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Visual arts education reasoning the acquisition and placement of public sculptures – Case of the public sculptures of the Jyväskylä City Art Collection in 1977-2007

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Abstract

This article argues that visual arts education is one consequential value of the acquisition and placing public sculptures. My thesis clarified the functions public sculptures of the Jyväskylä City Art Collection performed in the city in 1977-2007 and the analysis showed that the city acquired and placed public sculptures based on grounds related to the cityscape and visual arts education of the citizens. Furthermore, this article suggests that through public art acquisitions and their thoughtful placing equally anyone can learn more about visual arts, design and aesthetic value embedded in the urban planning and the built environment.

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Keywords: visual arts education; art works; art collections; public art; visual arts policy; cityscape; Jyväskylä

1. Introduction

Traditionally the acquisition of public art has been justified on grounds related to politics, history and aesthetics as well as social and art policy. Public sculptures are often featured by consequential value and their instrumental use, because they are acquired upon different grounds and values according to their owner. In Finland, in addition to municipalities, public sculptures are commissioned and placed in urban space by the state, separate organisations, house companies, congregations and health care districts, among others.

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In the city of Jyväskylä before the end of the 1970's nearly all the public sculptures were acquired by different associations and civic organisations. However, at the end of the 1970's the city began to acquire sculptures for its possession – for public buildings and public places – in a more target-oriented and systematic way, in other words, by arranging artwork competitions and commissioning.

The objective of my MA thesis in Art Education at the University of Jyväskylä (2009) was to bring out the reasoning for the acquisition and placing of public sculptures particularly by the city of Jyväskylä in 1977-2007. I attempted to answer the research problem by finding out the grounds on which the acquisition and placing of public sculptures were based in the municipal decision-making in that period of time.

According to Marcia Muelder Eaton, an aesthetician and Professor of Philosophy at the University of Minnesota, it is justified to question who should make the decision of the acquisition and placing of public art; councillors or municipal officials, professionals in the art field or the city dwellers (Eaton 1988). In my view, it is further well-founded to question on what grounds public sculptures are acquired and placed in public places, firstly because in practice the sculpture projects are often expensive and take a long time. Secondly, the question about the reasoning is relevant, because unfortunately it is not always clear how public decisions concerning the funding and displaying of artworks are made.

Even if people like public sculptures, one can question whether it justifies spending time, energy and public funds for acquiring them. It is thus interesting to clarify whether one expects public funds and efforts to lead to benefits beyond the pleasure of the general public. (See Eaton 1988, 142.) Things that have inherent value are prized for themselves alone; things with consequential value are prized because they produce or lead to something else that is valued (Eaton 1988, 126).

The subject choice was affected decisively by the fact that in 2006 the Jyväskylä Art Museum offered the students in the Department of Art and Culture Studies at the University of Jyväskylä a study subject related to visual arts in Central Finland: "Art acquisitions of the city of Jyväskylä after the year 1976 – the acquisition principles and focus areas". The art museum hoped that the subject would be studied from the year 1977 on in the form of a Master's thesis. The proposed treatise would be an extension to an earlier study entitled *Art acquisitions of the city of Jyväskylä before the year 1977* (Partanen, J. (1985). *Jyväskylän kaupungin taidehankinnat ennen vuotta 1977*. Master's thesis in Art History. University of Jyväskylä). I seized this given study subject, but whilst the research project proceeded, I made two subject delimitations.

I chose to study particularly public sculptures of the city of Jyväskylä since 1977. I marked off public sculptures from all the art acquisitions since 1977, because it would have been nearly impossible to examine all the art acquisitions en bloc. The Jyväskylä City Art Collection contained more than 5000 artworks in 2008: paintings, drawings, graphics, photographs and sculptures (JAM. Collection Policy Programme. Art Collections, 3). Public sculptures form only a small fraction of this collection: in the city art collection there are altogether fifty-three public sculptures, from which over a half, thirty-one public sculptures, have been acquired in 1977-2007 (JAM. Jaana Oikari. Jyväskylä. The art collection database. Public sculptures). Furthermore, I decided to concentrate on outdoor sculptures in public places, even though the city acquired also indoor sculptures especially in accordance with building public buildings in the 1980's.

2. Research material and methods

Along the study process I noticed that the functions of given public sculptures in 1977-2007 could be explained through the external context of the sculptures – not by observing and evaluating the aesthetic features of the artworks or by studying the given artists.

The research material consists of both, already existing text material and new data. The existing material includes publications and presentations about the Jyväskylä City Art Collection and its sculptures, two culture strategies and *The City of Jyväskylä's Architecture Policy Programme* as well as *The Jyväskylä Art Museum's Collection Policy Programme*. When listing the public sculptures acquired by the city in 1977-2007, I used the art collection database of the Jyväskylä Art Museum. I supposed that the acquisition grounds for public sculptures are mentioned in the decisions about the sculpture acquisitions. Therefore, the research material comprises as well the minutes or records of the Visual Arts Division, the Board of Culture and the City Board of Jyväskylä concerning the art acquisition grounds in specific. Ordinances of the Board of Culture and of the Urban Planning and Engineering and the city budgets during the given time period were used as a source as well.

When analysing the text material and the minutes I used theory connected content analysis following the art political objectives of the modern art systems in Finland since 1960's presented by Sevänen. The objectives during the period of the art system becoming nationalized (from the 1960's until the early 1990) were shown in the acquisition grounds of public sculptures by the city of Jyväskylä. By acquiring public sculptures municipal officials indeed attempted to improve the equal accessibility of art. Since the market-based period from the beginning of the 1990's, the acquisition of sculptures was justified based on arguments related to benefits of art acquisition for the city such as the positive city image.

In order to gather new data I interviewed in March and June 2008 five municipal officials who are or have been in charge of the preparation or execution of the sculpture acquisitions in the city of Jyväskylä. As the informants of the study I chose Markku Lahti, the Alvar Aalto Museum director, because he prepared sculpture acquisitions in the Visual Arts Division (1977-1988) and later made decisions on public sculptures in the Board of Culture (1989-1996) in his position in the Alvar Aalto Museum. I interviewed Marketta Mäkinen, the former Alvar Aalto Museum intendent and the Jyväskylä Art Museum director in 1998-2004, because she has a broad view on the acquisition of public art by the city from the end of the 1970's until the 2000's. The next and present Jyväskylä Art Museum director Päivimarjut Raippalinna I chose as an informant because she has been making decisions on the acquisition and placing of public sculptures since 2004 as a member of the Art Working Group of Common Areas (2000-2007, at first as a deputy director of the Jyväskylä Art Museum). Raippalinna served also as the secretary of the art competition of the bridge of Lake Jyväsjärvi in 1988-1989. It was justified to interview Osmo Rosti, the Urban Planning and Engineering director in 2005-2008 and the founder of the Art Working Group of Common Areas, since he has had a visible role in the acquisition of public art since 1986, when he was appointed as the chief of the Planning Department of Municipal Engineering. The planning and building of streets and parks was on the responsibility of his functional unit. As a technical director since 1998 he has influenced the following of the percentage principle and the allotment of the art acquisition allowances for real estates. I chose to interview Leena Rapo, the constructor horticulturist of the Street and Park Department and the secretary of the Art Working Group of Common Areas since 2002, because she does the investments of green services and public sculptures have been part of these investments since the end of the 1990's.

The interviews were structured; I carried them out following a ready question form with fixed themes. In most cases the informants did not tell directly the acquisition principles of public sculptures – that is, the type of public sculptures that were acquired and the grounds used in acquiring them. Therefore, I had to interpret and read between the lines the grounds set up and fulfilled. In the analysis of the theme interviews I focused on the meaning structures by the interviewees. The meaning structures of the interview answers revealed unpredictable themes, which I interpreted as forming part of the research problem. For example, the fact that the interviewees discussed the art concept of the shore line of Lake Jyväsjärvi as municipal art policy seemed to be related to the question about the public art policy of Jyväskylä. Eventually the network of different themes described the subject of the thesis and enabled

explaining the reasons for the acquisition and placing of public sculptures by the city of Jyväskylä in 1977-2007.

Furthermore, I approached this qualitative study subject by examining the material as a whole and by trying to understand its internal consistency. Since the analysis of the material is inductive, I analysed the text material and the minutes in addition to the interview material.

The content analysis of the text material and the minutes facilitated above all understanding of the local context in which the public sculptures were acquired. The purpose of the theme interviews in the thesis was to bring out practical experiences and points of view from the present and past reasoning for the acquisition and placing of public sculptures. The attempt was to form a network of different themes forming the research problem and to understand the internal logic of the network.

3. Institutional art theory as a background

The key concept of the research is public art. Other essential concepts are sculpture and monument, which are often thought as forming public art. In the study I examine public art from a practical point of view and by applying institutional art theory.

The narrow pragmatic definition of public art is as “art installed by public agencies in public places at public expense” (Mitchell 1990). In practice one can consider that 1. placing an artwork in public space, 2. applying the public acquisition methods in connection with the art purchase and 3. public financing of an artwork are the factors that make art public. For instance, an artwork placed in a public library is a public artwork. An artwork acquired through a public competition is a public artwork. Likewise an artwork financed by allowance from a public budget is a public artwork.

Päivimarjut Raippalinna, the director of the Jyväskylä Art Museum and an informant in my study, specifies public art in a quite practical way. Raippalinna states that public sculpture acquisitions are always site-specific, which in her opinion means that when a city builds an area, a certain amount from the building funds will be used for art acquisition.

According to institutional art theory, artworks are art appointed by the art world, the core of which is formed by artists and the audience; more specifically the interaction between artists, mediators, critics, researchers and the public, among others. However, the concept of art world does not necessarily refer to concrete institutions. For example the artwork equates the way of thinking of art according to Arthur C. Danto, a philosopher of art. After seeing “Brillo Box” by artist Andy Warhol in an art exhibition, Danto wrote that seeing something as art requires something that the eye is not able to distinguish – an atmosphere created by the theory of art, information about the history of art: art world (Danto 1964).

According to institutional art theory, all the public sculptures of the Jyväskylä City Art Collection are artworks by definition: they were carried out by the decision of a division, board or working group which consists of members of the art world. Considering these sculptures as artworks requires the public information about the history of art, as Danto puts it. Related to the public sculptures in question it is to be noted that there has also been interaction between artists and the public.

Since I approach the concept of public art from an institutional point of view, my research is context-oriented. In sociology of art the thesis merges with the institutional research. Among the theories of aesthetics the approach of the study is closest to the theory based on artistic objects and their contexts, because the research emphasises the role of institutions and the centrality of the modern art institutions. Further, in my opinion not only art museums and galleries, but also municipal bodies acquiring public art in public urban space can be considered as modern art institutions. In my view, the social, political and historical conditions of public sculptures need to be fulfilled in order for public sculptures to be understood as artworks in the first place.

With the chosen topic I aimed at clarifying the causes to which the augmented public art acquisition by the city of Jyväskylä was related. I expected that by clarifying the grounds for the art acquisition and placing, I would be able to describe, explain and interpret the functions of public sculptures given in public policy as well as examine the change of these functions in different time periods. More generally, the topic concerns the acquisition and placing of public artwork in relation to time and place.

Since instrumental use is the feature which essentially defines public art, I had two assumptions in the study. The first assumption was that with the help of new public sculptures the city of Jyväskylä aspired to build the image of the city. Thus, the sculpture acquisitions by the city could be based on the will to build the image of the city. The assumption derived from the fact that the city began to pay attention to the cityscape and to environmental matters in the end of the 1970's.

The second supposition was that the public sculptures were acquired on grounds based on art education, at least with respect to the placing of the sculptures. Previous research proves, nevertheless, that the use of the Jyväskylä City Art Collection for art educational purposes gained only little attention until the end of the 1970's, even though “--one task of the public art collection is usually to bring citizens closer to visual arts and to the visual environment” (Partanen 1985, 122-123). I expected the art educational point of view would have taken root in the city administration followed by the launching of the new cultural policy in the 1970's, that is, attempts to democratize culture and to promote cultural democracy. The objective was to make cultural services accessible to all citizens, in other words, to bring art closer to the city dwellers and enhance their aesthetic appreciation.

4. Abstract sculptures and fewer monuments shape essentially the cityscape of Jyväskylä

Public art is often thought to comprise sculptures and monuments. A typical example of public art is a monument that has been placed in the centre of a locality, in space which is available to everybody – (Karttunen 2000, 46). The acknowledgement of a sculpture and a monument as public art, unlike for example a painting, is natural at least for five reasons. Firstly, for example a public outdoor sculpture in a park is within the reach of everybody. A public sculpture is concretely the most visible artwork, as it requires neither stepping into a public building, museum or gallery space nor buying an entrance ticket for an art exhibition. Secondly, the expenses of public sculpture are the highest of all artworks and they are often publicly funded. Thirdly, the acquisition methods, such as competitions and commissions, of public sculptures and monuments are often public. Fourthly, public sculptures and monuments raise public discussion, since the public acquisition processes are eventful and interesting as projects and because sculptures and monuments may depict generally known persons or events. Fifthly, sculptures and monuments can be regarded as public artworks, because the artists often deliberately attempt to enter a dialogue with the public.

Recent philosophical thought has sought to understand sculpture primarily in terms of the physical characteristics of art materials and the role of our perceptual and cognitive faculties in appreciation (See Koed 2005, 147). In my opinion sculpture should, however, be specified rather through culture and history, because sculpture is apparently dependent on the material and spiritual culture, such as other art forms, of its time. Visual arts form a wide cultural field of information in which different sectors are in constant interaction with each other (Töyssy, Vartiainen & Viitanen 1999, 5). As regards material culture, the earliest known sculptures have been made from natural materials: from tree and stone. In the 1970's the use of plastic based materials has become common; in Finland in the early 1970's sculptors Heikki Nieminen and Kimmo Kaivanto, among others, used reinforced plastic and fibreglass in their sculptures (See Valkonen 1986, 38). Nowadays sculpture can be made from any given material, for example snow, ready-made objects and groceries or the making of the sculpture does not require material at all. In brief,

it is not reasonable to define sculpture with certain universal criteria. Instead, one can speak of ancient sculpture, modern sculpture and post-modern sculpture.

Concerning the definition of monument a monument can be a sculpture or a building: essential here is the function, not the form. A monument has a function in relation to the logic of representation and marking. The term monument derives from a Latin verb *monere*, to remember. Accordingly the monument is described as a commemorative representation.

Monumental art represents functional art, which has had for example political and ideological tasks in regard to the public. A monument has traditionally been a statue, which reminds of some person, event or idea. One speaks of monuments to a person, hero monuments, war memorials and national monuments. Monuments are symbols, they tell about the persons of a given time that will become raised to the status of great men, as well as about acts and ways of thinking that are seen to be valuable (See Lähdesmäki 2000, 24).

Monuments always function as artworks as well. Monuments are significant because they represent the art of their own time according to Marketta Mäkinen, the former director of the Jyväskylä Art Museum and an informant in my thesis. (Interview of Marketta Mäkinen.)

From the point of view of my research problem, it is particularly interesting that a monument may give surplus value to a public place or building. In addition to social meanings, regionally and locally attuned emotions are connected to many monuments (See Lähdesmäki 2000, 25). For instance, the Havis Amanda fountain is supposed to symbolize the city of Helsinki, the Eiffel tower and the Arc de Triomphe are known as symbols of Paris and Christ the Redeemer has become an icon of Rio de Janeiro.

The public sculptures included in the Jyväskylä City Art Collection in 1977-2007 are principally sculptures of their type. There are twenty-four sculptures, which is about 75 per cent of all the public sculptures. By sculptures in this context I refer to artworks made by, for example, carving or by casting. The city has participated in the acquisition of four monuments in 1977-2007, which are included in the city art collection: *Monument of Päivö Oksala* (1982) *Marketplace King* (1989) *A Tribute to a Hearer* (1991) and *Veteran Memorial* (1992). Furthermore, there is one wall painting, one fence painting and one environmental artwork.



Fig. 1. The only environmental artwork in the Jyväskylä City Art Collection Court Sessions Stones (1996) by Jarmo Väisänen is used as a group work site on the yard of Pohjanlampi School. Picture: JAM.

Instead of being environmental artworks, the public sculptures of Jyväskylä are more like site-specific artworks. A public sculpture is placed in a special place, a place in which many people move and in which people can be brought to a stop. According to Osmo Rosti, the director of Urban Planning and Engineering, in fact it has been attempted that the sculptures would halt people. “Rather the attempt has been that they [public sculptures] would be stoppers” (Interview of Osmo Rosti). The public sculptures acquired by the Art Working Group of Common Areas since 2000 cannot be considered as monuments in any case, states Rosti.

Mäkinen gives as well examples of non-traditional sculptures of Jyväskylä. The installation *Säteilevä, virtaava, pysyvä* (Beaming, Running, Stable) by artist Tuomo Blomqvist, which expands from the ceiling of the Kuokkala School to outdoors, takes over the space and is nothing but a traditional statue (Interview of Marketta Mäkinen). With the sculpture by Kain Tapper *Night* it was obvious that the work is not put on a pedestal. One wanted to give up the thought according to which the base raises the work into the position of an artwork.



Fig. 2. The sculpture *Night* (2003) by Kain Tapper stands purposefully without a pedestal in the Church Park close to Kauppakatu. Picture: Oona Myllyntaus.

5. Public sculptures create city image and challenge citizens to reflect art in public places

The most significant result of the study was that in 1977-2007 the acquisition of public sculptures and their placing were determined mainly on grounds related to the cityscape. The bodies which made the decisions on the acquisition and placing of public sculptures aspired to “beautify” the cityscape, increase the city dwellers’ satisfaction with the urban environment and to influence the city image; with public art it was demonstrated that the city has a desire and can afford to improve the visual appearance of the city. “It is quite a cliché, but one makes the city dwellers’ living room with them [public sculptures]. And then they are for showing outsiders that we are doing well.” (Interview of Marketta Mäkinen.)

Among the public sculptures in the Jyväskylä City Art Museum Collection especially the architectonic sculpture *Suuri Kompassi* (*Big Compass*, 1991) fulfils the task related to the cityscape, since it has been

placed in a strategic section in the cityscape. According to Mäkinen, *Big Compass* was consciously placed in the intersection of two lines. The sculpture is in a horizontal line with the shore and in a vertical line with Harju. The sculpture can be seen even all the way from the top of Harju in which case it emphasises a certain line in the cityscape (Interview of Marketta Mäkinen).

The second research result is that the city of Jyväskylä acquired public sculptures from art educational viewpoints in 1977-1996. The city expected in the 1970's and the 1980's that by acquiring specifically abstract sculptures it could challenge the city dwellers to art installed in public places. The public sculptures in the Jyväskylä City Art Collection are mostly abstract sculptures. The Visual Arts Division considered important that the sculptures are abstract, because abstract art is always more challenging to receive by the general public than figurative art (Interview of Marketta Mäkinen). For example the abstract form of the sculpture *Big Compass* has exercised the minds of the inhabitants of Jyväskylä according to Mäkinen. Markku Lahti found it progressive that the city did not begin to seek for figurative proposals, but laid the main stress very clearly on abstract art (Interview of Markku Lahti). The minutes of the Visual Arts Division and the Board of Culture indicated that it was considered important to promote children's art education and habituation to aesthetic appreciation. Instead the Art Working Group of Common Areas did not justify sculpture acquisitions on art educational grounds. However, it is noteworthy that by acquiring public sculptures the Art Working Group intended to inspire city dwellers visually, among other things.

Leena Rapo states that public sculptures always fulfil educational or art educational tasks according to the character of the feedback given to the public sculptures in question. The sculptures have provoked many kinds of discussions. "Perhaps it [the acquisition of sculptures] also leads to the fact that art itself is pondered" (Interview of Leena Rapo).

6. Conclusion and discussion

On the basis of the research results it can be concluded that the present, permanent sculptures in the urban space of the city of Jyväskylä perform the functions related to the cityscape and art education: the public sculptures make the urban space more urban and art more available to the general public.

In connection with the task related to the cityscape, the city attempted to influence people's ideas of a good town. By good I mean a town, which is more than just the necessary, a town that increases general welfare and improves the inhabitants' quality of life. Second conclusion of the study is, thus, that the public sculptures of the city of Jyväskylä had consequential value also due to their inherent value.

In connection with the art educational task, the sculptures displayed in different areas of the municipality - outside galleries and art museums - make the public more familiar with visual arts and the visual environment. It was considered essential to distribute art democratically, challenge the general public with abstract art to art installed in public places and make especially children acquainted with the visual environment and aesthetic appreciation.

When discussing how these results connect to the institutional art theory I must mention that along with the views of Danto, Eaton and other institutionalists the outcome of this research indeed relate to the external context of an artwork. The results of this institutional research are in synchrony with the belief of Eaton; what is special in the artworks is our way of handling them: we protect, respect and display them and this special treatment, in particular, distinguishes an artwork from an ordinary object.

The research brought out a group of new questions and suggestions for further study. One further approach could be to clarify particularly the aesthetic value of public sculptures. Since the aesthetic grounds were not taken into consideration largely in public policy in the city of Jyväskylä in 1977-2007, the conclusion of Eaton is very interesting concerning the studied public sculptures: "the use of public

money to support aesthetic activity or decisions about how to maintain and improve environmental resources demand attention to aesthetic issues” (1988, 145).

In connection with the aesthetic value of public sculpture, it is also interesting that it is possible that there is no aesthetic value in public sculptures in the eyes of the general public, even though the sculptures are particularly intended to serve the public. What is required is not just a way of determining whether something has aesthetic value, but comparing this value with other types of values (Eaton 1988, 139).

Abbreviations

AAM Alvar Aalto Museum

ACSC Archives of the Culture Service Centre

AJAM Archives of Jyväskylä Art Museum

AUPE Archives of the Urban Planning and Engineering

CACJ Centre Archives of the City of Jyväskylä

JAM Jyväskylä Art Museum

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