

The Role of Public Art in an Arts District

Displays and installations of art in public places does much to set a creative and attractive tone for the built environment. Public arts serves to inspire and attract creative types to the district to live, work and do business. The innate aesthetics improve the appearance and distinctiveness of the arts district, improving property values and attracting new visitors. Public art plays a critical role in establishing a viable arts district – displaying for the world to see – the artistic priorities of a community and ultimately serving as the best form of advertising and promotion for the aim of the district.

Establishing Public Art as a Priority

The role of public art should be addressed in detail in the plan for establishing an arts district. The goal of introducing art, the forms that art might take, funding and planing guidelines can all contribute to creating a rich and diverse array of art. The first step in introducing public art to an arts district is education. Educational resources including examples of public art in other communities can do much to open the eyes of stakeholders who may wish to contribute their energy, talent and funding towards the creation of art in their community. An inventory of existing public art should be taken and steps taken to ensure that they are preserved and celebrated.

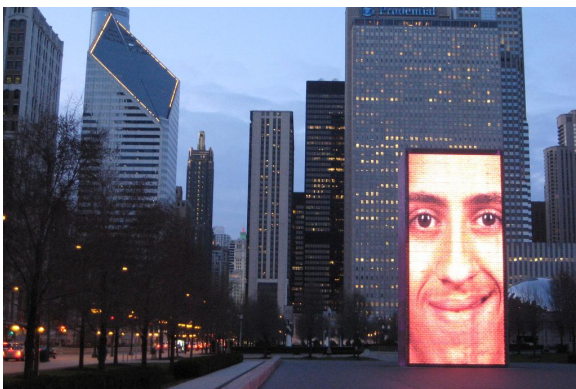
Examples of Public Art



Mural



Sculpture



Mixed Media



Mosaic



Water Art



Music



Landscape Design



Live Performance



Artistic Approach to the Built Environment



Historic Design Elements

Making Public Art Happen

Private Funding – Private property owners may choose to invest in public art on their properties to enhance their attractiveness and marketability. Arts District partners may provide recommendations on types of art and assist in the selection of artist(s). Free or low cost assistance has been shown to be an effective tool in promoting private investment in public art.

Low Cost Public Art

An inventory of suitable places for public art installation can be a starting point for encouraging the installation of public art. Property owners may be asked if they'd like to participate and they can be matched with an artist who may work voluntarily or for a fee paid by private, public or nonprofit funds.

Public Art Incentives

Property owners who invest in public art, or allow it to be created on their property may be encouraged by a variety of incentives:

Recognition – for their patronage and support of the arts in arts district and community publications and events.

Property Tax Abatement – Some communities have encouraged public art by excluding the enhanced property value created by a public art installation from the property's assessed value. Still other communities offer a percent reduction in either assessed value or property tax rate based on installation of public art in conformance with published local government guidelines.

Mandated Public Art

Some communities have established requirements for new development projects in their jurisdictions to create or invest in public art as a requirement for their plan approval. They have written guidelines for the types of public art that will meet their requirements and guidelines for the scale and dollar investment that is required depending on the scale of their development project. The most common type of mandate is known as percent for art, where an investment in public art equal to a percentage of projected construction costs, is required for plan approval and a final certificate of occupancy.

Mandated public art programs have been established in a variety of communities and have met with mixed results according to arts advocates. Mandated programs have been extremely successful in highly competitive and robust development environments where strong market factors have dealt local government a strong hand in dictating development.

In communities where the development and economic development is less robust, arts mandates often proved to be politically unsustainable and were viewed as anti-competitive. Arts groups that had initially advocated for mandate programs reported a backlash effect that generated negative publicity and sentiment against their aims.

Public Art Nonprofits

In some communities, a nonprofit group takes a critical role in creating public art projects to highlight causes, businesses and other concerns of local interest. The nonprofit organization will undertake an educational role in the promotion of the arts with school age children and interested adults. They advocate for arts education, raising funds in the community through donations and sales of art objects inspired by their public works. Some groups, notably Heart to Art LLC of northeast Pennsylvania, partner with supporters of causes like breast cancer awareness to fund and create works of art inspired by the cause.

Public Arts Festivals and Celebrations

A new kind of public art celebration was born in the U.S. In the late 1990's when the City of Chicago sponsored *Cows on Parade*, a celebration of public art inspired by similar events in Europe. Life size fiberglass cows were given to artists selected by a committee to decorate and embellish their "blank canvas" and create unique works of art to be displayed throughout the city for one year. Cows on Parade was wildly successful, boosted tourism by over \$100 Million, raised hundreds of thousands of dollars annually for city sponsored arts programs and grants.

In Chicago, costs for the project were covered by the selling the cows to local businesses, most of whom proudly display their cows to this day. Other communities have emulated Chicago by sponsoring similar projects, where artists create works on a blank sculpture of an animal or other community icon. Small communities have used volunteer artists who shared in the proceeds of the ultimate sale of the works at a gala auction at the end of a year long public display. For low cost, they realized a large impact resulting in higher arts awareness and identity, promotional opportunities for local artists, and funding for ongoing arts related programs.



Cows on Parade, Chicago IL



Pigs in the City, Lexington NC