

Art in the Public Spaces

Towards a Livable and Quality Outdoor Environment

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Introduction

ART and PUBLIC SPACE can be symbolized as inseparable as melody and song. Missing either would lead to a mundane and unexciting experience to users. The dearth of art in public spaces may be traced to the fear of art which pre-program in certain professional's mind. This aligned with Howett (1985) statement that the positioning of human ingenuity may endanger the earth unique equilibrium. Nowadays, through various studies and high awareness of art, the ideas of how to respond to the land and to fulfil the human needs has progressively developed the idea of no fear in binding the art in the public spaces especially in parks and landscape areas. This article describes art in public spaces and their effects on the community they are located in.

Art in Public Spaces?

Art in public spaces is an artwork specifically commissioned to engage, interact and harmonize with the public or the community at large in public open spaces. It is for the public to use or enjoy the beauty of the artwork in different perspective of visual appreciation (Mohd Fabian, Osman et al. 2012). It is any form of artistic expressions such as sculpture, mural, street furniture or cultural event, which is located in a freely accessible site as opposed to museums, galleries or homes.

Hence, the integration of art in the outdoor environment could be included under the rubrics of public art, site specific art and land art. This affiliation of art and design has been increasing its relevance to the landscape architecture profession due to its own historic concern for the design of outdoor spaces. Nowadays, there is abundance of examples where a landscape design would experiment this type of art thus capable of exerting much influence on the landscape project.

Harmonious Integration of Art Work in Public Spaces

Two examples of such harmonious integration of art in the public space could be observed from the work of Maya Lin and Martha Schwartz. Firstly, Maya Lin brings an unusual implication towards the landscape architecture, art and architecture field. Her ultimate design of Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Washington D.C. (as in figure 1) deeply impacted the veteran's community by inscribing the names of more than 50,000 casualties on a black granite wall which is placed below ground level.



Figure 1: Vietnam Veterans' Memorial, by Maya Lin
Source: (<http://www.tripadvisor.com>, 2012)

Secondly, Martha Schwartz, a landscape architect with fine arts background managed to intersect landscape, art and urbanism together, thus, creating sustainable cities that incite beauty in all aspects and sectors in urban life. The work of Martha Schwartz (see Figure 2) translates her idea of public art in a landscape design and has successfully uplift public activities in the form of social interactions and promotion of a utilitarian society.



Figure 2: Jacob Javits Plaza, New York, USA by Martha Schwartz
(Source: <http://www.marthaschwartz.com>, 2011)

The Impact of Art to the Community

The integration of art in public spaces exuberates the routine pulse of landscape design thus enriching the typical environment of public space into an 'avantgarde' design (Mohd Fabian, Osman et al., 2012). It could heighten the civic pride in term of nationalism spirit which nowadays is depleting. It also generates positive social influx towards the public spaces. The impact of art on the community is invaluable. It could make a unique contribution to a city's life by celebrating its community, highlighting past memories and even increasing the economical impact of a city. Hence, art in public spaces will continue to be an essential form of urban redevelopment strategies.

Concurrently, art in public spaces can increase the sense of community by promoting community exploration and awareness. Swales (1992) suggested that the success of art projects in the public realm requires four fundamental values to the community development: shared history, identity, needs and aspirations. In addition, Hall & Robertson (2001) claims that art in public spaces does develop a sense of community, which refers to the awareness of a social body and shared space with common identity, values or culture. This is supported by Muhizam (2009), who states that art in the public spaces is capable of making spaces to be used at its pinnacle state, which is as a place for social events.

In some projects, it is noticed that public involvement may leave participants with a sense of achievement and ongoing pride in the completed work (Landcom 2008). Landcom (2008) further explained that the opportunity for community members to work together can strengthen social ties and build community connectivity. Additionally, the potential for creative work for energizing and liberating at a personal level cannot be underestimated. This illustrates how art in public spaces has the ability in creating a positive impact in the community.

The Function of Art in Public Spaces

The function of art in the public spaces could be represented in several applications. The current study done by Mohd Fabian et. al (2012) revealed that art in public spaces fit well with the community wellbeing. It serves the purpose of creating a quality living environment which enlivens the community, commemorates the past memories and boosts the economic value in term of tourism. Moreover, art in the landscape transforms the public space by celebrating the local history and nation's culture which simultaneously functions as a perfect platform of outdoor education for the public. This could be observed as in Figure 3 that shows the interrelation of art as educational purposes and enhancement of patriotism.



Figure 3: Art in the public spaces capable in educating the public

The notion of art for aesthetical purpose serves well in the public spaces as it would beautify and enliven the space and more often than not it would act as memories' container which would enrich the quality of space it belongs. An example is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4: Art in a public space enhances aesthetically the overall ambience of cityscape
(Source: <http://youcallthatart.net/tag/1-for-art-law>)

Furthermore, art in the public spaces could contribute through several functions and provide values such as increasing the sense of community; promote sense of place; addressing community needs through functional art; reducing social exclusion as well as being a remedy for social illness. This can be exemplified through the participation of public during the development of artwork. The cooperation among the public during the installation can heighten the community spirit thus creating a quality of life.

Conclusion

In summary, the need of integrating art into public spaces becomes more crucial as it serves significance intangible values towards the community and the country. It surpasses the main purpose of art, which usually acts as a beautification element. This category of artwork could offer benefits beyond its aesthetic value. It enhances the ambiance and could help creating a liveable and quality outdoor living environment. It strengthens the place's identity and incites community aspirations, stimulating a positive aura among the public and creates a cordial public spaces. In short, the art in public space could bring out the meaning of local culture thereby placing distinctiveness and utilitarian purposes. Encouraging people's engagement with public art could eventually further create favourable spaces in landscape design whilst maintaining the sustainability of space for future generation.

References

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