

# Public Art:

## A Placemaking Strategy for Destinations



*Public Art is a reflection of how we see the world – the artist's response to our time and place combined with our own sense of who we are.*  
- Association for Public Art<sup>2</sup>

Destinations today seek specific ways to convey their authenticity and distinguish their community from all others. Often, this process involves **public art** – including visual elements such as murals, sculpture, streetscaping, wayfinding, infrastructure (benches, signs, bridges) and parks – to showcase community values and define “personality of place.” *Whatever the form, public art instills meaning—a greater sense of identity and understandings of where we live, work, and visit—creating memorable experiences for all, residents and visitors alike.*<sup>1</sup>

**Key Considerations:** Public art can be expressed and shared in many different forms and formats. According to the Project for Public Spaces, “*the success of a work of public art relies heavily upon the design of the public space in which it is located.*” It also depends on how the art and site are maintained, for safety as well as aesthetics.

*Photos: Above: Jennifer Marman's and Daniel Borin's The Water Guardians, Toronto; Right: Ixia Tile Tacoma, public art installation for water fountain.*

How the space incorporates art and functions is also important. If design elements like benches are not provided, if pedestrian access is difficult, or the public art is not connected to or nearby other activities where people congregate, “the artwork will have failed as a placemaker and a community enhancement.”<sup>3</sup>

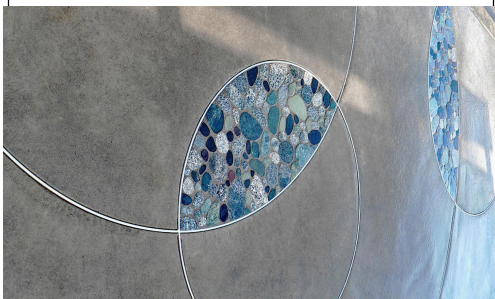


## The Benefits of Public Art:

Why do destinations install public art? The City of Toronto reports these positive impacts of public art:

- ✓ Creates landmarks throughout the city and **contributes to the identity and character** of neighborhoods and districts
- ✓ Has the ability to **boost economic development and tourism**
- ✓ Is recognized both nationally and internationally as a **significant tool for city building, economic development and beautification**
- ✓ Installations are recognized as **community benefits**
- ✓ Presents an opportunity to increase the profile of a development, **contributing to the identity and character of the community**
- ✓ May **increase property values** and create a destination for visitors who will contribute to the local economy.<sup>6</sup>

Photo Below: Bruce Myers; Above Right: Cité Mémoire – Projections of Montreal's History, montreal.for91days.com



Also, if public art is haphazardly placed, or not considered in the context of the destination's overall aesthetics and brand, the artwork may end up compromising design integrity and negate its intended purpose.

**Public Art as a Catalyst:** Good public art provides a foundation for the destination to grow activities that create a multi-use space for a variety of users – businesses, civic organizations, residents and visitors.

More recently, public art programs are part of a larger placemaking mentality. Arlington County, Virginia's policy "directs us to create exciting, appealing, and harmonious public spaces by integrating art into

architecture, urban design and the planning of infrastructure at the earliest design stage."<sup>3</sup> The Project for Public Spaces states, *"Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process to shape the public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution."*<sup>5</sup>



## Master Plan: A proven pathway to sustainable public art

Successful and award-winning public art programs are often built on a foundation of strong policies and a master plan to guide the process. Whether public art is installed in a year or over a decade, a master plan allows the destination to seek out and organize the appropriate types of public art to tell the destination's story and convey its core values. The master plan also outlines the

procedures for public engagement, development and management, funding, artist identification, approvals and permits, protocols for permanent or temporary art installations, placement criteria, and site selection. It also defines the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, and ownership, stewardship and maintenance of the artwork. Destinations with recognized public art programs use their master plans to ensure continuity of installations and design

integrity. The policies guide the work over the lifetime of the public art program; the plan provides proven instruction to leverage resources and realize desired results.

In its ***Community Guide to Creating Public Art***, the city of Tacoma recommends first defining the need and then establishing a vision for public art before getting started.<sup>1</sup> The needs assessment identifies potential locations and frames community issues/ priorities that could be helped by public art. After defining the need, a vision helps articulate the reasons for a public art program and conveys the definition of success. From this vision, the master plan (with well vetted strategies, goals and tactics) answers key questions, such as:

- What types of public art are most appropriate or desired?
- Are there preferred types of media (bronze, glass, textiles, etc.) to create public art?
- Where should public art be placed or utilized?
- What community values should be conveyed or reflected in public art?
- What stories, imagery, and symbols can be utilized to relate to your community and its unique cultural heritage?
- What are the desired outcomes or impacts from public art?
- Who needs to or should be involved in making public art?



Photo: Steel sculpture created by award winning public artist Andy Scott



*“Public art projects will be most effective when they are part of a larger, holistic, multidisciplinary approach to enlivening a city or neighborhood.”*

*- Cynthia Nikitin in “Collaborative, Creative Placemaking: Good Public Art Depends on Good Public Spaces”<sup>4</sup>*

*Photo left: Waterfront Murals in Paducah, KY*

### 10 Steps for Sustainable Public Art:

The destination – led by its policy makers and key community stakeholders – should follow **10 basic steps** to achieve a valued, sustainable public art program:

- 1 **Establish oversight:** Identify the lead fiscal agent, decision-making committee, and key stakeholders to involve (for permits, design review, maintenance, etc.) and confirm goals, scope of public art program, and schedule to keep on track.
- 2 **Decide what you want to create:** Using community forums to generate ideas, define the type of public art desired: gateway, wayfinding, decorative fences, mural, street furniture, pathways, sculpture, fountains, earthworks, sidewalk decorations, streetlights, etc.
- 3 **Select a Site(s):** Based on a community inventory, decide where the public art will make the most impact and help realize the vision.
- 4 **Define your Parameters:** Material and content specifications, themes and other guidelines will help direct the artist’s creativity to achieve the desired outcome(s).
- 5 **Determine the Budget:** Research costs of similar project – artist fees, installation and maintenance costs.
- 6 **Identify Funding Sources:** Government agencies, Arts Commissions, Neighborhood or Business Improvement Districts, public grants, private foundations, sponsorships (via business and service organizations), in-kind donations and individual donors that may be inclined to fund part or all of the public art project.
- 7 **Select an Artist(s):** Either hire an artist directly or distribute a “call to artists” (a competitive process to secure submissions for committee review). Schedule artist interviews, select finalists (to obtain more detailed drawings or model, budget and timeline) and identify preferred artist for each public art project.
- 8 **Hire the Artist(s):** Create a contract for signature to clarify all expectations.
- 9 **Define Project Management and Maintenance:** Outline the review and approval process for each phase of the public art creation: a) information gathering; b) conceptual phase; c) schematic phase; d) final design; e) completion/ installation; the role of the artist and approval committee should also be defined, plus the stewardship for future maintenance.
- 10 **Celebrate!** Plan and host a dedication ceremony to christen the new artwork, recognize partners and funders, credit the artist, and inform next phases of the public art program.<sup>8</sup>



## Conclusion

Public art, when considered and utilized as a destination design strategy, can serve as a catalyst to spark other forms of community and economic development. Public art also helps build brand awareness, often becoming an iconic landmark or “selfie spot” recognized by residents and visitors alike. Done well, public art visually expresses community values and acknowledges important cultural heritage themes for the destination as part of a placemaking strategy.

### White Paper Source Credits:

<sup>1</sup> Public Art 101, Americans for the Arts, <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/public-art>

<sup>2</sup> Association for Public Art, <http://www.associationforpublicart.org/what-is-public-art/>

<sup>3</sup> Kent, Fred and Nikitin, Cynthia, “Collaborative, Creative Placemaking: Good Public Art Depends on Good Public Spaces” (January 2012), article reproduced from Issue 45 of Public Art Review for Project for Public Spaces, <https://www.pps.org/article/collaborative-creative-placemaking-good-public-art-depends-on-good-public-spaces> (downloaded March 3, 2018)

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> What is Placemaking? Project for Public Spaces, <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>

<sup>6</sup> Toronto Arts Stats, 2016 downloaded March 2018 [http://www.torontoartsfoundation.org/tac/media/taf/Research/Toronto%20Arts%20Stats%202015/2016\\_Toronto\\_Arts-Stats-Booklet\\_public\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.torontoartsfoundation.org/tac/media/taf/Research/Toronto%20Arts%20Stats%202015/2016_Toronto_Arts-Stats-Booklet_public_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> “A Community Guide to Creating Public Art,” The Arts/Arts\_CommunityGuide.doc, TacomaCulture.org, downloaded March 2018) [http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/CEDD/TacomaCulture/arts/TA\\_PublicArt\\_CommunityGuide.pdf](http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/CEDD/TacomaCulture/arts/TA_PublicArt_CommunityGuide.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> “A Community Guide to Creating Public Art,” The Arts/Arts\_CommunityGuide.doc, TacomaCulture.org, downloaded March 2018, pp 7-20 [http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/CEDD/TacomaCulture/arts/TA\\_PublicArt\\_CommunityGuide.pdf](http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/CEDD/TacomaCulture/arts/TA_PublicArt_CommunityGuide.pdf)

*Photo Above: Temporary “wave of buckets” floods Mextropolis Architecture Festival in Mexico City (Credit: Design Boom)*



## Public Art Resources:

1. **Americans for the Arts:** Patricia Walsh, Public Art Programs Manager, <https://www.americansforthearts.org/by-topic/public-art>
2. **Association for Public Art:** <http://www.associationforpublicart.org/what-is-public-art/>
3. **Project for Public Spaces:** <https://www.pps.org/article/how-pps-drives-change>; Design and Review Criteria for Public Art: <https://www.pps.org/article/pubartdesign> (December 2008)
4. **Public Art Coalition of Southern California**, (PAC SoCal), <https://pacsocal.wordpress.com/>; Rebecca Ehemann, PAC SoCal Contact
5. **Community Guide to Public Art**, City of Tacoma (Washington) [http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/CEDD/TacomaCulture/arts/TA\\_PublicArt\\_CommunityGuide.pdf](http://cms.cityoftacoma.org/CEDD/TacomaCulture/arts/TA_PublicArt_CommunityGuide.pdf)
6. **“How to create award-winning public art”** by Angela A. Adams, Arlington County (Virginia) Public Art (August 2015), <https://blog.americansforthearts.org/2015/08/26/how-to-create-award-winning-public-art>; Public Arts Policy: <https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2013/12/public-art-policy.pdf>; Master Plan: <https://arlingtonva.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2013/12/public-Art-Master-Plan-.pdf>

White paper produced March 2018 by:

**HARGROVE**  
INTERNATIONAL, INC.