

Understanding the Role of Public Art in Communities

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Abstract

In this brainstorming session, I will share a working framework of ways to understand public sculpture in various locations focusing on the social function of public art. As a form of theoretical research, I consider various perspectives on what different works of art do in societies. I work from the perspective that public art is a form of education related to the sustainability of cultures. The question of which people or events within the history of a society should be monumentalized is controversial as Levinson (1998) noted. As the concept of a ‘public’ space is changing (Kohn, 2004), it is crucial that we think about the democratic nature of public spaces and the role that art plays in these spaces. I take the view espoused by Bailyn (1960) that education is the transmission of culture across generations. Thus, public art is a form of education that is related to the sustainability of cultures. When groups erect works of public art in their communities, they are typically created with lasting materials to enable that group to project their ideas and beliefs to future citizens. Through a discussion of the flexible framework of various social functions of public art, I will invite the audience to participate and share examples from their experiences. Through the brainstorming discussion, we may be able to better under-

stand forms of public sculpture and how they function in societies, assisting communities in developing sustainable futures, in part, through their public art.

Keywords

Public art, Sculpture, Community.