

EDITORIAL

Public Art, Urban Arts: on Aesthetics, Practices and Languages in the City

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Urban spaces and their transformations, as well as the very notions of 'public' and collective memory, have grown into increasingly critical, complex, and fragmented subjectivities. This change entails a review and rearticulation of collective sensemaking in which art is inevitably involved as a syntax of urban space. As tangible or intangible products of human action imbued with symbolic and aesthetic value, 'works of art' proliferate on the streets and squares of cities, partaking in expressing relations, catalysing social life, embodying power, and entailing conflict. By being either an integration to, or an intervention in the urban space, art has assumed over time a variety of context-specific forms and languages, diversely responding to the expressive patterns of local cultures and political formations.

PEER REVIEWED

<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2612-0496/20624>

ISSN 2612-0496

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In the notion of 'public art', art is public in a twofold sense: first of all, because it is manifest in a public space, unfiltered by the walls that conventionally enclose other types of artworks. And second, because its very creation is often public, entailing an open, shared process in its design or in its (co)production – a characteristic that differentiates it from monuments and sculptures in public spaces. However, like monuments and sculptures, public art has political connotations, either asserting or contesting power: in its twofold 'publicness,' it both triggers public processes of action/reaction to political stances, and it gathers specific communities and actors around its production dynamics. Indeed, many artistic interventions in urban public spaces have been enacted to articulate ideologies, achieve consensus, enforce political agendas, or memorialise and celebrate people and events. Processes of co-production and consultation in the creation of public art, while often presented under the guise of cultural democracy, can serve both as a way to enhance cultural participation and as a form of public legitimization of dominant cultural narratives. The reverse is also true: art has become the powerful catalyst of acts of resistance and contestation, where its symbolic meaning acts as a salient channel for social and political claims. Many artistic practices are today situated in the contested terrain of social struggles and urban futures, often in the form of ephemeral agencies by performative artefacts. New digital media and mobile devices have been used to multiply and amplify the ways in which people can engage with urban space; as a result, the digital sphere has become another site for the construction and contestation of values related to public art.

In both cases, and in the many nuanced typologies that fall in between these polarities, public art has also become instrumental in what is commonly known as urban regeneration – that is, the process of attributing new meanings and values to compelling and crucial urban areas, also through creative and critical interventions in spaces of crisis, where different forms of dissent or social cohesion, of gentrification or regenerative local economies are taking place. By acting across the cultural and political guerrilla for the control and ownership of shared spaces, very different practices participate in the engendering of counter-institutional narratives, transforming the urban landscape into a political palimpsest where institutionalised displays of art, artification, and aestheticization are challenged by radical interventions that leverage social engagement and collective mobilisation.

This issue of the European Journal of Creative Practices in Cities and Landscapes explores the constantly evolving and expanding boundaries of the notion of 'public art,' delving into challenges related to the form of public art in urban space, its relation to urban regeneration, and the controversies and potential of community participation and public engagement. Encompassing a rich spectrum of cross-disciplinary contributions offered by both scholars and practitioners, the four sections of this issue

– Positions, Main, Practices, and Miscellanea – revolve around seven thematic areas.

The exploration of **urban aesthetics and narrative analyses of the city** unveils a multifaceted understanding of urban spaces. Unpacking this issue, **Henrik Reeh's** position paper initiates this discourse by exploring the concept of 'site-specificity' in urban aesthetics, focusing on Venice and Marseille. Reeh explores how scholars and professionals influence site-specific qualities and their implications for urban culture and transformation. He highlights Venice's diverse site-specific qualities beyond tourism and Marseille's transition from industrial urbanism to cultural planning, offering insights into the appreciation of site-specificity and contemporary questions about urbanity and aesthetics. Building upon this awareness, **Elisa Mozzelin's** paper delves into psychogeography, a method pioneered by the Situationist International in the 1950s, aimed at understanding how geographic environments influence individual psychology. She examines Ralph Rumney's application of psychogeography to Venice, utilizing the *fotoromanzo* (photo novel) format as a narrative tool. Through this approach, Rumney seeks to represent Venice's analysis as a condensed form of affective mapping, tapping into the subversive potential inherent in psychogeography.

Transitioning to **the 'making of' the public artwork between objects, processes, and place**, **Irene Ruzzier's** paper focuses on the structures and methodologies employed in artistic practices in urban spaces, using the Public Art Agency Sweden as a case study. The paper addresses the often opaque and convoluted production processes of art in public spaces, which can hinder its integration into urban development and design projects. Ruzzier highlights the scarcity of scholarship on procedures and methods for developing public art projects and aims to bridge this gap by offering insights into the workings of the Public Art Agency Sweden. The study draws from Ruzzier's six-month internship at the Agency, during which she conducted documental and bibliographic research, interviewed staff members, participated in usual work activities, and contributed to the development of two artistic projects. Concurrently, **Amanda Gabriel, Elisabeth Von Essen, Beatrice Guardini, Sara Kjellgren, Claire Peterson, and Christopher Staundinger** explore land art's capacity for place-making. They investigate how brief exposure to a space through creative performances can cultivate personal meaning and emotional bonds. Through reflections on land art projects conducted as part of an international master course, the authors highlight the cognitive and embodied processes involved in developing a deeper relationship with place, while raising questions about rights to the city and public space.

Moving to **the social and political dimensions of public art**, **Styliani Bolonaki** examines the intersection of aesthetics and urban life. Focusing on art practices with ethical commitments to the social-political sphere,

the article explores participatory and collaboratively-led activities akin to activist practices. It reevaluates public art's role as a socio-political agent, considering the autonomy of visual arts and its impact on cultural inclusion/exclusion in public spaces. The paper discusses current themes surrounding the social-political engagements of public art, reflecting on its dynamic relationship with urban multiculturalism.

In a similar vein, the articles by **Yulia Tikhomirova** and by **Vincenzo Cosentino** and **Chiara Cozzatella** explore the impact of **contested memories and postcolonial identities** on urban landscapes, respectively. Tikhomirova's contribution investigates the evolving concept of monumentality in contemporary art, focusing on counter-, non-, and anti-monumental practices as critical forms of institutional commemoration and social ritual. In her article, she questions the validity of monumentality as shaping synthesis of collective memory by analyzing the remembrance practices of the Bologna-based art collective TIST - This Is So Temporary. The contribution by Cozzatella and Cosentino takes into account the historical and symbolic significance of urban structures in Mogadishu, particularly focusing on Italian colonial and religious art. They discuss the impact of interventions like the construction of the Mogadishu cathedral in 1928, reflecting Italy's attempts to Europeanize the city. Using religious, architectural-spatial, and political lenses, they unravel the complexities of colonial urban art, highlighting how it displaced local populations and reshaped the urban landscape.

Ana Gariso's paper touches upon issues of **commissioned, un-commissioned, or unauthorised art in urban space**. Her study explores the ambivalence surrounding graffiti and street art in contemporary cities. In her contribution, she contends that, on one hand, there is a growing validation and promotion of these art forms by municipal policymakers, recognizing creativity as an asset. However, she also highlights an effort to eliminate or prevent unauthorized street art. This ambivalence arises from these practices' ability to shape new city images and public space discourses. Gariso approaches this phenomenon from urban communication studies through an ethnographic study of the local legal frameworks in Lisbon and Bologna regulating graffiti and street art production.

Shifting focus to **public art as a means of transforming, developing, or regenerating urban space**, **Valeria Morea** and **Liola Urso's** paper explores the dynamics of cultural clusters in urban regeneration, focusing on the planned district of Manifattura delle Arti in Bologna. The authors contend that while policymakers often attempt to stimulate cultural clusters through top-down strategies, it is observed that clusters often form organically without direct intervention. Their contribution investigates this phenomenon through 14 interviews with key actors in the district, revealing the emergence of a spontaneous subcluster of bottom-up organizations and the role of civil society in driving regeneration and inclusion efforts.

Meanwhile, the paper by **Silvia Scardapane** and **Luca Borriello** investigates the rise of urban creativity, particularly focusing on the emergence of 'new muralism.' They explore how this form of expression has redefined public spaces, especially in marginalized areas, leading to the development of networks of meaning. Scardapane and Borriello propose the concept of "urban creativity systems" and examine various case studies, including the "Parco dei Murales" program in the city of Naples, aimed at enriching social housing complexes with murals and community involvement.

Lastly, **Asma Mehan** and **Sina Mostafavi** explore the intersections of **AR, VR, and public artwork across urban space and digital public space.** Their paper investigates how public exhibitions, urban spaces, and socio-political norms shape urban thresholds in Houston and Amsterdam. They explore the influence of new media like AR and VR on design production and consumption, merging fields like Design Computation, Urban Communities, and Spatial Justice. Their contribution primarily emphasizes critical urban studies and the role of Extended Reality (XR) in advancing theoretical and methodological frameworks in the presented immersive installation project.

Alice Borch is a Lecturer in Creative Industries at the University of Leeds (UK). Her research interests include the study of the cultural commons and cultural value, with a particular focus on participatory practices and shared governance in cultural policy and management. She is also interested in interdisciplinary approaches to the safeguard of the commons that bring together environmental and cultural perspectives.

A list of her publications can be found here

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=bVHZP2EAAAAJ&hl=en>

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For a list of his publications, see here

<https://scholar.google.com/citations?hl=it&&user=myv1AQ4AAAAJ>

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His most recent research interests focus on contemporary art practices, site-specific artworks, and creative processes in relation to urban change. In his current interdisciplinary research, he examines how artists working in city spaces experience, interpret, and integrate changes in public urban sites into the production of their urban art-works, exploring their 'ways of doing' and the creative processes underlying their urban artistic practices.

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