

# Canadian art



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Public art can be defined as the appealing human creations or activities of all forms displayed or staged in public where they are accessible to willing viewers. The term also applies to forms of art which are displayed in the public spaces like gardens; parks; buildings like churches, schools, theatres; institutions like Universities and banks; eateries and public squares among others. The public art works of Mariette Rousseau-Vermette together with his partner Micheline Beauchemin of decorative stage curtains can still be found in the Place des Arts in the city of Montreal.

These decorations were made way back in the 1960's (Royal Ontario Museum, 2009). On the same note, some religious Public art pieces can be found in a chapel known as Ursuline in the city of Quebec. Public art include various forms of statues, monuments, and architecture that may take the form of casting, assemblages, carvings, buildings of even paintings. To some extent, graffiti and furniture found in streets can still be considered as public art. Aside from physical objects, public art includes processions, poetry, dances and even theatres staged in streets too.

Forms of public art are erected or staged in various parts in the public sphere for various purposes. These roles played by the public art ranges from aesthetic purposes, identity creation, promotion of values held by the community, commemorative and even educative purposes. Some also play the role of bringing the people together with the aim of making them interact with each other due to their interactive nature e. g. the federation bells found in Melbourne is an instrument of music played by the members of the public at their own discretion (Lord 2003 pp63-65).

There are a number of agents who sponsor the creation of public art within a given area. In the fore front of this sponsorship are governments of various nations, organizations owning a public space, individuals and groups of people. The Toronto culture, for example, has created a public art section that is vibrant in promoting creation of public art. Some national policies require a given percentage of the expenses incurred in building any public building to be allocated to public art creations within that building.

In most cases, the theme carried by a piece of public relates closely with the surrounding environment within which it is found. (Dewdney 2006 pp36-38)

Art in Canada has undergone through a great deal of revolution. The major Canadian art development appeared in 1960 and today, art testimonials are virtually everywhere. Adair 2009, in the Canadian encyclopedia, points out that monuments being the early commonest forms of public art have since 1976 been overtaken by modern modes which comprise of land, street, and site specific art; performing arts; paintings; community arts; architecture; photography; and electronic art.

Similarly, investing in public art has ceased from being a government and church specialty to a practice of done by organizations, municipalities, groups within the community and the private sector (Adair 2009) The Public art pieces in Canada and elsewhere are made out of various materials which include; glazes, basketry, and glasses. There are various roles that public art play in the Canadian cities yet I believe the running theme in most of them if not all is purpose as the following argument depicts.

Interactive purposes Public art may be designed for the purpose of encouraging the public to participate in working or getting involved in its

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operation. To make this possible, some artists have created forms of public art that are kinetic in nature not to mention sonorous, that can be subjected to operation by touch or otherwise (Dewdney 2006 pp37-40) Interactive public art can be found in museums, parks, or leisure centers where large numbers of people frequent. These types of public arts may have other functions that may not necessarily be artistic in nature or design.

A good example of a public art work that is open to the public is the hydraulophone at the Ontario Science Centre (Lord 2003 pp63-66). It is not only a fountain but also an instrument of music which members of the public play at their own will. Patterson 2005 writes that Winkler in his project he called Waves has created wave movement measuring buoys in wading pools that attract the public in Toronto. These then ends up translating movements into sounds of music in order to relate waves in water and the sounds in waves.

The hands on galleries found in the Royal Ontario Museum provides interactive public art with real archeological experience for upcoming paleontologists and a costume area where visitors dress in various robes depicting animal figures (Royal Ontario Museum 2009) Political purposes Political regimes often use public art for purposes of putting their political beliefs across to the public e. g. during campaigns where political parties erect bill boards that favor adoption of their political inclinations and tarnish political beliefs of their rivals, spread propaganda, and even suppress political rivals.

Public art may also be politically displayed for the purposes of acting as memorials of past political experiences or the reign of certain political figures

that had impact during their times in power. Public art used for political purposes has been known to reconcile opposing political functions due to the use of powerful visual impacts that speak for or against an oppressive regime and possibly the impacts of such a regime on the general public.

Monuments on the other hand are mostly used as references to or reminders of historical moments and figures e. g. the Generals Montcalm and Wolfe are commemorated with a stone monument displayed in 1828 in Quebec as a reminder of their patriotic services to Canada. At the same time, the fore fathers of Canada like John Macdonald and George Cartier have had many commemorative monuments in their honor (Dewdney 2006 pp37-41). Used this way, public art help to evoke patriotic feelings in the public from where they are found.

The religious figures in the Ursuline chapel in Quebec, apart from implying the presence of catholic power in the church in Canada, gave a hint of the French royal power as these figures were made in line with cultural traditions that had French influence (Tonnancour 2004p32). Purposes of Controversy Artists may be compelled to speak out for the societies in which they live since theirs is an undertaking that is highly effective in mirroring the society. They may want to bring out vices either driven by some groups within the society or those practiced by members of the society themselves.

At the same time, they provoke the society to take heed of some issues and at times portray the society's feeling of issues such as; mismanagement of public resources, child rape, human trafficking, family life, e. t. c. Pieces of art themselves evoke differential feelings among the public members with some groups favoring them while others prefer to view them negatively. In

so doing, controversial issues within the community are addressed through sharing e. g. in gatherings in the public places or in parks (Stolow 1999 pp16-18). It gets some people like strangers and children questioning, friends arguing e. t. c.

For example, the painting: Art of Papal, found in the Canadian national gallery gets us questioning about early sexuality in Rome as the two nude adults seem to be disregarding the presence of children as they allegedly are about to have sex (Adair 2009) Controversies brought out by public art may be religious, social or political in nature thus giving a wide array of issues that are of importance to the public (Tonnancour 2004pp26-27). Aesthetic purposes Most art pieces possess' aesthetic value and they appeal greatly to the eyes of the public.

This is the catchiest aspect of all forms of art, public art included. Public art pieces when displayed in the public spaces like buildings, along the streets, and in parks offer pleasant looking scenarios and may evoke positive feelings in regard to the particular place they are found. Public art- like any other art, often have this end result despite the many other functions that they may have e. g. the painting done by Frere Luc situated at the Hopital General in Quebec offers greatly enhances the appearance of this place.

Wood carvings and wooden monumental sculptures during the French regime were used to decorate the surrounding environments of churches and the altars were decorated with paintings and gilded statues e. g. the Ste-Famille church compound in Ile d'Orleans has numerous monuments made from curved wood which improves the visual appearance of this surrounding (Housser 2006 pp17-21). A 1938 group of artists in Montreal known as the

eastern group of painters did their art work primarily for aesthetic purposes in Quebec.

They specialized in painting and making public art for its own sake aside from the beautification purposes (Royal Ontario Museum, 2009) The murals found on the plywood hoardings were meant to beautify the street alongside combating vandalism directed against graffiti along the Bedford Row Street as the Canadian services puts it. Therefore, public art is very effective in the enhancement of the community gateways, roadsides, street corners and corridors (Royal Ontario Museum, 2009). It helps green space thrive, enhances roadsides, pedestrian corridors, and community gateways.

Commemorative purposes Canada has various historical events that are commemorated through use of public art. An example is the 1812 war that had the statue of the war hero Isaac Brock erected on top a column at Queenston Heights in Ontario. Likewise, statues of George Hill and Allward W. S. found in Montreal and Toronto respectively were erected in commemoration of the South African War (Housser 2006 pp19-24). After the 1918 war and the Second World War in 1945, there arose a proliferation of commemorative public art pieces that include plaques, busts, soldiers, and figures in a victorious stance.

A good example is the Ottawa memorial of war that was erected after the Second World War to commemorate airmen who died in their posts of duty during this war and whose location of their graves remain unknown to date (Royal Ontario Museum, 2009). Lots of other commemorative public art pieces are found in various public buildings, and along the streets and cities.

Another example of this is the monument located in Ottawa's Confederation square (Kingwell 2009 p64).

Identification purposes Public arts are useful in identifying the geographical location of a place or building as their description might prove easier to remember than the name of a location or building e. g. the cast figure of Louis XIV and other statues were erected in 1686 in intersections of streets and corner buildings for the purposes of identifying the streets. Louis' figure is found at Place Royale within the city of Quebec (Hutcheon 2003pp24-34). The cultural department of the Toronto city has one of its policies as making Toronto a place where its residents can identify with the proliferation of public artwork.

In this case, public art has been picked up by both public and private departments for the purposes of realizing this dream. An estimated 190 public art works can be found here having been erected since 1870 (Stolow 2001pp12-17) It is therefore in order to conclude that public art is useful in definition of the identity of a particular society and even tell a lot about the views of its neighborhood. In this case then it unifies the community through creation of a sense of identity.