School Curriculum
She Wouldn’t Take Off Her Boots, Victoria Milstein, 2022

Case Study:



Thousands of middle and high school students, college classes, and community groups tour the monument each year. These tours are led by local educators, the artist, and local Holocaust survivors.

Tours for School and Community Groups
She Wouldn't Take Off Her Boots, Victoria Milstein, 2022

Case Study:

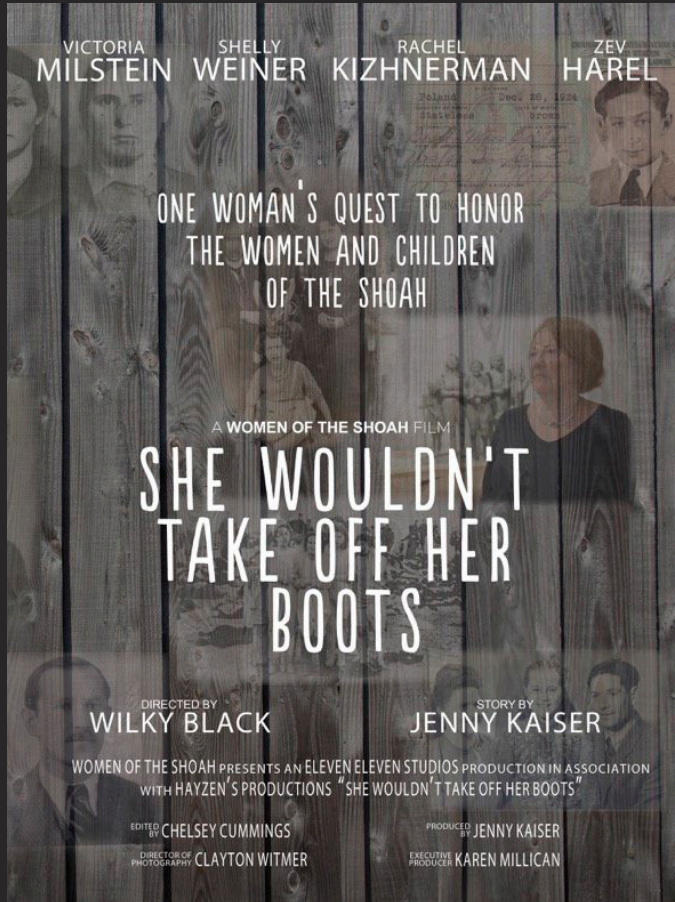


The Women of the Shoah Docents are ambassadors for the mission of Women of the Shoah Jewish Placemaking and the monument “She Wouldn’t Take off Her Boots.” Through extensive training throughout the year, they are equipped to lead tours on-site and in the community about the stories the monument represents, and the lessons that they convey.

The Women of the Shoah Teacher Fellowship awards Guilford County High School teachers training in the curriculum, funding for in-class arts activities, and field trips to the monument where students can engage with the memorial through discussions with the artist and holocaust survivors.

Teacher Fellowship and Docent Program
She Wouldn’t Take Off Her Boots, Victoria Milstein, 2022

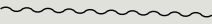
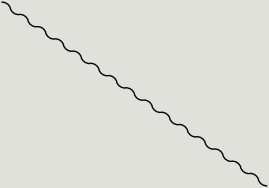
Case Study:



What would you do to save your children? How would you act in the face of defeat? How would you make sure the stories of bravery are passed down to the next generation? Our story shows one woman's determination to sculpt the first Holocaust Memorial Monument in North Carolina commemorating the women and children of the Holocaust. The film *She Wouldn't Take Off Her Boots* shows her motivation, her drive, and the people that helped her dream become a reality. The film puts faces, names, and stories to what the monument represents. Survivors of the Holocaust do not live far away. They live in Greensboro, NC where the monument stands. They work with us. They are our neighbors. The film gives three of them an opportunity to tell their stories. One is the story of a boy who survived multiple concentration camps and the other is of two cousins hidden during the war by their brave and courageous mothers. The monument is named in honor of the cousins' mothers.

Documentary Film

She Wouldn't Take Off Her Boots, Victoria Milstein, 2022



Criticality

Most of the time, the public chooses when they look at art. They buy a ticket to go see a movie; they stroll into an art gallery; or they sit down to watch a dance or theater performance. This is not the case with public art as they confront it while they move through communal space. Because of this, the decisions you make hold more weight than the other aforementioned art experiences. You have a responsibility to be considerate of those that will encounter this artwork, and are subject to a greater scrutiny than others who choose less public artistic platforms. The following projects are not meant to discourage you, but to understand why it is crucial to thoughtfully consider all aspects of your project.

Case Study:



Baseball Family, Rhoda Sherbell, 2006

The acquisition of the statue ran into controversy when it was presented as a take-it-or-leave-it gift to the City. The representatives of the Portland Public Art Committee did not feel the statue adequately represented the diversity of Portland's population and voted against acquiring the piece. The committee also felt that art containing the logo of a private business, as this did with the Sea Dog emblem emblazoned on the males' baseball caps, violated the public art ordinance. The City Council overruled the Committee and the statue was installed in front of Hadlock Field, home of the Portland Sea Dogs.

Case Study:



Crack is Wack!, Keith Haring, 1986

While installed simultaneously to move local children towards drug-awareness, Haring's unauthorized piece also unfortunately happened to coincide with New York City Mayor Ed Koch's crackdown on graffiti. Putting the city firmly between a rock and a hard place with his Crack is Wack piece on the side of a handball court, Haring was enjoying a boom in his own career — being hassled by police while making his art (literally) underground in the subway, he was also selling the same works in galleries for thousands of dollars. Thus, the Parks Department fined Haring \$100 dollars, something that the city would later apologize for, while asking him to recreate the piece as a permanent installation.

Case Study:



Pierre Vivant, Traffic Light Tree, 1998

The city's public-arts commission installed "Traffic Light Tree" in 1998 to replace a plane tree that was, incredibly, "choking to death as a result of pollution." At the time, Vivant said that his traffic complication "imitates the natural landscape of the adjacent London plane trees, while the changing pattern of the lights reveals and reflects the never ending rhythm of the surrounding domestic, financial and commercial activities."

The sculpture, located in the middle of a roundabout, caused much confusion with motorists. Indeed, when Saga Motor Insurance surveyed British motorists on the best and worst roundabouts in the country in 2005, the one containing the "Tree" naturally came up high on the ranking.

Case Study:



Scaffold, Sam Durant, 2017

In June 2017, Durant erected a two-story wooden beam sculpture entitled Scaffold for display in the garden of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The sculpture was intended to represent “the gallows used in seven hangings from 1859 to 2006 sanctioned by the U.S. government”, as well as “America’s history of state violence and its use of the death penalty”. The sculpture elicited protests from Native American groups prior to being put on public display, and delayed the opening of the gallery’s public art garden. Protesters were offended by a reference in the sculpture to the 1862 hanging of 38 Dakota Indians at Mankato, Minnesota. This is because it was seen as a form of cultural appropriation of Native American culture. Durant agreed to dismantle Scaffold, and after initial plans to burn the piece, it was buried by Dakota tribal elders.

Case Study:



Lucille Ball, Dave Poulin, 2009

In 2009, a statue of Ball was installed in her hometown of Celoron, depicting the climactic scene from the 1952 I Love Lucy episode "Lucy Does a TV Commercial." Residents noted the statue's deranged, androgynous expression, which bore little resemblance to Ball, earning it the nickname Scary Lucy. The statue garnered little outside attention until 2015, when images of the statue went viral and received international media coverage. The artist discussed fixing the statue with town officials, but claimed they wanted him to do it at his own expense. In 2015, Celoron's mayor said the town was looking to hire a different artist instead.



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