

Management of Aesthetic Intentions in Urban Design

- Artworks in Urban Public Space -

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ABSTRACT

After World War II, Japan experienced a great political and social shift, which brought a concern of emerging public landscape in urban development. This paper analyses the management of the aesthetic intentions in urban design effort. We reviewed the development of various public installation of artworks concerning urban landscape aesthetics through its administrative process in chronological order.

The monuments during the first decade marked a shift in emphasis from the militarism of the pre-war and wartime period to one of peace. However, some of the monuments and sculptures are not immune to controversy. This became an issue that could not be ignored by public officials whose responsibility was to place the sculptures while maintaining sensitivity to public opinion. As public administrators began to consider the possibility that sculptures may contribute to improving public amenities, the contextual concepts were basically ignored. Some of the programs in 1970s began to show more respect to the context, while other programs in this period expressed more interest in educational aspects of sculptures in the public spaces. Urban development projects also seek to introduce artworks integrated to their urban design concepts in 1990s.

Generally, the administrators responsible for these programs were rarely trained in any relative field study other than public administration. Installing sculptures tended to be considered as part of public works projects on the level of urban planning and construction. The general public is basically removed from participating in the critical decisions that actually impact their lives in relation to the artworks.

In conclusion, public art in Japan has unique social and historic background both in its advantages and disadvantages. Issues pertaining to art in public spaces have evolved over the decades as the term "sculpture pollution" began to appear by the mid 1990s. Most of the problems originated in either the lack of monumentality, contextual consideration, quality, or public participation. From another point of view, these programs played great roll in the development of modern Japanese sculpture and patronizing process, and the creation of new urban landscape with aesthetic value. In this sense, they must be considered as successful and noteworthy examples of cultural administration and urban design policy.

Key Words : Urban design, Public space, Art management, Outdoor sculpture, Public art

I. INTRODUCTION: RECONSTRUCTION OF MONUMENTS

The aftermath of the Second World War marked a new ground for the expression of art and its relationship to public in Japan. While public art was emerging in the United States through various public programs, similar civic projects were taking form in Japan as well. These were basically involved in the creation and installation of statues and monuments into the public realm. Unlike the general history of modern art in Japan, however, ideas and concepts of public art after World War II were quite different from the ones seen in the western countries.

Following World War II, militaristic sculptural expression, which had been only remaining statues in the public realm were removed or demolished under US occupation, simultaneously historic figures without militaristic background were being re-introduced.

Starting early 1950s, new kinds of statues were installed in the public places along with the traditional subject. Most of them are figurative



Figure 1. Asamori Okina, Peace, 1959

sculptures, such as Mother and Child (Figure 1) or other nude statues representing ordinary people. These sculptures are often entitled as Peace, Freedom, Family, or Construction, and represent essential values for human beings. The ideas of reconstruction, and democratic ideas, as their titles suggest, came to the fore, and more emphasis was placed on presenting new ideologies rather than artistic values. Although the ideologies they represent are different from those of the pre-war period, characteristics of their sites and the relationship to the context are similar.

During this period, a pattern emerges in the installation of sculptures that seems to follow three precepts: 1) the selection of the site, 2) the selection of artist(s), and 3) the production of the artwork. It was within these parameters, the artist operated. Thus, some of these sculptures subsequently played an important roll in the emergence of public spaces as impromptu landmarks and meeting places. It is true these are common characteristics of traditional statues. However, the new sculptural expressions marked a change in the social and political views of Japan.

II. SCULPTURES FOR THE URBAN BEAUTIFICATION DURING ECONOMIC RECOVERY

In the 1960s, the erection of monuments was still popular among local governments. A new program emerged to introduce sculptures into urban landscape that was less in accordance to a particular social context, earmarked by statuary of the period immediately following the war, and directed towards urban beautification.

1. Ube City

A pioneering administration in this field was

Ube City, on the western tip of mainland Japan. In 1958, The Ube City Park Department installed a plaster copy of 18th century French sculptor Etienne Maurice Falconet's *Bathing Woman* at Ube-Shinkawa station. This was clear break from tradition and can be seen as one of the first alternative approaches to improve the urban environment. The sculpture received an enthusiastic response from the citizens. This extraordinary move on the part of Ube city led to the idea of sculptures being installed into the urban landscape. Ube city formalized this process with the *Decorating City with Sculptures Program* of 1960. This was the first program of its type in Japan. Ube city set up guidelines which are as follows: first, the city organizes an open competition; secondly, participating artists submit mock-ups. The third stage, selected entrants produce sculpture subsequently exhibited to an open jury at the Contemporary Japanese Sculpture Exhibition at Tokiwa Park. Finally, award winning sculptures are purchased and installed at the suitable places in the city. It is of interest to note that winning competition sculptures are selected by the professionals from art world, and thus, rarely represent the public interest or social ideologies, but were seen as pure expressions of art. Most of the sculptures installed through this program were abstract form, and mark a radical departure in the way public art was selected and displayed in the public domain in Japan. (Figure 2) In this sense, a very different genre emerged moving away from traditional human figures to abstract and conceptual sculptures. Since then, biennial competitions and exhibitions have been held leading to the installation of more than 100 sculptures.

Now sculptures installed in public places played very different roll from that of monumental statues. It appears that sculptures began to be devoted

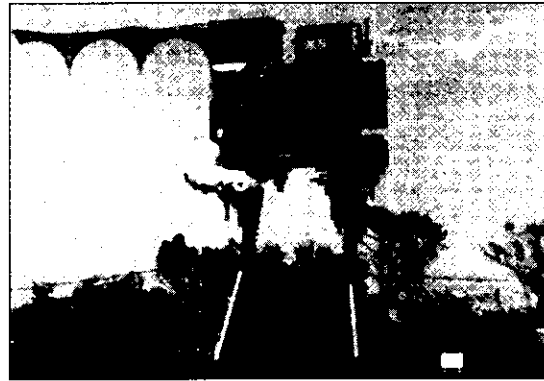


Figure 2. Ryokichi Mukai, *Castle of Ants*, 1962

towards the concept of urban beautification. It is interesting to note that at this time Ube city was grappling with serious environmental problems such as air pollution and urban sprawl. Community leaders realized that a new understanding between economic growth and environmental responsibility had to be borne and this program played a vital part.

2. Kobe City

In 1968, City of Kobe initiated its own program. Following the success of Ube, Kobe's program was started with similar intentions and related directly to city's tree planting campaign. Thus, the competition and exhibition emphasized the contributions to the urban landscape. Since then, Ube and Kobe municipalities have co-hosted an annual Contemporary Japanese Sculpture Competition and Exhibition on alternate years.

The innovative programs of both Ube and Kobe represent public interest concerning the negative effects of the uncontrolled industrialism during the economic recovery after WWII. As local administrations began to struggle with pressing environmental issues, they realized the importance of creating places within the urban context that enhanced social interaction as well as helped to beautify a blighted cityscape. The installing of

sculptures and planting of trees in the urban realm was considered an effective remedy for the environmentally challenged urban landscape. However, the installed sculptures rarely expressed the public interest, and they had no effect on mitigating the pollution problems.

During this period, the exhibitions organizers were more interested in the acquisition of as many sculptures for a small price rather than cultivating public support from the citizenry for their patronage of the artwork. For the artists, this process allowed one of the few opportunities to exhibit their works in the public. Yet, they tended to produce sculptures without any consideration to its context. On the other hand, while organizers wanted to acquire something that related to the urban landscape, artists followed their own vision. This contradiction between administrators and artists remained for decades, which were to derive from this initial idea, and were never fully reconciled.

III. OUTDOOR SCULPTURES AS A SYMBOL OF CIVILIZATION AND CONTRIBUTION FOR PUBLIC AMENITIES

Increased public interest of environmental issues in early 1970s, and the economic expansion led the general public to force local governments to pay more attention to public amenities. At the same time, local identity began to be reconsidered against the backdrop of economic progress and administrative centralization. Gradually local policy concerns shifted from those of purely economics to those of public amenities infused with a sense of place. Some of the municipal programs concerning local identity and urban design concepts were started during this period. The educational and cultural values of public sculptures began to be

realized as part of urban beautification, and programs became an integrated part of the local public works. Nagano city in 1973, Hachioji city in 1976, and Sendai city in 1977, all began to employ the concept of including public funds for public artworks. One exception is Yokohama City, which had started an advisory program. However, whereas the aforementioned cities relied on public financing, Yokohama city's was based on private sector.

1. Nagano City

The Nagano program has the following guidelines: first, select potential sites, and secondly, select suitable sculpture for the site from a list of ready-to-install artworks. Advantages of this procedure are threefold. First, there is no influence of the physical or mental state of the artist. Secondly, a close relationship between the sculpture and its potential site can be established. Thirdly, it is expedient in terms of the decision making process. The down side of this rationale was that listed ready-to-install sculptures were often produced for exhibition in the galleries or museums, and thus, most of them were relatively small and not suitable for outdoor installation. (Figure 3) The effectiveness of the installation greatly depends on the aesthetic coordination of administration officials and



Figure 3. Masamichi Yamamoto, Memory, 1977

contractors. Unfortunately, it was more than likely that the administrators had no educational backgrounds in aesthetic fields. In addition to this, another disadvantage is that it allowed for less public participation in the overall selection of sites and artworks. The major purpose of the Nagano program was to feature cultural elements in the urban landscape, and this inherently implies that administrators consider sculpture as a symbol of culture.

2. Sendai City

Sendai's program has the following process: first, site selection, secondly, artist selection, and thirdly, artwork production after an artist visits the site. The primary advantage of this process is that the artist has the opportunity to produce their work based on their site visit experience whereby considerations for the context become inherent. Installed artworks can be site specific, or at the very least, site adjusted. (Figure 4) Additionally, administrators exercise flexibility over the selection of the artist. Decisions at each stage of the installation procedure were published for public recognition of the artworks, but only after an



Figure 4. Churyo Sato, *Wind of Green*, 1977

administrative decision had been rendered.

3. Yokohama City

The City of Yokohama, while it did not have a publicly funded program during this period, introduced many sculptures that were attained through private sector funds. This process seems to have allowed Yokohama to attain a collection of sculptures of a widely diverse artistic expression, yet maintain a relationship to the overall urban design. During this period, most of the sculptures installed in Sendai and Yokohama were works of internationally renowned sculptors, including Auguste Rodin and Henry Moore. (Figure 5) One of the overriding effects of the processes of these programs is that it tended to reflect the public administrators' intention to avoid controversies on its selection and patronage for the artworks.



Figure 5. Auguste Rodin, *La Meditation*, 1977

4. Hachioji City

In 1976, Hachioji city introduced the Sculpture Symposium into the public works program. This was a unique program. While similar to those of other cities in the selection process of sites and artists, Hachioji broke new ground by increasing

public participation. This was done by holding sculpture seminars with the artists involved. This program is distinguished by its open procedure calling for public participation and interaction between the artist and the public. For the purposes of this program, involved artists were not necessarily renowned and administrators were only asked to provide local materials and places to work. It can be assumed that these guidelines gave the opportunity for the administrators to acquire many sculptures for a relatively small budget. The shortcoming of this, however, was that the artwork usually lacked diversity in material and form, and tended to be isolated from the context when installed in places other than where it was created. (Figure 6)

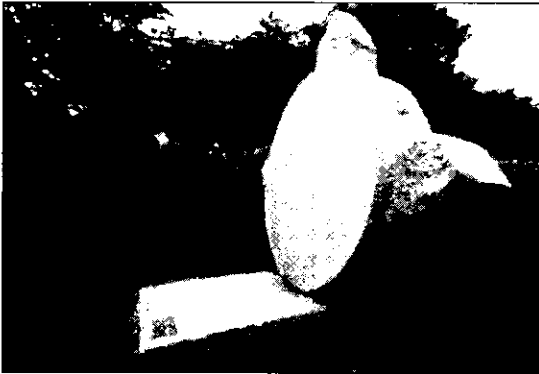


Figure 6. Ryosuke Kobayashi, Wind Festival, 1976

These programs, together with the Ube and Kobe programs represent typical attitudes towards public art programs in Japan. Subsequently these programs were adopted by many local governments all over the country during following decade as a model of successful cultural administration.

IV. EXPANSION OF PUBLIC ART PROGRAMS DURING GROWING BUBBLE ECONOMY

In the middle of the rapidly expanding economy

during 1980s, also known as the “Bubble Economy”, public art programs rapidly proliferated. Economic growth was the driving force that local governments used to assert more consideration of cultural administration as part of general public works projects. Many local governments followed the success of previously mentioned programs when instituting their own public arts programs. This is reflected by the tendency to establish similar administrative guidelines in the selection of artists and artworks. However, this is not to say that it was the only accepted model for public arts projects. During this period, a few but valuable attempts emerged seeking to rectify the shortcomings of preceding models.

1. Competitions

The cities of Hiroshima and Sanda both explored the Sendai program as a model for their own respective public arts projects. Both cities pragmatically approached the Sendai model yet each took different means to achieve similar ends. The Hiroshima city was one of the first municipalities to introduce a designated competition for the selection of artists. The essential guidelines are: first, select a site for sculpture, second, select artists for the designated competition, third, judge winner by mock-ups, fourth, produce full-scale sculptures, and fifth, install it. The advantages of such designated competitions are two fold. Initially the artist produces artwork for the specific site, much along similar lines first explored by Sendai’s program, and in addition, administrators reserve more choices on artworks for the selected sites. The Hiroshima program was one variation on the Sendai model that sought to remedy some of the inherent disadvantages of Sendai’s program. (Figure 7) However, at the same time, Hiroshima’s program created its own set of problems. Most notably the competition process restricted the selection of



Figure 7. Atsuo Okamoto and Masaaki Nishi, Form from Ground Zero, 1986

artists, it also required securing of budgets for all the competition entries. Whereas Hiroshima sought to place restrictions on the creative process, Sanda city introduced a program based on open competition for the selection of artist and artwork. The overwhelming response from the artists and community was enthusiastic. There are some other variations in procedures followed such as: the multiple selection of sites, either designated or open competition, and use of local materials which sought to represent locality.

2. Open-air Exhibitions

Another major stream of thought in this period was that of open-air exhibition, which followed the guidelines established by the models of Ube and Kobe, and would sometimes hold collaborative symposia as well. However, in the case of the Cities of Hagi and Obihiro, these programs ended up installing sculptures densely in the same location where the exhibition held. Thus, sculptures were rarely introduced to the urban landscape. Generally stated, municipalities could ignore the sensitive issues of context.

The programs described here are just a few examples that have sought to resolve apparent

disadvantages of earlier programs. Yet in the desire to rectify concerns many of these programs created a new set of problems. Moreover, most of the programs only followed the predecessors without resolving some of the inherent disadvantages. New experiments in public art and urban context did not appear until the 1990s.

V. ART PROJECTS INTEGRATED TO URBAN DESIGN STRATEGY

By the mid 1990s, new artworks in public spaces appeared within the urban context. Often published in books, newspapers, and magazines, these artworks became very popular and represented the emerging term “public art.” Japan had experienced the craze of public art until the Bubble burst and the economy rapidly declined. The Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUD) led this trend by introducing artworks into redevelopment projects. Parallels to the Japanese experience can be observed in similar projects in the United States most notably Battery Park City development in New York City. Two innovative projects completed in 1994 and 1995 highlight this fact. One is the Faret Tachikawa project, a Tokyo suburb, and another is Shinjuku I-Land project in the middle of Tokyo. (Figure 8)

These projects secured about 1 percent of the construction cost for the artwork acquisition, and artworks were introduced under the direction of art curators. The funding, artist selection, and relation of artwork to the context are similar to GSA projects or other municipal art programs in the United States. The only significant difference is, the whole process was directed by single curator who held virtual control over the decision making process. Thus, the character of the project relied heavily upon the curator’s predilections. Since then, HUD has



Figure 8. Hidetoshi Nagasawa, Pleiades, 1994

introduced artworks in most of their development projects accepting it as an obligatory rule. In this sense, HUD became de facto leader in the public art craze of 1990s. Following HUD's lead, many private and public projects followed suit in the waning days of the Bubble Economy. However, as economy declines, the private sector's interest in public art works disappeared as quickly as it had arrived.

VI. CONCLUSION: CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC ART PROGRAMS IN JAPAN

In conclusion, public art in Japan has unique social and historic background. The monument during the first decade marked a shift in emphasis from the militarism of the pre-war and wartime period to one of peace. This shift reflected the fundamental social and political change Japan experienced following its defeat. Mother and Child statues, characteristic figures during this period represented peace that has become an essential postwar ideology in Japan. Quite a few statues with the use of nude figures are installed during this period. Unlike mythic statues in the western world, these nudes represent ordinary people. This is not to say that some of the monuments and sculptures are

immune to controversy. In the 1990s, Japanese feminists voiced concern over the representation of the female body. This became an issue that could not be ignored by public officials whose responsibility was to place the sculptures while maintaining sensitivity to public opinion.

As public administrators began to consider the possibility that sculptures may contribute to improve public amenities the integration of landscape architectural concepts were basically ignored. Perhaps because of this a quantity over quality paradox developed. Open competition and exhibition model offered the opportunity to acquire more sculptures for less money, while meeting some of the longer term goals of the participating artists as well. Consequently, many sculptures without any relation or consideration to the context have been installed in the public spaces with such programs. In addition, art critics began to claim that artworks without monumentality or consideration to the context are preferable, since they believed such artworks could represent artists' intention more clearly. However, the lack of monumentality and contextual integration weakened the basis of public patronage for the artworks installed in the public spaces.

Some of the programs in 1970s show more respect to the context. Although these sculptures have some signs of contextual consideration, most of these sculptures are nothing more than site adjusted machination, and rarely site specific examples of an artistic mind. Site specific artworks were not usually considered with sculptures in public places program. Other programs in this period expressed more interest in educational aspects of public sculptures. Holding public events where people were invited to join the discussion were considered as important as the outcome of the event. It seems that by emphasizing public

participation over the outcome, while it achieves a certain level of enlightened public policy, unfortunately in most cases, it was to the detriment of art. A quality of unconsciousness in the artwork helped to produce unwanted works that were eventually installed in the public places.

Generally, municipalities and the administrators responsible for these programs were rarely trained in any relative field study other than public administration. Installing sculptures tended to be considered as part of public works projects on the level of urban planning and construction by those cultural administrators who sought physical evidence through this process. Often described as "cultural administrators" these government officials rarely expressed their interest in promoting social activism or the social process, but tended to represent bureaucratic legitimation. In addition, the general public is basically removed from participating in the critical decisions that actually impact their lives in relation to public art.

Issues pertaining to art in public spaces have evolved over the decades. Most of the problems originated in either the lack of monumentality, contextual consideration, quality, or public participation. It is interesting to note that some of the public controversies ceased and desisted as the economy spiralled downward. In turn, the once celebrated term "public art" seems to have rapidly decayed and declined. From another point of view, these programs helped to develop a unique category of art. Installed sculptures are clearly distinguishable from typical public artworks in the western countries. Installing more than 10,000 sculptures across the country, these programs have played great roll in the development of modern Japanese sculpture and patronizing process. In this sense, these programs must be considered as successful and noteworthy examples of cultural administration.

Today the installing of sculptures in public

spaces, initiated by local governments, is undoubtedly an outdated process. The lack of the diversity of Japanese public art often referred as public sculpture, which is unfortunate since in Japan we have no suitable term reserved to describe emerging new kinds of art in public places. But it must be viewed as a nascent and pioneering cultural administrative step. It is fair to say that the public art craze is gone, but the importance of art in the public context is still realized by local communities. Programs are constantly being modified to be more interactive to the public interest, and often this is initiated by the local community. It is exciting to see many experiments have just started, and these new streams will, by extension, contribute to the unique and unfolding history of public art.

NOTES

1. Art-in-Architecture program by General Services Administration and Art in Public Places Program by National Endowment of Arts (NEA) are among them.
2. Japan does not have nation wide program for installing artworks in the public places such as NEA's Art in Public Places program. Thus, most of programs were fully funded by the local governments or private sector.
3. Robert Irwin's definition applies here, that is, most of these artworks would be described as site adjusted
4. The term "public art" began to be popular during this period. Until then, artworks in the public places were often described as outdoor sculpture or open-air sculpture.
5. Some people prefer to use the term "art project" or "civic art," but we have not derived a definite term.

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