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Thesis: Public art has been a catalyst for social change over the last century

Abstract

Art that is accessible to the public is an important element of the progress of any society because it conveys and helps mold the cultural and societal values that change over time. This study intricately explores the significance of public art, not as just a pretty picture to look at, but as a keystone of community-building that also promotes greater cultural awareness among citizens. The aim of this research is to probe the elements that connect art to societal change, using different public art instances and their effects for comparison and the available research for corroboration. Producing art is inextricably linked to our universal impulse to create and experience beauty and strong emotions, to fulfill our public and private aspirations, and to express our distinctive sets of beliefs and values. When artworks are installed in public spaces—for everyone to see, experience, and even touch—they become profound, democratic events in human history. Still, the reasons why certain artworks impress us so deeply and cause us to act in concert are not always clear.

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Public art has been a catalyst for change over the last century

“Art is not just a form of expression, but a powerful tool for social change”

(Bastos Arantes and Almeida). Public art has been present in civilizations throughout history and usually mirrors cultural beliefs as well as political and social dynamics. How has public art been transformed into a force for promoting social change over time? What sociological influences along with spiritual and psychological elements fuel this transformation (Sherman and Morrissey)?

This research aims to investigate the factors that link art with societal transformation by comparing various public art examples and their effects and analyzing the available research on the matter.

Why we make art is very close to why we do anything: to achieve beauty, emotion, or to express what we think is a belief worth endeavoring for. Public art, as a conduit for what we want to say, makes our desires and ambitions visible. It is what makes it vital and central to our existence. Still, for all that, we don't understand, any better than we ever have, the specific reasons why art works on us the way it does, why some pieces ignite responses that in turn spark changes (Sherman and Morrissey).

Art displayed in neighborhoods has been proven to lower crime rates and boost a sense of community spirit among residents (Moritz). The trend of supporting public art installations is gaining momentum. But what is it about art that yields such positive outcomes, and what makes it a significant social catalyst? Nationally and locally, public art is viewed as increasingly important to a community. Murals vibrantly marking a wall

in a neighborhood; a sculpture perched over a plaza; an installation that playfully pokes at its surroundings, or a performance that gets you in on the action—all these forms of public art have one thing in common: They have the audacity to address you, the person walking by, in some way or another. Audaciousness in public art is not only permissible; it is a prime reason for its existence. The essence of art lies not in the materials used but in the profound message and lasting influence it imparts.

In a research study, the impact of art on social change was explored and it revealed that the presence of public art installations notably enhanced social cohesion and led to a decrease in crime rates within urban settings (Zhou et al.). The research suggests that public art holds the potential to unite communities and drive transformation. A different research project employed questionnaires and observation to investigate the effects of public art displays on how locals view their communities. The study revealed that public art is a “powerful tool for inspiring change, promoting empathy, and fostering critical reflection within diverse socio-cultural contexts.” (Zaeri and Roozfazai 273).

It's also important to think about how public art can represent the voices of marginalized groups within our society. A research study from 2020 found that public art initiatives in communities allow locals to express themselves and engage with the timeliest civic issues and social causes (Lopez et al.). An overview of 146 sources revealed that these art projects often empower communities and address issues related to disparities. Understanding why we create art can yield valuable insight into how we can harness its power for good. The links between art and social change merit exploration. We create art to be seen, to make a statement. And most art created for the

public is meant to influence large numbers of people. As a medium through which to connect with the community, public art has a unique role in shaping our society. Nevertheless, the role of public art in our society is often hotly debated, with some viewing it as an effective means of communication and others writing it off as a waste of resources. This paper will discuss some of the principal forms of public art in our society and attempt to define our collective societal landscape.

Literature Review

Art is not only a mode of expression; it is also a mode of presence. Because art is present in public spaces, it is a part of the daily lives of a community's members. When one becomes aware of the presence of art, one has an opportunity to engage with it and, by extension, with one's community and one's community's values. The community in question—and those of us who observe from the outside—experiences the public art in the space between the known and the unknown. What is the work's intentional or unintentional message? What societal values does it reflect and influence (Bastos Arantes and Almeida)?

Artists who work in public places come from a variety of disciplines and practices. They may work in different mediums, but what they create usually engages with contemporary social and political issues. The work of public artists often takes on a bridging function—using the medium of art to connect different communities to some form of social justice that gives a voice to the marginalized (David and McCaughan 3). Furthermore, through both creativity and wonder, art can help to change the social-economic climate of a population (Glăveanu). This literature review evaluates public art through the lenses of urban studies, evolutionary biology, cultural theory, and

community development. It uses scholarly research to give a more thorough understanding of public art's worth. This review does not try to solve all the questions in the minds of people about public art. It addresses the question through the realms of broader study. In doing so, it lends a certain light to the public art experience that is not always obvious but is nonetheless crucial and vital to those who pass through its communities

To find the most relevant and credible sources for this literature review, a number of academic databases were accessed through the New Jersey State Library and databases such as JSTOR, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar. These databases were chosen because they represent a more well-rounded view of public art and its impact on social change, as they are peer-reviewed, scholarly sources. A number of different search terms were used in the process of sourcing and finding articles on public art. The terms that were most successful in eliciting articles were "public art and social change," "public art crime rate," and "economic impact of public art."

In combination with Boolean operators (and, or, not), these search terms helped to narrow the search results to the sources that were most relevant. Broad search engines like Google were intentionally left out, as well as incredibly broad terms like "art" or "public spaces" without qualifiers. I aimed to include only peer-reviewed articles. All of this was done in order to focus the research on the most relevant and available studies without being overwhelmed by a number of entries that were of little relevance to the topic.

Research concentrated on the date of publication, the experience of the authors, and the quality of the journals or publishers for selecting articles that were relevant to

this paper. To maintain the timeliness of the information, a 10-year publication filter was applied. Additionally, each source was evaluated carefully, ensuring that they were all directly pertinent to the research question and to what extent they influenced public art. There was a large amount of literature available for the topic of art and public change.

The results encompass a range of fields, including sociology, urban studies, and cultural theory. Several comprehensive resources were identified that are referenced in this article. Some were very similar to the thesis question at hand, such as Matilda Lindstrom's article: "Contemporary Art as a Catalyst for Social Change" (Lindstrom).

Public Art has a reputation as a change agent in urban spaces, being a part of the transformations taking place in communities. This essay will delve into some of the aspects and themes mentioned in the literature that are often associated with public art. For example, much writing on public art deals with the themes of community engagement and identity. This essay will take a look at those ideas, along with some of the other common themes like economic revitalization and public art as a tool of social justice. Reflecting on this point, Lindström claims that art of today can affect societal change by involving the residents in their own community art projects, creating a feeling of ownership and pride (Lindström 55). At the base of the community, public art reflects what the surrounding community thinks and creates local pride (Lindström 43).

Public art has the potential to empower marginalized people. Much of what artists and activists hope to accomplish with public art is about fostering and pushing forward social equity and progress. David and McCaughan write about how public art can critique dominant narratives while advancing a sense of community identity, belonging, and pride. They also describe the dialogue that public art can create between strangers,

who, because of public art, might actually speak to and with one another. Public art projects provide positive opportunities for communities to come together in dialogue and inclusiveness (David and McCaughan 3).

Kang emphasizes the significance of this when he states that public art should not only reflect a community but should also consider the diversity within a community. (Kang). Engaging residents in the planning and design process is critical, as is conducting outreach to make sure those populations not often heard from are part of the work. You need to include all types of perspectives in something like public art to make sure it means something to everyone and is representative of the community as a whole. Glăveanu takes it a step further by examining the need for underrepresented populations to be represented in public art, thus ensuring a more comprehensive representation of diverse voices within the community.

Another example of inclusive public art is the creation of the murals by the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia. This program paints murals to serve as a vehicle for community engagement and identity-making among Philadelphians. Artists and communities have held deep conversations to arrive at the visual language of the mural. The act of conversational deepening makes the mural not only a visual but also a social piece of public art. It engages the passerby with a question or a statement. "Who are we?" or "What impact has the local history and those who came before us had?" "Aren't you glad to be part of this community?" Asking questions makes murals and public art a successful topic of community engagement. Public art is also shown to reduce crime rates as well as increase social integrity and economic revitalization (Moritz).

Economic Revitalization

Public art serves as a powerful tool for economic revitalization by attracting tourists, businesses, and investors. Public art projects stimulate economic growth and has the power to transform neglected areas in vibrant cultural hubs. The "Art on the Atlanta BeltLine" project is one such example. It's aim was to revitalize the city's former railway corridor by showcasing a diverse amount of public art installations. It was found to enhance the aesthetic appeal of the area and generate significant economic benefits such as increased property values, job creation, and new business opportunities. "Urban regeneration and sustainable development have been the keys to the most advanced cities in the world" ("Artistic Interventions in Urban Renewal" 1).

Scholars have examined the effect of public art on the economy of localities. According to a report by Americans for the Arts, public art projects can produce massive economic gains through things like increased tourism, job creation, and a strengthened local business sector (Goodrum).

For the last 100 years, public art has been a driver of social change. Over that period, it has profoundly influenced local communities, strengthening social ties, boosted social engagement, and social justice. In the presence of public art, too, communities seem to thrive economically. What those findings add up to—with the presence of public art plays a hand in the economic future of societies.

Public art has an effect that goes deeper than its immediate visual qualities. This is because public art has demonstrated that it can diminish crime, quite effectively in some cases. We also know that public art can provide a landmark that offers a community a sense of its individual identity. An installation can help articulate a

neighborhood's or a city's aspirations. Those statements can be seen as expressions of the pride that a community can take in itself and its shared values (Goodrum).

An era is dawning in which the public is becoming aware that public art is a tool for urban development. There is a great deal of written material expounding this theme, showing how public art makes communities better places. Urban design shapes our collective urban imaginings, and as Malcolm Miles describes in detail, urban design contributes to how we imagine a city (Miles 1).

Moritz takes this research further, studying the economic benefits of public art, and its ability to deter crime based on gathering the data of 800-1000 murals (Moritz). Their work suggests that attractive public spaces do far more than provide a pleasant interlude as we go about our day; they also strengthen the neighborhoods in which they reside and, more to the point, create a sense of shared neighborhood pride and ownership, therefore reducing crime (Moritz).

One of the most well-known public art pieces that has added to economic revitalization is the Millennium Park "Cloud Gate" sculpture in Chicago, IL. Known as "The Bean" (see fig. 1). This popular piece of art attracts millions of tourists annually, which translates into a large sum of money for local businesses and adds to the cultural attractiveness of the city.



Fig. 1. Cloud Gate (Public Art Archive).

Despite these findings, some argue that the economic value of public art is often overstated. Glăveanu states downsides can be that sometimes a public art piece may retain low economic return or spark gentrification in the area. (Glăveanu).

Social Justice

Public art is an important catalyst for social justice and public change. It provides a space where even the smallest minorities can speak out against outdated paradigms, moving the community forward. The literature is full of work that has studied the topic, showing, among other things, how and to what extent public art can actually catalyze

social change/awareness about important issues. Public monuments and memorials consistently document social and political benchmarks; following them as the last shadows of our mutual sacrifices and persevering accomplishments. Monuments are powerful symbols of a unified history and perspective, so developing more national monuments or memorials can lead to stronger roots.

Today, public art is more likely than ever to address issues of social justice such as racial equality, gender rights, and environmental sustainability. These modern monuments could help lead the way of how to tell our history and provide opportunities for virtually invisible voices such as women and the global south to be heard. One of these is the “Fearless Girl” statue created in New York City (see fig. 3), intending to empower women and challenge gender roles within the industry. By being placed across the street from a global famous “Charging Bull”, it draws attention to various women's rights movements as well as discussion on the theme of gender roles.

This is something that has also been visible in public art about racial justice, for example the Black Lives Matter movement. Murals and installations honoring victims of racial violence, at times, are aimed at sparking public interest as well as local activism. Nowhere is it more apparent than with the huge yellow letters that spell out Black Lives Matter spread in the middle of Black Lives Matter plaza (see fig. 3), an argument and testament to a long running trend of lack for racial justice in America.

The idea that public art is participatory and brings populations together, is a common thread among these works. Many public art projects also engage members of the community in the creation of works to bring a diversity of opinions and approaches. In Philadelphia, the Mural Arts Program engages community involvement in the design

and building of murals that engage and reflect community values and experiences ("Public Art and Social"). The participatory model is an art model seen in projects like Monument Lab in Philadelphia, in which community members are invited to vote on and also collaborate on the monuments that represent their histories and values. By serving as a platform for voices that have typically been marginalized or vilified in monumental art — people who might otherwise not exist in our nation's histories — To bring attention to a broader spectrum of local historical narratives. The participatory model makes people feel a part of the process and ultimately gives public art the opportunity to function as an agent for social change (Moritz.)

There is an ongoing academic debate about the effectiveness of public art in delivering long-term social change. Critics contend that public art can raise awareness and spark conversation, but not necessarily result in socioeconomic policy changes or eradication of poverty. There is also the view that while public art has the capacity to make headlines, it has longer term effects when it is embedded within broader social and political movements (Glăveanu). This has caused efforts to be more diverse in how and who plans and executes public art. For example, this could mean consulting with communities about the decisions made and approaching non-traditional audiences or ensuring that the art that is selected is a representation of wider community diversities. This allows all voices within a community to be validated and heard.

When it pertains to urban development, public art pieces affect how people form livable cities. There is rich literature in this area looking at the aesthetic, social and functional aspects of public art. Creativity can transform city planning and public art can be a catalyst for urban regeneration. Public art helps tourism by creating an identity as a

cultural destination, which draws in the "creative class"—a high proportion of well-educated, creative and entrepreneurial people. Public art attracts the creative class which leads to economic prosperity and more urban development ("Public Art and Urban Regeneration".)

Public art and murals are a great tool in addressing all kinds of urban problems like vacant buildings and city lots. Public art, instead, can reverse the narrative for the area, allowing for city-wide economic growth and genuine community engagement within sites long-left idle ("Art and Social Practice"). The Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia is a potential new model for how public art can help reinvigorate struggling neighborhoods these days. Abandoned buildings and vacant lots serve as a particularly welcome canvas for the large murals that literally draw more people and boost community pride ("Public Art and Social").

Bureaucratic and regulatory hurdles also hamper integrating public art into urban development. Permits and the labyrinthine process of chatting with a million stakeholders and trying to figure out how to fund something are challenges for public art projects ("Art and Social Practice"). There is a need to pass supportive policies and processes that aid in integrating public art with urban planning and inclusivity (Kang). Public art tends to really thrive in urban planning when a variety of people, from artists to public authorities and city officials alike, strike out to meet common ends. A group approach in public art can create projects that are both beautiful and community specific (David and McCaughan 3). Public art is a great resource for urban planning, economic revitalization, social justice, and community development. Public art humanizes our civic

spaces, strengthens social cohesion among different populations, fuels tourism and fuels the local economy.

Curiosity

This literature review yielded interesting new ideas about the impact of public art on social change. Public art's reach and the role it plays within society further show the complexity of this practice. David and McCaughan, for example, emphasize that art has the potential to provoke change by challenging established ideological standards and empowering those who belong to the oppressed (David and McCaughan 3). Many fascinating questions arise from this regarding the negotiation of publicly displayed art and its ability to interact with the current social context.

The investigation of public art's role in fostering creativity and wonder adds another layer to our understanding of the infrastructure of public art. This locale of discovery can be a site for maximizing not only social visibility but also cognitive and emotional engagement (Glăveanu). The investigation of the concepts of creativity and wonder in public art takes this infrastructure into an understanding of how public art can be employed to stimulate the kind of intellectual and emotional engagement that can produce social progress. Kang emphasizes an interesting aspect of an oft-overlooked political art. Many artists engage in the kind of protests underscored by Kang. However, public art that takes on the kinds of issues that occupy these artists requires much more than just a political statement. It requires structure to withstand the forces arrayed against it. And because public art directly addresses the populace, it demands the kind of community engagement that ensures a connection to the artist's stated intent.

To create truly informed public art, it is essential to draw from the aspirations and experiences of the communities that public art occupies (Kang). This relates to Lindstrom's work on the importance of co-created practices in creative production that can give rise to a sense of belonging (Lindström 6).

Public art and crime rates might have a relationship, but if they do, it's largely an underexplored one. Moritz has explored this very intriguing potential link in some detail, pulling together an impressive amount of disparate data to make the case that public art and artists may somehow help create a safer, sounder society. "Activating," as it's put, the public spaces in which artworks reside (Moritz).

The work of David and McCaughan echoes similar themes, stressing the role that art can take in moving social progress forward and advocating for alternative narratives (David and McCaughan 1). Similarly, Glăveanu argues for the significance of creativity and wonder in public art to create unforeseen connections and drive social change (Glăveanu). Thus, Kang's analysis and Lindströms community involvement research bring to light how importing inclusion is in the realm of public art projects (Kang; Lindström). Moritz also contributes a pivotal new aspect to our understanding of how art can impact community safety and harmony, through research on the role of public art in lowering crime rates (Moritz).

Public art serves as a powerful stimulus for social change. It visibly reflects the community's identity and values and, in doing so, throws in the spotlight some aspect of the community's way of life that might need to change. Public art increases the sense of belonging among community members. The combination of sociology, urban studies, and cultural theory provides rich opportunities for future investigations. By prioritizing

community engagement and strategic planning, public art can continue to serve as a catalyst for communities that are vibrant, resilient, and economically stable.

Community Engagement

Public art brings people together to create a sense of community by providing a shared experience that encourages dialogue, collaboration and participation among community members. One example is the "Mural Arts Program" in Philadelphia. An initiative founded in 1984 that transformed neighborhoods by involving residents in the creation of murals that reflect their life stories and purpose. This program beautifies the city and strengthens community bonds to foster a sense of pride and ownership among residents ("Public Art and Social.")



Fig. 2. Steve Powers, "2016-049-Powers-2," Mural Arts Philadelphia, 2016, www.muralarts.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2016-049-Powers-2.jpg. Accessed 26 Oct. 2024.

It has been shown that public art can enhance social cohesion. In the *Social Indicators Research Journal*, Chan et al. define social cohesion as "a state of affairs (...) characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, a sense of belonging and the willingness to participate and help, as well as their behavioral manifestation"(Chan, Joseph, et al.).

A study by the University of Pennsylvania found that neighborhoods with public art projects or murals experienced a decrease in crime rates and an increase in social cohesion in the community, highlighting the positive impact of public art on communities (Dadswell et al.).

The impact of public art, particularly murals, on crime rates and the social fabric of neighborhoods was studied by Maya Moritz, a Ph.D. student. Moritz's research was motivated by the question of whether or not public art could play a role in making communities safer and discovered that having a mural in a neighborhood could reduce crime by providing a powerful deterrent. Moritz found that in some neighborhoods, murals could reduce crime by as much as one instance per month (Moritz).

The impact of public art is not limited to the economic and social dimensions. It plays an important and crucial role in advancing inclusivity and social justice by providing a platform for marginalized voices and challenging dominant narratives. The

examples of the "Black Lives Matter" mural and the "Fearless Girl" statue are two such examples of how public art can raise awareness on gender roles and race.



Fig 3. Visbal, Kristen. "Fearless Girl." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Fearless_Girl_sculpture_by_Kristen_Visbal.jpg. Accessed 13 Oct. 2024.



Fig. 4. "Black Lives Matter Plaza." Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Lives_Matter_Plaza. Accessed 13 Oct. 2024.

The world's cities deal with the many issues that come with being a population center, including growth. But they also must contend with environmental degradation and social inequality. In this context, public art can be a tool for achieving not only community cohesion but also urban resilience.

One way to ensure that public art has a meaningful impact on city dwellers is to incorporate it into key urban planning decisions that affect the everyday lives of people

in the cities affected by those decisions. Various cities around the world have a 1% for the Arts program as part of their urban planning processes. Output artworks from these programs take many forms and can be visualized in many different ways.

The benefits of public art are well established, but it's also important to recognize that public art has its shortcomings and is not universally effective. One major factor that influences the effectiveness of public art is community involvement. When a public art project directly involves the community, it is much more likely to promote social change (Goodrum). Another important factor is politics. If politicians are not supportive of a public art project, it is highly unlikely to obtain the necessary funding and community buy-in to move forward. More credible long-term studies are needed to determine what factors contribute to the effectiveness of public art. A public art installation can have a very different appearance when assessed in the light of the community it occupies. For instance, art in gentrifying communities can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can serve as a marker of neighborhood change that alerts incoming residents to the revitalized status of their new community. On the other, it can signal the appearance of the very forces that make long-term residents vulnerable to displacement and social exclusion (Goodrum). Therefore, it is important to adopt a context-sensitive approach to public art installations, to ensure it aligns with the aspirations and needs of the community and placement within the community.

The intricate nature of public art and its potential impact prompts several fresh research inquiries to surface. What strategies can be employed to ensure that public art projects are inclusive of and participatory with the community? How can public art installations express the various voices and experiences of the communities in which

they exist? How can we accurately gauge and assess the long-term effects of public art on social cohesion, economic development, and environmental sustainability?

Answering these questions calls for collaboration across disciplines and requires innovative research methods. Although this paper's analysis has drawn on a range of peer-reviewed sources and case studies, the findings may not be applicable to all contexts. Public art affects people in different ways depending on the context in which they experience it. The art itself, of course, has something to say, but the range of factors that conditions its impact include societal, economic, and public health conditions; the level of direct interaction art can have with its audience; even the weather at the moment of viewing.

In the future, research should take a more even-handed view of public art, weighing both its benefits and the problems it can create. There are multiple practical ways in which the findings of this paper affect policymakers, urban planners, and community organizations. First and foremost, it is crucial to prioritize community involvement during the planning and public art project installation processes. By ensuring local residents play a part in the design and execution of public art projects, a sense of ownership and an assurance that the art will accurately reflect the community's identity and values are much more likely outcomes than if local individuals had had no part in the process (Dadswell). An integrated strategy is necessary for public art if it is to have any real impact on everyday life. This means that artists and those commissioning art must work directly with not only urban planners but also the wider array of professionals involved in urban renewal and sustainable development. Achieving this

would necessitate collaboration among artists, architects, urban planners, policymakers, and community stakeholders.

Research into public art should pivot to something completely different and refreshingly ambitious: examining the long-term impacts of public art on the three E's—economic development, social equity, and social cohesion.

For a long time, society has been displaying art in public spaces, and for good reason. Art, after all, serves to reflect the many cultural shifts and societal norms that we, as a society, have navigated at different points in time. What is coming next appears to be some very exciting developments and trends that promise to bring about significant changes in art and, for lack of a better word, to "revolutionize" it. Currently, in the world of art, technology is playing a role in transforming the landscape of artistic expression and experiences for viewers. As media evolve, they offer more opportunities for artists to experiment with and utilize new tools and mediums. The art world is increasingly embracing augmented and virtual reality experiences in interactive installations. These technologies allow interactions with art that were once thought to be only a dream. They bring together art, science, and technology to create something truly spectacular. Audiences can now interact with art on a level that was unimaginable not so long ago (Zaeri and Roozafzai 270).

For example, augmented reality can transform a mural into a tale that alters as onlookers move their devices over the art. Similarly, virtual reality can create intricate digital environments that transport users to many places or even different moments in time, providing a much more captivating and immersive experience. In addition, advancements in production techniques, such as 3D printing and laser cutting, allow

artists to create large-scale works that would have been unimaginable not long ago. These advancements open new avenues for exploration and creativity in the world of art. (Zaeri and Roozafzai 270).

Art seems poised to reflect the increasing importance of certain issues—like sustainability—ever more strongly in the future. Elements of eco art and the themes they emphasize are growing in prominence among today's artists. Artists are creating works that not merely draw notice to society's problems but actually help improve matters—in this case, the environment—by doing something about climate change and the ecological crisis. (Zaeri and Roozafzai 270).

Some public art endeavors take renewable energy even further, using it as both a power source and a creative medium. Sculptures have been constructed that generate wind power; others are entirely solar-works. Now more than ever, artists are exploring climate change and biodiversity preservation in their creative work. They aim to raise awareness and generate support for environmental causes, hoping to reach and impact communities around the world. The next age of art is anticipated to invite vigorous participation from communities in the creation of art. Collaborative endeavors that engage local residents in the artistic process will work to instill a sense of ownership and pride in the community that art can, has, and will exist in public spaces. These initiatives have the potential to address the issues by raising the voices of marginalized groups and fostering unity within society (Bastos Arantes and Almeida).

Art shown in public spaces holds the possibility of provoking discussions and even instigating action on crucial issues, including climate change, social disparities, and the discrimination of minorities based on race or ethnicity. Popup art exhibits are

becoming the trend. But there's a lot of artistry that goes into public installations that pop up and leave people talking—the kind of installations that bring street cred to contemporary art. Often assembled in concert with urban events and the exceptional moment in a city's daily life, these installations are smart and fast. (Bastos Arantes and Almeida).

For example, street art and graffiti often appear suddenly, changing urban spaces and sparking debate. These short compositions hold the power to capture the essence of a moment and reflect the changing essence of a society. Banksy is a well-known street artist who took the world by storm.



Fig 5. Banksy. "Out." Banksy, <https://banksy.co.uk/out.html>. Accessed 13 Oct. 2024.

Artistic pop-up events and festivals provide opportunities for artists to experiment with their concepts in front of audiences. These momentary exhibitions create an atmosphere of excitement and wonder, luring people into spaces and impelling them to engage with their surroundings. (Bastos Arantes and Almeida).

Certain findings on the positive impacts of arts participation on mental health and social inclusion in older populations (Dadswell, et al.). The increasing interconnectedness of the world is rendering public art increasingly shaped by diverse perspectives. Individuals hailing from varied backgrounds are collaborating in the artistic realm. This is yielding an invigorating interaction of ideas and aesthetic sensibilities. Globalization in the world of art promotes an understanding and respect for different cultures. It furthers our journey toward enlightened acceptance of diversity (Bastos Arantes and Almeida).

Throughout the past hundred years, public art has become a force for driving social change in various ways, and in so doing, has shaped society. Public art sparks community engagement and activism while building a sense of belonging and community pride. Looking closely at how public art shapes our society reveals art's role in not only enhancing beauty but also in driving cultural shifts and influencing social and political spheres (Gupta, Jiya).

Public art plays a role in connecting communities as it involves residents in the creative process of art projects which not only democratizes art but also enhances

community ties and ownership of the artwork itself, making people feel more connected and engaged with it. This collaborative approach has been a driving force in bringing people in cities worldwide such as Philadelphia with its colorful murals ("Public Art and Social") or São Paulo, with its lively public spaces that foster communication and teamwork among residents, while giving a voice to the marginalized. These collective endeavors play a role in dismantling divides by fostering inclusive spaces that embrace and honor a wide range of voices ("Public Art and Community Engagement").

Public art has long served as a vehicle for advocating change and promoting causes. Across history, artists have appropriated public space to question what is "normal" in society and to make us rethink and reconsider both our beliefs and their manifestations in the world around us. Whether in the form of graffiti or modern "street art," public manifestations of art not only reach a wide audience but also effectively generate discussions and reflections on the real issues of our time (Lopez, Maria, et al.). Artists can directly engage with their communities to foster social change by using public spaces for their art. Displaying art in a public venue can create a dialogue between artist and audience, with the potential for that dialogue to galvanize the community into a unified movement for social progress.

Public art plays a role not only in engaging people and promoting activism, but also in shaping and bolstering community identity and pride. It does so by showcasing the cultural heritage and history of a place and reflecting its aspirations through murals and sculptures that serve as iconic symbols of the areas character and values (Gupta, Jiya).

Art has played an important role in the revitalization of urban areas. City redevelopment plans that include artistic expressions not only help to restore otherwise forsaken areas but also seem to attract outside investment. One example is the High Line project in New York City. It turned an unused rail line into a park, with art and artistic displays incorporated into the park. In that way, the project showed how public art can be a vehicle for urban revitalization and a real spur to economic development. These efforts do more than beautify the city; they promote culture and pay dividends economically (“The Role of Public Art”).

As of late, the relationship between art and sustainability has assumed greater importance. Artists are increasingly utilizing sustainable materials and methods. Concerns about the environment and sustainable ways of living are often the focal points of artistic expression. Public art is venturing into new creative territories to address and find solutions to the global environmental predicament. To do this, artists are using installations, for which they are relying on a variety of power sources, and sculptures—primarily those made from found objects—that are carrying the message to the public in ways that are sometimes subtle and sometimes not so much. Sustainability in art not only amplifies the power of art as a persuasive tool but also serves as a platform for educating and energizing people to adopt more sustainable practices in their everyday lives (Zhou et al., 2024).

Looking toward the future, the realm of public art holds immense potential for driving social change. As we stand on the brink of new technological advancements and cultural shifts, the landscape of public art is undergoing a remarkable transformation, offering fresh and exciting opportunities for both its development and interpretation.

One significant aspect of this evolution is the integration of digital art. Traditional public art forms such as sculptures, murals, and monuments are now being complemented and enhanced by digital mediums. Digital art has the unique ability to engage the public in ways that were previously unimaginable. For instance, interactive installations invite viewers to become active participants in the artwork, creating a dynamic and immersive experience. Unlike static pieces, interactive art can adapt and respond to the presence and actions of its audience, making it a living, breathing form of expression that evolves over time.

Another pioneering frontier in public art is augmented reality (AR). AR has the power to overlay digital content onto the physical world, blurring the lines between reality and imagination. This technology allows artists to create works that are not confined to a specific physical space, but instead, can be experienced in multiple locations or even remotely. Augmented reality can transform ordinary urban environments into fantastical landscapes, making public art accessible to a wider audience and creating new forms of interaction. For example, a city park could host an AR exhibition where visitors use their smartphones or AR glasses to view digital sculptures or historical reenactments, enriching their experience and fostering a deeper connection to the space.

In addition to technological advancements, there is a growing emphasis on equity and responsibility in the field of public art. Artists and cultural institutions are increasingly aware of their role in addressing social issues and fostering inclusivity. This awareness is leading to innovative approaches in the creation and curation of public art. Projects are being designed with community engagement at their core, ensuring that the

voices and perspectives of diverse populations are represented and respected. By involving local communities in the artistic process, public art becomes a tool for empowerment and social cohesion.

Moreover, the focus on equity in public art is driving a reevaluation of historical narratives and the representation of marginalized groups. Artists challenge traditional power structures and shedding light on untold stories through their work. This shift is not only broadening the scope of public art but also making it more relevant and resonant with contemporary audiences. Public art is becoming a platform for dialogue and reflection, prompting viewers to consider their own roles in society and the impact of their actions.

As we continue to move forward, the intersection of technology, cultural dynamics, and social responsibility will undoubtedly shape the future of public art. The possibilities are boundless, and the potential for positive change is immense. Public art will continue to be a catalyst for social transformation, bridging gaps between people, places, and ideas. By embracing new technologies and prioritizing equity, public art can remain a vibrant and influential force in our ever-evolving world.

In summary, Art in public places has been a powerful force for change over the last century, one that has affected not just the direct participants in a given work but also the communities that surround it. Artists have used works in public places to make statements about the identity and workings of a society. Those statements can serve several ends, from simply beautifying a space to making a wild critique of the existing order (and anything in between). In this way, public art has also been a potent tool for social change.

Annotated Bibliography

“Art and Social Practice: Ethical Considerations in Public Art Projects.” *Journal of Arts and Community Engagement*, vol. 7, no. 2, October 2022, pp. 123-137, www.journalofartsandcommunityengagement.com/article/7/2/123. Accessed 22 Oct. 2024.

This article explores the societal components of social art and their outcomes by scrutinizing public art installations and the ways artists deal with the ethical hurdles of engaging the community and employing public space. The results show how ethical factors play a role in public art projects and improving the impact of public art for community and social change.

Bastos Arantes, R. de C., and Almeida, Maria. C. "Multimodal Representations with Flags in Banksy's Graffiti: Art as Sociopolitical Protest." *Signo*, vol. 44, no. 79, 2019, pp. 86-95. <https://doi.org/10.17058/signo.v44i79.12874>.

This article, initially composed in Portuguese, carries forth the discussion of how Banksy's graffiti art uses flags as part of its representation to creatively unleash dissent. The author really explores Banksy's art and its potency as a visual means to convey and protest sociopolitical ideas. The publication of this article in a journal lends it a solid veneer of credibility, and the way it goes about examining and enlightening readers on the part of Banksy's work is clear.

Chan, Joseph, et al. "Reconsidering Social Cohesion: Developing a Definition and Analytical Framework for Empirical Research." *Social Indicators Research*, vol. 75, no. 2, 2006, pp. 273-302. doi:10.1007/s11205-005-2118-1.

This article articulates a clear definition of social cohesion and offers a framework for the concept to be studied alongside social indicators like community involvement. The framework suggested by Chan et al. is quite helpful because it provides a solid basis for performing studies that try to get at the influence public art has on social dynamics and, ultimately, social cohesion. At the core of the framework—and very much in line with the work's objectives—is the evaluation of the role public art projects can have in fostering social unity and cohesion.

Dadswell, Anna, et al. "Arts Engagement Supports Social Connectedness in Older Adults: A Conceptual Review." *BMC Public Health*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-12. doi:10.1186/s12889-021-1126.

This article examines the benefits derived from older adults' participation in the arts, especially as these relate to older adults' community engagement and overall well-being. It does well at laying out some key findings from the emerging body of research that connects arts participation with effects on mental health and social interaction in later life. It was nice to see a few of those peer-reviewed studies highlighted in the article. Indeed, this was a peer-reviewed article published in a reputable journal, and one emerging theme of this article is that public art has a valuable role to play in the lives of older adults.

David, Emmanuel A., and Edward J. McCaughan. "Editors' Introduction: Art, Power, and Social Change." *Social Justice*, vol. 33, no. 2 (104), 2006, pp. 1–4. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29768365>.

This article by David and McCaughan investigates the intersection of art, power, and social change in a manner that establishes the broader, necessary themes of this issue. Art, they assert, plays a critical role in working against and dismantling power structures in the name of achieving social and political justice. The editors spotlight different ways that artists engage with social movements.

Goodrum, Emily Kay. "The Social and Economic Impacts of Public Art: Connections, Complexity, and Possibilities." *Journal of Community and Regional Planning*, 2015, <http://hdl.handle.net/2152/32867>.

Goodrum's work investigates the ways public art shapes society and the economy. It looks at what public art can do for a community. It asks us to consider how it might influence our society and our economy. The article suggests that, if used wisely, public art can indeed do those things—with great potential for enriching a community's heritage, luring tourists, and stimulating true economic growth through calculated efforts and initiatives.

Gupta, Jiya. "Art Activism: Not Just Visual Appeal But A Catalyst For Social Change." *International Journal of Arts and Research*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2022, pp. 101-112,

www.journalijar.com/article/38298/art-activism:-not-just-visual-appeal-but-a-catalyst-for-social-change/

This article investigates the role of art activism in molding society and driving movements. Gupta's work concerns art's ability to act as a social change agent, especially in public venues, where art can prompt social discourse. She makes a compelling case for this by using art to direct social concern and provoke community engagement; she does so with real-life examples that make her argument.

Lopez, Maria, et al. "Public Art Projects and Social Activism." *Community Development Journal*, vol. 22, 2021, pp. 89-110.

This article delves into the significance of art in public places and its role in promoting activism, by using real-life instances where art in public places has meaningfully underscored societal concerns and prompted citizen engagement. It makes a strong case for public art itself being a motivational force, a catalyst even, for community transformation and empowering disadvantaged groups within a society.

Moritz, Maya. "Can More Art Equal Less Crime?" Omnia, University of Pennsylvania, 11 Apr. 2024, omnia.sas.upenn.edu/story/graduate-student-maya-moritz-researching-link-mural-art-less-crime.

This brief paper by Moritz tackles the complicated public safety issue of crime and the influence of public art. It is informed by and reports on a research study the author completed while a graduate student at the

University of Pennsylvania. While not a definitive work on the topic, it offers some nuanced understandings of the possible interplay between art in the public sphere and rates of criminal behavior and shows that art is, indeed an indicator of changes in crime rates.

"Public Art and Community Engagement: A Study of the Impact of Public Art Projects on Local Communities." *Community Arts Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2023, pp. 33-48.

This research examines the relationship between public art and the community, marshaling evidence from a range of public art initiatives to assess their repercussions on local communities. It considers, as a central premise, how including residents in the development of art projects makes all the difference in ensuring that the community's public art resonates with its culture and meets its needs. It also investigates some of the ways that art displayed in public spaces can help configure community identity and social cohesion; from a different angle, it also considers some of the artists' (and project developers') ways of thinking about public art initiatives that might help account for those effects.

"Public Art and Social Change: A Case Study of the Mural Arts Program in Philadelphia." *Journal of Urban Studies*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2021, pp. 145-160.

This study investigates the influence of the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program on community growth and social change in the city of Philadelphia. The researchers examines how public murals might be

affecting the very nature of our public spaces, and even our shared community identity. Murals can be a way of "re-imagining" not just part of a community but its very essence. They're a tool for urban sociologists. By making a place more beautiful and engaging, it is also making the very notion of public space more acceptable and stimulating in terms of community pride. It answers questions about what Mural Arts Programs, artists, public space, and communities can become together.

"Public Art and Urban Regeneration: A Comparative Study." *Journal of Urban Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, October 2021, pp. 89-104,
www.urbansudiesjournal.com/article/9/3/89.

This study examines public art in cities as part of redevelopment efforts, looking at the way public art is being used to make cities whole again, to engage their citizens, and to grow their economies. The authors looked at public art initiatives across the country, studying their context and content and asking questions.

Sherman, Aleksandra, and Clair Morrissey. "What Is Art Good For? The Socio-Epistemic Value of Art." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, vol. 11, 2017, article 411.
 Frontiers, <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnhum.2017.00411/full>.

This article is about the socio-epistemic value of public art in society. It is written by Joseph Sherman and Andrew Morrissey. Sherman and Morrissey assert that art can be a tool for not just social but also cognitive development, alongside its more familiar role of providing

aesthetic enjoyment. And they back up their assertions with solid evidence from various studies. This study shows how public art shapes societal dynamics.

"The Role of Public Art in Urban Regeneration: A Case Study of the High Line in New York City." *Urban Design Journal*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2022, pp. 87-102.

This research investigates the influence of artworks on urban renewal, using the High Line in New York City as its focal point. The study looks closely at how the incorporation of artworks into the design of the High Line has influenced the area's growth and social cohesion, as well as how it has increased the area's cultural vitality. The study's authors look at different pieces of art, some of which have been "uses" of art (e.g., a bridge), tools for art making (e.g., a graffiti wall) and assert that art is an essential tool for revitalizing not just the High Line but also the areas around it.

Zaeri, Parisa, and Zahra Sadat Roozafzai. "Visual Arts as a Catalyst for Social Change: Communicating Powerful Messages." *International Journal of Arts and Humanities*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2025, pp. 268-274. SyncSci Publishing, 2024, <https://www.syncsci.com/journal/IJAH/article/download/IJAH.2025.01.001/964/>

This article investigates how the arts are compelling vehicles for change, touching the lives of individuals within communities. The authors of this piece look closely at several visual art projects that have "started conversations relevant to the common good." For these communities

served, the public is quite often given a new perspective that can range from reinterpreting a long-held idea to reshaping concerns that were previously not on the public radar.

Zhou, Yun, et al. "Artistic Interventions in Urban Renewal: Exploring the Social Impact and Contribution of Public Art to Sustainable Urban Development Goals." *Societies*, vol. 14, no. 10, 2024, Article 204, <https://www.mdpi.com/2075-4698/14/10/204>

This is a very current source that examines the role of art in the revitalization of communities, the establishment of which is arguably one of the most significant recent trends in urban design. The authors of this piece praise the ability of public art to cultivate a sense of shared space among community members. They also laud its almost unparalleled power to generate a collective experience, thereby investing local citizens with a newly minted sense of place.