

2014 Creative Cities Summit

Sheraton Hotel, Hamilton ON

June 12, 2014

Notes from [The Public Art Round Table](#)

Founder & Co-Chair: Ciara McKeown

Co-Chair: Kristine Germann

General Ideas – Big Picture

- ◆ **We are in a post permanent public art phase.**
- ◆ Continue to create shared dialogue between municipalities, organizations, artists
- ◆ Let's establish best practice standards
- ◆ How do we manage the mediocrity which comes out of repetitive processes
- ◆ Short-term residencies, have people exposed to creative process, temporary art/ performative
- ◆ We have to do a better job of explaining our programs and what we do with communities (expense vs. value)
- ◆ Could we bring art into non-arts space/setting? ie.sports
- ◆ Create a new language, change how we talk about what we want/need

1. Topic: Community Initiated Projects - Creating Context and Balancing Expectations

General Comments

- Recognize the strengths of both a 1% capital development integrated municipal policy and artworks that are created through grassroots initiatives.
- Community-initiated projects are diverse in scope and outcomes: accept this diversity of projects for community to take ownership – public art can be many things
- Policy, plan or some kind of guiding document necessary to underline aesthetic and conceptual concerns as well as show process for public art in communities
- There is Curatorial Intent to public art – it is contextual, responding to site/context
- Particularly in smaller municipalities, challenges are maintenance, durability, de-commissioning; access to Conservators
- Arts History and Public Education: how can we help the public to understand genres of work -- Abstraction vs. Representation, Architectural vs. Landscape work vs. Kinetic vs. environmental vs. Technology

Planning and Policies

- Is it necessary to have a Public Art Master Plan – can public art planning happen within City and Neighbourhood Plans?
- Increase profile and Recourses: Arts and culture need to be added to official plans (where it is not) – Urban Planning and Development
- Donations policy critical to avoiding perils of City receiving everything; challenge of maintaining quality and what works for the collection
- Create public art policy with flexibility - modify Master Plans to reflect community

- Challenge with Master Plans are they become out of date. Long time frames between renewal and are dependent on urban evolution – can become rapidly out of date therefore necessary to keep flexibility and projects that are not strictly defined.
- Avid mono-culture within master plans –reality of timing: sometimes 5 years minimum to 10 – 20+ years before a resulting public artwork is achieved.
- Community Development and Planning Intent is to implement these strategies and their roll out minimum: 3 – 5+ years out.

Community

- Community Participation Workshops to develop site plans for public art: with design charette's; create longer term relationships with community groups
- Building from the ground up: from the neighbourhood out – don't parachute people into the process. Build community dialogue as base to build policy.

Financial

- Challenge of monetizing public art – value becomes about perception of cost rather than the value it adds to city building and the enhancement of the public realm.
- Create long term goals and investment.
- Public art consulting costs too; balance of administration and consulting should be weighed; plan for costs that will be incurred after completion
- Financing: Use part of project capital budget for community outreach and education, park design plans and secondary plans, temporary projects
- Scale project, goals to resources available

Achieving Artistic Excellence

- Gallery vs. non gallery (municipalities) (and/or museums)- quality as standard, ensuring artist and community voices are balanced
- Public and professional sector understanding of heritage assets vs. public art assets
- Public and Municipalities – are risk adverse – this extends to artistic/ conceptual risk – which is necessary in making great art.
- Maintaining artistic excellence and creativity within the structure

Curatorial

- How do you animate the artwork in the long term?
- Difficulty of managing the curatorial aspect of a public collection due to how a collection is formed – possible to build into scope, at outset of the project
- Heritage mandates seem to be clearer in regards to a collection
- Curatorial decisions vs. jury: important to think about how to balance
- Curating Strategy: Integrated into environment, neighbourhood, planning zones, urban design – rather the framework and notion of traditional gallery curating.

Strategies

- Involve Council in big picture but keep decision-making arm's length: empower the jury, oversight committee, etc.

- Build a foundation and then do projects:
 - Permanent Budget (Separate Council from the Process) arm's length jury for selection process
 - Education: for program and each public art project
 - Public art Master Plan and Policy – Creates a vision and plan for a Collection over time – review this and check each project/decision by the vision/direction of that plan
 - Establish a Funding Formula (with flexibility)

2. Topic: Public Input – Oversight and Engagement

General Comments:

Oversight

- Committees: no process to access funds to address how we might meet the needs of community/artists/engagement needs
- Create buzz around education, advisory committees and working groups for external outreach

Engagement

- What is engagement? When are we communicating, when are we teaching, when is there true reciprocal conversation, and when is there active involvement
- Its our responsibility to go to people
- Appropriate action needs to be taken with feedback.
- Transparency important in the engagement process
- Education piece needs to happen before engagement.
- Community Engagement good for some projects and not good for other projects (path of least resistance)
- Engage artists to engage the public, not as a rule but where appropriate; Include in artists scope of work if you want them involved in the process
- There are pros and cons of doing a consultation early on.
- Engagement is crucial in municipal politics and need right people to do this; Designate and engage a skilled facilitator to lead dialogue – to ensure an open and objective discussion
- On-line engagement is the new methodology – engagement needs to be re-defined because of this
- The neighbourhood needs to be involved and heard; and recognition that the artist is paramount to the process.
- Different formulas and forums for engagement need to be considered and adopted for different projects, situations and communities.

Questions

- Engagement – social media and how we can deal with reality of falseness online?
- Engagement as a municipality – how to make it quality engagement for public art
- What are interesting ways to engage community in public art with a focus on process and creating a greater sense of ownership?
- Community feedback could happen on 2 levels before and during the process?
- When is the correct time for community engagement?

Challenges

- Public Art is not always liked by all and the creative process that takes place; it's great to have the artist involved but, not all are comfortable doing this.
- Not all artists have a practice grounded in Relational Aesthetics (practices which are community / public engaged in both the creative process and functioning aspects of the artwork).
- Same folks attend to complain about the same issues.
- Multiple community voices a challenge.
- Engaging the unheard voices are a challenge.

Strategies

- Ensure call parameters are not too defined, structured with tight parameters leaves no room to engage the community
- Engage stakeholder groups in the area the art will be located – build trust between the artists and public; clarify and state that it is not a populist vote.
- Be creative – get out and meet people and dialogue with them in their realm.
- Method: Gather Input vs. Effect Change – Best method: should inform, not dictate the process, make it further away from council chamber.
- Establish a community engagement policy – define why the community is being involved and being brought into the process.
- Public education component needed

Examples:

1. Workshops on street art led by artists – i.e. Paint it up Program in Ottawa. Bring together Police, local arts groups, artists and public and private stakeholders, crime prevention all come together to make the project successful and create awareness.
2. Example: Sudbury has launched a survey to see if public engaged in City Process (Don't see the results at the completion – result are valuable and needed).
3. Example: Burlington has a public engagement charter and there is Coordinator 1AP2 certified (Culture Manager). This sets the framework for the public engagement process for their public art competitions; Process: Information is circulated to the press, engage citizen participation, draft RFP with the City Neighbourhood. Guideline used: The Community knows their needs/wants. Feedback is solicited through Lets Talk Burlington for each public art competition. This feedback is reviewed by the Jury
4. Example: Hamilton invites public to review shortlisted artists, jury explains the rationale for choosing the artist, jury selects the final artist, even if not what public thought was the strongest choice
5. Example: Kingston engaging and educating public to develop an artist in residency program
6. Example: Process for public input:
 - Open House system to present design drawings and artists. It is critical to explain to the community that their comments will be communicated to the Jury and Artists and form part of the criteria for selection. This process confirms that a broader public than just the selection panel or jury has been aware of the process
 - Maquette's are voted upon by the public
 - On-line voting or NO voting

3. Topic: Conservation: Maintaining and Caring Long Term for Public Art

Challenges

- Lack of professional conservation expertise within municipalities.
- Government shutdown of Conservancy Office
- Hard to locate Conservators specialists for the diversity of needs of the materials and fabrication methods of the artworks
- Expensive to hire an expert to review the project / solve the problem, need them in on the entire process, not just one part.
- Budgets are small and inadequate
- Real decline in Conservation specialists
- Diversity and range of materials and use of new materials and technologies is a huge issue
- Public Art can be made of controversial materials and content and consequently provoke vandalism by the public.
- Even if a new policy for reserve monies has been established for artworks, older pieces will have come into the collection without reserve funds set aside as an endowment for long-term maintenance
- Well intended colleagues from other Divisions will undertake a treatment on an artwork not realizing that they may be damaging the artwork.
- 15,000.00 was the average budget available for maintenance (discussed at one table).
- Note: Risk that a government collection might consider being sold (Detroit).
- Concern: That all technological based works cannot be considered permanent 10+ years. They will have to be retro-fitted or de-commissioned eventually.
- Public Art and maintenance must compete with the general ageing of all municipalities' infrastructure.
- Collections across the country are growing at an exponential rate and existing artworks are ageing and being subjected to more intense wear
- Finding conservators is challenging in small communities. Very few young people are going into the field.

Questions

- How do we encourage a Municipality to invest in Conservation?
- Policy: accept artwork only

Strategies

- Asset Manager % Formula – asset to maintain – An asset analysis of work adds value.
- Establish: regular schedules of maintenance
- Have a Conservation Expert Consultant as part of annual operating budget at a % of the value of the Collection
- Include the Artists in the beginning of the process to work with materials before the project starts
- Conduct public art workshop internally in organization to understand the process and the importance to have and follow protocols to maintain the work.
- Include a % value of the art to a reserve account for long term maintenance.
- Artists to provide a detailed manual of maintenance
- Establish contingency budgets
- Provide insurance for the artwork
- Establish a Collections Policy which would address maintenance, deaccessioning, etc
- Ensure conservation is part of artists' contract and project funding

- Other departments and divisions can look after the less challenging pieces like bike racks and furniture.
- Restoration can in some cases be undertaken by the artists or their estates themselves – if they are local.
- Use best Practise Conservation methods from other Cities as an example.
- Communicate with the Councillor and Council – let them become an advocate for maintenance for the artworks and monuments in their wards.
- Use language in policy development that can be connected: metaphor the older car that need repair or replacement.
- Advocate for the care of the artworks as enhancement of the public realm and quality of life for the public.
- Sponsorship Strategy: Adopt a sculpture/artwork/ memorial etc.
- Life Cycle Budget / Planning.
- Material nature of the artwork should determine budget for maintenance.
- Contracted consulting Conservator on technical review committees for new artworks, works with the artist to resolve the material nature of the artwork.
- Ensure that the integrity of the artwork is not negatively impacted by negligence or inappropriate treatments.

4. Topic: Re-defining Permanency

General Comments

- In municipalities - capital budgets are used for software and other structural elements in buildings that don't last forever – why not for art.
- A municipality is not needed to be involved in all public art, they can support and are important for permissions.
- Cities don't need to be the commissioner of the temporary works.
- Temporary art helps to build the culture in the city -- also good public art strategy during transitional periods in a city.
- De-accessioning is not always a bad word if artworks are fabricated out of materials that did not last or a landscape is re-done or building and a greater level of integration is desired.
- What museums collected in the past – Is it still relevant today? The same question should be applied to public art. Museums de-accession objects for reasons like: it may be politically incorrect.
- Temporary work helps to get edgier pieces accomplished by city and external groups.
- Temporary and de-accessioned works need to be documented – the process and result. This is in general not done well.
- ? Example: Murals as a tool to get to know a municipal process or the steps involved/public art process. If it stops functioning as a tool then its purpose is no longer needed (depending on the reasoning).
- Looking at goals – goals can't just be public art in isolation.
- Public art is not a band aid. Why can't we create public art based on the humanization of spaces and places.
- Defining an outcome restricts the artist and the best ideas – goal can be experience vs object
- Changing perceptions of the role of a City as a commissioning body.
- The decisions flow from where the monies come from – temporary / operational – permanent – capital.

- Now that technology has improved its possible to re-install and refurbish and retro-fit artworks. Example: Ottawa - Vox Populi in front of City Hall.
- Don't accept the status quo – vibrancy is about temporal, experience, and challenging thinking.
- We are in a post permanent public art phase.

Questions

- Why does public art have to be a collection that is permanent.
- Is temporal work better suited outside the municipality (arts groups).
- How long does work need to be displayed?
- How do you protect both the input of the public and the City?
- How do we have artists do more animation and performance, (where appropriate)?
- How to do it? Justifying a capital expenditure for public art that is not permanent.
- Better balances need to be achieved between shorter term and longer-term works.

Challenges

- The desire for artists to create temporal work vs. the desire for Council for permanent work. Differences in the perception of value.
- What happens when maintenance is more onerous, particularly for technologically based artworks.
- Cities can have resistance to spending on maintenance – *sexier* to have new pieces and these days temporary is *cooler*.
- Rigid process for creativity does work well in a change-based situation

Strategies

- Endeavour to create a culture of yes in your bureaucracy.
- Approach temporary public art as an event.
- The artwork commissioned may have a limited lifespan – this framework would allow us to say yes to new technologies
- Invest in infrastructure to support temporal work.
Examples: Kitchener invests in CAFKA (non-profit which produces a temporary public art biennial) – coordinating permissions.
Examples: Peterborough wraps buses with artist created images.
- Using art as a tool – communication.
- Balancing relationships of artists, public storytelling, creating an opportunity/ foundation with a framework/connection – we can all participate.
- Change the language so that people are not *scared* by the word temporary
- Pull public art curators in to create projects.
- Align planning with politics as the possibility – to support have artists re-imagine test and show what is possible.
- Create collaborative projects: to create fluidity and creates the memory and process that resonates with people – asking people to have living memory and involvement.
- Encourage engagement with art vs. static looking. Projects like Culture Days can act as a platform to get a foothold on engagement and to start other cultural public art initiatives.
- Utilize other events or programs to bridge.
- Public art programs do not have to be distinct from the other arts programming cities engage in: Re-defining public art allows other art forms and art practices to come in.

- Establish budgets to execute events.
- Temporary projects could be framed as commemorations.
- Must establish a solid base in a good collections policy, original RFP expectation, contacts etc.
- Be clear about the objectives of a project and public art program.
- Include a clause in artists contracts – re-assess at 5-10 years after a project is created

5. Topic: Issues Related to Durational Work

General Definitions -

Durational work: not static; transformative; temporary; not intended to be permanent, though some works last; some permanent works can be seen as durational as they change/transform over time; reliant on public engagement and in some cases participation.

In Edmonton, *transitory* is used to describe durational or temporary work.

- Success: measuring meaningful engagement is difficult – can two people having a conversation about the public art or experience be a successful outcome?
- Big festivals (Nuit Blanche, Supercrawl) have set a standard, wherein attendance numbers or bums in seats are what is perhaps the only thing measurable in terms of success. Expectations, around arts events/public art projects, of those in charge of public purse can therefore be hard to meet

Questions

- What does audience get out of being confronted by public art (permanent or durational)
- How big does the audience need to be for the programme to be successful?

Challenges

- Lack of support from municipal leaders, councils.
- Lack of understanding/education.
- Lack of resources for municipal staff.
- Art in the public realm not perceived as a priority by leaders and/or citizens.
- Fear of conflict and/or controversy

Strategies

- Suggestion to develop partnerships with arts organizations (CARFAC, artist-run-centres, municipal museums, arts councils) for examples and guidance for drafting plans and determining budgets required
- Best not to use the word temporary as it can cause anxiety for city officials and the politicians
- Develop clear policies around the process to ensure municipal council buy-in; and a framework around an ongoing Durational Art programme that still allows for flexibility
- Approach and appeal to the ‘experts’ in the field for guidance, and look to existing frameworks in other municipalities for best practice standards. *Not necessary to re-invent the wheel
- Try to access **funding** via special event budgets, planning and formulas to implement durational work programme.

Within this discussion, there were more questions than solutions:

Overview of Recommendations

- Recognize that *****Every project is different*****, with unique issues and problems for staff to solve, and thus should be managed differently
- Education, education, education!
- An informed citizenry will be open to things that are out of, and disrupt, the ordinary within their environment- buy-in required from citizens and leaders
- Artists need to be educated as well and need to collectively begin to address or change stereotype wherein they are 'starving' and/or feel 'entitled'.
- Artists also need to be mindful of the process. *Can't just walk into city hall and expect to be granted permission to create public art project
- In some instances, direct public involvement in creative process is a way to gain support for projects. *Yarn bombing and murals were mentioned.
- Artists should be consulted on how and in what capacity, community involvement is designed around a project so that the conversation/contribution can move beyond yard bombing and murals.