

Autocratic Yawn: The Manipulation of Public Perception

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Abstract

Public art in Western Australia has been boosted by the Australian Federal Government's Percent for Art Scheme, which requires one percent of all new construction budgets for new development over \$2 million to be spent on artwork. The scheme is a State Government initiative that started in 1989. It is managed by the Department of Finance in partnership with the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries - which is responsible for arts policy in the State. Examples of contemporary works and accounts from professionals in the Arts sector reveals the importance of engaging the public in the completion of these works. An analysis of these perceptions are comparatively examined, drawing upon the understandings of what constitutes public art from literature written by leaders in this field of endeavour.

Keywords

public art, government, politics, public, art, aesthetics, urban development, industry

CONTENTS	TITLE	PAGE
Preface	Preface	4-5
Chapter 1	Introduction	6-7
Chapter 2	Food	7-9
Chapter 3	Convenience / Compromise	9-10
Chapter 4	Seen / Unseen	10-11
Chapter 5	Public and Publicity	11-12
Chapter 6	Schemes	12-13
Chapter 7	Manipulation of Perception	13-16
Chapter 8	Cultural Memory: Emotional Graveyards	17
Chapter 9	Conclusion	18
Reference		19-20
Bibliography		21
Appendix A		22-24
Notes		25

PREFACE

The discourse and rhetoric employed to smother even the most banal response from a discerning and informed public has been cleverly employed in a temporary installation gracing the carnage of the vehicular forecourt to Perth, Western Australia. A central traffic island of moderate proportions, once clad with an indulgent display of reticulated petunias, mounds of manicured grass, flag poles with international colors and smatterings of signature grass trees now lies horizontally razed by bulldozers.

A monument to design, hovering on the brink of the well worn asphalt now boasts in reflective type;

BEAUTIFICATION AND LANDSCAPING TO COMMENCE SHORTLY

In the affirmative, it could be argued that the sign's presence simply connotes (a proportion of passing public have been conversant with relevant parties, made personified, if not animated comment on and contributed with) intent to the planned aesthetic for this locale. For the cynical or the otherwise informed, it may also imply that the complex web of restructuring, re-developing and ultimately the re-shaping of the foyer to the nations most isolated city, has entered a new phase of pseudo-negotiation.

This negotiation takes the form of covertly stated intent, enmeshed in political conundrum, bound in ordinance and statute, simple, subtle and confidently employed to ward off any fantasy of critical or creative consideration. To dismiss the affirmative or the cynic as having the correct answer, would negate the very complex and ever evolving forms of information edification our communities are prey to.

The subtlety of meaning and the implicit focus for intent, as suggested by the elected authorities responsible for the above signage, also surface at the forefront of contemporary art practice and discourse heavily imbedded with cultural and spatial boundaries. Manipulation of the viewer's reception (as well as perception) has for the better part of the century relied heavily on the receptivity of the viewer as a consumer of information, both cross-culturally and with little observation of physical ordinance.

Popular culture has also wound around and evolved from that of perceived and

immediate importance, attaching itself to forms and through movements which artists are known to wield as they catalyse critical public enquiry. Developers, though, simply and cleverly de-construct what is and describe what was in the bid to form new interests and differing conceptual understandings.

The polarities between political and social realities for the public art realm in comparison to popular culture are according to Miles, M. (1997), truncated by the conventional vocabularies governing and mediating form and ultimately the public's reception.

The aim of this paper is to identify these truncations and present how these differing perspectives of who the 'public' are and what 'public art' constitute, then further elucidated through contributions by art practitioners, philosophers, philanthropists, mediators and facilitators who reside in Perth, Western Australia. Note, correlations will also be drawn from broad reference to issues raised in two (2) differing articles; (a) *The Impure Public*, Australian Perspecta (1991 p. 116-117) and; (b) *Of Outdoor Sites, Context and the Site Specific*, Art & Text (1992 p. 30-31) by John Barrett-Lennard¹, writer and Curator of the Lawrence Wilson Gallery, Perth, Western Australia.

¹ There is a gap in literature according to Barrett-Lennard, which draws comparison to the perspectives (or indeed understandings) puts forward in either of these articles

INTRODUCTION

As with the corporate push for the architecturally civic, an unimpeded arterial flow of bumper-to-bumper traffic and digital information highways, redefines human behaviours which in turn re-define art forms and movements, all which constitute a need for ethical reflection.

These reflections litter history in a landscape of human endeavor, monument to it's own kind, of totems erected, buried and re-erected, of trails and conduits of whispers which re-define themselves to take shape as architecture and finally fall silent as tombs. Structures and statutes which form the skeleton for their existence have enabled the 'museum' or gallery in this context to be considered, re-considered and more recently inverted to accommodate the need to transverse the neutrality of it's confine, containment and ultimate control.

“... As a site of display, neither space is able to sanction a specific relationship between the artwork and it's own location and both will be endangered by any art which is in fact specific, which does address their wider surroundings or their epistemological framework.” -
Barrett-Lennard, J. (1991 p.116)

John Barrett-Lennard (1992) punctuates these observations with the core issue of art work context, claiming dynamics of site and 'public' space underpinning the success of art practice has for the better part of the 20th century been entombed in the homogenization of institutional structure namely that of the museum or gallery. Barrett-Lennard also relates that the move to escape the gallery's confines has been encouraged, embraced and articulated through contemporary normalization of such practice.

This has unfortunately or even naively assumed that 'public art', must also occupy a move to the exterior urban spaces outside of the institution, in effect a colonisation atypical of the postmodernity 'crux' in Western Art. The overwhelming mood (if such emotive derivations can be articulated clearly) for which Barrett-Lennard employs in his critical review is succinctly presented, with poise, when considering 'the' as well as 'and' public.

“... Although there has been considerable enthusiasm for 'public art' it has not taken any particular critical stance in addressing the various complexities and contradictions of life in an urban and postmodern society, nor made any substantive progress at linking art with everyday life. Much of what has gone on (even

as temporary installations) has done little or nothing to address 'the' (or even 'a') public let alone how the 'public' is constructed by various social and cultural forces." Barrett-Lennard (1991, p. 117-118)

The notions of who the 'public' are and in fact 'what' is public art, raised by John Barret-Lennard are the main ingredients for this papers discussion, as commented on and addressed in the following chapters.

FOOD

Referenced as "anonymous" affords the writer certain privileges, not otherwise easily granted. The decision to avert personal attachment to comments or indeed publications can occur for many reasons, the more serious, including perceived political or legal persecution.

The inclusion of the following article acknowledges that whilst removed from the immediate dialectic positioning of public art's relevance in contemporary Western Australia, it serves it to question the exposition of public art mediation in a manner beyond it's appearance of the grammatically trite. To simply state the content is tongue in cheek only adds to the critical refrain.

Q. What is Public Art?

A. Public Art? Don't know anything about that ! Perhaps I will just talk about food If we go to McDonald's 2 we know what we are getting. It's not particularly contentious or imaginative. Everyone seems to enjoy what they are consuming and even the kids love it ! You don't have to think too hard or make many decisions about ingredients, textures, subtleties of flavor etc. It's all pretty bland and easily consumed, popular, perhaps superficial but quite attractive and easy even predigested at times?! Marketing people & committees determine recipes and selling strategies they know what people want it! It's' all pretty much in your face and acceptable to the majority of the community. You don't need to be a great chef to construct popular food... Clayton's food? I think I will just have a Coke!

Q. Art in Public Places?

A. On the other hand, if you make a choice to have a good meal, you will perhaps spend a lot of time thinking about the kind of food you would like to experience and the particular context. We will probably look for things like interest, imagination, subtlety, variation, integrity (of ingredients), simplicity, quality and so on. This is real food. Sometimes the experience is challenging, quite provoking, intellectually and sensually engaging. It can be a risk to enter a new restaurant and be confronted with new experiences as the unknown is a bit scary! Sometimes we will not particularly enjoy it or feel ripped off by the higher price ! Not that economics is necessarily a factor; as a good and simple food can be quite inexpensive and really accessiblethe results of a labor of love, care and dedication. Hey, this is quite a nice red ! Have another drop? What ever happened to the ART in Public Art? " - David Bomfield (2002) in 'post_it_public_1' - www.alexanderhayes.iinet.net.au/public_art/discussion

Examination of the article's content reveals a questioning of the advent of what can be coined as the "specialist public artist". Using food as a simile for public art does not leave the questions raised replete, hence the recursive rejoinder at the conclusion of this quoted article from advocates and advisory bodies employed to facilitate the commissioning of individuals in the complex field of public art.

If indeed a retort needs to refute the above or discussion from those it seeks to implicate, an example of the understood criticism that public art receives can be perfectly summed up by Miller N. (2000).

"... Those working in the arts, but outside of public art, find it very easy to dismiss the burgeoning field of public art by questioning its aesthetic virtues. Their point is too easily made. It is after all a rare event to get art out of the public art process." Miller, N. (2000, p. 31)

To complement this position, Nicki Miller, quoted at the time as manager of ArtSource Western Australia, extends the argument for, as opposed to, against facilitated project management. These include the fiscal benefits public art projects bring the small business community, the changes having an Artist on design staff can have to the overall outcome of a project and the relationships that are fostered beyond the monetary aspect to public commissioning.

The ArtSource Agency of Western Australia, currently Managed by Jude Van der Merwe in 2002, cites the agencies focus as facilitating the increased professional opportunities for Western Australian arts practitioners with clients ranging from the corporate, local government and inevitably, the national public sector. Affiliations with the Institute of Independent Arts Consultants of Western Australia, the Artist's Foundation of Western Australia and the Arts Law Centre for Australia provide the reader with fuel for thought if siding with those wishing to assimilate collective consciousness with corporate intent.

Miller (2000) does not seek to emasculate projects that embellish corporate or large private financially secure sector rather, provides an examination in the article of the influence that the artist has socially and politically in management of such an enterprise.

CONVENIENCE / COMPROMISE

In a series of discussions with the author and in reply to five set questions (see appendix 1) posed of Jude Van der Merwe, Manager of Art Source WA in May 2002, new and emerging markets for consideration are opening for the commissioned professional artist.

Mediation and the cycle of advocacy (mirrored in the glossy brochures which adorn the vestibule of this service for artists) require the public art consultant to be conversant with the needs of a 'client, assisting them to expand their understandings of what public art can be. The 'public' and the public sector are in this instance portrayed as the consumers and the 'commissioner' as critical to delivering the artist's interpretation.

The 'safety of the design' by the artist necessitates compromise, especially when we seem unable to generate expressions that accurately express the real differences that artwork can make to spaces and places according to Van der Merwe (2002).

"... It is the stuff that happens around the edges that make the field of public art interesting ... Surely, a vision of a world, where the skills of artists are appreciated and incorporated into the fabric of the everyday, should not be so easily dismissed by the art-world." Miller, B. (2000, p.32)

To interpose the complex manner by which the contradictions of 'the public' effect professional practice (in which public art takes form) can be seen in both 'styles' of professional mediator.

Barrett-Lennard (1992) fashions the phrase 'thinking through public' as the focus for commissioning agencies sating the contemporary public body with reflections of its own aesthetic truths. Maturity and reverence are noted and argued to emit from individuals that encounter art works that also address the concerns and insecurities of the 'public' body, not only the client.

To attempt to placate all parties and address the greater needs of the public in the role of professional mediator must be an onerous, yet rewarding task. To facilitate powerfully and avoid 'public art' being reminiscent of the 'public convenience', the sanitisation of cultural expression must also be flushed away with the effluent that beguiles the public of freedom in broad expression.

It would be sad to embrace a conversation and position that compromise and defeat art from lived experience lies at the core of the contemporary public's art. Macaulay (1988) propounds however that the 'defeat' of perception where the meanings for reception of art outside the museum where it once was housed have already taken place.

Macaulay also states that due to the mediation of public expression, public art is no longer tantamount to nationalistic propaganda or pride designed for the public with unrestricted access, rather art with unrestricted worker access but limited public access. Dr. David Bromfield, Art Critic and resident of Perth, Western Australia sums up the need for the Artist to have control of the exposition of their own expression rather than the interference of ordination in that process.

Bromfield (2002) avoids the 'sour grape syndrome', a term coined by Andrew Nichols in *Thoughts On A Western Australian Emerging Practice* (2002) by simply observing that;

“... Without the animated pressure of Artist run spaces, art in Perth, all art, will be increasingly ever more derivative.” *Out Of Space* (Bromfield, 2002)

SEEN / UNSEEN

The place for unification of ideas and 'seen' expression have been dragged for centuries between spaces which are bound by statute or in pure form law. Gary Dufour, Deputy Director of the Western Australian Gallery provided in conversation with the Author in May 2002, two instances of where the 'seen' and 'unseen' public transcend the boundaries of institution and break free the shackles

of social control.

The German Artist Jochen Gerz, recounted by Dufour, whilst teaching at the art school in Saarbrücken, began removing the cobblestones in the main city square firstly covertly and thence with the permission of all governing bodies primarily after the conceptual framework for the work had ceased to predominate.

The idea behind removing and replacing objects within that environment resulted in a change of name and understanding for a 'public' place, designated area that people were permitted to congregate in. The scope of his negotiations and then purity of his conviction, not necessarily the result are what Dufour states are the requirements for 'true' public art.

The second instance of where the terms 'public' and 'public art' meet, were spoken through the works of Mexican born Artist, Gustavo Artiga. The concept of 'game', implicit with written rules and regulations has been actively used by Artiga for many years to test and revise the rules of confine, pitting situation and the public against each other and using both to conquer 'seen', the 'unseen' but understood and finally the 'unsaid'.

In both instances, Dufour drew comparison to movements of Artist's whose address for the public and the use of 'publicity' melded not as metaphor but rather as life itself.

PUBLIC AND PUBLICITY

Romesh Goonewardene, an Architect, firmly asserted in an interview conducted with the author at the University of Western Australia in May 2002 that the understandings of what constitutes the 'public' and the term 'publicity' can, in fact be tightly interwoven as one understanding.

Goonewardene was asked the question " what 'is' public?" who lavishly married the necessity for information dissemination and the need for hierarchical entities in history to evolve as 'is' public. Populace and the tolls in between spaces are understood as other ways to interpret what 'becomes' public.

Citing the motor vehicle as an example of the extension of private space, Goonewardene, drew comparisons between that which is understood to be private space and that which is of public ordinance. One is dependant on

the other and one necessitates the need for the divisions which divide and control any given environment.

Goonewardene chooses to draw upon the re-affirmations of our communities to place control over environment, of rules and by-laws that steer and determine structure. Architecture and the web of structural expression have, according to Goonewardene simply paved the 'place' and 'space' for public art as a social and ethical language.

The necessity to mediate and assert authority in the form of organization of cultural expression has according to Goonewardene not essentially changed since the beginning of time. To parallel this understanding and position, Installation Curator, Davies H. (1997) of the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego concurs with Goonewardene and adds that until the 17th century artistic expression was inextricably linked to the gifting sands of architecture.

Miles (1997) lubricates this point with definitions of structural placemaking like 'here' and 'not here' defining the advent of portable commodity as an icon for popularity, whereas Goonewardene chooses not to explore these boundaries of text alliance for fear they exhort others for what is possible in the public art realm. Phonetic structure of which text can structure meaning, are, according to Goonewardene what form the understandings and perceptions of what is 'public' and hence what is 'public art'.

To be able to step in and out of roles where language and control of information affects understanding, allows the artist to become the main instigator for social change the 'probe' as coined as a descriptor for this behavior. The historical flamboyance of differing cultures and the languages they employ, concluded Goonewardene, allows for those questioning the 'place' for public art to contemplate rather than replicate in monument and reminder.

SCHEMES

Historically the opportunities afforded artists who were considered unfit to fight wars or needing assistance to realize dreams came as grants, of schemes and initiatives which in hindsight leapt boundaries most often away from the original direction they were intended.

"... Rescue came from the unlikely direction of the Federal Government. In December 1933, as Roosevelt's new Deal got under way, the Public Works of Art Project was set up." Britt, D. (1989 P. 255)

The Public Works coffers of the corporate, government and community organizations in Perth also must surely be groaning with the plethora of guff that accompanies one good idea to its inception and likewise to its death. Britt (1989) as well as Barrett-Lennard(1992) speak of the emptiness that surrounds the implicit functioning for schemes and initiatives that draw communities and individuals together only to 'substantiate' public art.

Miles (1997) cites in many instances, names of projects, urban renewal sites, initiatives, groups and organizations seeking to lasso the public by virtue of the fact that they are needed for a term for a project 'public art'. Historically it is possible with the most cursory of a glance, to find similarities from county to county, state to state, and country to country of projects and terminology to describe the actions of social ordinance in the Arts.

Claire Hatch, Project and Research Officer for the Department of Culture and the Arts in Perth, Western Australia has been employed to conduct a review of the scheme otherwise known as 'Percent for the Arts'. The catch cry for its role is that it is an attempt to enliven and humanize the built environment.

So be it, as a great deal of effort is needed to embrace the cloistered boxes of the populace named 'city'.

Hatch gave many examples of where the Percent for Art scheme had by way of Committees, Briefs, Coordination and selection processes, commissioned Artists to address the issue of enabling public buildings to become more livable and workable. The 'suitable' projects deemed viable were budgeted at two (2) million dollars and more.

Similar such initiatives have arisen in other Australian states as the need arises.

"... Major corporate buildings use sculpture as selling points for their buildings and it is rare now for a foyer or plaza to be unadorned. This is definitely the future growth area for public sculpture." Hedger, M. (1995 p. 7)

Thankfully commissioned works of public art since 1995 in the 'Percent for Art Scheme' have avoided that 'growth area', evidenced by the

scope and breadth of works Hatch presented the author.

MANIPULATION OF PERCEPTION

The very essence of complete public perception, grounded supposedly by the ability of any individual to actively participate in the public art realm, unravels integrity scathed, tarnished more often than not when examining even the most carefully considered public art projects.

This broad statement derives from the understanding that perception is not only what is 'seen' publicly, but given to be the 'understood' and experienced. In the context of comments and views presented, understandings of how clever 'best practice' rewrites history by the inclusion of the commissioned visual metaphor, resurface more than once.

The manipulation of public perception in the context of public art is no better illustrated by examining certain aspects of what appears to be the well planned, Chinese financed urban and commercial center of East Perth or 'Claisebrook', Western Australia.

Adjacent to the translucent center of the city's central business district stands urban renewal, which, for the better part of the total area is part of the greater water catchment for the artesian basin in what Perth CBD now stands. A string of water bodies (of which Claisebrook is only one) spread their way up the coast of Western Australia buffered by sand dunes that string distant granite deposits to the ocean. Claisebrook is in fact none other than fake 'Claise' stream, now a mechanically controlled filtered flow of river water pumped to cascade from upstream facades via limestone cap clad channel to river inlet. The brook itself that divides this tilt-up construction or 'Tea Tree it Creek' as it was once known, is in fact several metres further down than it's present pathetic rivulet.

The history for Claisebrook could be the rendition for a horror movie if considering the Noongar Aboriginal community of the Whadjuk nation who were resident to this area 40,000 years prior to it's industrial inception, now a glorified mixed residential, corporate, government embassy and commercial waste depot with neighboring graveyard.

A total disregard for the area's cultural, spiritual and physical importance is evident. Historical records critically cross examine the bastard colonization that sought to sap its resource - water. History replete, the 'publicity' of this area is

abound with the rhetoric saturation the public have come to expect when a new model of motor vehicle is released or flavor enhanced body corporate posing as good Samaritan plies it's wares.

Artist's from numerous disciplines have been employed, commissioned, involved in re-shaping what slid from paradise into disgrace over the last decade. The East Perth Redevelopment Authority produced a brief for public art consultancies (private included) to make submission to "beautify' the area, stating in the context of it's capitalized Authority that;

“... Public Art in the context of East Perth means much more than the placement of individual artworks. It means imbuing an area with a strong social and architectural identity through the artistic and imaginative treatment of public space". *Brief for Public Art Consultancies* (1992) as cited in Farman N. (1993 p. 79)

The 'public' in this instance have taken the form of those using the space, or to be exact, those who are to be invited to use the space as posed in, on and under the written intent. A Master's dissertation completed by Nola Farman (1993) one such Artist selected to contribute collaboratively in the East Perth Project, refers to the planning, development and restructuring of space as taking the form of a cannibalization of another's space.

Farman also refers to the fact that any re-structure does not occur in a vacuum and needs to be observed from the greater context of social, ethical and moral consideration by the community. Farman Or remains for the better part 'appreciated' by both artists and those bestowed the privilege of making comment from a professional mediation perspective.

One such individual of the latter, Jude Van der Merwe makes reference to Farman's work *Tract Landscape Design* in the East Perth Redevelopment as having major significance as a fully integrated artist's expression. Van der Merwe (2002) points out that despite the attempts by which social landscaping imposes upon 'space' and re-orders for whatever the reason, the landscape and it's social, political and historical narrative should have the ability to re-assert itself.

The work *Tract Landscape Design* itself is considered as 'unseen', accepted because of the ability by artist and developer to address the 'space' of public perception relative to the change in the environment and absolute in its ability to 'speak' to the past. Structure, production and construction of space are addressed

most informatively by the philosopher Lefebvre (1998) in his text titled *The Production Of Space*.

This anthology of thought and discussion hinges on all that is understood to encompass space as an abstract, absolute and definitive concept, limited only by a poor cousin 'time' and most important attribution to 'place'. Both Lefebvre (1998) and Miles (1997) draw parallels with the nature of individuals which habit and determine these space managed structures, irrespective if they be defined as city, urban, rural or outback (a term developed to explain 'spaces' and 'places' of an extremely remote nature).

It is evident that underlying the rhetoric of the stated intent for change and reform in East Perth, lurks the underwritten, the arm twisting denial for 'spaces' of which the public including that of artist, mediator and public can inhabit. Examples of this hidden agenda can be taken as concretely endorsed by agencies that seek to explain their process for involving the public.

An example of this are the *Chinese Embassy Gates* at the East Perth Redevelopment site which have undeniably been constructed in a way to prevent the public from entering what was 'public' space altogether, now cannibalised by Imperialist gateway dictum; "... we are the new colonel who pay the bills and you do as you're told."

It is clear that the East Perth Redevelopment is simply another example of public art development with the implicit functioning which underwrites many conceptions in the public art arena, that of claiming to realize intent by virtue, inviting from those it seeks to enrol the most vile of vitriol.

"... Public is the result of an artist's expression that is potentially available to a wider audience. It may be temporary or permanent in nature ... the best public work involves the viewer." *Art for Public Spaces: Foreword* (1993 jn. p. 2)

Given the exclusion of the public from what is to be developed in certain precincts all under surveillance in East Perth can now be tagged as perhaps the new ghetto for political malcontent. The term 'available' encapsulates all that is inherently corrupt with the assumption that 'public' have access to where many of these works exist.

The abhorrence of elitism splashes its way into this argument as sloppy rhetoric, trying to assure the reader that in fact a 'viewer' is actually being considered.

Viewer, reader, reader viewer whatever the terminology may evoke, then one thing is certain. Any public work that does not reach the 'viewer' as the overarching receptor depicted in this previous quote lifted from a local government brochure, should be simply removed from the conversation of public art altogether and referred to as Van der Merwe (2002) using terms 'plop art' or 'plonk art', a colonial form of malignant occupation that which has little or no regard for any 'public' viewer whatsoever except itself.

This argument can be morphed to include the increasingly popular technological inventions that parade as 'projection art' or 'eye candy for the public' in Perth, Western Australia. The expanding domain of public art electronica, which provides an avante garde wallpaper to an otherwise ugly skyline testament of billionaire oligarchs must also answer to and deliver with ethical integrity and character, not more ornamental filigree to an already ugly nationalist architecture celebrating colonial occupation of public and civic space.

Recognition in the swirling mass of the everyday of the value of well founded public art which invites and involves the public then ensures it becomes that of the everyday, not an imitation of art as life and life as art relates Van der Merwe (2002).

"... A related but distinct possibility is that the projected image will have the character of a cipher or sign; another is that the projected image will derive precisely from the very object or territory that now accepts it." -
Passant, En. (1993 p.7)

To complement the topic of territories comes the following, to be expected, from the Education Department of Western Australia as another pearl of wisdom.

"... The gift of the Internet is this - it offers to each individual the powers of communication and exchange that in the past were held only by governments and corporations ... especially in the exchange of ideas within a broad, accessible community." Newman, D. (2002 p. 47)

CULTURAL MEMORY: EMOTIONAL GRAVEYARDS

Selz P. (1981) provides in a traditional historical linear narrative style that, at the end of the 1960's, artist's globally sought to transcend the limitations of the white walled gallery, creating impetus for 'earthworks' as was coined to describe projects which have previously been known as 'installations'. The deconstruction of constraint is further purported to have evolved to take form as installations that had previously been termed 'earthworks' to then be titled 'installations' simply because the inscriptions and objects of making were brought from the environment to the inside.

A tireless advocate for the retention of sculptural works placed into environments that act as adhesive for 'inside' to the 'outside' (understood to be that of public thoroughfare) is Ratimir (Ron) Gomboc of Gomboc Gallery, Middle Swan, Western Australia. Ratimir states that the removal of works to simply cater for the 'greeds' of the corporate or local government sector, are tantamount to emotive criminality, sheer torture to the spiritual sole of the individual and the community.

On numerous occasions in conversation with Gomboc in May 2002, the issue that 'public art' is constantly severed from the visual and tactile avenues of the Western Australian urban, city and rural communities can be considered rash and in many cases morally corrupt. The 'public' Gomboc argues in *Cultural Memories: Emotional Graveyards* (2000) directed by the Author, are in fact the private cultural memories that each and every individual carries on in thought, irrespective of race, gender, religion or Creed.

Ratimir is quick to express disgust and contempt for the elected underwriters who instigate the removal of highly realized works that challenge and provoke discussion and personal reflection in the broader community. Innumerable artists' names are inscribed on the consciousness of the Western Australian public flowed forth in a eulogy between interviewer and interviewee.

The visual, audible and tactile qualities of works which capture imagination, mood and ultimately evoke emotion are Gomboc believes best left for the ravages of the natural environment to strip clean, lest the catacombs for sculptural public art resemble the fields that surround the Gomboc Gallery buildings.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to draw together ideas and opinions differing considerably excepting in one key area; that of the artist as a visualiser, a powerful individual stretched between the whims of the economically jaded and the need to make our living environments ... living spaces.

"... The Artist is a visualiser' who can interpret what others want and do not want ... the involvement of an artist in a design team may not necessarily result in the production of a work of art" Newmarch, A. (1995 p. 22)

Various authors who have been quoted provide context and become the basis for theoretical maxims that flow through healthy debate. It is obvious though that the various language shifts and assemblage used to describe public and art concurrently are what make up this debate.

The complex and contentious area of Public Art makes for interesting research when considering the jolts in continuity it has experienced as a referenced term. Barrett-Lennard in his two articles provides the meal for which debates over the relevance for public art feed upon.

Interviews with differing individuals in the field seem only to substantiate his concerns almost a decade later. The transparency of disinterest and the rhetorical dust that floats from the fattened purses of the collective elite needs re-examining in order for the aesthetic to avoid becoming pathetic. Manipulation of public perception and reception has never before reached the zenith it now inhabits particularly with the advent of technologies that spread its ghosts.

If 'we' as the public are to try to embrace the concerns and woes of current practices in public art then 'we' also need to examine, record and share the instances where public art has effectively reached the individual and the public. Sadly though it appears that the homogenization of culture, the corporatisation of events and the lack of respect for cultural diversity means contemporary art practice including public art in Perth Western Australia will largely continue to alienate those it sought to involve.

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APPENDIX A

The following appendix has been prepared from electronic media submitted by Jude Van de Merwe of ArtSource WA, to the author as discussion notes only. It is important to note that these received were sent in the spirit of discussion and should be understood to be conversational reference in style only.

Reference to two articles written by John Barrett-Lennard entitled *The Impure Public* in *Australian Perspecta* (1991 p. 116-117) and *Of Outdoor Sites, Context and the Site Specific* in *Art & Text* (1992 p. 30-31) occurs throughout the submission. A series of questions fielded by the author in conjunction with the reading of these articles have been presented in chronological question and reply format.

A. John Barret-Lennard refers to almost immediately in his article *Of Outdoor Sites, Context and the Site Specific* (1991) to the 'art object' as having two differing facets which affect its 'place' - that of its display and that of its conceptual reference point. In your experience, is this factor (or difference) evident in works of public art that is featured in Perth Western Australia currently?

J. V. John's point about site and location of artworks is well made, in that in the early days of projects involving art in public places, there was a learning curve to be undertaken where artists needed to step out of studio practice and the themes that dominated their working life and learn new skills. There are now in WA some significant works where the artwork and the site are so thoroughly integrated that people often are not aware a work of art exists. A point in case is Nola Farman's work with *Tract Landscape Design* on the Claise Brook. That work talks about waterways and what is always under the ground in terms of history and geography. The work ensures that however we beautify, homogenize and re-order our surroundings, the landscape reasserts its own history. In this instance the display of the work and reference to its surroundings are melded.

A. The art gallery or in this case 'museum' has been referred to as a homogenizing or neutral space for the display of the portable art object. Has the trend to engage with other structures and move away from the perceived limiting environment of the museum, evolved to that of the art object simply being transposed or placed in differing sites and then referred to as 'public art'?

J. V. There are a number of cases where 'plop art' has been inflicted on an unsuspecting public with unfortunate results. In fact, the older style of commissioning was simply to go [to] the artists studio or gallery, select something that fitted a set of criteria and a budget and bang it in. There are however, significant instances where good 'plop art' have made ordinary areas into memorable spaces. An important work by Akio Makigawa purchased from an

exhibition by the City of Melbourne has found a place that it almost seems to have been born to. The skill of course lies in having a curatorial staff with imagination and flair who can visualize spaces and find a visual match within an artists' body of work " .

A. Do you agree with the assertion that the term 'public art' or 'public art space' has essentially been used as a rhetorical device only essentially failing to link art with that of everyday life? Why?

J. V. The term 'public art' is uniformly horrible reminiscent of public conveniences. We seem unable to generate expressions that accurately express the real differences that artwork can make to spaces and places. Like any field of endeavor, there are artisans', artists and then there are great artists. The moment when a [public] work or otherwise enters our psyche, touches us deeply and stays forever is rare and rightly so. To expect every piece of work in the public domain to achieve that is asking far more than we would of a clutch full of galleries or Architects. Just as some commissioners of art in public spaces have gone to inordinate lengths to commission works that bring a special something to a site, others have treated the process as badge making. It is impractical and a disservice to generalize individual processes. The great magic and mystery of a truly iconic artwork is surely that it can never be totally planned. A conjunction of idea, ability, site, society, history and some other special ingredient will always be required to bring through that exceptional piece of resonating artwork.

A. John Barrett-Lennard, in both articles, makes reference to artworks becoming isolated, meaningless and 'mute' due to the failure of (project management) the Artist or the funding bodies to adequately address context, site, location and display as governing forces for the artworks' relevance. Can you recall any instances where the above issues were evident?

J.V. I think that everyone who has been involved in the processes of observing new public art over the past decade has examples of artworks and processes that have gone awry. A significant factor, overlooked by Barrett-Lennard, in his comments, is the role of the client or commissioner in the process. In more cases than not, the client is commissioning their first, and perhaps, only piece of public art. They tend to be relatively uninformed and come from a position of making a safe choice. By safe, mean one where the risk level is low and the proposed work conforms to previously understood notions of what 'art may be. To select work by an artist with a long track record who has designed something readily accessible can be an attractive option. Artists are looking for work, and commissions are not terribly thick on the ground. So to design something 'safe' is an attractive option for an artist with serious bills to pay.

A. How does ArtSource, a preferred provider for the Acquisition of Art and

Craft by the State Government of Western Australia, address the concerns John Barrett-Lennatd has for artwork that encompasses site specific or indeed 'public space' ?"

J.V. The task that faces ArtSource and indeed all art consultants working in the field of public art is to understand the client, assist them to stretch their understanding for what great public art can be and encourage them to take some risks. In looking at public art in many places around the world, I believe that Australia is doing fairly well. Horrors perpetrated on an unsuspecting public abound however sophisticated the city. Exceptional works by artists such as Stuart Green, Tony Jones, Nola Farman and Andrew Leslie to name only a very few can be enjoyed by people in WA. More importantly there are numbers of artists waiting in the wings whose work we have not yet been privileged to see in the public sector. The twin 'arts' of persuasion and advocacy are ones that Art Source strives to succeed in on a daily basis, is our primary field of endeavor and is likely to last for the foreseeable future.

Jude Van der Merwe
Manager, Artsource
20th May, 2002.

NOTES

Preface

1. It must be noted that these articles were published more than a decade ago and numerous publications since do in fact attempt to address the theoretical arguments present with reference to public arts.

Chapter 2

2. McDonalds, as a reference only in the context of this article is understood to be a registered, global franchise serving foodstuffs.

Chapter 2

3. Coke, as a reference only in the context of this article is understood to be a 'Cola' registered foodstuff distributed by the global franchise 'Coca

