

**Public Art Round Table 2013 - *Fresh Perspectives: The Artists' Public Art***  
**Friday May 31, 1:00-5:00**  
**Creative City Network Summit**  
**Ottawa, Ontario**

**Chairs:**

Melissa Black, City of Ottawa Public Art Program  
Ciara McKeown, City of Calgary Public Art Program

**Moderators:**

Helena Grdadolnik, Public Art Consultant, Workshop Architecture Inc.

**Presenters:**

Adrian Göllner, Artist  
Mary Anne Barkhouse, Artist

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***Fresh Perspectives: The Artists' Public Art* (presentation and Moderated Discussion)**  
**Artist feedback: Adrian Gollner and Mary Anne Barkhouse**

**Doing things differently (constructive criticism): changing the process to get the best results**

- Public art artists have to be planners, coordinators, etc – there is risk for the artist in this role
- Artists integrated into the design team is a good idea – artwork can be integrated early on
- Each municipality is different – it is most successful when there is a small core team to work with – one point person to guide the process
- The ideas are often lost in the larger process- find a way to prioritize the idea and the conceptual approach

**Copyright with changing technology**

- A full contract that speaks to maintenance given the new technology (As LED technology advances so quickly, if possible buy extra sets for replacement)
- Copyright issue with digital/new technology public art can be difficult

**Sources for finding out about Calls to Artists**

- Vancouver's Public Art Program issues a good newsletter, Akimbo is great
- Some cities have a roster of qualified artists
- Mailing list through CARFAC, City of Ottawa, Akimbo, City of Vancouver
- Sometimes invited to competitions or sourced by developers

**Calls to Artists**

- A timeline is very important as it can take 1-3 years for everything to fall into place
- Canadian climate narrows the window for installation
- Also often not enough time is scheduled to build work from award to installation
- Artists' subcontractors are often scheduled 1 year in advance – need to keep that in mind
- Also, artists are also waiting- the project schedule can be delayed

- Contract can get stuck in legal department – need to be on top of accounting and legal – get that organized before asking artist to work on project
- Some artists like the restrictions. Gives context to the program – something the artist can respond to
- Context is important – then an artist will self select to know if the opportunity is right for their practice.
- More background information in the Call the better
- Artists won't always apply to open Calls as the timeline doesn't always work with their schedule
- More success with an invitation call or pre-selection
- Attracted to open calls but a direct source or invitation is better

### **Pay yourself appropriately**

- Unfair to ask Artists to submit concepts with a RFP, concepts should be paid for
- Suggest an RFQ at the first stage and then ask for proposals
- RFPs with concepts are only appropriate for emerging artists
- Like to make 30% of the commission budget but do not have an hourly wage
- Have to be prudent with \$ but if budget is done well it is OK
- A fully informed concept has more power with a jury – I give the whole thing at the first stage

### **Feedback/Advice**

- Feedback on unsuccessful projects can be a good thing
- I'm usually on to the next thing. The jury composition can run the gamut based on personalities and biases. I rarely ask for feedback.
- I work with people I trust but a conservator's advice would also be helpful.

### **Public Art Round Tables:**

#### **1. Putting the "Public" in Public art: Sharing experiences of developing community-based public art programs. Moderator: Ciara McKeown**

*The Big Idea: It's our job to change the idea of public art, what it is and what it means*

#### **Artists' Perspective**

- As artists, communal art is not always appealing
- Define parameters well
- Roster of community/ social engagement artists vs. Commissioned artists
- Asking for an approach vs. concept- often artists think conceptually, so sometimes they give it all when not asked and then are penalized
- Responding to calls: Helpful to define community and stakeholder context, helps artist self select, and vice versa, community should have context on artist (background, history, etc)
- Getting away from production of a physical product: social practice art

#### **Communications**

- Hiring a local artist can be an engagement strategy particularly for a City new to public art , e.g., resident's artefacts become part of a public art project

- Public consultations – some artists decline because ideas can get stolen
- Comments OK from public but don't set up too many expectations as sets up failure
- Promote calls publically so the public is informed from the get go
- Shortlisted artists can do community residencies and public presentations
- Pick and choose projects to relate to the community
- Define form of public engagement at onset of project / RFP
- Shortlisted projects on-line for community information and feedback

### **'Active' Vs. 'Passive' Engagement**

- Important to decide when and how to define community engagement
- Plop art leaves residents cold
- Discussion focused around Temporary Public Art as a means to effective, active community engagement and community cultural development
  - Nuit Blanche changed public expectations of temporary/ experiential public art
  - Temporary= experimental, to push boundaries and showcase ideas: reaches new audiences and add on events and programs
  - Active: Artist in Residence: integrating the project/artist into City works and with other groups/ Depts
  - Temporary art/social practice: process as outcome vs. Engagement, placing the artist within
  - Recognize cities change and neighbourhoods change: temporal approach
- Active: Develop a project that changes, can be programmed often i.e. lighting projects
- Active: Integrate/collaborate with community with longer term program
- Active: Engagement integrated in stages/ phases of project, e.g. interviews with architects and residents, workshops etc, so artist is involved throughout
- Learn how to read your community – are you matching your artists to them?
- Active: Not stand alone objects as much as community ownership
- Defining 'interactive' and how to create real opportunity
- Active: Working with other departments to help the artist integrate the projects
- Temporary art creates an event, going to see a destination

### **Community Involvement**

- No pre-conceived concept of history/project. Cities (like Ottawa) are moving away from specifying what artist should do: allow artist freedom to create and discover- not the same approach to each project
- Standard practice issue: how to 'procure' local in policy and planning
- Define terms of involvement for the artist from the get-go
- Reaching new audiences: temporary public art can be more experimental, engage by pushing boundaries
- Trust the artist to run community engagement: direct access and more positive relationships are built (Look to have conversations first)
- Focus on a specific community (not the whole) to be engaged by a project
- Define the parameters of the artist's involvement/ interest to then know how to work with community members
- Involves time and resources to engage – be clear about expectations and outcomes
- Neighbourhood based projects connect artists to residents in their front yards

- Issue based public art: what community issues are being dealt with, how to integrate into place/ neighbourhood
- Montreal: cultural facilitator option as community engagement
- A bigger system/program vs. separate public art projects: community doesn't see the distinction
- Have artists/municipalities directly connect with other depts., other jurisdictions and organizations that manage space – to help them address their issues through public art
- Importance of story-telling
- Could community be defined as part of the design team?

### **Community Arts: Defining Areas of Work**

- Community art not being artificial
- Community Arts Projects focused on engagement
- How to Categories around community art vs. temporary art?
- Social practice and art can be provocative (but it is not easy!)
- Some municipalities focus programs around Community Arts, some suggest not separating: defining context for program key to making this decision
- Separate definition exists mostly with public art, as many public galleries/art spaces create work that is in flux and interwoven
- Community arts are so much more than just visual art: this should be considered with public art

## **2. Maintenance, Conservation and Collection Issues with Digital and Technology-based Public Art; Share challenges, strategies and successes. Moderator: Melissa Black**

*The Big Idea: What is the public realm? Is it an actual landscape or a virtual landscape?*

### **Contracts**

- Contracts should include an archival copy or a copy of the original file
- Should contracts not allow artists to create similar versions of the artwork?
- Contract should include the circumstances of where and when the artwork can be shown, for how long and if there is permission to change format to keep up with changing technology - plan for other circumstances
- Keep in mind that the parameters for artists working in digital/ technology based artwork are extremely limiting and specific

### **Communications**

- Assumptions and expectations of challenges with digital/ technology-based work need to be understood by colleagues in the City (different departments such as finance, purchasing, legal etc.)
- Implications and challenges should be communicated and understood in advance
- Use QR codes to engage people with art

### **Copyright/Originality**

- With interactive artwork each moment, each circumstance is unique and produces an original work of art – how can this be archived?

- The system is the original unchanging artwork, the original is the digital file or system – this is what should be copyrighted or archived
- As technology changes so fast and the work is modified to adapt to new technology at what point is the artwork no longer the original?
- Consult artist when changing or modifying artwork
- Work with artists to understand what degree of change (modification to technology) is acceptable without compromising the artwork

### **Maintenance**

- With digital/ technology based public art there may need to be a change of expectation with regards to permanence – it may be difficult to change perceptions and expectations
- Consider a platform that can be used by multiple artists and exhibitions (projection or LED screen)
- Best case scenario: buy surplus of hardware and software for a number of years of lifecycle
- Ethics of the institution responsible for the care of the artwork – be realistic about the resources and maintenance available
- Best if the artwork is simple and hardwired
- Think about future migration, backups, hard drives, manuals, maintenance plan
- Define an end life
- Consider shorter lifespan (3 years as an example)
- Don't assume the work will last forever, a sense of permanence not realistic

### **Planning (financials, budgeting, process)**

- Planning for maintenance – 10-20% minimum for repairs and conservation should be allocated; Problem with where this funding comes from
- Make sure the project budget is robust enough for a digital/ technology based work
- Technicians or experts should forecast a life cycle estimate
- Important to have the experts on a jury so that the jury can have confidence to choose a digital/technology artwork - bring experts on the jury panel or award with a conditional offer that technical challenges are resolved in collaboration with the artist and experts
- Major issues are cost and storage
- Start planning early to cost effectively integrate infrastructure into the project
- Have a large contingency to account for surprises
- Get assistance from larger capital project if possible in the form of infrastructure (conduit, hydro etc)
- Also consider remote access to monitor work off site from office
- Have client of facility be part of the conversation about maintenance – they may be able to include the artwork as part of the facility maintenance – be sure to engage them early on in the process
- Find internal partners that support the project
- As it is difficult to plan for costs, consult with experts to understand all costs
- However often easier to get funds to fix the asset then build a new one
- We are in the early stages of digital technology artwork – there is lots of trial and error to come – not yet resolved

### **3. Is there a role for curation in a municipal public art program? Moderator: Mary Anne Barkhouse**

#### **4. Rethinking permanence and scale: The case for short-term and small scale public art capital projects. Moderator: Helena Grdadolnik**

*The Big Idea: Is bigger always better? Does public art need to be in perpetuity?*

##### **Rethinking Capital**

- Evolve from thinking of capital projects lasting for 25+ years and being large and iconic – can we be open to opportunities for short term (1 to 5 years) and small scale work (\$5-50K)
- Define capital projects vs. operating budget with your finance dept. – buying software, a film for a digital screen, sculpture installed for two years, can be considered capital expenditures
- For municipalities that only have capital budget for their public art programming, short-term and small-scale could open up more flexibility
- Digital and technology based – start making a set up and take-down timeline for project
- Small to medium scale projects are a good opportunity to develop emerging public artists, just takes more work for the staff/coordinator to help through the process (e.g. hold the budget, help to hire fabricators)

##### **Permanence**

- No such thing as permanent – things die – have a lifecycle
- Rethinking idea of durability – for projects that aren't meant to last a lifetime, material possibilities open up
- How can we have justify short term projects that won't last forever (one to five years)?
- Perception of the concept of temporary having less impact than permanent needs to change. Temporary or short-term work can be less "safe" more cutting edge and have a long-term memory.
- Renewal / replacement of a piece can give new life to a public space

##### **Temporary art platforms**

- 4<sup>th</sup> plinth program in Trafalgar Square, London – because the sculptures aren't permanent, they are able to push the boundary more
- Festival as a public work that is annual/seasonal
- Saskatoon's public art sculpture platforms have been successful, but at times it has been costly when city tries to buy a work permanently later (since it has increased in price with the artist's increased success). Public don't always want to see their favourite pieces go.

##### **Small Scale**

- Small sized pieces can also make a big impact, not just the iconic large artworks
- Small scale budgets are just as much work, but worth it to develop local talent
- No budget – creative ideas in collaboration with other partners – design terms of work
- Section 37, % developer projects tend to be one or two large pieces, what is smaller scale projects also considered

- Changing perception of 'Legacy'
- Scale big vs. smaller scale
- Opportunity to branch into other opportunities in other public art media
- Hard to move beyond sculptors for large work, small scale could make more room for Interdisciplinary projects or other art forms and practices
- Lots of small projects can touch more people
- Incubator for small artists (not just proven artists who can work in large-scale)
- There is room for both small and large scale work
- Focusing on participatory to the public

**5. Public Art Master Plans or Site Plans; share successes and challenges. What factors decide where public art is sited? Moderator: Sandy Merriam**

*The Big Idea: Will local, neighborhood-based public art planning be more effective at impacting communities than Master Plans?*

**City Centre in Richmond**

- While planning department did downtown plan, they did a downtown Public Art plan for town centre, produced a pamphlet
- Opp. public consultations, workshops
- Where strategic opp's were as well as implementation plan
- Monies pooled, sites identified 1<sup>st</sup> by public then formed partnerships
- Too inventory of where work should go (see plan on website)
- New walkways identified
- Council was consulted, they wanted a gateway
- By making it part of the city's plan, it gave them clout with developers

**Frederickton**

- \$ in a reserve
- BIA approached with an interest
- Steering committee with major players, City staff, developers, General Manager of Convention Centre
- Doing a downtown master plan that will look at Public Art Opportunities within that larger planning process
- How do you locate transitory projects?
- Also conservation issues of siting an artwork
- Involve public art advisory committees
- Richmond has a very strong program with development
- Site-specific vs. City wide plan -maybe start with site-specific to demonstrate success and then move to broader planning process

**North Vancouver**

- Master Plan was put on the back burner sometimes
- Targeted art in parks, turned out to be more difficult to coordinate with municipality
- Often projects ended up at new construction sites

- Attached to Official Community Plan for next 10 years
- Zoning is changing, will now be three village centres – changing focus from parks to these new centres
- Have been developing art plan along side City plans
- Public art has to fit in with streetscaping
- 1 planner assigned to each town centre developing guidelines which included public art i.e. gateways indicate higher budgets
- Writes referrals for every development application – in discussion with rezoning – then look at the possibilities
- Preliminary potential audience/ opportunities within development balanced against the location
- Weekly Development Application Review meetings
- Public Art Master Plan needs to be attached to Community plans of neighbourhood/ think about who it is for
- Factors of Official Community Plan: cultural tourism possibilities, audience engagement

#### **Canmore**

- Strategic 5 year plan with capital budget
- Every time they select a site they get council approval
- \$3 per capita per year = \$58,000
- Criteria for where it will be/ what public will be engaged
- There is a lot of trust with council and there is a councillor on the committee
- It takes staff time and resources to begin planning process

#### **St. Catherines**

- Does not have a plan or a policy
- One page on site criteria
- Two major infrastructure projects @\$50,000 each
- Still trying to understand the community
- Adjusting, community does know what it is
- 8 cenotaphs with huge maintenance/ budget issues
- Projects come to them – war of 1812 commemorations in St. Catherines
- There has to be meaning in locating artwork
- Donation – sited it in a park along the escarpment

#### **General Discussion: Points of Process from the Artists' Perspective**

- Workshops on learning about translating art practice for public space would be helpful- more learning opportunities on materials
- Could juries hold on to previous proposals from artists when applicable to current review?
- Helpful to have conservators review projects with artists at development phase – to mitigate issues before moving ahead
- Provide artists context, project info so they have enough to respond to
- The changing nature of expectations around public art, and the more experiential aspect of it, allow artists the freedom to create context on their own, let them define the response from the parameters given (i.e. don't be prescriptive in what artist should be creating)



- Not all artists want to engage in the usual way – how can programs/administrators redefine calls and opportunities to be more inclusive?
- Separating programs and opportunities: artists' practice vs. producing public art (i.e. City of Richmond)