

# thinking the city acting the city

art in urban public space



BELFAST/BERLIN/ISTANBUL/LISBON/RAMALLAH/BEIRUT

edited by Rainer W. Ernst and Anke Müffelmann

thinking the city  
acting the city

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art in urban public space

One of the indicators in the transformation of societies is the attendant emergence of a “culture of the public”. Artistic interventions in urban public space continue to make their respective contributions to this culture through moments or processes that offer entertainment, prompt reflection and contemplation, stir the imagination, or evoke emotional engagement and association. Appropriate settings are often hard to find for such moments and processes, above all in present-day urban contexts, where public spaces tend to be occupied by traffic and advertising rather than offering a welcoming ambience to linger and spend time.

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## PREFACE

by *Rainer W. Ernst and Anke Müffelmann*

This publication was created as part of an EU collaborative project<sup>1</sup> that involved the participation of partner institutions from Belfast, Beirut, Berlin, Istanbul, Kiel, Lisbon, and Ramallah.<sup>2</sup> The project “art-based research / research-based art”, which in addition to this publication also included an exchange programme, an exhibition series in Lisbon, and a conference in Berlin, served as a framework for taking a closer look at the conditions of “art in public space”<sup>3</sup> from the point of view of the participating institutions within their relevant fields of activity.

The authors explore the possibilities and perspectives of artistically exploring, enhancing, or manipulating public space. Various contemporary communicative and research processes used by artists to explore specific city spaces are presented in six different urban cultural spaces. The comparison that this allows on the subject of “art in urban public space” is intended to illuminate the conditions for artistic interventions in the urban public spaces of the regions where these partner institutions are located. This taking stock considers aspects of urban development, explores the question of art concepts and aesthetic features, but also investigates the local context in terms of the respective implementation of a culture of the public.

Artistic projects in public space always provide a direct or indirect contribution to the development of social structures or give indications on the forma-

tion of a culture of the public. Reflection, contemplation, imagination, emotional contact, entertainment, association, and aesthetic formal language can inspire communicative moments and processes. Above all in the urban public context, it is often difficult for these moments and processes to find appropriate locations for various historical and political reasons. Artistic processes in public space that are effective in the sense of a culture of the public often explode the conventional limits of the classical art disciplines – for example through the use of modern media or performative and/or participative elements.

In this documentation, attention is first directed at the current state of art in public space in Europe. The conceptual focus is placed primarily on the cultural memory of the “city,” in which more or less significant historical events have left various traces, provide the stuff of narrative, or ground mystifications that are decoded, perceptible, and made visible.

To begin to approach possible differences within Europe, contemporary projects from Berlin (complemented with examples from Munich, Hamburg, and Kiel) and from three European cities (Belfast, Istanbul, and Lisbon) were compared (pages 17–154). These four contributions already show that the historically developed conditions and current socio-political issues in the city in question cannot be ignored when it comes to making differences understandable. The introductory text, “Art in Urban Public Space in Europe,” which contextualises the four articles from Belfast, Berlin, Istanbul, and Lisbon in terms of urban history, initially takes a European comparison (pages 8–16). The following two

articles, looking at Beirut and Ramallah, provide important complementary findings on the impact of current political conflicts and the conditions of art in public space in the Middle East (pages 155–176). The latter examples clearly show how charged, explosive, and life-threatening conflicts define themes and formats of art in public space and its possibilities of having an impact. But it is precisely in these contexts that there are also chances for a special effectiveness: This was important to us when it came to comparing the four European cities. In the text “Grasping Contexts”, which analyses the similarities and differences of all six examples, this is explored and evaluated in more detail (pages 192–203).

The experiences and conditions of art in public space are very different around the world. In light of the dynamic of globalisation, a trans-regional and/or an international and intercultural exchange on the subject seems urgently necessary with the goal of recognising differences, exchanging inspiration and experience, and promoting commitment to this field of work. The article “The Democratic Principle Embodied by Art Competitions” at the end of this book contains important and interesting experiences from Berlin, where it becomes clear how important the establishment of democratic procedures of awarding prizes is in this context (pages 178–191).

From the point of view of the editors, this differentiated engagement with “art in public space”, as the expansion of the classical division of tasks between art, design and society, is of special interest. This ultimately is significant when it comes to renegotiating the field of work in the regional context in question. The political dimension inherent to this field of

activities makes it possible to develop an additional sensitivity for cultural differences, particularly in projects of international cooperation. The thematic focus for the Muthesius Kunsthochschule is thus placed ultimately on discovering possibilities of communication, action, and comparison, despite all the methodological difficulties and challenges of such an undertaking.

- 1 Financed with funds from the programme EU Kultur 2007. See also <http://www.muthesius-kunsthochschule.de/de/netzwerk/radius-of-art/index.php>.
- 2 Initiated by Muthesius Kunsthochschule and Heinrich Böll Foundation Schleswig-Holstein; supported by Kiel's Amt für Kultur und Weiterbildung as part of the shared project office Radius of Art. Other partners include: Interface; University of Ulster (Belfast, Northern Ireland); International Academy of Art Palestine (Ramallah, Palestinian Autonomous Area); Maumaus Escola de Artes Visuais (Lisbon, Portugal); “98 Weeks” (Beirut, Lebanon); “5533” (Istanbul, Turkey); Büro für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum (Kulturwerk des bbk Berlin); Heinrich Böll Foundation Berlin, Beirut, and Ramallah; and the Goethe Institut Beirut.
- 3 By public space, we are referring not only to three-dimensional space, but also to social, economic, and cultural space – unused space, virtual space, temporary space, and institutional space.

## ART IN URBAN PUBLIC SPACE IN EUROPE –

Suggestions for a Representative Comparison

by *Rainer W. Ernst*

This title links five different concepts that in common perception are mostly applied in a very woolly sense – the result is that on repeated and multifarious occasions it requires all manner of laborious efforts to lend them some degree of conceptual clarity. In many cases, this clarification is sought to more forcefully assert exclusive status for concepts lying within one's own sphere of interest. In doing so, however, people tend to overlook that each of the five concepts listed here – art, public, urban, space, and Europe – only assume definition in relation to the subject of scrutiny, be it the moment in time, the context, the purpose of the examination, etc. The reason for this is that these concepts always make reference to highly complex issues. In other words, no single aspect or yardstick based on just one scale of measurement ever suffices to ascertain whether something is art or not, whether something can be considered public or not, and so on. This also means that these concepts are always used in either an expansive or a delimiting sense. They are conducive to controversy and misunderstanding, and are ideal for talking at cross purposes. The above labels, particularly in this combination, are also admirably suited to liberal-minded, tender-hearted, idealistic, socially critical, culturally pessimistic, and conspiracy-theoretical projections and presumptions. What a relief that “art” refuses to be hampered by such problems of definition. The woolliness in com-

mon perception described above compels us, on the one hand, to delve deeper into each respective relativisation. At the same time, this circumstance also offers a chance to review how far each concept can be expanded. For especially when the thematic realm charted by five such woolly concepts is subject to comparative and intercultural examination, a narrow definition of these concepts is more likely to be an impediment.

The representative range of artistic projects in the sampled urban contexts located on what somewhat ironically might be termed Europe's “periphery” (Belfast, Istanbul, Lisbon, and Berlin – even if Berlin is always said to be situated in the middle of Europe) and beyond (Beirut and Ramallah) that was required for this study to demonstrate striking differences, was not selected according to a common, narrowly defined set of criteria. Rather, the selected examples are intended to highlight possible distinctions. The key criterion was simply that each author's choice of examples should take into account their emblematic role within current discourse and how each chosen example is perceived in its local context. In performing this task, the authors were inevitably subject to the explicit influence of their respective disciplines and experiences. This was clear to us from the very outset, and is indicative of a methodological dilemma that in the course of the project became apparent but could not be offset. In pragmatic terms, the various inevitable aspects of chance in the choice of authors, the range of examples and their descriptions could only have been curtailed by undertaking a far more complex study that would have required the participation of multi-disciplinary representatives from each of the different case studies, the extensive

involvement of the different artists mentioned in each case, and various levels of discursive feedback. Hence, the outcome can only be a first impression coupled with a set of initially hypothetical comparative findings.

I would thus suggest that the five concepts be considered from a pragmatic perspective: “urban” is where some kind of municipal administration is in charge; “public space” consists of places more or less accessible to everyone; “Europe” comprises all the countries in the European Union and their radius of influence up to and including former colonies of these countries; and “art” is what is produced by artists and as such cannot be created through funding determined by market forces. Seen in these terms, the challenge still facing us is to scrutinise projects that have already been implemented as well as the further development of tasks and concepts for art in urban public space. Similar to how the progression from “art and architecture” programmes to “art in public spaces” projects represented a sort of emancipation of art from architecture with all its much-criticised Drop Sculptures, endeavours are now being made to explore further steps in this direction. Making what is “impossible” possible – in the sense, as it were, of Adorno's “The Possibility of the Impossible” – continually creates new perspectives for artists. Accompanied by calls for a contextualisation of art in public spaces – or “site-specific commitment” as some critics like to call it – there has been an intensification of connections and links to the site of artistic actions and perspectives as well as to the involved artistic protagonists.

Art cannot disengage itself from the conditions of

the site in question and the intrinsic material and immaterial characteristics of its context to the same extent as it can from architecture (as part of the site). The features of these sites and the factors bearing on them are simply too diverse, too complex for this to be possible.<sup>1</sup> An artistic process, action, or installation, or an artistic project that takes place in public space will at the same time always be a component of public space and can thus also be taken as a contribution to the culture of the public realm. In this regard, attempts to deny art projects in public spaces the status of art – with the now obsolete reference to the autonomy of art as the defining criterion of art – are superfluous. The attendant fear that in such projects art is rendered subservient to immanent circumstances categorically ignores the fact that autonomy in itself is an academic fiction: Art is never context-free. But as the legitimation of art, even where it is derived from a radicalisation of subjectivity, this reference to autonomy is now no longer required even in academic terms. Art today legitimates itself by means of other attributes such as imaginative power, the transgression of cultural boundaries, or sensate communication or actions, indicating what can or cannot be called into question.

In addition, a true understanding of urban public space in the present requires a consideration of past urban development in the given context. For instance, the prevailing spatial structures in European cities today are the result of long-term historical processes. In particular, the age of the industrial revolution gave rise to transformations or incremental shifts in function that in many cases still exert a formative influence today. Again and again over the last few decades, especially in central Europe, there

have been calls to reappraise the qualities of the “European city” within the discourse surrounding strategies of urban development, as if it were possible to come up with a single model capable of clearly defining the “European city”. It goes without saying that in the various cultural spheres around the world, the functions, spatial structures, responsibilities, and cultural significance of cities (or elements of cities) manifest striking and indisputable differences – however lasting and massive the effects of globalisation are on cities worldwide.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, it was precisely the debate about the putative “Islamic city” in the 1970s that brought first insights into major cultural differences within urban space that, albeit with varying regional impact, still pertain today.<sup>3</sup> Nowadays, the city is recognised as a mixture of globalised phenomena and local particularities, hence the moniker “glocal city”.<sup>4</sup> With this understanding, greater emphasis can be given to the hybridisation of urban contexts around the world as a feature of globalisation. In relation to a comparative study of art in public space, particular attention should be paid to the development of urban contextual conditions.

These differences are relevant to each individual city, irrespective of the relentless globalisation of the conditions that shape our existence. If in nothing else, this is evident in the failure of geographers, lawyers, economists, sociologists, and architects alike to formulate a globally valid definition of “city”, which could be of significant relevance to the undertaking of concrete activities. Irrespective of the permanent processes of change that affect all cities, each city appears to stand as a distinct case in its own right, the singular product of its specific historical origins. Following Max Weber’s typological classification of

European cities, historically determined categorisations of cities have now become commonplace. This kind of classification conformed to the then prevailing modes of thinking, whereby collections or archives were organised according to hierarchically structured attributes. This gave rise to a typology of cities based on the predominant reason for the city’s founding or its original function. No one topography resembles another, no historical situation is ever repeated in exactly the same form, and even if the motives or interests of the protagonists were similar or the same, in its entirety each city’s history is unique. In Germany alone, there are enough examples that demonstrate the failure of national urban development programmes, which proved incapable of accommodating the specific conditions of individual towns and cities.

This merely serves as an indication of the broad area of research<sup>5</sup> covered by this study, irrespective of the fact, firstly, that only recently has awareness been growing both for the need for cultural differences within Europe<sup>6</sup> and their potential for its further development, and, second, that this aspect has as yet been paid very little attention either by European politics or academic research.

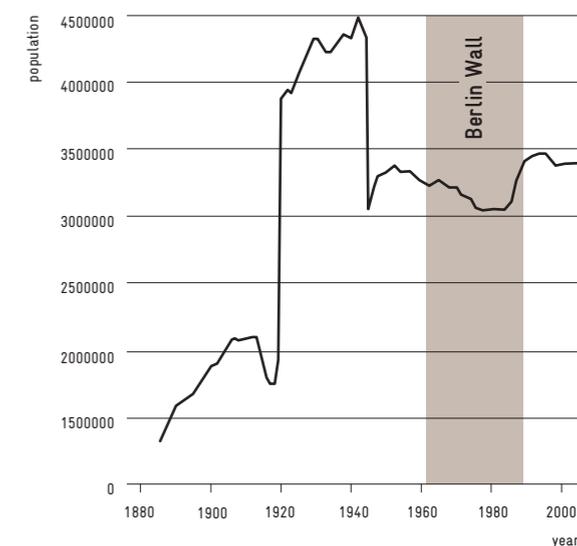
For all these reasons, before readers proceed to discover for themselves such differences in the various contributions, I would like to describe the disparities in the nature of public space for art in each of the four European case studies presented here (Belfast, Berlin, Istanbul, and Lisbon). In each city these differences are contingent on the respective processes of urban development, political circumstances, and the varying impact of these on public space.

## AN OUTLINE OF URBAN-PLANNING DEVELOPMENT FOCUSSED ON THE RESPECTIVE ART-RELATED CHARACTERISTICS OR THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PUBLIC SPACES IN EACH OF THE FOUR CITIES UNDER STUDY.

### BERLIN

Berlin can be described as a decentralised metropolitan ensemble whose various quarters originally started as separate villages that have now grown into 12 municipal districts, each run by its own local government authority. The major period of expansion that crucially shaped the city’s spatial structure as we know it today took place in the late 19th century, until Berlin had fully grown together by 1920, making it at that time the third largest city in the world after New York and London. Most of the spatial elements in the city – its boulevards and arteries, public parks and city squares, and the built infrastructure of the public transport system – date back to this period. This is further compounded by the gaps in built-up areas flattened by the Second World War, the open areas laid bare by the fall of the Wall – a political change that has had a lasting impact on art in public space – and the “decommissioning” of all the institutional buildings spawned by Berlin’s post-war four-power agreement and the Cold War.

The so-called critical reconstruction of the city’s historical layout in the 1990s marked the inception of a further phase of reinterpretation of spatial structures in the centre of the city, which by then had been made the new capital of reunified Germany. This was accompanied by a dynamic surge of development projects that stripped traditional industrial and manufacturing sites of their former functions.



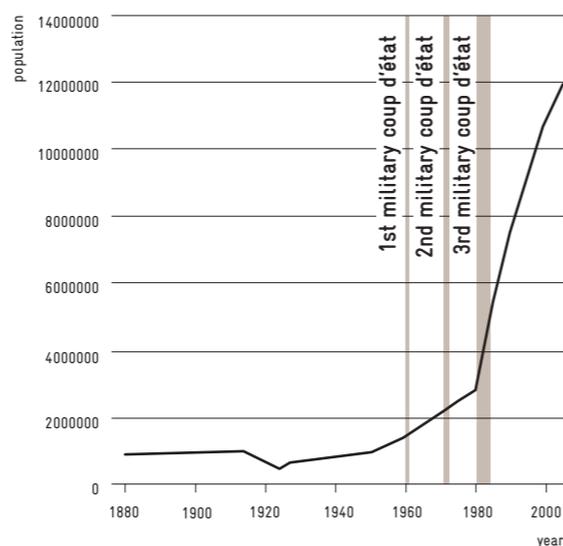
Berlin, Urban population – Political events whose traumatic impact can still be felt today.

As a result, Berlin accrued an immense and highly diverse volume of built and unbuilt space in virtually all areas of the city, opening up a wealth of new possibilities for all manner of cultural activities. This aspect has acted as a major attraction to young artists from all over the world. The multitude of empty spaces – combined with visible historical evidence of the era of German monarchy, the Weimar Republic, the Nazi era, the Cold War, and the GDR dictatorship – play a key role in the various debates and controversies in Berlin about possible public spaces and their potential. Particularly when compared with the other three case studies, this explains the striking density, variety, and geographical distribution of artistic activities in public space and spaces around the city that have been declared public.

Furthermore, the diversity of these activities arises not only from the diversity of venues and occasions available but also from the diverse cultural identities of the protagonists themselves. As a cultural melting pot, Berlin is an ideal artistic breeding ground, even to the extent of including the at times severely criticised and ridiculed survival of “drop art” projects and art-and-architecture additions to representative – or supposedly representative – buildings and objects. Examples from Hamburg, Kiel, Munich, and Leikendorf near Berlin cited in the essay are evidence that public efforts and public commitment, up-to-the-moment artistic activity, and the diversity of art in public spaces projects are not restricted to Berlin alone, however singular Berlin’s position within Germany might be. In these terms, one comes to grasp the significance of the aspects of “participation” and “urban memory” within contemporary artistic developments in public space in Berlin. In addition, the degree of public (and publicly funded) commitment to this situation is illustrated in a report describing the official framework of public art competitions.

#### ISTANBUL

The city’s steady growth in demography and surface size over the last few decades has transformed Istanbul into one of the largest cities in Europe. As a frontier separating Asia and Europe that runs through the centre of the city, the Bosphorus has become one of the busiest waterways worldwide. Istanbul is one of Europe’s most important cities, with a history of urban planning that goes back to an era predating our own culture. Given that, unlike Berlin, the city’s cultural life is still centred largely on just two historical districts on either side of the Golden Horn, located in the European sector of



Istanbul, Urban population – Political events whose traumatic impact can still be felt today.

the town, I can focus my discussion of these issues on urban developments in these two quarters. In neither historical district can one find public space comparable to that of Berlin. The prolific growth of the city has left its architectural and spatial mark on them in the form of transformations of previously built structures and increased density – traditional residential neighbourhoods have now mostly been replaced – yet without having given rise to new, explicitly public spaces. Public spaces of the kind that evolved in many European cities from the mid-19th century onwards in conjunction with massive surges of expansion are nowhere to be found in Istanbul – with the exception of several zones along the banks of the Bosphorus. Besides transport infrastructure, the only publicly accessible spaces are the

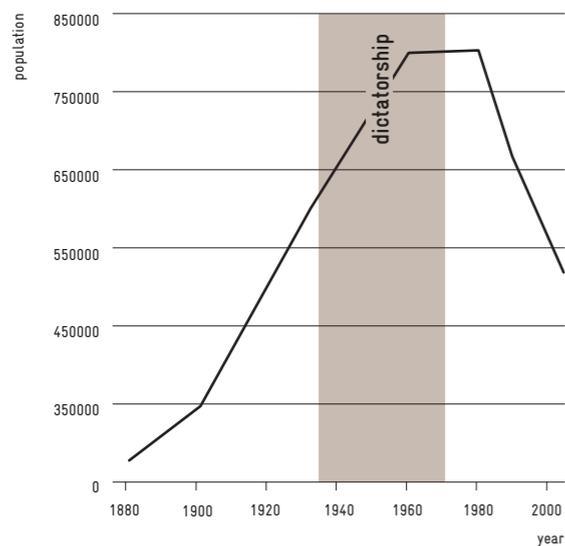
historical sites located in the old town: around the large mosques, the entire area of the bazaar, and the wharfs and landing stages, including Galata Bridge, though these are given over to functional purposes. In the early stages of modernism in the 1930s under Atatürk’s rule, the monumentally representative Taksim Square was built – the sole historic square that was officially designed as a public park in the “old European quarter” (south of the Golden Horn). With its large pedestrian thoroughfare (Istiklal Caddesi) and several smaller squares adjoining it, or close by, this bustling area is where the city’s vibrant public life is most prominently on display. Yet the key Beyoğlu quarter at the heart of this district, where most modern art galleries are located, is exposed to fiercely competing interests, due in part to the area’s huge tourist appeal. Thus, public space could be described as largely overloaded. There is now a noticeable tendency to shift or extend art galleries into disused former industrial areas, on the heels of new shopping centres and metro stations (even in the “Asian” sector), or along the banks of the Bosphorus.

Art in public space will evolve in tandem with this tendency, especially as contemporary galleries and alternative spaces have become the driving forces for recent developments in art in public space. In terms of Istanbul’s public cultural life, the three periods of military dictatorship, especially the final military regime in the 1980s, continue to leave their mark on the minds of the country’s artists – as we learn from the essay by Markus Graf. So it hardly comes as a surprise that, up till now, the city itself seems not to have planned any activities to further art in public space. By contrast, it has been the gal-

leries, the *Istanbul Biennial*, and the numerous artists who have been attracted to Istanbul from all over the world that have responded to the seeming lack of public space. They have done so by inventing new presentational formats, creating mobile installations and temporary projections, appropriating unoccupied buildings, taking indoor space outside, and initiating participatory or interactive processes. As such, many of these works can also be viewed in connection with endeavours to advance democracy in Turkey. The issues and artistic messages addressed in these works are determined by a number of factors: endogenous cultural diversity and international outlook, the variety of religious settings, the great historical and political legacies reflected in public affairs, and prevailing controls of public life. In contrast to Berlin, there is no visible evidence of the state getting involved as a contracting agent or coordinator of art in public space projects, whereas the role of the *Istanbul Biennial* as an initiating and driving force can be clearly felt.

#### LISBON

With the densely built architectural substance of its historic centre studded with architectural monuments from various eras, Lisbon, once the hub of a great world empire, can still pride itself on all the “flâneur” qualities commonly associated with historic European cities. At the same time, precisely because the entire city centre has such immense heritage value, there is barely any public space of the kind found in other cities that is available for art. In Lisbon, the kinds of public squares and parks commonly associated with urban expansion in the 19th century are located outside the historic centre in the first “onion ring” belt of the city’s expansion. Consid-



Lisbon, Urban population – Political events whose traumatic impact can still be felt today.

ering these belts from an urban planning perspective, one must conclude that – apart from several large-scale projects deposited into municipal precincts as locational factors – there has been no evidence of urban structural planning. The decisive aspects appear to have been the city's topography and growing (or shrinking) demand. The only planned and functionally indispensable arterial roads running in a straight line into the city – and from the city centre out into Lisbon's hinterland, creating a link via the harbour overseas to the former origins of the city's wealth – are the two major traffic routes, which form a V and lead out of the historic centre towards the areas of urban expansion: the two avenues Avenida Almirante Reis and Avenida Liberdade (that itself then forks out in two directions). The fact that

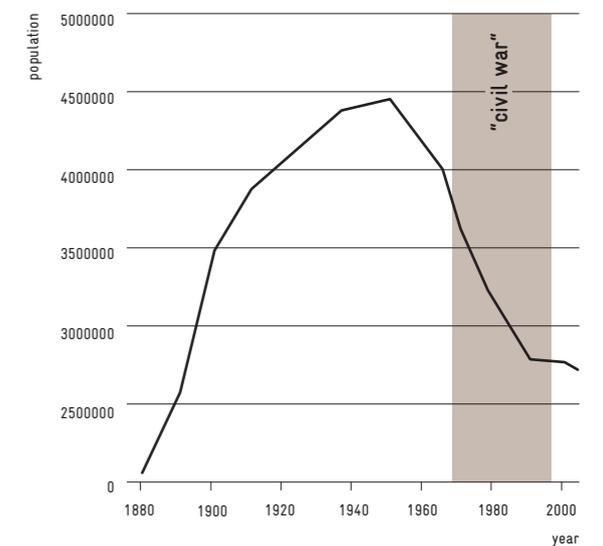
the chessboard-like reconstruction of the area of the city destroyed in the earthquake of 1755 – including the reception facilities for goods shipped in from the colonies, and the connecting routes that linked important city sites – appears to have been the sole measure of inner-city planning undertaken in Portugal's capital, suggests a civic consciousness that relocated its power to move things to distant parts beyond the ocean's horizon. Today, new measures of architectural and spatial development are focussed above all on the port area – with emphasis on Belém and the Expo site – and the urban renewal zone in the Chiado district (burnt down in 1988). I mention this since it struck me that the art in public space projects cited by Jürgen Bock are located precisely in the few sites of planning intervention and contemporary transformation. In this context it is altogether logical that colonialism and the public realm itself are key thematic points of reference. The inviolability of the historic districts Chiado, Baixa, and Alfama – except of course when it comes to natural disasters – might also offer an explanation why Lisbon's public sector in general stays clear of funding art in public spaces. Yet, the obvious popularity of exhibitions of modern art in Lisbon is also an indication that contemporary culture enjoys a high status in the city's population.

#### BELFAST

The political conflict over and within Northern Ireland is a major contextual factor for the city of Belfast and the issues surrounding art in public spaces. The city's spatial structure is dominated by territorial divisions and boundaries between the conflicting parties. The last event that shaped the current situation in a significant manner was the armed struggle

of a civil war that lasted almost 30 years (1969–1998). Ninety walls, some of them enormous, carve up the metropolitan area (outside the city centre). They are a prominent spatial element, and even if they are not visible from a distance, their intrinsic violence overshadows everything around them. For these reasons, holding a political discussion without taking sides with one or another party is all but impossible. As of recent, public interest has increasingly focussed on the visible remains of the once thriving textile and shipping industries, as well as on the destruction wreaked on the city and its port facilities by German bombers in 1941. This might explain why Susanne Bosch has chosen to discuss examples of art in public space that are largely concerned with questions of perceptibility, as opposed to simply representative sites/spaces/buildings.

In thematic terms these works make only indirect reference to the political context, and instead address sensibilities to various aspects of everyday life. All the works have been initiated by the artists themselves and are mostly process-oriented, temporary, and interactive projects. They can be read as attempts to present life in the city from a different perspective than those offered by the conflicting parties. In a radical departure from the traditional conventions of art in public space, these works are based on participation, collaboration, and dialogue. At the same time, the difficulties in facing attempts to find strategies to further develop public culture in Belfast are particularly evident. The all but complete lack of state funding can almost certainly be seen as a consequence of the politically overcharged environment. The kind of art in public spaces that receives public funding comes from classical art-and-architecture competitions and programmes<sup>7</sup> aimed at



Belfast, Urban population – Political events whose traumatic impact can still be felt today.

depoliticising urban space through art. Unlike Istanbul and Lisbon, one can observe public initiatives in support of art in public space, yet the reasons for this are manifestly quite different from those in Berlin or elsewhere.

The various references to different contexts offer clear evidence of the complex diversity that results from the simultaneous disparities in the political, cultural, and urban planning processes in each city. Once again, this emphasises the significance of gaining understanding and maintaining dialogue about the relationship between local and global conditions and circumstances in order to evolve successful forms of cooperation in the domain of art in public spaces within and beyond Europe.

- 1 The complexity of space is determined by a number of constantly modifying aspects, some of which are also interdependent. Space is both a product of material and informational processes, and at the same time an object of use determined by various material and informational processes. In addition, space also always manifests different representative characteristics, with a changeable physical structure composed of elements that act as vehicles for these characteristics. Arising from this is also the methodical problem that, in terms of their distribution and impact, not all elements and characteristics can be determined by means of a common spatial model.
- 2 One of the first studies to explore the conflict between the specific cultural aspects of cities and colonial and post-colonial globalised influences was carried out in a research project that undertook an inter-cultural comparison of building and urban developments in non-European cultures. This was also the subject of the exhibition *andernorts* (elsewhere) shown in the Hochschule der Künste in Berlin (later renamed the Berlin University of the Arts) in the 1980s, which accompanied the 1984 International Building Exhibition in Berlin. See also: Rainer W. Ernst (ed.), *Stadt in Afrika, Asien und Lateinamerika* (Berlin: 1984); Rainer W. Ernst, *Living in Cities: Five Comparative and Interdisciplinary Case Studies about Living in Inner Cities* (Berlin: 1990).
- 3 The concept "Islamic city" was first coined in the late 1970s and became an issue of fierce controversy through to the mid-1980s. It was also frequently the subject of seminars at certain architecture faculties (especially in Darmstadt and Zurich). On this, see: S. Bianca, *Städtebau in islamischen Städten* (Zurich: 1980); M. Scharabi, *Der Bazar. Das traditionelle Stadtzentrum im Nahen Osten und seine Handelseinrichtungen* (Tübingen: 1985); S. Bianca, *Hofhaus und Paradiesgarten, Architektur und Lebensformen in der islamischen Welt* (Munich: 1991).
- 4 For example: Rainer W. Ernst, "Internationalisierung versus Lokalisierung", *Werk und Zeit* 3 (1991).
- 5 Literature on the subject "European City": L. Benevolo, *Die Geschichte der Stadt* (Frankfurt: 1980); C. Rowe and F. Koetter, *Collage City* (Basel: 1964); R. Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: 1991); H. Häußermann and W. Siebel, *Neue Urbanität* (Frankfurt am Main: 1987); G. Albers, *Entwicklungslinien im Städtebau, Ideen, Thesen, Aussagen 1875–1945* (Düsseldorf: 1975); Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, *Stadt und Utopie, Modelle idealer Gemeinschaften* (Berlin: 1982); C. Sitte, *Der Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Ansätzen* (Braunschweig/Wiesbaden: 1909); F. A. Cerver, *Urban Spaces I (Streets and squares)* (Barcelona: 1994); M. Webb, *City Squares* (London: 1990); S. Kristof, *The City Assembled* (London: 1992); Rainer W. Ernst, *Stadt, Raum, Strategie* (Berlin: 2007).
- 6 On the current debate about cultural differences in Europe, see, for example: Thomas E. Schmidt, "Europa: Die Idee von der Angleichung der Europäer ist gescheitert", in: *Die Zeit*, vol. 9, 23 February 2012, p. 46.
- 7 On these competitions and programmes, also see the following sources:
  - a) Commissioning of New Artwork for Public Places: The Public Art Programme is designed to support the commissioning of new art for public places throughout Northern Ireland. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland's policy position is articulated in its Public Art Policy. Along with practical guidance, advice on best practice, and documentation on public art projects that have received support, the policy is reproduced in the publication "Public Art Handbook for Northern Ireland". In summary, the Arts Council embraces a wide range of media and art forms as Public Art – painting, sculpture, photography, installation, video and new media, temporary works, crafts, and applied arts. See: [http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/award/public\\_art.htm](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/award/public_art.htm).
  - b) The Re-imaging Communities programme is a pilot programme that places artists in the heart of communities to work with local people to tackle visible signs of sectarianism and racism to create a more welcoming environment for everyone. See: [http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/award/re-imaging\\_communities.htm](http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/award/re-imaging_communities.htm).

# BELFAST

## PUBLIC ART FOR CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN IRELAND

by Susanne Bosch

### PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Northern Ireland – especially Belfast – appears to be a place that has no need for more public art. It is full of it. Territorial marking through aesthetics exists everywhere: Many kerbstones are painted in red, white, and blue; flags and banners of different types are seen everywhere displaying heraldry and symbols; the skin on arms, necks, and hands are covered in tattoos; corner house walls are decorated with murals; not to mention the various styles of fences and walls. The choice for the colour of a car, a sweater, or a scarf has a specific meaning. The place and its inhabitants are labelled – marked not for outsiders and guests, but primarily for the people themselves using an explicit visual language. Colours, symbols, text – they all possess meaning. The inhabitants read the symbols in public spaces as being for or against them. Only in cases such as with advertisements or decorations in public and private gardens are specific meanings not linked to the context of local politics.

*The communities in Northern Ireland collided, almost like flotsam, on a tidal flow of historical forces on which they had little purchase or control over, but which created a powerful need for intimate articulations of identity. This was rooted in land and place but also, in terms of self imaging, if not in art, then in power and powerlessness, as expressed through emblems, symbols, and behaviour.<sup>1</sup>*

The markings exist in order to clearly define the space. There is no neutral public space in Northern Ireland: Each space belongs politically to one side or the other.

*What we have been calling “the Troubles”<sup>2</sup> is just the most recent manifestation of a fault line in the culture, over centuries, which has been dramatised, but cannot be wholly explained by religion or politics. This fault line represents a deep-seated collision of opposing cultural mindsets, of ways of understanding and claiming our place in the world.<sup>3</sup>*

### WHY IT LOOKS THE WAY IT LOOKS

The historical, political, and social dimensions of Northern Ireland have had a massive effect on its civil society and the meaning of public space, and consequently art in public spaces. Its appearance has been created over a long period of conflict. Ireland is rather rural with few post-industrial territories, a colonialist history of occupation and bondage under the British, as well as a complex religious history. These divisive elements – be they class, religion, or politics – still exist in peoples’ minds. For 800 years, a recurring violent conflict has expressed itself in many ways, specifically in the 30-year period from 1969 to 1998, which resulted in 3,480 dead and countless injured.<sup>4</sup>

*Northern Ireland has never functioned as an active, pluralistic, and participatory democracy. It is a jurisdiction functioning on the normalisation of the politically abnormal; its political life has been defined by an entrenched emergency. The United Kingdom has been in persistent derogation from its human rights obligations under the European Convention and International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Extraordinary law has become a norm of legal regulation.<sup>5</sup>*

Because the entire population has experienced a reality based on an official and unofficial version of events – where the state and its representatives turned out to be highly biased and operate far from a representational democracy – the Northern Irish mentality is split by inescapable paradigms and is a psychophysically fragmented geography clustered by segregation. The loss due to the conflict is far worse than the mentioned dead and injured, as the social trauma has, even today, neither officially been recognised nor dealt with.

*To expand upon the above point: the future of “the Troubles” in Northern Ireland is dependent on an agreement between two conflicted communities as to the nature of the truth regarding the injustices of the past. While such a settlement remains unresolved, Northern Irish society will necessarily remain fragmented, as those who constitute its social body continue to gravitate towards others within the social body who can identify with the confusion and trauma that is the residual effects of their experiences during “the Troubles”: especially because such trauma is not legally recognised to exist by the State and thus there also exists no representation in the supposedly collective symbols of social history as may be personified, for example, through works of public art in shared public space.<sup>6</sup>*

### SHORT INTRODUCTION TO SIX PUBLIC ART WORKS

*Artists working in Northern Ireland have functioned as creators, polemicists, documentarists, listeners, initiators, and experimenters. They have worked as catalysts for debate and dialogue; have taken key roles in supporting and challenging the economic redevelopment of Belfast and other regions; have worked with various local and national arts and administrative agencies on the development of public and institutional space in the region; and have made beautiful, poignant, intelligent, challenging, difficult, and affecting artworks which*

*have received international acclaim. The political history of Northern Ireland has created a rich culture of exchange and traffic between local and international artists: artists educated in Northern Ireland work at the highest level all over the world. Artists are visionaries and sceptics and this makes them extraordinarily well suited to working within complex cultural landscapes. It also makes the art practices of Northern Ireland very diverse.<sup>7</sup>*

The following contributions of six contemporary public art approaches in Northern Ireland accept that art is not autonomous, but connected to the social space at the time. These approaches are site- or situation-specific responses by locals and non-locals and highlight the specificity of working in a public where the public is not experienced in welcoming and owning a place. Northern Ireland is a society with a damaged “civil craft”,<sup>8</sup> and therefore the civic behaviour of its citizens is not comparable to other places. Civil participation is an absolute prerequisite for the attainment of a social transformation, therefore participatory art forms in Northern Ireland always negotiate ways of dealing with the damaged society. The character of the place, and the lasting undefined situation, has given the country a distinctive culture of ephemeral art.<sup>9</sup> A state in struggle and conflict brings forth tremendous absurdities every day, unstructured open spaces, and unregulated territories as well as situations. Additionally, the region has a strong black humour. The city has no art market worth mentioning – instead, countless artists run galleries, project spaces, workshops, studios, and event locations.<sup>10</sup>

The works introduced in this book give an in-depth example of how aesthetics, concept, humour, play,

process, as well as conversation can change and challenge the landscape.

Dan Shippides' "SORRY" intervention in December 2004 is an example of how to address – in a joyful and playful way – civic unhappiness with the conservative power structures.

Public buses play a special role in Northern Ireland as they were often a target for attack and bombs. Buses in Belfast function as visual time capsules and reveal the change and normalisation that has occurred over time regarding their design and shape. Belfast did not have double-deckers as the bomb disposal robots could not climb stairs. To have double-deckers return was a real sign "the Troubles" were over. Still today, Belfast, a divided city, has a special bus system whereby all city bus lines radiate out from City Hall to their destination and then back. Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell's works with buses. Her ongoing "Bus Stop" works (since 2007) explore and use public space as an adventure playground. At no point does the "player" Sinéad introduce any new meaning to the given playground. Playfulness is both an end and a means of arousing curiosity in herself and others, leading towards creativity and discovery. The harmless appearance of play enables Sinéad to publicly question her surroundings.

Justin McKeown, founder of the Centre for Suburban Research (CSR), set up an artist residence programme based in his family home in Belfast from 2005–2008 to explore with resident artists the role of home in Northern Irish society in relation to public space. "Within the present Northern Irish context, the home is also potentially the most radical of

political vehicles since it is simultaneously a sanctity, dominion, vehicle and point of reflection."<sup>11</sup>

Andrea Theis used an inconspicuous-looking intervention of the everyday in 2010, "Left Luggage", to turn the private into something public. The surprise element within the interventions triggered storytelling and fed a human curiosity in others. Her situation as a non-local came in very handy in enquiring into the privacy of others.

Anne-Marie Dillon's public art practice has taken place in her home village since 2009 with a typical Northern Irish setting of army presence and conflicted communities. The artistically collaborating villagers address unresolved issues through artistic interventions and present creative solutions. International support coming from outside provides the missing links to the village, such as discourse, networking, and other useful support. Ruth Morrow and Peter Mutschler of PS<sup>2</sup> (Paragon Studios/project space) took a role in helping foster these links.

Finally, "CROW" ("City Right of Way") was set up by Aisling O'Beirn and Mike Hogg in 2010. It was initially suggested by the Rome-based urban research group Stalker. On monthly walks through the divided territory, an open group explores and widens the space in a playful way. An international dialogue is maintained about the fluid right of way in the urban setting of a participatory democracy.

## "SORRY"

**Location:** Cave Hill, Belfast

**Who:** Dan Shippides with the help of (on the day) Stephen Hull and Danny McPolin as well as support from *The Vacuum* team (mainly Richard West) for the development of the piece.

**What:** Intervention of public space, 13 December 2004, later a gallery piece consisting of a photograph and a newspaper article.

**Web:** <http://www.danshippsides.com>, <http://www.thevacuum.org.uk/>

**Keywords:** *The Vacuum*, British Council, visibility, conflict, intervention on hill

**Description:** During 2004 Belfast City Council demanded that the cultural newspaper *The Vacuum* apologise to "the citizens of the City" and "Members of the Council" for "any offence which may have been caused by previous publications." It was in response to the paired issues of the publication entitled "God" and "Satan". The demand for an apology was backed by a threat to withdraw pledged funding. The Council could or could not identify what in the two issues had caused offence, nor could they produce evidence of the complaints. It was a blatant attempt to stifle freedom of expression by the conservative religious right, who make up the majority of city councillors. In response *The Vacuum* organised an ironic day of "apology". It included a march through the city of supporters carrying "SORRY" placards and banners and a "SORRY Santa" as it was Christmas time. Dan planned and executed a project to say "sorry" from the top of Cave Hill – a hilltop visible from most parts of Belfast. The hills around Belfast have a history of republican and loyalist "pronouncements", for example protests to free political prison-

ers and statements in relation to the referendum on the Good Friday Agreement (yes / no). "I wanted to make a big statement of being sorry." The word was 15 metres high and 40 metres wide, made of plastic sheets, and pegged with bamboo canes. *The Sun*, a tabloid newspaper, covered the "SORRY Day" with typically misleading but humorous reporting.

The local satirical cultural magazine *The Vacuum*<sup>12</sup> published two issues in 2004 with the titles "God" and "Satan". Based on one complaint from a member of the public, some Belfast City councillors at their monthly Council meeting denounced the publication as "filth" and said it was "encouraging devil worship". The Council withdrew its funding for the magazine (£3,300). A spokesman of the Belfast City Council said: "Two issues of *The Vacuum* were considered to have caused offence to citizens and constituents with the use of obscene language and material of a sacrilegious nature."<sup>13</sup> On 13 December 2004 they launched a public "SORRY Day" with contributions of various artists<sup>14</sup> throughout Belfast and worldwide. The "SORRY Day" makes reference to the national Sorry Day in Australia to express regret over the historical mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples.<sup>15</sup> Following the "SORRY Day", Richard West, one of the paper's editors (along with Stephen Hackett), challenged the Council's demand for an apology in the High Court as a breach of articles 9 and 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The case ended in front of the European Convention of Human Rights, as *The Vacuum* publishers cited Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience, and religion) and Article 10 (freedom of expression). In May 2006 the case was lost. The case then went to the Court of Appeal and, as of May 2009, a judgement on this

appeal was still being awaited. It was suggested that *The Vacuum* offer an apology to the city of Belfast.<sup>16</sup>

Contributions arrived through a public call made by *The Vacuum*. The artist Dan Shipsides proposed a big “SORRY” text on Cave Hill Mountain, echoing previous public interventions such as “yes / no” during the referendum in 1998. In that instance “yes” and “no” texts were put in huge letters onto the Black Mountain hills by supporters campaigning against or for the Belfast Good Friday Agreement.<sup>17</sup> Other political texts have been installed on the Black Mountain hills throughout “the Troubles”.

Dan Shipsides, who is also a professional and passionate climber, developed the work that was funded with approximately £80 for the material in around three months. He and two helpers executed the piece on December 13 from dusk to sunset. Dan’s conceptual work consisted of finding the right location, the right material to last a full day, as well as a highly visible spot to be seen throughout the city. He decided to mount the work on Belfast’s Cave Hill, one of the hills in the ridge, because it is the least politically connotative and more neutral compared to the other surrounding hills, which were mostly under the control of the Ministry of Defence and used as training areas for the British Army until 2005, and therefore closed to the public. Cave Hill, in contrast, is a magnet for locals and tourists alike, and is a popular public walking site. Whereas the Black Mountain is inaccessible by intent and has remained a politically connotative site due to its proximity with the subjacent West Belfast. Dan wanted to make sure that “SORRY” would be perceived as a personal as well as cultural – but definitely humorous – message. Previous texts

on the Belfast hills have been forceful, demonstrations of power with a definite political message. The population was meant to read “SORRY” in multiple and open ways. Dan designed a font and cut out 14-metre high and 7-metre wide letters. He rolled them up and put them into plastic bin bags to be able to carry them uphill on his back. The clear plastic material was anchored on the ground with bamboo sticks. The angle of fixation was important to reflect the light on the clear material properly. All materials were removed at sunset. (figure 1)

On that day, a reporter from *The Sun*<sup>18</sup> climbed up the 370 metres to find out more about this piece, which gained attention in no time in the city. He was looking for a story: “Who is saying sorry for what?” Patrick Giffins’ article became part of a multiple artwork project that Dan created after the public art event.

Besides the various artistic actions that day throughout Belfast, which tried to raise awareness of the conflict between the City Council and *The Vacuum*, the “SORRY” piece had a lasting effect. It continues to exist as a myth and visual experience in people’s minds. Many years afterwards, it is still communicated through word of mouth. Since 2004, other artists have used the mountain as a canvas and the entire city as an audience.<sup>19</sup>

Dan sees his “SORRY Day” action as creative citizen empowerment. With willpower and logistics, public actions like this can be executed by anyone. In “SORRY”, Dan highlights his creative methodology to raise the issues of the artist’s job, to question how far one can use a situation and a site to highlight

Dan Shipsides, “SORRY” installation, Belfast, 2004. Photo: Dan Shipsides



Dan Shipsides, “SORRY” installation, close-up, Belfast, 2004. Photo: Dan Shipsides



issues in an open way. For him, the main point of the conflict was the deepening recognition of how conservative the Northern Irish government is and how significant his dissatisfaction was with what he experienced as a citizen in relation to the current official power structures. Presumably as a countermeasure to the chaos of “the Troubles”, the people of Northern Ireland had voted the most conservative, religious-right parties into the government.<sup>20</sup> The main point for him was to make an intervention in response to a very conservative reactionary local (and national) government – but as an open response that carried some level of humour and creativity. Both are lack-

ing in the static fixed ideologies and actions of those holding official power. The enjoyment and thrill of doing the work was important. It helped shape his thinking about public art in Northern Ireland as well as his role as an artist. (figure 2)

As this was an image-based public event, the multiple elements – including an image of the event – has been internationally exhibited various times since 2004 and even sold as an artwork. The image of the words “SORRY” on a hill is so universal that it can apply to many sites and situations. (figure 3)



figure 3

Dan Shippides, “SORRY” installation, close-up, Belfast, 2004. Photo: Dan Shippides

## “BUS STOP” –

ONGOING SINCE 2007

**Location(s):** Various locations in Belfast and abroad

**Who:** Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell with collaborators, playmates, and/or alone.

**What:** Since 2007, there is a re-occurring theme of bus stops and public buses in Sinéad’s work. She uses the site of bus stops and buses for public interventions and performances; it also forms the content of some of her works.

**Web:** <http://www.uncertainremains.wordpress.com>

**Keywords:** Public buses, interventions, performances, bus stops, performance festivals,

**Description:** Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell is a Belfast-based artist who uses play to question the impact of habits and compliance on our capacity to create new responses. Through play she investigates how our surroundings shape how we experience, explore, investigate, manipulate, and think. Her work is generated by a direct response to and observations from her surroundings and their social contexts. This kaleidoscopic practice includes interactive installations, collaborations, drawing, performance, and curating. Since 2007 she has participated in a number of artist exchanges (in Canada, Chile, China, Iceland, Ireland, and Uruguay). Sinéad can be encountered with playmates or alone, plundering the streets, making playful interventions in search of a beach under the pavement.

To write about one work of Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell is impossible. To get a grip of her practice demands understanding more of her methodology, her world, and something about Sinéad herself. Lets

start with her: One encounters a young woman who is very articulate in her verbal and aesthetical language and whose entire body aesthetic is embedded in her practice. To be more precise, her practice is the expression of her being: long brown braids, rosy skin without any signs of makeup, open eyes and an open laugh, a dress code resembling children on their way to a playground – in rubber boots and bib-top pinafore dresses, she looks playful as she lives and interacts with the world. Her public character comes across as being playful, naïve, and girly. Her role models are the street characters one can observe in almost every city, the people that live in the public and express certain habits there. Examples are characters like “Mrs Notes”, a woman who in the 1980s in Belfast covered herself daily with the latest newspaper clippings,<sup>21</sup> and the eccentric Dublin beggar “Johnny Forty Coats”,<sup>22</sup> a Dublin-based figure who went around wearing layers of coats.

### HER WORLD

Sinéad aims to experience the city as an urban playground. The urban space has loose parts, allows for disruption of controlled behaviour, and it offers endless material to work towards a certain mindset. Her methodology is driven by the fluidity of materials and ideas. She has no intention to impose fixed meanings on situations or places; the focus is on play itself. (figure 4)

### HER PRACTICE

Sinéad’s practice is to play. When an adult plays, it tends to be controlled and approved games for adults.<sup>23</sup> It is highly unusual for an adult to engage in free creative play such as children would do, like changing a site into an imaginary site (e.g., building

sand castles on a construction site in town<sup>24</sup>).  
(figure 5)

Sinéad breaks these adult play patterns. Her work is spontaneous and fluid, relying on inspiration from people and situations. She regularly visits pound shops<sup>25</sup> and second-hand shops to get inspiration from the items, and she is constantly gathering material from the street and on these shopping tours for her playful interventions.<sup>26</sup> Methodologically, a theme develops out of her daily life and is usually ongoing. Any impulse or image in her head can lead to something.

Sinéad is more in control of the situation due to her local knowledge. She does profound research and develops in-depth knowledge about sites and situations. Happy accidents, coincidence, and a lot of aimless wandering create the starting points of her artistic work. Being incapable of doing something is also a good starting point for her work, as it suits her public character of being a professional amateur. Appearing vulnerable, playful, naïve, and generally “crap” is an effective invitation for others to join in as an equal or to share their expertise.

The “Bus Stop” interventions and performances



figure 4

Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell, performance at the Art College Belfast, (the “Pessimism” text above is an intervention by Dan Shippides), 2007.  
Photo: Cherie Driver

figure 5

Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell, performance in College Court (video still), Belfast, 2008.  
Photo: Fionnuala Doran



started to develop in 2007 from her home, which is her family home shared by her parents and siblings. Sinéad’s home is based near Malone Road, in the south of Belfast – a green, middleclass environment with single and semi-detached houses surrounded by gardens. The number 8 bus<sup>27</sup> circulates the area on a 15-minute departure schedule. Since childhood, she has been familiar with the bus and its turning circle on the Stranmillis Road as she passed by every day on her way to school. She still regularly uses the public bus system. This bus stop has a semi-circular shape, as it is also a turning circle that bus drivers use to change direction.

Bus stops are places where people have to wait regularly. In Belfast you have to wave to signal the bus to stop. The concentration of a waiting person has to be focussed outwards. The emotional state of the people is consequently anticipatory, but at the same time often bored. For Sinéad’s way of performing

and interacting with the public, this state of the audience is perfect: uninvited, random, and encountered by surprise, they would either ignore or engage in Sinéad’s offers.

In the case of her first bus stop piece in 2007, she remembered the existence of a large metal toadstool beside this circular bus stop that contained a bus driver’s toilet. It stood slightly to the side of the greenery surrounding the bus stop. Over the period of four months, she stood in silence six times up to three hours on the spot where the toadstool used to be, dressed in a white tracksuit with a large, painted, open umbrella protruding from her head. The evening and morning commuters were her audience, often stuck in traffic jams with time to observe her. In this performance, she existed in public space without purpose, just observing, not making any sense or explaining why she was standing there.<sup>28</sup> Sinéad described how internally she would subsequently be

confronted with herself and with reactions from the outside that would potentially trigger new ideas. (figure 6)

#### AUDIENCE REACTIONS

In 2007 she was invited to *The Cat Show*, a performance art festival in Cardiff,<sup>29</sup> and decided to perform a bus stop performance where she would travel around Cardiff by bus, playing with salt and sandbox toys under the bus shelter as she waited for the next bus. Partaking in this festival, early in her career, she experienced a situation where an invited



audience had already arrived at her site of play, but her material had not. It is highly demanding to play spontaneously in a festival situation while being responsible for organisers and under observation by a large audience. Since then, she has learnt how to plan a situation beforehand to be able to transcend these external constraints and be spontaneous. (figure 7)

Sinéad is aware of her vulnerable position, her child-like looks, and the superficial naïvety she radiates. Her work consists of small spectacles and is not dependent on the ignorance nor attention of an audience. But coming from Belfast, Sinéad is used to people heckling any action or dress code that is not representative for the local norm. The public control in Belfast is strong and outspoken. Northern Irish people live and perform a territorial behaviour. Everyone acts on territory, either in their own or in the territory of others. By deciding to play as an adult in public spaces and therefore engage in non-normative actions, Sinéad is highly aware of the social dynamics she creates: As a woman, she is less at risk for aggressive attacks than a male performer, as any aggressions evoked by her (usually in young male groups) are not acted upon. Individual young males tend to be polite and blend into the other local norm, which is to ignore and not interrupt uncommon events. In principle, her actions in public spaces are verbally ridiculed, as people do not see them as serious offences.

#### CONTEXTS

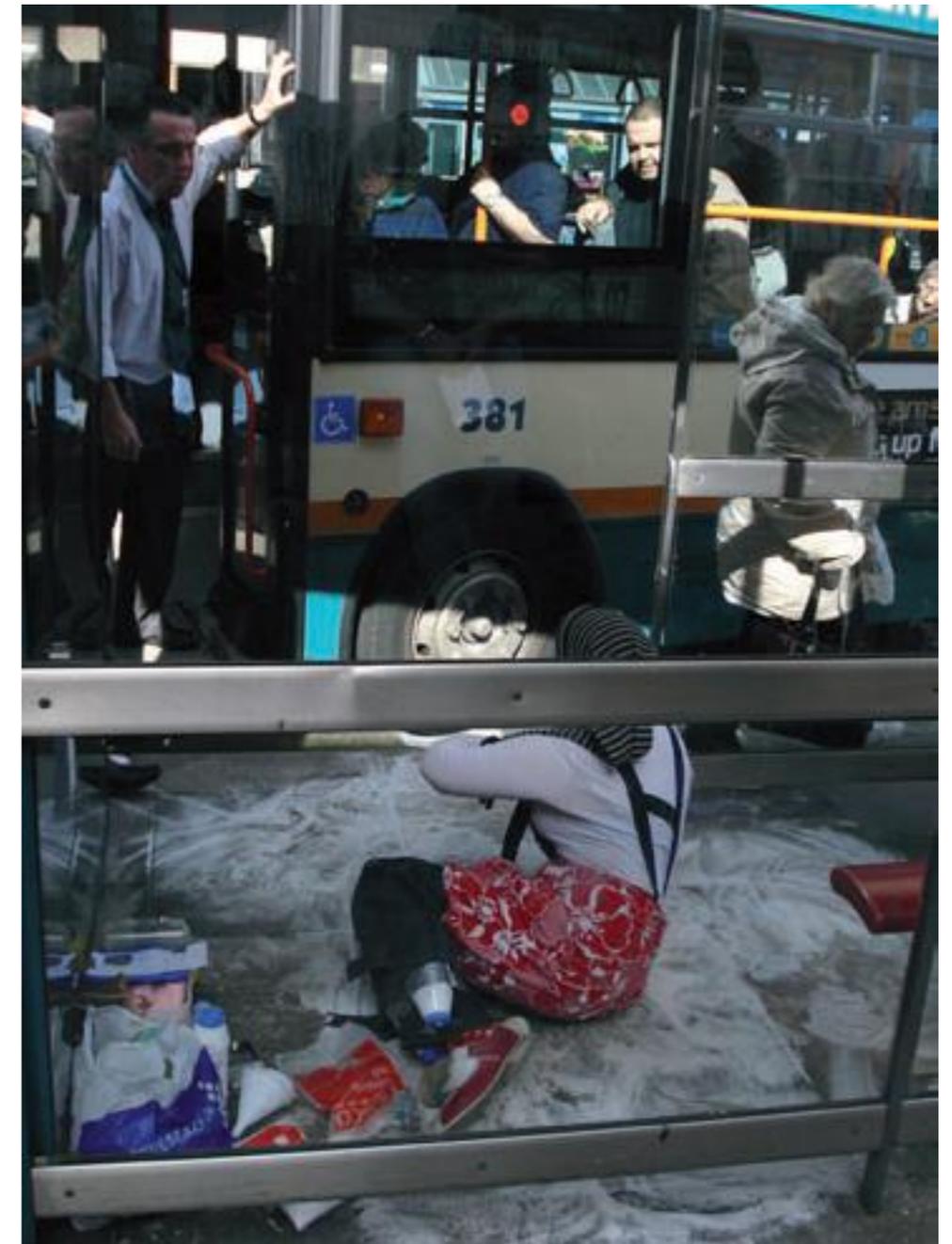
Play demands freedom. Play can take place when the primary drives such as hunger and thirst are satisfied and external pressures are minimised, then player is

figure 6

Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell, performance at local bus stop in Belfast, Toadstool from Stranmillis, bus stop action shown as part of an installation *I AM*, Polish Exchange, 2007. Photo: Ray Cashell

figure 7

Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell, debating with an annoyed bus driver performance at the *The Cat Show*, Cardiff, 2007. Photo: Soozy Roberts





able to transcend reality. Decisions like how long, where, and when play takes place should be intrinsically motivated.

Sinéad often needs to ring-fence this freedom in order to be able to play. Being invited to shows, events, and festivals demands a careful negotiation of her freedom and play space. Festivals and events often do not allow for freedom of play when determining duration, location, and conditions necessary to invite an audience. These restrictions might be frustrating and the expectations of an audience might not match the playful approach of Sinéad. She also tries to minimise the number of people she works with, as minding other people and being in charge of their well-being can be a distraction from the right mindset for play. She most likely ends up worrying about minders and documenters<sup>30</sup> and her flow of play is disrupted.

The first two bus stop events led to a return to the bus stop at home. For two days in Autumn 2008, her sister and fellow artist, Sighle,<sup>31</sup> and her school friend Eve McAllistair dressed in black, put on their rollerblades and hid under a 1980s red cardboard city bus built by Sinéad. They drove up to the bus stop, often behind and between the contemporary metro buses in the same sequence of 15 minutes, and stopped for potential passengers. Sinéad would stand as before, dressed as the toadstool positioned beside the bus stop. When the bus stop was empty, Sinéad would roller skate around the turning circle and then quickly back into position before the next bus came. Sinéad and Sighle's father filmed the sequence from the other side of the road.<sup>32</sup> Some children between eight and ten years old took up the occasion to enter the playful event. They invaded the video image by camouflaging themselves with branches and leaves to become part of the bus stop background. As a consequence of an artwork, the use of space and images can alter the perception of a situation for observers. Sinéad enjoys the authentic, spontaneous street crowd more than an art audience with specific expectations.

#### "BELFAST BUS RACE"

On 28 August 2011, Sinéad performed the "Belfast Bus Race". For this work, she created 11 types of old and new public buses<sup>33</sup> out of cardboard that circulated in Belfast during the 1980s and still do today. She chose the Mary Peters race track<sup>34</sup> in Belfast as a site and invited six friends, colleagues, and professional runners to run the bus race on the tracks. Her brother documented the event. Next to presenting the film in art venues, she intends to show the film in professional betting shops. (figure 8)

figure 8

Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell, "Belfast Bus Race", Mary Peters' Track, Belfast, 2011.  
Photo: Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell

figure 9

Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell, passing cyclist (passer-by) trying out a bus costume, Mary Peters' Track, Belfast, 2011.  
Photo: Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell



#### CONCLUSION

"I placed a strong emphasis on identity ambiguity: The artwork was to remain, as long as possible, unclear in its status ... My guideline is simple: One shouldn't rush too quickly to label art; this may deaden the game."<sup>35</sup>

The practice of Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell is as serious as play needs to be in order to be play. Playfulness is both an ends and a means of arousing curiosity in herself and others, leading towards creativity and discovery. The harmless appearance of play enables Sinéad to publicly question her surroundings. Play-

ing instigates a trial and error investigation in which the things that disrupt it are as revealing as the play itself. It is an intelligent practice developed in Belfast to mirror the play of, on the one hand, guerrilla-style street laws, and on the other hand, British manners established in an Irish setting over centuries, without ridiculing them. Sinéad managed to establish herself as a character, an authentic person who is very reflective, disciplined, hard-working, and who explores the details of her existence. The ability to keep playing in and with the world and in and with art is serious business! (figure 9)

## CENTRE FOR SUBURBAN RESEARCH (CSR)

**Location:** South Belfast

**Who:** Justin McKeown

**What:** Artist-in-residence programme based in artist's family home in Belfast

**Web:** <http://spartaction.com/originalspart/csr.html>, <http://www.justinmckeown.com/>

**Keywords:** Artist in residence, family home, engagement with domesticity, feminist politics of art-making, interrelation of art and politics

**Description:** The CSR was an artist-in-residence programme based in the family home of Justin McKeown, his partner and fellow SPARTist, Meabh McDonnell, and their child, Luke McDonnell. Residencies at the Centre for Suburban Research (2005–2008) were by invitation only and consisted of staying in a family home in South Belfast up to one week. The reasoning that brought this artist in residence programme into being differed radically from that of most other programmes: The overall objective was to facilitate artistic processes that explored some aspect of the artists' relationships with Belfast. Through doing this, the aim was to use artists' residencies as a tool to subtly disrupt the cohesion of everyday domestic life within the family home so as to cause hitherto invisible aspects of its political dynamics to materialise. As such CSR asked all artists in residence to leave behind copies of everything they produced while in residence, as the documents would trace these elements. CSR did this to understand Belfast as a lived reality, beyond its representation and manipulation in the media. By building up documents over the process of several residencies, they were able to achieve this. After art-

ists finished their residency, they also asked them to undertake an appraisal of what it was like to live with the family for a week. They did this to not overlook the domestic aspect of life in Belfast, in fact Justin and Meabh believed the domestic to be integral to what they were trying to understand.

During a residency, artists could expect:

1. A warm welcome
2. A comfortable living environment and a nice bedroom with a view of the garden
3. Access to all mod-cons from washing machine to TV, PC, and Play Station 2
4. Access to art materials and tools
5. Access to various computer and technical resources
6. Access to the Centre for Suburban Research archive

The residency offered food and accommodation for the duration of the residency. Justin could not offer the artists a fee. He tried to arrange for visiting artists to give a talk in one of the local universities.

The CSR was the practical part of Justin's PhD "Materialising a Political Art Practice within Contemporary Systems of Power: Northern Ireland", which focussed on the interrelation of art and politics. He published the mail-art books *Centre for Suburban Research Publications*, issues 1–9<sup>36</sup> and made the outcomes available on a web page.<sup>37</sup>

### EMBODIED ART PRACTICE

Besides living for a period in England, Justin McKeown grew up and developed his art practice in Northern Ireland. Justin, who had a Catholic background, came from Ballymena, a stronghold of predominantly Loyalist paramilitaries, including the

UVF and the UDA. Ballymena also later became a stronghold of the Real IRA, a faction that split from the Provisional IRA movement in 1997. Like many people from Northern Ireland, he experienced a specific external reading of himself.

Justin founded an art action group and practice he called SPART.<sup>38</sup>

*Since its inception in 2001, SPART has developed as a strategic embodied questioning of the interrelation of art and life in the late 20th / early 21st century. Drawing on a rich legacy of political and artistic thought, SPART explores the legacy of 20th century avant-gardist politics and art within a 21st century context. In keeping with this, SPART explores the potential of the dissolution of the category of "Art" through embodying and evolving questions regarding the politics and role of creativity, culture and leisure within 21st century western neo-liberal society. Just as the birth of the 20th century demanded new forms of art, so too does the birth of the 21st century demand new forms of leisure. What we are interested in is exploring radical approaches to creating and structuring social relationships through leisure activities. To this end we propose SPART: the ultimate hybrid of sport and art and therefore the most evolved form of leisure on the planet.*<sup>39</sup>

With embodied art practice, Justin and his fellow SPART activists explored "how the theoretical and ideological aspects of being merge with the lived and personal aspects of human experience; so that the two, while remaining distinct, become one in the experience and articulation of being."<sup>40</sup>

### THE RESIDENCIES

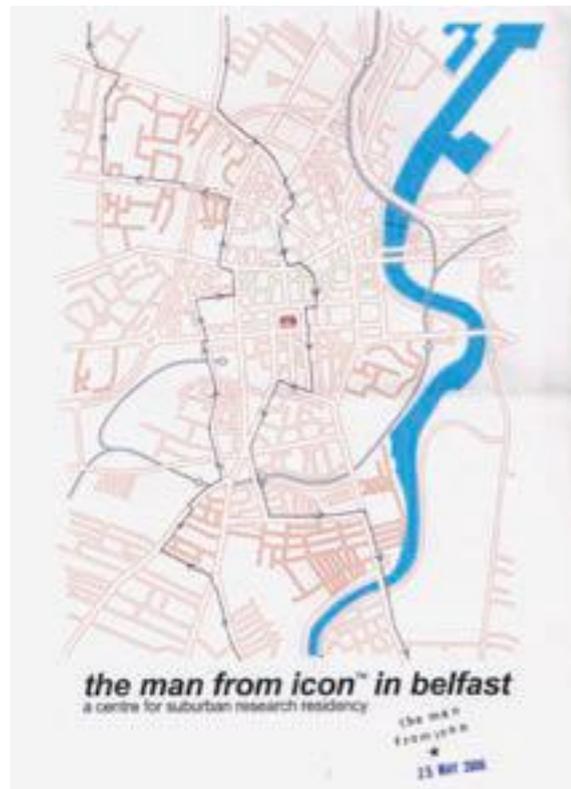
*Key to normalising Northern Irish society is an understanding of the way in which it is codified. It is my contention that key*

*to this is an understanding of the role played by domestic space in the cohesion of everyday life in Northern Ireland. [CSR] originates from the desire to create a political art practice that successfully materialises and engages with the political conditions underpinning Northern Irish society in the period 2005–2008.*<sup>41</sup>

Over a period of three years, the following eight artists stayed at Justin and Meabh's private home to undertake a residency: Stewart Home and Clare Carolin (UK),<sup>42</sup> Gavin Peacock (UK), Denis Romanovski (Belarus), Paul Stapleton (USA), Caroline Pugh (Scotland), Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell (Northern Ireland), Nathan Crothers (Northern Ireland). In response to CSR, Emily Kyoko Snowden (JP) created a residency in Tokyo in her own home. Most of them responded to the invitation with a proposed action for the visit, with the exception of Denis Romanovski, Stewart Home and Clare Carolin.<sup>43</sup>

Gavin Peacock from Brighton, UK, was the first official artist to stay at CSR from 21–26 May 2006. He left the house every day and explored Belfast – a city he had never been to before. At the end of each day, he sent a copy of his notes and photographs he took, etc., to the CSR. He reported his enquiries in the evening to the family, and the next day his material would arrive by post.

Gavin very much represented two phenomena: the artist as tourist and a British person visiting Northern Ireland. Most English people's understanding of the place is highly formed by Northern Ireland's depiction in the British media. What became clear through this residency is how unrecognised social



trauma plays out in everyday contexts in Northern Ireland and within the living reality of the hosts' lives.

While Northern Ireland looks exactly the same as Ireland or England on the surface, the reality is that it functions very differently.<sup>44</sup> (figure 10)

Since Gavin's work essentially dealt with the phenomenon of visiting Belfast as a British tourist, it provoked very emotional reactions on the hosts' side about tourism in relation to the city and essentially

about art tourism in underprivileged areas depicting "the Troubles". "The Troubles" as a site of tourism, and the romanticisation of "the Troubles" through tourism, became a core issue of debates. Is there any way for outsiders to have access to a deeper understanding of this civil society? Could tourism and a more accurate meditated depiction of "the Troubles" do any good for the people who grew up in Northern Ireland? On Gavin's last day, he visited the Falls Road and his records mirror the imbalance of understanding a lived situation. Meabh and Justin saw Gavin as a cipher of British culture. As every resident was asked to evaluate the visit with a report, Gavin reflected on his two-folded experiences: the one in the private setting of his host family and the other one in Belfast's public space. As Belfast was for him equal to the media image of police, army, bombs, barricades, tear gas, hunger strikes, etc., he experienced his life-threatening fear of getting physically attacked when walking on Falls Road as a British citizen with a British accent. It was his embodied experience of the site-specific issues and it created the unpleasant sensation in him to tap unintentionally into an art-making process about the conflict.

(figure 11)

Paul Stapleton was artist in residence from 20–28 of April 2007. Paul explored various issues of family life and of Belfast through food, eating habits, and culinary creativity. He used his time during the residency to reflect on the hosts' own eating habits and the ideas about food in Northern Ireland. Being from Mexico, Paul cooked a lot of international, non-local food during the week. He reflected on exported and local food. He spent all day going out exploring the local food markets, doing shopping,

figure 10

Image from Gavin Peacocks notes, 25 May 2006. Photo: Justin McKeown

figure 11

Image from Gavin Peacocks notes: "No Maps, photos or lists today. I took a bus down the Falls Road and then walked back into the city centre. In the time that took I'd started to ask myself many questions about what I was doing and why. These questions won't be answered here and now but I will send a postscript kind of document once I've returned to Brighton and formulated some coherent answers," 26 May 2006. Photo: Justin McKeown<sup>45</sup>



figure 12

Mexican food cooked by Paul, 2007.  
Photo: Justin McKeown

and then brought the family together in the evenings over a cooked meal.

Northern Ireland has a reputation for offering an unhealthy, poor diet based on meat, potatoes, and lots of fat. Food choices were extremely limited for a long time. People were not interested in cooking, nor socialising over a meal. The diet often was impacted by the economic situation. Tinned food and potted noodles were common. Paul discovered local food such as various breads: soda, wheat, and potato breads. The entire host family was vegetarian and tried to come to terms with the learnt eating habits. Issues of food led to looking at the heavy drinking, which is a common Northern Irish form of socialising. Justin and Meabh reported how eating was getting in the way of serious drinking.<sup>46</sup> An empty stomach would fully support the power of alcohol, whereas food would lower the impact. “Because a country that suffers trauma likes to drink, but it makes for merriment and passionate people.”<sup>47</sup> (figure 12)

Paul was interested in having a conversation with both the family and Belfast through the medium of food. In and through his art practice, he shows interest in how we relate and shape our cultural identity through food production, transport, purchasing, preparation, consumption, and disposal. Food links the inside and the outside of the house and makes the family home a microcosm of the macro society. Through the relationship between the home and the larger body of society, Paul found similarities to his Mexican society, for example the larger body of people is made out of smaller communities that bond. (figure 13)

figure 13

Luke eating Mexican food, 2007.  
Photo: Justin McKeown

Caroline Pugh,<sup>48</sup> a sonic artist from Edinburgh, Scotland, was artist in residence from 16–22 July 2007. Caroline’s residency explored the housing market in Belfast from the perspective of someone trying to rent a house – as she was about to move to Belfast. Caroline’s residency revealed the preconceptions that estate agents<sup>49</sup> hold about the people who rent houses in Belfast.

The island of Ireland has a strong culture for owning property. Only the “mad, bad, and sad” rent a home, besides students and young professionals. Possession of land is connected to the idea of both the right to and the security of owning a home. This stance mirrors the deep traumatic experience of the colonialist history of Ireland and its dramatic consequences for the Irish population today. Renting therefore is seen as a transient choice of home. The current economic situation since 2008 has shifted the relationship to renting space. In 2007, the massive property boom in Belfast was part of the normalisation process. It pushed up housing prices tremendously (in 2007, a



house in Belfast could reach the same price as a city-centre flat in Paris).

Caroline made appointments with estate agents and went out each day looking at potential places to live. The process reflected the estate agents' sense of what different people will find desirable, how they think and categorise people. Local categorisation is based on dress codes, age, gender, and foreign (Scottish) background. Categorisation as such reflects a Northern Irish survival strategy. It is based on making assumptions about situations and putting oneself in relation to the assumptions. At the extreme end of this categorisation between friends and enemies is the lack of grey in a black and white experience. "People here only feel like themselves when they are in opposition to someone or something. It's how they gain a sense of who they are. Without it they are lost. People here only feel like themselves when they are in a state of confliction."<sup>50</sup>

This discussion of housing led to a discussion of preconceptions and judgments made by estate agents and other people regarding what areas in Belfast are suitable for people, based on the backgrounds suggested by their names. This inevitably led to an assessment of the concept of nationality, which underlies such judgments. Northern Irish citizens can hold a British and an Irish passport.

*In Northern Ireland someone may feel more British or Irish but they are Northern Irish whether they like it or not. It's not healthy to go on holding such strong national affiliations to countries outside of our social reality. People should be focussing on changing our society together.*<sup>51</sup> (figure 14)

Caroline identified the segregation of the town and the few areas left for her, as a Scottish outsider, to live and work in – which was mainly South Belfast. This segregation comes with some specific phenomena, like few non-locals and racism, poor standard of living, damp houses, and politically coloured tensions in areas. She appreciated having Justin and Meabh, who would share frankly with her their own experiences. As a non-local, she would be confronted with Scottish ideas of Belfast still being a "war zone", as well as Belfast-based peoples' surprise at a non-local moving to the city. Having a partly shared history in the triangle of "England-Scotland-Ireland" made her aware of her political stance. Unique points of Belfast she found out by moving to Belfast were: close communities, a lack of a totally nasty industrialised countryside, word of mouth still functioning, great pubs and music, proper "dodgy" characters around, a nation where even young people are into gambling and horse betting.

Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell was artist in residence from 17–22 December 2007. Her work revolved around exploring the family environment at Christmastime through strategies of play. Sinéad's residency served to highlight the paradox of Christmas: supposedly a time of festivity for families, but in actual fact it is also a time of great emotional and financial stress. It brought out an idea of the wider Northern Irish understanding of family: camaraderie and mutual support, but also often a fragile balancing act between work, family, love, and time.

Sinéad organised a "Christmas Draw In"<sup>52</sup> at the family home as well as night-time croquet in the garden. She also baked a cake (from a recipe found in a maga-

Street in Belfast, 2007. Photo: Justin McKeown



"Christmas Draw In" by Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell in our living room, December 2007. Photo: Justin McKeown



zine in a dentist's surgery seven years ago). She turned the situation in the house into a play zone, much to the distress of Meabh, who on one hand enjoyed the play, the chaos, and the amount of people rambling through the house, but on the other hand was trying to accommodate the arriving Northern Irish family and Christmas preparations. As Sinéad is local, she brought people (friends and family) into the house and explored the hierarchy of visitors such as lodger / cuckoo and the temporary visitor.

Sinéad also had the task of navigating between her own family and the host family in preparing for Christmas. Her family as well as Meabh's family came to the residency. It set up an exchange of her life with the hosts' lives, allowing everyone to get to meet each other's families and friends. (figure 15)

Emily Kyoko Snowden Naka was artist in residence from 1–7 May 2008. Emily's residency was imagined. Emily never stayed at the CSR. Instead she

built a cardboard mini version of the CSR in her own home in Tokyo. The mini CSR was large enough to accommodate Emily, her daughter, and friends. For the period of her residency, she carried out different activities in the mini CSR, very much based on her childhood memories of living in the UK.

Questions came up around imagining living with people for a week, like how did she imagine it would be to live with Justin, Luke, and Meabh? How did Emily imagine the relationship between Meabh and Justin? How did she imagine Luke and Meabh might be? She thought a lot about marmite on toast, couches, builder's tea, council tax, road signs and roundabouts, and school during the mini CSR residency. She realised what she was missing in Japan from her previous English life: newsagents, the smell of damp walls, pint glasses, and libraries. Emily described how the Japanese people were amazed that there are people out there who have fun. (figure 16)

Finally, Nathan Crothers, also from Northern Ireland, was artist in residence from 19–25 May 2008. Nathan's work set out to explore the family environment by focussing on the objects in the house – the everyday things and stored away objects for future use – for donation to charity or for dumping. As an activity of his residency, he organised a yard sale and got rid of a lot of unnecessary objects. The yard sale again attracted people to the private house – the site of events. The living space became the site of a cultural event. The goal of the residency was to create an experience for a more open society. As opposed to the usual societal event, which would involve drinking, Sinéad, Nathan, and the host family offered action, conversation, and food. The notion of being present and taking part became important, embodying the experience instead of reading about it or hearing about it later on. It took many residencies to get people to attend the events, as the format is not usual and curiosity is not typical in this societal climate.



During the residency, Nathan was looking to explore the relationships that members of the house had with the objects that surrounded them. Nathan was interested in seeing how different people related to the same objects and the question of ownership within a shared house. He set up the yard sale as an opportunity to buy the “relics” he made while on residency, for example neatly packaged and labelled bags of Nathan's hair. Justin told the stories of where the things had come from. (figure 17)

#### CONCLUSION

The PhD that Justin pursued gave him the time, financial support, and framework to theoretically examine this life-like art practice. Initially, Meabh and Justin wanted to continue the residencies with one to two guests a year, as they felt the residencies turned all of them into more sociable people and made them more self-aware of their Northern Irish living conditions. They finally decided the continuation of the CSR would not further inform their understand-

figure 16

Mini CSR in Tokyo, 2008.  
Photo: Emily Kyoko Snowden Naka

figure 17

Yard sale by Nathan Crothers, 2008.  
Photo: Justin McKeown,



ing of the situation and stopped. They did progress the work in another way though, through the work “How to Explain Northern Ireland to a Dead Leprechaun”. This work transported Northern Irish living rooms into galleries as opposed to transporting people into Northern Irish living rooms, as was the case in the CSR.<sup>53</sup>

The residencies, which were set up in a family home in a suburb, challenged the guests' perceptions of the place due to the social and site-specific fabric of the situation. The challenge was the embeddedness

of a guest in the family and offering devoted interest to the explorations of – as well as the needs of – the guests. A wider audience, other than passers-by, got to witness events more or less typical of a suburban family setting. Justin and Meabh mentioned in their reflections what an effort it is in Belfast to get people to come to an unfamiliar setting and to be challenged by the unknown. The residencies had success in that sense, as they managed to give a feeling and sense of a site in a suburban situation in Belfast that questioned the given set-up of suburban thinking and stifled behaviour.

## “LEFT LUGGAGE”

**Location:** Belfast, Fountain Street, across from the Linenhall Library’s side entrance

**Who:** “Left Luggage” is a work by Andrea Theis with participation of the Belfast public; the contributions of two guards, Christoff Gillen and Anthony Champa; two photographers, Liam Campbell and Sean Mallon; and one video documenter, Fiona Larkin. Martin Carter built the wooden showcase. Andrea’s entire team are Northern Irish except for Fiona and Anthony.

**What:** Intervention in the public space, 4–9 October 2010, 10.30 am – 5.30 pm (Thursday until 9 pm).

**Keywords:** everyday culture, interactive intervention, investigation through artistic means

**Description:** “Left Luggage” was a temporary facility in a showcase placed in a lively shopping street. It offered each passer-by the free service of storing their everyday luggage while simultaneously investigating the phenomenon. The project has so far been realised in Berlin (May 2007, in collaboration with the Otto-Nagel Gallery), Dublin (August 2007, within the framework of OUT OF SITE), and Belfast (October 2010). In all locations, the artist dressed like an attendant. She wore a uniform jacket with the label “Left Luggage” on her sleeve and her name on the front pocket. A display stand indicated the opening times. For several consecutive days, and for seven hours each day, passers-by were able to leave their bags and briefcases with her during the service hours until closing. In return for keeping their bags and possessions safe, she asked these people – now unburdened by their luggage – for permission to display the contents of their bags in the glass case. The objects were taken out of the

backpacks and handbags by their owners, listed in detail by her and displayed together with the list in the showcase. In this way, they were visible for all and, simultaneously, under public control. The private was made public, the belongings became exhibition pieces in a temporary, contemporary cultural museum showcase.

### BELFAST 2010

Within her artistic practice, Andrea Theis developed “Left Luggage” in 2007. As an intervention in the every day, so far “Left Luggage” worked on the one hand in a site-specific manner, and on the other hand it could be applied to other urban settings. “Left Luggage” touched upon universal issues like property, ownership, desire, the meaning of things, the content of bags, or on context-specific issues such as security, security checks, trust, transparency, and the risk in handing over the responsibility of one’s own property to a stranger on the street. As a temporary service in Belfast in 2010, it also referred to an everyday experience from Northern Ireland’s past: During the Troubles, security forces were posted in front of every public building to check bags for explosives and weapons. (figure 18)

Andrea Theis’ interventions tend to appear simple and clear rather than spectacularly designed. By contrast, the questions inherent in the intervention are complex and manifold. The methodology of “Left Luggage” similarly looked very simple, yet it was planned and executed with precision.

Its physical appearance dealt with the context, inserted itself, and ideally adapted to it in order to simultaneously break from it. The intervention,

figure 18

British soldiers man a checkpoint, Belfast, 1973. Photo: NAM. 2007-12-6<sup>54</sup>



which lasted six days, was realised with a wooden showcase with large glass windows made from Perspex, a sandwich board with information about the type of service and the opening hours, with Andrea Theis as service provider and in addition one guard in proximity to her. Andrea wore a uniform that suggested a service provider and underlined the impression of an apparently official position. The hope was to generate trust and gain respect from the passers-by. The guard was asked to dress in black with a neon safety vest on top. It gave him an official look; the projects logo on his back added to that. His task was to observe the crowd and support Andrea in watching the showcase in moments when she was involved in conversations. (figure 19)

The immediate verbal communication was an important artistic medium in “Left Luggage”. Verbal and visual body language, as well as the style of information given, were part of the aesthetic. Andrea would not declare this piece in public as art, but rather as service or research<sup>55</sup> on the everyday. That way the

figure 19

“Left Luggage”, the setting in Fountain Street with assistant, attendant, display cabinet and passers-by, Belfast, 2010. Photo: Liam Campbell



facts and the concept were easier to comprehend for passers-by. The physical appearance of the project in the urban setting were also part of the aesthetic language: the uniform; the design, size, and material of the showcase and its positioning on the street; the design of the typography used; and the chosen brownish colour nuances – it all belonged to the sophisticated aesthetics of the work.

### PERFORMATIVE AND PERFORMATIVITY

The work was performative and therefore dealt with performativity. With the aim of paying maximum attention to the public over a period of a week, Andrea required a number of careful, personal preparations as a performer, such as wearing comfortable shoes and thermal underwear; sleeping enough to be fit and alert with her senses and to make active eye contact; withstanding excessive evening activities; and eating healthy. The daily procedure of getting dressed in the morning and undressed in the evening, setting up the facility in the morning and storing the cabinet in a nearby exhibition space in the evening

were the unseen parts of the performance. She prepared to welcome the unknown. It also meant for her to attend communication training in asking the right questions and to engage in active listening as well as practicing friendly contact with people. She also forced herself to constantly take notes during the intervention and in the evenings so as not to lose any details.

Andrea Theis' driver of the experience onsite is her nosiness and curiosity in the contents of people's bags, stories, and the experience itself. "Left Luggage" worked with a surprise moment that was blended into the everyday. Surprise unlocked people and made them talk about the public and the private. Andrea's experience of the interventions taught her that people in Belfast are talkative and open, giving insights in their thinking and bags, although they might not expose the contents of their pouches. During the Troubles, people were used to opening up their private bags to strangers in security checks; this act has remained with many until today.

(figure 20)

The public display of the contents of bags in a showcase evoked on one hand the desire for the belongings of others, to a point that passers-by claimed items in the showcase to be theirs. On the other hand, by displaying the content of a person's bag, the owner gained public attention for a moment and became visible to everybody through the objects.

(figure 21)

#### BEING NON-LOCAL

Andrea decided to perform the intervention after living in Belfast for a year.<sup>56</sup> The time spent there made

her feel secure about the local accent and comfortable as well as confident enough to have these local conversations. Through research and over time, she developed an understanding of the complexity of history and site. For the set-up of the work, her established network was useful in choosing the people to be involved as well as the site, which was meant to be central but neutral and as safe as possible. She was comfortable being identified as German, which had a positive effect on people's trust in the intervention as well as its worth. A foreigner in Belfast appears neutral in a divided city. Still, age and gender play a key role, as does appearance, as illustrated by an elderly woman who said: "I trust you, you have good teeth." The conversations happened very spontaneously without any hierarchy involved, creating an authentic study of people's reactions to the scenario.

Through the conversations, Andrea learnt about the Troubles and the issue of security in Belfast. This was not necessarily the main topic that came up in street conversations (although in the reflective discourse it always came up), but it was often the underlying theme, the elephant in the room,<sup>57</sup> which is typical for the Northern Irish conflict. The work gave her a better idea as a non-local of the culture and of the underlying anxious atmosphere. People's little comments and hints as well as ways of expressing themselves created an authentic, context-specific flavour, as it varies locally. The work consists mainly of storytelling, and as such it is for the participants an extraordinary encounter in a daily routine. It highlights as action the diversity in an urban setting.

(figure 22)

figure 20

"Left Luggage", one of many insights to handbags, Belfast, 2010. Photo: Sean Mallon

figure 21

"Left Luggage", discussion about the things on display, Belfast, 2010. Photo: Sean Mallon

figure 22

"Left Luggage", client observing how Andrea places her belongings in the showcase, Belfast, 2010. Photo: Sean Mallon



An artistic intervention like this allows Andrea to meet within a short time an enormous number of people she would usually never have a reason to interact with. The learning experience for her was one about life on the street through often unexpected reactions that explains the mind frame of this particular context-specific universe.

(figure 23)

#### DOCUMENTATION

As “Left Luggage” is an ephemeral work, Andrea feels forced to have a comprehensive documentation for various reasons: to recall and evaluate her work afterwards, to give evidence of its existence to the art context and funders, to create visibility through exhibition contributions, artist talks, and media applications. Gathered material from the process is necessary to process and edit as well as to communicate knowledge production and research outcomes.<sup>58</sup> (figure 24)

As the artist involved, Andrea collected stories and observed behaviour through note-taking. She also hired two photographers and one video documenter for the visual documentation. One photographer, as invisible as possible in the background, was on site all the time. The task was to capture the process in long shots, but also details, where possible, such as gestures, opening of bags, contents of bags, and facial expressions. Similar to the guards, the two photographers were briefed to maintain attention of the situation and the presence of Andrea, to observe thoroughly and thoughtfully, to be prepared for the unpredictable, and to not miss key moments. Andrea, a trained professional photographer herself, had the idea to capture as many situations in photographs



as possible. With that, she hoped to create material to work with at a later date.<sup>59</sup> As the work is happening in the moment, the art is what happens onsite and in the process.

As it is difficult to keep attention focussed all the time, she asked the photographers to change over after half a day. The result of the Belfast documentation was good, but it was impossible for the photographers to indeed capture what Andrea had perceived or experienced. To follow her instructions to photograph the same situation over and over again for a number of days proved to be very difficult; either they did not take enough pictures (because they did not see the point in photographing similar situations over and over again) or they missed many of the key moments due to a lack of attention. The documentation of these moments exists to show what happened. In order to become art pieces themselves, they would need to be transformed and reviewed as material. (figure 25)

figure 23

“Left Luggage”, someone’s shopping stored and on display, Belfast, 2010. Photo: Liam Campbell



Andrea set up one video camera on the first storey of the Linenhall Library, almost invisible to the passers-by on the street. The idea was to shoot a film with one fixed frame only, a top view like a CCTV image, and to use it afterwards in a time-lapse manner to visually document the interaction of the crowd with the “Left Luggage” project. The existing footage has some gaps due to closing times of the institution. The video footage also intended to serve as evidence in case of theft.

#### FINAL THOUGHTS

The development of the work went into its third stage and had a different standing than the initial one in Berlin in 2007. She started to think about “Left Luggage” in Belfast 18 months before its execution. The actual preparation took eight months, including the design and construction of the wooden showcase, hiring staff, finding the right location, finding out about public permissions, and other negotiations in the background.

figure 24

“Left Luggage”, conversation on items and collections, Belfast, 2010. Photo: Sean Mallon



Andrea highlighted that within the ongoing development of such an intervention her personal development and growth also played a key role, especially in learning more about communication tools such as how to deal with aggression and attack as well as ways of giving feedback to the hired team.

The aftermath of such an intervention is unpredictable. There is no method to measure the impact of such an artwork on the random passers-by and participants. The immediate initial steps for Andrea were to thank people, to collect the images, to write up the project, and to send out some images with a brief description to the group of followers and media, riding the wave of attention such an intervention creates.

figure 25

“Left Luggage”, man showing voluntarily the content of his back pack (but would not put it on display), Belfast, 2010. Photo: Sean Mallon

## “UP-DOWN” AND “BEACH HUTS FOR BALLYKINLER” –

TWO PROJECTS COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOPED AND INITIATED BY PS<sup>2</sup>, PETER MUTSCHLER AND RUTH MORROW WITH LOCAL ARTIST, ACTIVIST ANNE-MARIE DILLON AND THE BALLYKINLER, BALLYKINLAR<sup>60</sup> COMMUNITY

**Location:** Ballykinler, County Down, Northern Ireland

**Who:** Anne-Marie Dillon, artist and activist; the community of Ballykinler; PS<sup>2</sup> and Ruth Morrow (citizen of Northern Ireland, Professor of architecture); students of the Architecture Department, Queens University, Belfast; the artists Phil Hession, Belfast; public works, London; Paddy Bloomer, Belfast; Duncan Ross, Belfast.

**What:** PS<sup>2</sup> (Paragon Studios / project space) is a small artists' collective with studio space in the centre of Belfast. Alongside the studio space, PS<sup>2</sup> uses a former shop for project space on the ground level of the building as a platform for art projects and cultural activities, which are often located in the city fringe and further afield. The focus of PS<sup>2</sup> is on urban intervention and social interaction by artists, urban practitioners, multidisciplinary groups, and theorists. PS<sup>2</sup> is run on a voluntary, non-commercial basis and supported by funding from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and other sources. The projects are initiated and organised by Peter Mutschler, together with Ruth Morrow as curatorial adviser. Peter and Ruth have been collaborating since 2007 with Anne-Marie Dillon and the community in Ballykinler.

**Web:** <http://www.pssquared.org/UP-Down.php>, <http://www.pssquared.org/beachhuts.php>, <http://villageworks.org.uk/wp/>, <http://www.internationalvillageshop.net/shops/ballykinler-village-shop>

**Keywords:** Village, RHYZOM – pan European research project, community art, activism, Forever Young Pensioners, Army base, rural setting

**Description:** The small village of Ballykinler, with around 270 houses, is situated at the south-east coast of County Down. The village is dominated by a British Army site, Abercorn Barracks (1310 inhabitants), located there since 1901. In the past this created great tensions and divisions in the community, which still resonate today. More than other similarly sized villages, social and political tensions are magnified. The cultural and social activism has very much been driven in the past few years by artist and local resident Anne-Marie Dillon. Her art practice is focussed on and with the community, where she organises events from mother and toddler meetings to bingo for pensioners. With no community centre, she started weekly coffee mornings in the open and later converted a caravan into a much used mobile community centre. Actions which seem like practical community work are turning into happenings and performances through her politically provocative, practical, and poetic artistic vision. Her work is supported by and linked to the “Forever Young Pensioners”, a group of older ladies who do not accept the non-existence of a community centre in the village – for their own needs and that of young people. PS<sup>2</sup> and Ruth Morrow have been following Anne-Marie's activities since 2009 and have created active links to students, international art practitioners, and other initiatives. With their skills and networks, they play a key role in bringing non-local actors into

Anne-Marie Dillon, map of Ballykinler and community representatives, Parish Hall, 2008.

Photo: Anne-Marie Dillon

the setting and introducing Anne-Marie's activities nationally and internationally.

Key two figures need to be mentioned when introducing the work of artist Anne-Marie Dillon and her activities: Peter Mutschler of PS<sup>2</sup> and Ruth Morrow. Both of them made a series of events possible that took place within Anne-Marie Dillon's long-term local project in rural Ballykinler. By focussing on PS<sup>2</sup> and Ruth Morrow, the necessity of elements such as networking, funding, and contextualising a local art practice will be highlighted in the following text. What roles might PS<sup>2</sup> and Ruth Morrow and other non-locals play in the development of a situation?

Anne-Marie Dillon is a practicing artist with extended family roots in Ballykinler. She received her MFA degree in Fine Arts from the University of Ulster as a mature student in 2009, focussing her practice more and more around community building in her home village. Being a mother of seven, she had spent years trying to improve the segregated community by setting up bottom-up community groups and joining committees to get basic structures in place.

Within her art practice, Anne-Marie always focussed on life-like art in the real world. She has an extended practice collaborating with other artists in Belfast and her horse Dandy, initiating playful, poetic, and absurd situations to break open the territorial and hardened settings in Northern Ireland.<sup>61</sup> In 2008/2009, both practices were slowly merged by Anne-Marie, moving the centre of her action from urban Belfast to her rural home context of Ballykinler. The dialogue with local authorities started long



ago and was sparked again during an interagency meeting set up by the East Down Rural Network for the Community Association.<sup>62</sup> Anne-Marie used the opportunity to test out art within the conversation by mapping the village with the army camp, the Gaelic football pitch, the rugby field, and scattered housing on the floor – using an aesthetic language of tea pots and other decorative home décor elements. She invited the police and political representatives into the empty Parish Hall to look and walk through the somewhat naïve and innocent-looking map of the village. A dialogue started about key issues in Ballykinler such as community structures, stakeholders, factions, and struggles. The Community Association had argued for years that the derelict school building in the village centre, owned by the Education and Library Board, should be used as a community centre – a request that has been refused many times.<sup>63</sup> (figure 26)

Anne-Marie's project “Bus Stop” in 2009 revealed,

figure 27

“Bus Stop”, in front of closed school,  
Ballykinler, 2009. Photo: Anne-Marie Dillon



figure 29

“Coffee Morning”, Commons Road, Ballykinler,  
2009. Photo: Anne-Marie Dillon



figure 28

“Bus Stop”, documentation in PS<sup>2</sup>, 2009.  
Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>



figure 30

“Forever Young Pensioners” and Mother & Toddlers  
at their Mobile Community Centre, 2009.  
Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>





as a form of direct action, the lack of social provisions, the divisions in the village, and the opposition to a proper bus stop from parts of the community in fear of anticipated vandalism. She invited the youth<sup>64</sup> of Ballykinler to build a mobile bus stop out of cardboard in front of the derelict school building. PS<sup>2</sup>, interested in Anne-Marie's work, invited the bus stop into its Belfast space, and re-assembled it, displaying it together with a personal documentation of the history of the Community Association.<sup>65</sup> (figures 27 and 28)

This experience sparked Peter's ongoing interest in Anne-Marie's work. He had invited the rural initiative into the urban setting. Although the young people came to assemble the work, they did not appear during their own opening. Peter began to attend Anne-Marie's actions onsite to experience her notion of community art within her own community and at its place of reality in Ballykinler. By that time Anne-Marie had begun to set up a regular open-air community centre every Tuesday morning with coffee and activities for all the villagers. The pensioners were the ones who came. The open-air community



centre consisted of chairs, tables, and other furniture assembled on an empty corner site, Commons Road. Electricity was donated by nearby houses. It was highly accepted by the locals and attended by many. In October 2009, the open-air community centre was transformed through a caravan<sup>66</sup> into a temporary community centre. (figures 29 and 30)

PS<sup>2</sup> was at that time involved in a European project called RHYZOM, a pan national community of artists, architects, and initiatives looking at collaborative networks for local cultural production and trans-local dissemination.<sup>67</sup> Peter invited Anne-Marie to join the international group on a fieldtrip focussing on cultural production in rural environments and small towns of the Irish border region.<sup>68</sup>

Anne-Marie presented in that context her work to the Forum in the Millennium Court, Portadown. The trip and presentation was a turning point for the Irish RHYZOM group and Anne-Marie's involvement. Anne-Marie was invited to take part at an event

figure 31

RHYZOM, PS<sup>2</sup> workshop Ballykinler – army presentation: cultural bridge building, 2010. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

figure 32

RHYZOM, PS<sup>2</sup> workshop Ballykinler – artist and villagers presentation, 2010. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>



in Abbey Gardens, London, organised by public works on 16 March 2010. The international RHYZOM group met up in Belfast in June 2010. The group discussed on their first day in Belfast whether cultural activities needed to be housed in permanent spaces versus the temporary nature of space, ways of engagement, participation, and collaboration in rural areas, especially in culturally under-resourced locations. Within the group it was argued that “permanent space might make artists consistently visible and to some extent responsible or accountable to the community with whom they work.”<sup>69</sup>

Ballykinler became then the location for a workshop from 19–20 June 2010. The international group<sup>70</sup> stayed in five caravans positioned in a circle, had access to the Abercorn Barracks,<sup>71</sup> including a tour of the facilities and a discussion with Lieutenant Colonel Bill Wright of the 2nd Battalion, The Rifles. (figure 31)

It became clear that the perception of the role of the army in the region differed greatly between Anne-Marie (community's lack of access to the vast army

figure 33

RHYZOM, PS<sup>2</sup> workshop Ballykinler – visit of Army site, 2010. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

territory, including the beaches and potential future use if abandoned by the army) and the Lieutenant Colonel (army strongly supported by the local community, good location, permanent presence, employment for the villagers).

*Later, we are told of other effects of the presence of the army camp on the village: For security purposes the entire area is under close surveillance, and this has led to families who are perceived to cause problems in other areas being sent to live in the village; and roads out of Ballykinler have been kept in relatively poor repair and remain winding in order that during the years of conflict, anyone escaping after an attack on the camp would not be able to leave the village at high speed.<sup>72</sup>*

Having no speed ramps to allow the military vehicles to race through a site as well as very low property prices are two further effects of the barracks.

The international group met all the local groups involved in the temporary community centre, had discussions, presentations of their practices, and a huge party. Christoph Schäfer described “the pensioners” caravan, which resembles a living-room, as being “aggressively cosy”. He considered it special for its symbolic value. If art manages to translate the private into the collective and public, then the caravan spatialised this process.<sup>73</sup> This onsite visit and stay gave both sides an extended field for understanding the site and situation as well as contextualising the local practice. (figures 32 and 33)

#### “BEACH HUTS FOR BALLYKINLER”

Ruth Morrow, who was a participant at RHYZOM and is a professor of architecture at Queens

University in Belfast, picked up on Anne-Marie's description of the communities lack of access to land as well as the recent army camp's co-option of the shoreline and the closure of the village's route to the beach. She set up a student project as part of "Street Society",<sup>74</sup> a real-life project by the Architecture Department of Queens University. The "Beach Huts" project in March 2011 addressed the issue of the "right of way" of the community in Ballykinler to the beach and the withdrawal of these rights by the Minister of Defence (MOD) and the army. The research project was seen as a creative strategy to focus on the recreational value of the beach, public ownership, and the beginning of a regeneration and

de-militarisation process. It was an approach by sea instead of by land.

The students<sup>75</sup> looked at the option of designing a nature park with cheap, possibly self-built (or to a great extent), ecological (material / toilet / electricity / water) beach huts for the community, involving the army and MOD consultation. They proposed huts made out of wood based on earthbags (sometimes called sandbags), used by the military for creating massive and substantial huts that resist all kinds of severe weather. They can be erected simply and quickly with readily available components.



figure 34

"Beach Huts", part of "Street Society": architecture students from Queens University Belfast and PS<sup>2</sup>, site visit, 2011. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

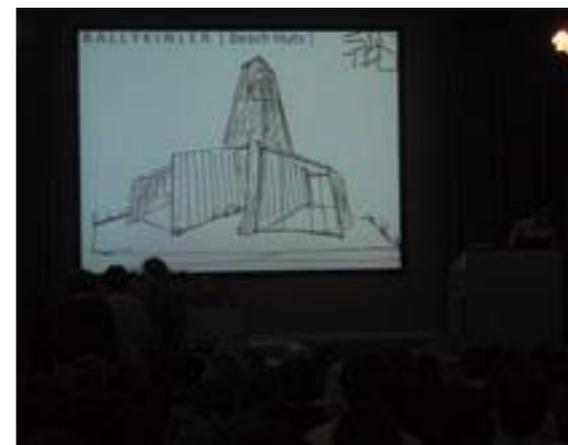


figure 35

"Beach Huts", public presentation, Ulster Museum, Belfast, 2011. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

figure 36

Presentation of the "Beach Huts" project (and models) to the Army Commander, Abercorn Barracks, 2001. Photo: Anne-Marie Dillon



The students argued for the designing and building of beach huts with the appropriation of the beach by and for the community as well as a civil and cultural liberation of (army) occupied territories and the future integration of the army site by the community. It would allow individuals and groups to meet and spend time at the beach. It would also function as shelter, a meeting place, a leisure spot, allow for activities, games, barbecues, and possible overnight stays. Beach huts could offer toilet facilities and a shower.

The outcome was presented to the public in the Ulster Museum on 11 March 2011 and, separately, in Ballykinler to the Army Commander of the Abercorn Barracks. (figures 34–36)

Recently, Margaret Ritchie – MP (Member of Parliament), MLA (Member of the Legislative Assem-

bly) – and Stormont<sup>76</sup> civil servants have taken on the case. The basic right for the villagers to access the beach is an ongoing process with a possibly happy ending, supported in recent months with petitions and signature campaigns.

#### "UP-DOWN" PROJECT

The "UP-Down" project was an idea put forward by PS<sup>2</sup>, planned and executed with the help of the villagers and Anne-Marie. PS<sup>2</sup> found funding<sup>77</sup> for a series of eight- to ten-week-long workshops trying to engage the population of Ballykinler and offer ways of expression about their community, their understanding as villagers, their connectedness and disconnectedness, as well as ideas about utopias and realities.

Anne-Marie occupied an empty hairdresser shop to serve as the new Ballykinler Cultural Centre

in December 2010. Four workshops ran locally between February and May, such as the production of a film,<sup>78</sup> the fabrication of a local souvenir,<sup>79</sup> the construction of a scrap-metal paddle car limousine – this workshop<sup>80</sup> took place in a container in front of the centre – and a village newspaper/ web blog.<sup>81</sup> The scrap-metal workshop managed to get the men of the village involved for the first time. The voluntary participation in the workshops by the villagers also helped determined the themes and direction of the activities. (figures 37–40)

The village fair on 28 May 2011 was seen as a type of temporary museum for rural cultural and political activities, aspirations, and proposals, using the rural tradition of agricultural fairs and linking it to new content. It was a practical and joyful attempt to bring a diverse community together, open for anyone in the community to show their skills and crafts. The police wheeled down their mobile police station and the army joined the fair with ethnic food (which prompted the Local Gaelic Association to not participate), local and regional politicians attended, money was earned, and lots of people turned up.

The village fair took advantage of the natural form of rural public exhibitions and debates modelled on agricultural shows by presenting outcomes of the four workshops like the newspaper, the film in the cinema caravan, the bike-limousine, a local souvenir in the form of a caravan pot, but also second-hand objects, homemade jams, cakes, crafts, art ethnic foods, lambs, ducks, chickens, and hens. A tombola and a raffle took place and an air-filled bouncy castle for kids was onsite. (figures 41)

“IT IS ART, BUT IT IS REAL.”<sup>82</sup>

Allan Kaprow emphasises his idea of the blur between art and life on identity ambiguity – as long as you do not put a label on it, it remains open and flexible about what it is. He rightly points out that artists themselves find it difficult to see their art as everyday activity and like to highlight it as a special event (be it shows, concerts, readings). As soon as the marginal become the ordinary, the art blurs into life.<sup>83</sup>

If the community structures in Ballykinler worked properly and they had a centre in the empty school building, probably most of the current creative processes would never have happened. Similar to a project like “Park Fiction” in Hamburg,<sup>84</sup> an unresolved political and public issue sparked a creative process with participatory and collective elements. Unlike a typical understanding of developing rural culture in Northern Ireland, which built cultural centres all over the country,<sup>85</sup> this has been a bottom-up process so far, developing step-by-step through an artistic process dealing with a challenging situation. A situation like this is fragile. The pensioners’ group and Anne-Marie are both aware of it and are working on formulating their agenda. A lot of empowerment has taken place, also for the young mothers and the young people.

These rural activities benefit from an outsider group being involved that can intellectualise and contextualise this project. The play space and the mental space together move the situation forward, introducing new elements and people to the situation. Examples are an EU logo and funding that convinced the army to open their doors and made cer-

figure 37

Ballykinler/Ballykinlar Cultural Centre, Commons Road, 2011. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

figure 38

“UP-Down”, bike-limousine workshop with Paddy Bloomer, 2011. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

figure 39

“UP-Down”, village newspaper-workshop outcome, village fair, 2011. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

figure 40

“UP-Down”, mobile workshop for bike-limousine, 2011. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>



tain equipment acquisitions and activities possible; students and lecturers that studied and practiced onsite and transferred the project back into an academic setting<sup>86</sup>; media attention that reported and created new waves of support such as official registration for complaints; an active involvement in an international art scene that broke the rural isolation of such a project and lifted it into the international discourse.

The artistic playing onsite achieved a lot on the ground, such as the police acknowledging the positive impact of the project on the youth by giving £1,000 out of their budget, or by local positions moving forward after a long period of cemented standstills.

Ruth and Peter play a key role in the development when it comes to trusted and welcomed non-village members. They function as a bridge between people, ideas, and objects. Ruth and Peter expressed their role in empowering people and helping to build a structure. They see the huge potential of this informal structure and fear for its future with every step taken. Due to experience, they see the potential loss of flexibility, playfulness, and joy as they might someday arrive at a point of success with given funding and infrastructure to institutionalise the setting. The loss could potentially also happen by giving the process a name. Coming with the understanding of the urban situation in the capital, they are highly honoured to be part of this rare and powerful process. They further acknowledge the importance of being present in time and space to honour the process and relationships with the right input. (figure 42)



figure 41

“UP-Down”, village fair on the field of the Council Pitch, 2011. Photo: PS<sup>2</sup>

figure 42

Timeline of the project, created by Susanne Bosch, 2011

Ruth Morrow, Peter Mutscher /PS <sup>2</sup>	Anne Marie Dillon
AM Graduates from BA Fine Art, UU and has show in PS2 with her 'Once upon a Now'	
	Makes map of Ballykinler out of tea pots, location: Ballykinler
	Building of bus stop out of cardboard with the young people of Ballykinler
Bus stop gets exhibited in PS2	
	Starts an Open air community centre on Ballykinlers' streets
Rhizome (EU project) comes Belfast and the groups does Fieldtrips to Leitrim	
	AM joins Rhizom on fieldtrips to Leitrim and gives a presentation of her work
	First Temporary community centre in a caravan in Ballykinler
	Anne-Marie at event in Abbey Gardens, London, organized by public works
Rhizome does workshop in Ballykinler, meeting the Army, etc	
	One Caravan being developed into a cinema by a group of young people
	Anne-Marie Dillon takes the Pensioners on a residency to the Curfew Tower in Cushindal, Northern Ireland
	Occupation of an empty hairdresser shop as the new Ballykinler/Ballykinlar Cultural Centre
PS2 proposes and funds 4 workshops 'UP-Down'	
'Beach huts for Ballykinler', Co.Down. Part of 'Street Society', Architecture Department, Queens University	
Ulster Museum presentation of 'Beach huts for Ballykinler'	
Village Fair 'UP-Down'	

“On/Edge”, pilot walk “looking for route 77”,  
Belfast, 2010. Photo courtesy of Stalker,  
Mike Hogg, and Aisling O’Beirn

## “CROW”

(“CITY RIGHT OF WAY”)

**Location(s):** Belfast, but a model of practice that could be applied elsewhere

**Who:** Mike Hogg<sup>87</sup> and Aisling O’Beirn<sup>88</sup> with a core group of participants.

**What:** a monthly walking / wandering project located in Belfast.

**Web:** <http://www.crowwalks.blogspot.com>; <http://onedgebelfast.blogspot.com/>

**Keywords:** Walking, mapping, PLACE<sup>89</sup> (Architecture and Built Environment Centre for Northern Ireland), British Council<sup>90</sup> (funded the project “ON/Edge”<sup>91</sup>) and Flaxart<sup>92</sup>

**Description:** “CROW” is a monthly walking / wandering project based in Belfast. The project was born out of discussions with the Rome-based urban research group Stalker<sup>93</sup> during their pilot project “ON/Edge” in Belfast. They pointed out how access was cut off in so many areas of the city in the form of closed entries, walls, and other obstructions, leaving a lot of the city unseen and unexplored.

“CROW” (“City Right of Way”) was devised as a situationalist project<sup>94</sup> to address this problem by exploring and highlighting areas of the city that are not normally or easily accessed. Each walk is suggested by a participant in the group and has ranged from hunting unusual landmarks to playful wandering, guerrilla gardening, and water divining.

The project has also involved direct collaborations with organisations concerned with how the urban environment is experienced, such as PLACE and GROW Community Gardens.<sup>95</sup> It is hoped this project will bring some insights into ignored or unseen parts of Belfast.

The Rome-based urban research group Stalker has been to Belfast twice, in 2007 and 2010. Aisling O’Beirn and Mike Hogg took an active part in organising the FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions, organized by Flaxart Studios and Queen Street Studios) series of seminars in Belfast, “which aimed to explore relationships and tensions between redevelopment, and the city’s marginal and abandoned spaces by presenting artists and activists who engage with spaces under transformation and are contesting the formation of urban spaces into non-public, commercial ownership under market-led redevelopment.”<sup>96</sup> Stalker was invited to take up a residency of two weeks in order to participate in the second of the F A Q seminars<sup>97</sup> and arrived with three members of the collective.<sup>98</sup> Stalker offered a walk as part of the F A Q series and introduced their observations as strangers in the city. As a group of architects, urbanists, and activists, their core interest lies in the connection between a participatory democracy and the consequent fluid right of way in an urban setting. Due to Belfast’s political history, the urban structures were successively transformed into a “doughnut scenario”<sup>99</sup> with an economically driven city centre, surrounded by motorways to drive the middle classes from suburban settings into the city as well as to create a structural barrier between the city centre and the working class neighbourhoods, which are located like a ring around the city centre. As the Forum for Alternative Belfast put it:

*The Belfast we now live and work in has been shaped in recent years by a relatively unconstrained development market and by an approach to infrastructure that privileges the car over the pedestrian. We seem to be losing our city, our streets, and our*



*spaces to the imperatives of profit and functional regulation ... We seem to be almost obsessed with barriers and boundaries; not just barriers between the "traditional" communities, but barriers between the rich and the poor, the city centre and neighbouring communities, and between the institutions of government and the people.*<sup>100</sup> (figure 43)

The discourse began in 2007 and continued in 2010 with the pilot project "ON/Edge" (initiated by Hogg&O'Beirn through Flaxart), which allowed three members<sup>101</sup> of Stalker to come back. Again a walk took place<sup>102</sup> as well as discourses with other initiatives of urban concern.<sup>103</sup> The main issues that came up through walking were issues of access, walls, and the existing ideas of redevelopment. The group walked through private houses, overcame walls, squeezed through fences and dreamed of getting the keys to all the "peace wall" gates to walk the city through open gates for a day.<sup>104</sup> Outstanding in Belfast are the physical barriers, the closed alleyways, and the vast amounts of controlled and unused



space. (figure 44)

With the "ON/Edge" pilot project, Stalker suggested the continuation of walks through Belfast. Aisling O'Beirn and Mike Hogg took up the idea and developed "CROW".

"CROW" ("City Right of Way"), has a transparent structure: On the project's blog, the time, place, and theme of a walk is advertised. Everyone interested is invited. The theme is proposed by a participant or anyone with an idea. The blog serves to document the walks via image slide shows and a route drawn on Google map, thereby building up an archive. People can comment on the events. "CROW" is set up in a non-hierarchical way, building upon the collaborative effort. The team of O'Beirn and Hogg support the preparation for a walk with their local knowledge, their networks, and organisational skills.<sup>105</sup>

The walks are based on dynamic elements of explorations and accidental ventures. Anyone can propose a walk and take part. So far, "CROW" has done a seed-bombing walk, an Easter egg walk, a game-like walk in East Belfast, a fountains and fonts walk, a public toilets walk, a Belfast from Above walk, and an Ormeau Road alleyway walk. The idea of "CROW" is an attempt to build upon the philosophy of learning and information-gathering through walking. It is hoped its development will bring some insights into ignored or unseen parts of Belfast as well as map the city in a new way. "CROW" follows Stalker's suggestion that a walk can be planned with a route to follow and an overriding question giving a reason for the walk. But in addition to planned routes, deviation and exploration are encouraged and seen as valid ways of learning new things. Distraction is

figure 44

"On/Edge", "public talk at PLACE, Belfast", Belfast, 2010. Photo courtesy of Stalker, Mike Hogg and Aisling O'Beirn



essentially the core element and a walk should follow instinct rather than road. Mike Hogg highlighted that the notion of a walk should be a child-like wondering and wandering around. (figure 45)

"CROW" positions an artistic practice into a real-world setting where the practice is affected by and read through the context. Mike Hogg and Aisling O'Beirn see art-making as a practical way of dealing with real phenomena. In Belfast it becomes obvious that walking as strangers through hostile areas will break insular settings and foster potential dialogues. Strangers and the somewhat theatrical appearance of the group are helpful elements. The term "stranger" applies in Belfast even to locals or people who have been living in the city for a long time, as walking through non-familiar areas is highly unusual. (figure 46)

To organise such a walk, including the evaluation

figure 45

Walk 5, "CROW and GROW go seedbombing", lobbing a seedbomb over the fence, 8 June 2011. Photo: M. Hogg and A. O'Beirn



figure 46

Walk 1 "CROW", Ormeau Road Alleyway Walk, choosing a route, 2 Oct. 2010. Photo: M. Hogg and A. O'Beirn

and documentation of it, takes Aisling O'Beirn and Mike Hogg about four full days. The type and amount of work depends on who proposes the next walk, as their input can vary from just suggesting an idea to fully planning and executing a walk. Aisling and Mike's role in this project is mainly to generate discussions about urban space, to make sure the information is widely distributed, and to document the walks online. They perceive themselves more in the role of continuous facilitators of a process, as the group and themes change continuously and many elements are based on accidental ventures. They developed a visual formula for the blog and documentation. They aim to continue to conduct one walk per month. It is their vision to bring back Stalker for further conversations, to establish the walks as a permanent event, and to increase the number of participants and followers.

"CROW" as a structure is based on a supra-regional

discourse, actively bringing in the outside voice into a rather insular setting and fostering networks. (figures 47 and 48)

### CONCLUSION

Northern Ireland has a long way to go to develop into a place where differences and diverse identities can co-exist and mingle and would not be felt as (life-) threatening. Art in public space therefore touches on the extreme, whether it be political, collective, or performative, but its direction is also conservative. It calls for a clear and unambiguous position on the part of the author of art in order to produce strong work, both for and in this extreme space. It leaves no doubt about the “common” in the “public” space and its meaning for artists, processes, work, and observers. With common I refer to the feeling of a space and site for society in public that is strongly expressed in the introduced art works in this text.



The ephemeral art interventions in Northern Ireland have a long legacy of being an appropriate format to react to an ever changing, dangerous, and life-threatening existence. To challenge the situation with process-based art that interferes with everyday routines is the aim of many contemporary artists. While more traditional public art work, like sculptures and commissioned art, are more visible and far better archived and documented by funders and commissioners, the ephemeral art-making introduced here – with its consequent relation to the building and meaning of sites in Northern Ireland – remains largely unnoticed.

*I thank all the interviewees for the time and details they provided me with as well as Julie Miller for reading through the text.*



figure 47

Walk 3 “CROW”, “Some Public Toilets”, portaloos, City Hall behind statue of Queen Victoria, 16 Dec. 2010. Photo: M. Hogg and A. O’Beirn

figure 48

Walk 4 “CROW”, “Fountains and Fonts”, the Bouys outside the University of Ulster, 27 January 2011. Photo: M. Hogg and A. O’Beirn

- 1 Declan McGonagle, “[Re]-Making Mindsets. Art and the Northern Irish Context”, in: Kate Pryor (ed.), Northern Ireland Collection (Wolverhampton, 2007), p. 19.
- 2 “The Troubles” was a period of ethno-political conflict in Northern Ireland that spilled over at various times into England, the Republic of Ireland, and mainland Europe. The duration of “the Troubles” is conventionally dated from the late 1960s and considered by many to have ended with the Belfast Good Friday Agreement of 1998. As of 2011, sporadic violence nonetheless continues.
- 3 Declan McGonagle, “[Re]-Making Mindsets”, 2007, p. 19.
- 4 “Nearly three thousand dead may seem a relatively small toll in a conflict ... however, scale matters. The population of Northern Ireland in the 1981 census, itself disrupted by violence and abstention, was estimated at 1,488,077. If the equivalent ratio of victims to population had been produced in Great Britain in the same period, some 100,000 people would have died, and if the similar level of political violence had taken place the number of fatalities in the USA would have been over 500,000, or about ten times the number of Americans killed in the Vietnam war.” From Brendan O’Leary and John McGarry, cited by Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, *The Politics of Force: Conflict Management and State Violence in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2000), p. 228; see also Sutton Index of Deaths, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/> [accessed January 2010].
- 5 Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, *The Politics of Force*, p. 224.
- 6 Justin McKeown, summary to his PhD “Materialising a Political Art Practice within Contemporary Systems of Power: Northern Ireland”, published in 2008 at the University of Ulster Belfast, p. 98.
- 7 Shirley McWilliams, in: “Revalidation”, document for BA Fine Art, University of Ulster, 2011, p. 1.
- 8 Philip Napier: “Expecting the Terror”, 4 February – 19 March 2011, Ormeau Baths Gallery, <http://www.ormeaubaths.co.uk/exhibitions-2011/philip-napier-expecting-the-terror/> [accessed 20 October 2011].
- 9 Directly arising out of the situation of conflict, Northern Ireland has an extremely active and strong performance scene. In Northern Ireland, often the practice of art only with one’s own body is a comprehensible reaction to the here and now. The performance scene is organised mainly by the group Bbeyond, which promotes theoretical discourse as well as international festivals and networks, <http://www.bbeyondperformance.org/> [accessed 20 October 2011].
- 10 Una Walker, “On Visual Art Infrastructure in NI 1960–1995”, PhD, University of Ulster, October 2007: “Hilary Robinson has described two circumstances in which artists’ organizations tend to emerge [T]he first, positive reason is that a group of artists conceive a collaborative project ... The second reason is essentially reactive: individuals coming together to produce events or organizations as the result of an experience of lack [sic]’ (Hilary Robinson, “Artist Run”, Circa no. 66, winter 1993, pp. 41–43) [...] Robinson identified a rather more sophisticated series of ‘lacks’ encountered in Belfast during the early 1990s, including the practical (lack of gallery spaces) and the intellectual (lack of forums for debate) ...” (Ibid.), pp. 224–228. Examples of artist-run spaces that were founded out of the lack mentioned above are PS<sup>2</sup>, <http://www.pssquared.org> [accessed January 2010] and also FIX, an international performance and live art biennale, which has been organised since 1994 by CatalystArts. CatalystArts, <http://www.catalystarts.org.uk> [accessed January 2010]; Queen Street Studios, <http://www.queenstreetstudios.net> [accessed January 2010]; Flax Studios, <http://www.flaxartstudios.org> [accessed January 2010]; platform, <http://www.stationproject.com/page8.htm> [accessed January 2010], and others are structures that fundamentally support each other and deal with collective forms of self-organisation. This spirit provides for interesting interventions in public space.
- 11 Justin McKeown, PhD thesis, 2008, p. 104.
- 12 The Vacuum is a free bi-monthly newspaper published in Belfast, Northern Ireland, by the arts

- organisation Factotum. Each issue is themed and contains critical commentary about the city and broader cultural issues. 15,000 copies of the paper are produced and distributed in bars, cafes, and other public spaces. The paper was first published in January 2003; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Vacuum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vacuum) [accessed 24 August 2011].
- 13 Patrick Griffin, "Mag Sorry for 'Satan' Flatley Jibe", in: *The Sun*, 17 December 2004.
- 14 Contributions were: "Sorry Santa" by Paddy Bloomer, a local bus touring with SORRY banners, SORRY on a beach in Melbourne, Australia, and two clowns carrying "All apologies" placards.
- 15 Held each year since 1998 on May 26, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National\\_Sorry\\_Day](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Sorry_Day) and <http://www.nsd.org.au/> [accessed 24 August 2011].
- 16 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Vacuum](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vacuum) [accessed 24 August 2011].
- 17 The Belfast Agreement referendum in 1998 was a referendum held in Northern Ireland over whether there was support for the Belfast Agreement. The result was a majority (71.1%) in favour. A simultaneous referendum held in the Republic of Ireland produced an even larger majority (94.4%) in favour; [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern\\_Ireland\\_Belfast\\_Agreement\\_referendum,\\_1998](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northern_Ireland_Belfast_Agreement_referendum,_1998) [accessed 24 August 2011].
- 18 *The Sun* is a daily national tabloid newspaper published in the United Kingdom.
- 19 See the piece "A city of =" by artist Chris Gillen in 2008/2009, <http://www.mastersartinpublic.wordpress.com> [accessed 24 August 2011].
- 20 As an example, please view the current blog "Nelson's View", MLA Nelson McCausland's of the Democratic Unionist Party. It is a personal blog giving an insight into his time as MLA and currently Minister for Social Development in the Northern Ireland Executive. He was previously the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure, <http://theministerspen.blogspot.com/> [accessed 24 August 2011].
- 21 See also the Belfast character of "Bag Lady", by environmental activist and journalist Shirley Lewis, <http://www.bagladyproductions.org> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 22 [http://www.dublin.ie/forums/showthread.php?6077-Johnny-Forty-Coats-\(Street-Character-No-4\)](http://www.dublin.ie/forums/showthread.php?6077-Johnny-Forty-Coats-(Street-Character-No-4)) [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 23 Pat Kane, *Towards the Play Ethic: A Manifesto for a Different Way of Living* (Macmillan, 2005), p. 4; see also Michael J. Ellis, *Why People Play* (Prentice Hall, 1973).
- 24 <http://uncertainremains.wordpress.com/playful-interventions/outside-isea-a-builders-and-bowerbirds-playground/> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 25 "[A pound shop] is a retail store that sells inexpensive items, often with a single price for all items in the store. Typical merchandise includes cleaning supplies, toys, household goods and gardening equipment. In the United Kingdom, 'pound shops' are common, where everything costs £1; some lower-value items may be sold on the basis of 2, 3, or 4 for £1..." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variety\\_store](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Variety_store) [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 26 Sinéad funds her practice in a playful way: It lives off of a lot of good will and favours she does for her community and others for her. She also accumulated a lot of material and technical equipment over time, which makes upcoming events cheaper and easier for her. She accumulates money through occasional artist fees to be able to do unfunded events. She further accumulates time by working casual jobs and being on the dole. She also uses freecycle and some freegan methods of finding her material for free, <http://www.freecycle.org> and <http://www.freegan.info> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 27 Public buses play a special role in Northern Ireland as they were often a target for attack and bombs. Buses in Belfast function as visual time capsules and reveal the change and normalisation that has occurred over time regarding their design and shape. Only people with local knowledge can decode the meaning of the formative environment on Belfast streets. Still today, Belfast, a divided city, has a special bus system whereby all city bus lines radiate out from City Hall to their destination and then back. They do not circulate around or across the city. Buses have circulated in Belfast since 1954, replacing a tram and trolley bus system.
- 28 This piece became part of a video installation for the festival "I AM", a Polish performance and visual art event, presented by Bbeyond in conjunction with The Residency Programme at Stranmillis University College from 20–27 October 2008, <http://uncertainremains.wordpress.com/actions/i-am/> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 29 "The Cat Show", Art In Time International PRRR-formance Art in Cardiff, UK, 14–17 March 2007 title, <http://www.araiart.jp/cat32.html> [accessed 2 September 2011] and <http://www.tracegallery.org/old/events/artintime/artintime.htm> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 30 Sinéad uses documentation by either asking friends and family or doing it herself. As she usually cannot pay fees nor does she expect people to stay with her in public, she often finds unusual forms such as hiding a camera in a birdhouse.
- 31 <http://www.sighlebc.com> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 32 Family Bhreathnach-Cashell, an honourable family of the neighbourhood, are well known and respected. The fact that both parents support the unusual profession and practices of their artist children and participate in documenting the work, gives Sinéad an easiness to work close to home.
- 33 Archive of buses in Northern Ireland, <http://www.skylineaviation.co.uk/buses/+Citybus.html> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 34 <http://www.niathletics.org/opencontent/default.asp?itemid=317> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 35 Allan Kaprow, "Success and Failure When Art Changes", in: *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, edited by Suzanne Lacy (Bay Press, 1995), p. 155.
- 36 Centre for Suburban Research Publications, issues 1–9, CSR, Belfast, ISSN 1758-7824.
- 37 <http://spartaction.com/originalspart/csr.html> [accessed 20 October 2011].
- 38 SPART stands for sport+Art = SPART.
- 39 <http://spartaction.com/originalspart/index.html> [accessed 20 October 2011].
- 40 Justin McKeown, PhD thesis, 2008, p. 6.
- 41 Justin McKeown, PhD thesis, 2008, summary.
- 42 The web page documents some, but not all of the residencies.
- 43 Denis Romanvoski is a performance artist from Belarus and was artist in residence from 19–26 February 2007. Denis did not seem to understand what the residency was trying to achieve. He seemed mainly interested in networking and creating opportunities for himself. Stewart Home and Clare Carolin from London did not make work for the residency as they were the first guests when the CSR in 2005 was still in a process of figuring out its form and potential. What became clear is that a couple would not be ideal to stay with the family.
- 44 "... The paranoia caused by the Troubles, by the constant knowledge that although society looked normal, that in actual fact you didn't know what was happening behind the scenes and that you might be being targeted by someone for some reasons you didn't know." Justin McKeown, PhD thesis, 2008, p. 115.
- 45 Gavin Peacock in *Centre for Suburban Research Publications*, vol. 1, no. 1, Justin McKeown (ed.) (Belfast: Centre for Suburban Research, 2008), p. 43.
- 46 "... Elsewhere in Europe people go out to eat and drink. But here in Northern Ireland we think. Food gets in the way of the serious business of getting wasted ... Meabh McDonnell: Yeah food was for losers ..." Justin McKeown, PhD thesis, 2008, p. 129.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 128, quote by Meabh McDonnell.
- 48 Caroline Pugh currently lives in Belfast, Ireland. She teaches voice at Queen's University Belfast, <http://www.carolinepugh.co.uk> [accessed 20 October 2011].
- 49 In Northern Ireland, estate agents function as mediators between home-owners and tenants/future buyers. They negotiate the conditions. Often, a tenant would not know their home-owner.
- 50 Justin McKeown, PhD thesis, 2008, p. 118.
- 51 Justin McKeown, PhD thesis, 2008, p. 133, quote by Meabh McDonnell.

- 52 A "Draw In" is a kind of drawing event Sinéad has been organising in different contexts in Belfast and elsewhere. These are basically events where people get together to draw and make things.
- 53 More info on this work can be found here: <http://www.justinmckeown.com/?p=230> [accessed 12 November 2011].
- 54 <http://www.nam.ac.uk/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/northern-ireland-1969-2007> [accessed 12 August 2011].
- 55 She is currently undertaking a practice-based PhD in Art at the University of Ulster (2009–2012). The subject of her PhD is the artistic exploration of interventions into everyday practice and its potential impact on methods in the social sciences. The requirements of university research demand getting a consent form from participants. They have to be informed of and agree to the research. Filling out a form first of all diminishes authentic and spontaneous interactions within artistic research, as with Andrea's intervention. Andrea solved the problem by using the registration form that she used to register the contents of someone's bag as a consent form. She says, "A consent form is an aesthetic issue rather than an ethical one for an artist." She also solved the naming of the university as her "employer" by putting the logo onto an information card, which she carefully decided to hand out. Being part of a scientific form of research creates hierarchies and barriers that she would naturally not even build up with her intervention.
- 56 She lives currently between Belfast, Cologne, and Berlin.
- 57 "Elephant in the room" is an English metaphorical idiom for an obvious truth that is being ignored or is not being addressed. The idiomatic expression also applies to an obvious problem or risk no one wants to discuss. It is based on the idea that an elephant in a room would be impossible to overlook; thus, people in the room who pretend the elephant is not there have chosen to avoid dealing with the looming issue, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant\\_in\\_the\\_room](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elephant_in_the_room) [accessed 24 August 2011].
- 58 The artistic intervention was an essential part of her practice-based PhD research in 2010. She financed all expenses (£2,930) herself, which covered fees for all employees and material expenses.
- 59 Unlike other countries, the UK permits photographing and publishing photos of people in public spaces. What Andrea herself identified as unethical was not letting the passers-by know how much they were being observed when interacting with the "Left Luggage". Although most of the documentation process was transparent, it was so far in the background as to be overlooked. Communicating the documentation process to the participants might have caused a "hidden camera effect" and the loss of their intuitive, spontaneous engagement on the street. A camera onsite would influence the situation and create theatrical notions or would be dealt with as either a friend or a weapon.
- 60 With its seaside location and the Mourne Mountains as a backdrop, the small village of Ballykinler/Ballykinlar in County Down seems idyllic and is highlighted as one of the most attractive country-sides in rural Northern Ireland, unless you take a wrong turn and end up at the gated compounds of a long established British Army site. Ballykinler represents a complex Northern Irish situation, with two different spellings – Irish and British – of its name on road signs. Ballykinler is the most common and Protestant/loyalist spelling; Ballykinlar is the Gaelic/Catholic/republican version on a few road signs. It is a small detail illustrating a conflict. The text will use the most common spelling.
- 61 For example, "High Tea at High Court", 2007 and other activities with Sinéad Bhreathnach-Cashell and Dandy, the horse. They formed the "Playgroup", an artist collective that made playful interventions in urban contexts. It was about playing with time, space, urban, and rural elements. Passers-by were invited to take part in their seemingly absurd activities and share their wealth of experience, skills, and knowledge.
- 62 Founded in 1998 by members of the Ballykinler village.
- 63 The village lacks all basic community infrastructure such as a community centre and sheltered bus stops; there are two basic bus stops for both parts of the community: a unionist/Protestant and republican/Catholic bus stop.
- 64 The group was called "Young Adults Forum".
- 65 "Bus Stop", Ballykinler Young Adults Forum, 25 July–9 August 2009, <http://www.pssquared.org/Ballykinler.php> [accessed 3 September 2011].
- 66 Bought for £49 by Anne-Marie.
- 67 RHYZOM – May 2009–October 2010, see: <http://www.pssquared.org/research.php> [accessed 3 September 2011]. The Irish RHYZOM group consisted of Ruth Morrow, Fiona Woods, Dominic Stevens, Bryonie Reid, Craig Sands, Sarah Browne, and Peter Mutschler. The original idea was to focus on the border condition on the Island of Ireland (between North and South), its different cultural policies, regional independence, and creative activities in rural landscapes, villages, and small towns.
- 68 20–22 November 2009, <http://www.pssquared.org/FieldtripPS2.php> [accessed 2 September 2011].
- 69 Broynie Reid, <http://www.pssquared.org/workshop.php> [accessed 10 September 2011].
- 70 The group consisted of Peter Mutschler, Fiona Woods, Anne Querrien (representing aaa), Özge Açikkol and Seçil Yersel Kosova (from Oda Projesi and Cultural Agencies), Kathrin Böhm (from public works and my villages), Ruth Morrow, Christoph Schäfer, and Margit Czenki ("Park Fiction", Hamburg).
- 71 The army camp is used nowadays to train the British troops for their missions in Afghanistan.
- 72 Broynie Reid.
- 73 Ibid.
- 74 Ruth Morrow set up the street society project at Queens. After an open call for project briefs, students chose projects they were interested in. PS<sup>2</sup> and Anne-Marie wrote the brief for their proposal. "Street Society" happens once a year in the first year of the postgraduate programme. The students get to choose between 12 projects. Once they decided which one to work on, they spend a week on the analysis and onsite work with real clients as well as the delivery of outcomes. The project finishes with a public presentation, <http://www.qub.ac.uk/schools/arc/Gallery/BSc/StreetSociety2011/> and <http://www.qubarc1.blogspot.com/> [accessed 10 September 2011].
- 75 Architecture students: James Purdy, John Murray, James Walmsley, Niall Robinson, Stephen McClland, Paul McAleer, Marc Tracey, David Magennis, Roxanne Cowley, Kayleigh Gregor, Callum Black.
- 76 Stormont is the Northern Irish Assembly building, a castle on the Stormont Estate.
- 77 "UP-Down" was supported by The National Lottery through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.
- 78 Facilitated by Phil Hession, Belfast.
- 79 Facilitated by public works, London, <http://publicworksgroup.net/> [accessed 10 September 2011].
- 80 Facilitated by Paddy Bloomer, Belfast.
- 81 <http://villageworks.org.uk/wp/>; facilitated by Duncan Ross, Belfast, <http://www.dfross.com/> [accessed 10 September 2011].
- 82 Quote by Anne-Marie Dillon about her practice.
- 83 See more in Jeff Kelley (ed.), Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
- 84 Since 1994; <http://www.parkfiction.org/> [accessed 10 September 2011].
- 85 Approximately every 25 miles you will find one cultural centre. They tend to have more funding for the window cleaning than for the annual programme space.
- 86 School of Architecture, Sheffield, and QUB, Belfast.
- 87 <http://mikehogg.org> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 88 <http://www.aislingobeirn.com> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 89 <http://www.placeni.org/> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 90 <http://www.onedgebelfast.blogspot.com/> and <http://www.britishcouncil.org/northernireland.htm> [accessed 20 August 2011]. The British Council supported Stalker's "ON/Edge" visit, as they were also interested in their potential approach towards

an area in West Belfast, around Northumberland Street, where Belfast City Council had some re-generation plans.

- 91 "ON/Edge" was a pilot project and re-invited Stalker back to Belfast from 9–15 August 2010. Flaxart Studio, PLACE, and the British Council hosted the Rome-based urban research group for a week-long research visit. Stalker is comprised of architects and other interested parties who, along with residents, explore urban locations using a range of investigative processes in order to better understand and utilise these environments; <http://onedgebelfast.blogspot.com/> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 92 <http://www.flaxartstudios.com> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 93 <http://www.spatialagency.net/database/stalkerosservatorio.nomade> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 94 The Situationist International was a group founded in France in 1957. With their ideas rooted in Marxism and 20th century European artistic avant-gardes, they advocated experiences of life being alternative to those admitted by the capitalist order, for the fulfilment of human primitive desires and the pursuit of a superior passionate quality. For this purpose they suggested and experimented with the construction of situations, namely the setting up of environments favourable for the fulfilment of such desires. Using methods drawn from the arts, they developed a series of experimental fields of study for the construction of such situations, like unitary urbanism and psycho-geography.
- 95 <http://www.grow-ni.org/> [20 August 2011].
- 96 <http://www.flaxartstudios.com/interventions.html> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 97 Title: "Intervention in Climates Of Redevelopment", venue: Black Box, Belfast, 26 October 2006.
- 98 Peter Lang, Aldo Innocenti, and Eva Sauer (she was not officially part of Stalker but a photographer who came and worked with them).
- 99 The term "grey doughnut" is Forum for Alternative Belfast's description of Belfast's urban situation; Stalker met and spoke with Forum on their 2010 "ON/Edge" visit.
- 100 <http://forumfab.wordpress.com/> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 101 Aldo Innocenti, Giulia Fiocca, and Lorenzo Romito.
- 102 When Stalker came to Belfast, they led a group along what was once the number 77 bus route and through such deviation and exploration, they came to a number of conclusions; they felt that Belfast was a difficult city to walk with many boundaries unable to be traversed. Their idea that a walk should be fluid, meandering, and playful were difficult to practise in a city of walls, gates, and locked doors.
- 103 <http://forumfab.wordpress.com> and <http://www.stationproject.com> [accessed 20 August 2011].
- 104 At night, the gates of the "peace walls" are closed to both traffic and pedestrians, effectively cutting off Protestant from Catholic areas. It makes the local population feel safer, at least physiologically, with these physical barriers intact.
- 105 The "CROW" walks were initially supported financially through a grant by Flaxart until April 2011. It came without any conditions and was supported as an idea that is of benefit for the community. Other organisations have offered so far in-kind support such as space (PLACE) or material (GROW).

# BERLIN

## ART AS THE CULTURE OF THE PUBLIC REALM

by *Martin Schönfeld*

Over the past 30 years, the practice of art in public space has undergone fundamental change. It has evolved from embodying values of representation and education to being artistic work in its own right, embedded in institutional, social, spatial, and political contexts. Since the 1970s the departure from traditional “drop sculpture” has been articulated with notions of site specificity. This development has fostered two important tendencies: Art in public space has become increasingly involved in the history and significance of historical sites, as well as frequently addressing the social environment and social context surrounding artistic sites of activity. As such, Berlin has proved itself an important place for the development of new, contemporary art in the public realm, standing as a radiant example in a variety of ways. Innovations in this field have followed from the democratic involvement of users and citizens in the framework of art competitions, especially those that have been conducted since the 1980s. Yet at the same time, Berlin is a prime example of the problems that arise when a city, its representatives, and its citizens are brought face to face with art in public space.

### ART AND THE PUBLIC REALM

Art in public space confronts people with aesthetic strategies in their everyday lives and has a political, social, and historical background. With its socio-

political context, art in public space has become especially important to artists whose work endeavours to voice a commentary on prevailing social and political conditions. Public art assumes an opposing stance to the art market, which is driven by speculation and complaisance. Rather than setting itself apart, public art remains open to dialogue with society and the numerous micro-publics within it. The general public does not have to seek access to art – art itself goes on collision course. It makes itself unavoidable and impossible to miss; it calls for dialogue and opens up spaces for the exchange of ideas and debate.

In a period when the public realm is increasingly being pushed back by a steadily mounting wave of privatisation, artists have realised that defence of the public sphere – and particularly of urban public space – is crucial if freedom and autonomy in a modern, democratically constituted society are to be maintained. The constant curtailment and commercialisation of public life have given rise to ever more obstruction and abrogation of the individual’s freedom of choice and self-determination. As a result, people are gradually retreating from the public sphere; there is growing apathy towards prevailing political conditions. With participation in plebiscites and elections on the decline, neglect and vandalism have become increasingly prevalent in public space. But it is precisely the public arena where independence is manifested: For the sake of democracy, this needs to be defended and, in many instances, also reclaimed – as has been achieved through the resistance mounted by public campaign groups against the privatisation of public assets.

Art in public space epitomises an independent artistic outlook. Public space thereby acts as a point of reference for the freedom of autonomous action. In public space the individual’s behaviour is released from the dictates of economic concerns, market mechanisms, surveillance, and control. In public space a person has the chance to become a free individual – and the same applies to artists too. Public space guarantees a person’s intrinsic being, whenever or wherever desired. Hence public space is where the utopia of freedom – emancipated from all claims made by economic exploitation and all commercial constraints – can be given shape. The public domain becomes a place without utilitarian purpose, where neither charges nor costs can be raised for the simple fact of *being there*.

The freedom inherent in public space is a much-coveted commodity. When public finances are in a dire predicament, the public domain and public space come under increasing threat of privatisation and are treated as contingency assets in times of budgetary crisis. As a result, the freedom associated with public space becomes increasingly restricted and withdrawn from society.

For artists, public space and artistic activity within public space are a means of overcoming the limitations of commodification and market pressures, while developing individual approaches towards social context and conditions.

Artistic work in public space proceeds without being allied to or sheltered by the “haven” of an institution. It is exposed without “protection” to the public realm and needs to assert itself against the public’s

demands. For artistic work, public space is the absolute opposite of the “white cube” of an exhibition venue. Consequently, public space enables artists to abandon self-referentiality, requiring them to make a clear statement. The contextual reference this inevitably entails leads to a thematic orientation of art in public space and acquires a political dimension. As a result, not only does art become an expression of social awareness, but it also makes a connection and fosters dialogue with society. The act of persevering and holding ground within a social context amounts to a personal and artistic/aesthetic challenge. Hence, art in public space can be defined as artistic work that is immune to commercialisation or exploitation and unsusceptible to financial and speculative interests, and which is manifested, above all, in a time-related social and political context.

For artists, public space also serves as a stage for their artistic performance. Artistic action in the public domain transpires in the reciprocal interplay between the public gaze and public sensation. Yet art in public space that is considered contemporary must extend beyond being merely a spectacle within the economy of attention; it should aspire to do more than achieve publicity, which, in spite of being the opposite of public art, sometimes cannot help but be sparked by an artistic action that steps beyond norms and stirs social taboos. Unlike publicity, public art is not intent on individual self-display but concerned with social reality. Public artistic actions set their focus on questions of space and the public sphere, and explore the interplay between their various components. In the forefront are theme and message. In relation to these, the artistic personality assumes a background role. Compared with publicity, a public

artist acts as an initiator or catalyst, someone who fosters debate and public reflection. Rather than the artist, it is the public interest – *res publica* – and public space itself that are the themes of contemporary art in public space.

#### ART IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

In a democracy, society has a profound interest in the unfettered development of art and culture. The state guarantees the freedom of art and, as a “cultural state”, pledges to support the arts in a variety of ways. This principle should be mirrored in many of its activities and is manifested in the public places and institutions that represent the democratic state. They are supposed to reflect the state’s artistic aspirations as well as its social goals. These sites and, in particular, public edifices belong to everyone and are accessible to everyone; they are the quintessential embodiment of the achievements and endeavours of all citizens, of society as a whole. As such, they categorically differ from private institutions and private property – which is why, by means of public competitions and on the basis of official regulations governing public building works, such high demands are made of their quality and appearance.

Democracy’s self-depiction in the appearance of its institutions and institutionalised representatives is also joined to the principle of providing support to the visual arts. In these social and, hence, societal conditions, art assumes the function of lending meaning and visual form to matters of public interest. As such they are an integral element of the public image of democracy, in the interest of which the visual arts are encouraged to develop through and with it and to become a component of a culture of

the public domain.

Being a public embodiment of democracy in the form of contemporary art, art in public space can adopt three possible functions:

- firstly, it can be a factor in public cultural education and in conveying contemporary approaches to art and artistic work;
- secondly, it can become a factor in shaping the outward appearance of the public sphere by being involved in public art projects within a participative framework;
- thirdly, it can act as a mediator of social values in the form of artistically conceived works enabling the public commemoration of history or events that society considers particularly memorable or exemplary. Social and political consensus is reflected in public commemorative culture, which embodies the self-conception of state and society.

Public interest in public art is formulated in these three possible functions of art in public space. Yet this is not manifested simply in the form of instrumentalisation. The most appropriate artistic means are sought and found through art competitions, which themselves ensure a high level of quality and afford artists artistic autonomy and creative self-fulfilment.

Budgets for this kind of “art in the public interest” are secured through the guidelines that govern “percentage for art” and “art in public space” programmes. Funding is either tied to specific measures and generated through public building projects as “percentage for art” programmes, or it is unrelated to specific projects and made available through a special annual

Jepe Hein, “Changing Invisibility”, Hiroshima Park, Kiel, 2004. Photo: Jens Rönna

core fund for art in urban surroundings.

A number of projects executed as part of “art and architecture” and “art in public space” programmes can be taken to exemplify the three functions of “art in the public interest” described here.

#### CULTURAL EDUCATION – ART AS A CULTURAL MISSION

The Danish artist Jepe Hein created a water installation for the Hiroshima Park in the city of Kiel in North Germany titled “Changing Invisibility” (2004). Four ascending “walls of water” – formed by rows of vertically spouting fountains – create in their midst a kind of pavilion that can only be reached

by someone who has no qualms about walking straight into the sheets of water. As the individual approaches, the water in the fountains dies down and discloses a passage leading to the centre of the installation space. The work is about how the individual can open up and penetrate public space. Only when someone lays claim to the space can he/she actually broach it and appropriate it. The rise and fall of the fountains is regulated via pressure sensors set into a floor grid. (figure 1)

The historical transformation of a place that has undergone many changes is addressed in a text and sound installation titled “Air Borne” (2006) by the





Berlin artist Stefan Krüskemper (in collaboration with the Viennese composer Karlheinz Essl).<sup>1</sup> In his proposal for a limited art competition to design the Aerodynamic Park at the centre of the Humboldt-Universität's new campus in Berlin-Adlershof, Krüskemper came up with a concept involving several ellipsoid sound elements placed randomly around the park. They have been inscribed with short texts that associate the first Berlin airport located on this site with the aeronautical research facilities built here later on. The texts are accompanied by aural fragments that can be heard in a staggered sequence. As well as creating a relaxed and colourfully refreshing design on the green meadow, the installation infuses the place with an astonishing profundity, offering passers-by and visitors a multi-dimensional and subtle commentary on the significance of the site. (figure 2)

A metaphor describing the significance and function of an institution was formulated by the Berlin artist Norbert Radermacher in his installation

“Zwei Vasen” (“Two Vases”, 2006) for the Centre for Anatomy at the Berlin university hospital Charité. Winning a limited competition, Radermacher's project consists of two precisely formed, slender vases made of Murano glass, which he installed in the building's two major stairwells, visible to anyone visiting or working in the institute. In a building where students examine corpses to learn anatomy, the vases speak of the beauty and simultaneous transience of life. Every week a single flower is placed in each vase – as time passes, the flower gradually dies. Its original noble beauty wanes and is lost. As long as the funding for new flowers was still guaranteed through the (public) budget of Berlin's “Kunst am Bau” (“percentage for art”) programme, the project proceeded without impediment. But after four years, the Charité felt unable to continue the project from its own funds. Thus, since 2010, the two vases have stood empty and the work of art has forfeited its meaning by not being refreshed with new “content”. (figures 3 and 4)

figure 2

Stefan Krüskemper (in collaboration with Karlheinz Essl), “Air Borne”, Berlin-Adlershof, 2006. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



figures 3 and 4

Norbert Radermacher, “Zwei Vasen” (“Two Vases”), Charité University Hospital, Centre for Anatomy, Berlin (Mitte), 2006. Photo: Martin Schönfeld

figure 5

Josefine Günschel, “innenhaut-aussenhaut” (“interior-exterior shell”), Wisbyer Straße, Berlin (Prenzlauer Berg), 2008. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



The Berlin district of Pankow recently allowed for road construction measures to be assessed for funding the “Kunst am Bau” programme – as is in fact stipulated in the “Kunst am Bau” guidelines for the state of Berlin, but which previously was seldom applied by local authorities in relation to civil engineering projects (which includes building new roads). In the case of the very busy Wisbyer Straße, artists were invited to participate in an art competition to design an artistic signage system that would draw attention to key pedestrian crossings. Winner of the limited competition was the artist Josefine Günschel with her concept of painted trees titled “innenhaut-aussenhaut” (“interior-exterior shell”, 2008).<sup>2</sup> Historical wallpaper patterns are painted in white tree-protective paint on the trunks of trees close to the crossings. These patterns are a reminder that Wisbyer Straße was once a desirable residential area and has now, due to the heavy traffic, lost much of its appeal. The designs painted on the trees will hold up for a period of five to eight years, after which they will gradually be erased by the growth of

the trees, increasing moss, and weather conditions. (figure 5)

Of the many possible examples, these four projects indicate how artistic interventions can be integrated into the everyday settings of spaces and institutions, conveying aspects of history as well as introducing surprising and unconventional artistic forms. They can motivate viewers to see their living and working environments from a fresh perspective and to appropriate what are often unusual forms of art.

#### PARTICIPATION – ART IN SOCIAL DIALOGUE

On the basis of a classical “percentage for art” project for the newly built vehicle depot (Betriebshof Ost) of Munich's municipal waste management corporation AWM, the Munich artist duo Empfangshalle (consisting of Corbinian Böhm and Michael Gruber) installed a work titled “Woher Kollege Wohin Kollege” (“Buddy, Where Do You Come From, Where Are You Going?”, 2003–2006).<sup>3</sup> Rather than producing a permanent work of art – a mural



or a sculpture, for instance – they converted a refuse truck into a camper van. On board of the vehicle, they accompanied 28 workers from the AWM in Munich on a journey to their respective home countries. They drove through the Alps, visited Turkey, then Serbia and Kazakhstan, and even travelled as far as Ghana in search of each person's individual image of "home"/"Heimat". These images of "Heimat" were blown up into large-scale photographs and, for a certain length of time, pasted onto the sides of the refuse trucks one sees everywhere in Munich, creating a visual counterpoint to the commercial billboards that dominate our urban landscape. For everyone involved, the project proved an exceptional experience. It reflected, altered, and expanded everyone's idea of "home", but also people's conceptions of art and artistic work in the present day. As a means of communication and an intervention, the project was intended to be temporary. It is documented in a film, but also in brochures, leaflets, and postcard editions. (figure 6)

A major motorway passing through and dissecting the Berlin district of Neukölln had been lidded with a concrete roof and greened over in a makeshift

manner to create the Carl-Weder-Park. In search of a lasting artistic solution, the municipality initiated a "percentage for art" project. The limited competition was won by Seraphina Lenz with her project "Werkstatt für Veränderung" ("Workshop for Change").<sup>4</sup> Each summer from 2003 until 2010, the artist turned the park into a venue for discovery placed at the disposal of local residents. Each action was conducted under a certain motto and with a particular thematic focus – such as "The Park by Night"; "The Park and Its Vegetation"; "The Park as an Open Kitchen"; or even "The Park as a Paddock". Each summer the programme kicked off with a party for local residents and was followed by workshops and series of events. From year to year, Seraphina Lenz probed the district's spatial and social potential. With the activities she staged, she succeeded in demonstrating, above all, the communicative possibilities of urban space for community life in this particular quarter of the city. Eight years later, Lenz's project came to an end and the results were published in a book. What remains of the project are a series of plaques mounted on a balustrade in the park, one for each year, which give an account of one particular action staged that year. The plaques are mementos of what took place and was experienced there, but above all they are meant to stimulate individual recollection and appropriation of public space. (figures 7 and 8)

The limited "Kunst am Bau" competition for a facility building within the Julius Hirsch sports complex in the Berlin district of Charlottenburg offered the Berlin artist Maria Linares an opportunity to talk to sportsmen – mostly footballers – about racism, anti-Semitism, violence, and prejudice in sport.<sup>5</sup> Working in tandem with an ethnologist, she fed the results

figure 6

Empfangshalle, "Woher Kollege Wohin Kollege?" ("Buddy, Where Do You Come From, Where Are You Going?"), Munich, 2003–2006. Photo: Stefan Zoche

figures 7 and 8

Seraphina Lenz, "Werkstatt für Veränderung" ("Workshop for Change"), temporary action in the Carl Weder Park, Berlin (Neukölln), 2003–2010. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



of her field work into an LED ribbon installed all around the walls of the building's ground-floor lobby. The red lettering coursing across the red walls quotes the views of various sportsmen – the work is titled “Hirsch Rot” (“Hirsch Red”, 2010). Her project was inspired by the man after whom the sports complex was named, the German-Jewish footballer Julius Hirsch (1892–1943), who was murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz. In addition, the sports facility is also used for training by the Jewish sports club TUS Makkabi Berlin. Her installation reflects the particular nature of German-Jewish history against the backdrop of the present and seeks to shed light on how prejudice arises, but also how it can be overcome within a community of people from very dif-

ferent backgrounds. She has also succeeded in creating a visually striking symbol for the possibilities of cooperation and mutual respect. Some of the office staff in the complex were worried at first about the directness of the quoted statements, but through discussion and with the aid of a printed documentation (which included an assessment of the work involved in the project) these anxieties were assuaged. (figure 9)

These examples are clear evidence of how art can directly intervene in social processes and stimulate changes in social behaviour and the way urban contexts are experienced and challenged. The projects seek to connect with viewers/users, ask their opin-



figure 9

María Linares, “Hirsch Rot” (“Hirsch Red”), Julius-Hirsch Sports Complex, Berlin (Charlottenburg), 2010. Photo: Bernhard Schurian

ions, and mobilise both people's viewpoints and individuals to actively contribute to artistic interventions in the public interest and in public space. Artistic work and actions provide impulses to foster identification with places and social situations.

#### MEMORY – ART AS A SIGN FOR THE PRESENCE OF HISTORY

As the powerbase of the brutal Nazi dictatorship, the city of Berlin is linked to the memory of recent German history in an altogether special way. Historical evidence of resistance and persecution can be located and discerned all around Berlin, in its streets, addresses, and many of its buildings. Accordingly, since the late 1970s numerous sites of recollection

figure 10

Micha Ullman, “Bibliothek” (“Library”), monument to the 1933 book burnings, Bebelplatz, Berlin (Mitte), 1995. Photo: Martin Schönfeld

have been established within greater Berlin. The culture of remembrance reached a peak in the 1990s. In 1995, a monument commemorating the book burnings of 1933 was inaugurated on Bebelplatz square in Berlin's historical city centre, designed by the Israeli artist Micha Ullman with the title “Bibliothek” (“Library”). His project was the result of a limited art competition held in 1993. An empty room sunk into the ground stands witness to the losses incurred by Nazi terror. In terms of formal language and artistic approach, the memorial is one of the most impressive works of contemporary commemorative art, and for Berlin an outstanding example of contemporary art in public space. Yet in spite of this, since 2006, the square – thus the memorial too – has become



increasingly commercialised. Ludicrous, colourfully painted bear figures have been set up all around the memorial, while a Christmas market with its ice rink was held directly adjacent to the memorial for a few holiday seasons. Between 2009 and 2011, it was even completely covered over and concealed from public view by the main marquee of Berlin's annual "Fashion Week". Viewed as a debasement of Micha Ullman's commemorative work, the memorial's treatment sparked protests against the creeping privatisation of public space, which finally succeeded in ensuring that, from now on, only cultural events such as readings, lectures, or special music programmes would be allowed to take place on the square and around the memorial. (figures 10 and 11)

Set up in 2002, an installation consisting of 104 traffic mirrors by the Berlin artist Patricia Pisani now

lines the 700-metre route leading to the site where between 1944 and 1945 more than 230 people – mostly members of the Wehrmacht who had been sentenced to death by the Nazi military courts for desertion – were executed.<sup>6</sup> Sixteen of these mirrors are inscribed with laser-etched texts. They begin with factual quotes of laws and sentences, followed by highly personal eyewitness accounts. Although the mirrors' intended function is to prevent vehicles colliding, in their unusual arrangement here they signal a dimension of the site's history that – lying beyond our present-day field of vision – has gone out of sight. The mirrors do not seek to retrieve this history or visually illustrate it; rather, they steer viewers' attention towards realms of German history that lie beyond their awareness. In a neutral manner utterly lacking in pathos, the monument indicates the past



figure 11

Structures built over the Bebelplatz, covering the monument to the 1933 book burnings, during Fashion Week 2009. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



and, through its formal language, reveals the distance separating the present from history. (figures 12 and 13)

This commemorative site was the result of action by a campaign group in the Berlin district of Charlottenburg. Patricia Pisani's concept was chosen in a limited art competition held in 2001.

With the "Denkmal der Grauen Busse" ("Monument of the Grey Buses"), inaugurated in 2008 in memory of the victims of Nazi killings at the Weissenau psychiatric clinic in Ravensburg, the artists Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz sought to commemorate the deportation of the patients who, in the course of the Nazi "euthanasia" programme (1940–1941), were transported to other sites and murdered.<sup>7</sup> The actual question reportedly asked by one of the patients, "Where are you taking us?", prompted the two artists to duplicate the monument and transport a second cement-grey cast of the bus to the places where the murders had first been planned, to the

figures 12 and 13

Patricia Pisani, "Memorial to Commemorate the Victims of the Nazi Military Courts at Murellenberg", Berlin (Charlottenburg), 2002. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



psychiatric clinics where the patients' deportation began, and to the sites where they were finally murdered. The itinerary of the second grey bus depends on the efforts of local campaign groups, which are thus given an opportunity to "borrow" and provisionally erect the monument to the murdered victims at "their" respective historical sites. The first stop by this "mobile" concrete bus was in Berlin in 2008 at Tiergartenstraße 4, the address of the place where the programme of killing – euphemistically named "euthanasia" – was bureaucratically prepared and from where it was directed. The memorial's temporary installation in Berlin was also part of the discussion process about how victims could, in fact, be suitably commemorated at the site "belonging" to the perpetrators in Tiergartenstraße 4. The bus then continued its journey in 2009 to Nicolaiplatz square in the city of Brandenburg in the Havel region, where in 1940/1941, a total of 9,722 patients were murdered in the prison in the town centre. This project by Hoheisel and Knitz was also the outcome of a limited art competition. (figure 14)



Over the past 20 years, these largely limited art competitions have generated a new form of commemorative art. The procedures accompanying competitions have injected a more objective tone into the discourse on history and released it from claims that certain victim groups and their representatives have sought to impose. The design concepts for these sites have focussed more and more on a primarily artistic issue, responsibility for which is borne by the relevant experts – in other words, the artists themselves. Consequently, these and other commemorative works and forms are distinguished by their objectively distanced gaze on history. The projects frequently incorporate authentic documents and treat the methods of conveying history as important components of present-day memorial sites. Thus, a new symbolic art of commemoration has emerged that marks sites and documents their varied historical significance. These “historical markers” forego any kind of artificial pictorial emotionality. The experience of history and individual shock in the

face of historical events should instead be based on objective, factual information.

Many of these “historical markers” and memorial sites are the result of lengthy processes of collective recollection. Ultimately, art competitions themselves are an outcome of the public discussions held by various campaign groups. But to ensure that a memorial site does not simply finish and bury the public debates about collective memory that preceded it, process-oriented and participatory elements have been progressively introduced with the aim of turning the memorial itself into an on-going process of recollection, as is demonstrated in the example of the “Monument of the Grey Buses” by Hoheisel and Knitz.

#### ARTISTIC INTEREST IN THE PUBLIC REALM

Art, of course, does not need public attention to survive, and in certain political circumstances, being made public does more harm than good – achieving public prominence for a self-willed work of art can

Horst Hoheisel and Andreas Knitz, “Monument of the Grey Buses”, temporary exhibition, Tiergartenstraße, Berlin, 2008.

Photo: Martin Schönfeld

harbour peril for its producer. In democratically constituted societies, the public arena should be taken for granted as part of cultural life. Here, artists can enter into dialogue with the public and draw important stimulation for their work from an exchange with their audience. In institutional and financial terms, democracies are still unable to adequately satisfy art’s need for public exposure. Many artists’ initiatives are doomed to fail from the very outset due to the state’s financial and institutional limitations.

The more state structures supporting art and the public sphere are threatened, squeezed by failing municipal budgets, the more imperative it becomes for artists to challenge the political culture curtailing their radius of activity. Through their works and actions, artists join in the discussion about the public sphere and adopt approaches that go beyond purely formal and aesthetic issues. Artistic initiatives that support the public realm are concerned with the present world and with the politics and society of their time. Art in public space thus acts as a social and political statement, following on from the long tradition of socially critical, realistic art that stretches back as far as the debate about realism in the 19th century.

The public sphere and public space are fundamentally situated beyond the sway of the market. It is this freedom that makes public space so attractive for artistic work, on the one hand, but at the same time also for the strategies of commercialisation exercised by private interests. Public space is where a contrary perspective to the hegemony of commercial exploitation can be voiced and where the freedom of the public sphere can be claimed or, if it comes under

pressure, reclaimed. Artistic work in the public sphere offers the means of publicly sending a signal by articulating an artistic standpoint of one’s own making, allowing artists to intervene in public discourse. They thereby encourage public challenges to issues related to the city, space, urbanity, social interaction, and the relationship between past and present in public space. In addition, they stimulate new ways of addressing these questions and embark on new approaches in the debates concerning problems in the public realm. They thereby venture onto common ground with social movements and civic protest campaigns, fostering mutual exchange and interaction. In the context of contemporary art in public space, Käthe Kollwitz’s historical credo of “wishing to make my actions felt in my own time” gains new relevance and depth.

Artistic interest in public matters is articulated in initiatives determined by the artists themselves. Such activities might, for instance, take the form of unconventional modes of interim application, treating transitional and temporary use as a flexible and situation-specific working principle. Artistic interest in the public sphere is also articulated in the artistic approaches artists choose to adopt in public space, developing actions that allow them to intervene symbolically in debates, or to expose and question political tendencies and economic strategies. But above all, artistic interest in the public realm focusses on the politics of urban development and the curtailment of public space through privatisation and the attendant processes of social displacement or the destruction of grown urban structures and city profiles.

In these areas of work and thematic preoccupation,

artists can choose for themselves how they wish to engage in the debate on public issues through their artistic work. This occurs frequently in a spontaneous manner and without recourse to state structures. Their involvement in public issues depends largely on the principle of self-exploitation, the formation of unpredictable alliances, working in groups, making temporary shared use of facilities and structures, and on attracting funding and support for their work. Their initiatives fall outside the boundaries of economic viability and exploitation, are not concerned with material gain, and – given their largely local situation – do not speculate on enhancing reputations or reaping financial profit from attracting public attention. Yet where these initiatives do generate profit, it is usually ploughed back into the public domain. This calls for considerable passion for a particular purpose, an exceptional degree of commitment, and some manner of financial security provided either outside the bounds of this artistic activity or from other artistic works. For the initiators, the true, non-material value of their work is derived from their input for the community, from their par-

ticipation in social and otherwise complex contexts, and from the social success of being able to generate impetus – of setting things in motion and paving the way for social and spatial change. As the initiators share this success with many others, the authorship of a project is automatically multiplied and thereby dissociated from individual gain.

#### INTERIM USE – TEMPORARY ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS

A school was due to be closed – the oldest one in the neighbourhood around Kastanienallee in Berlin's Prenzlauer Berg district. The fact that there were now too few pupils or that the school's location and building failed to meet the standard requirements of a modern educational institution was not some incidental matter but signalled a pronounced watershed in the history of this quarter. Wolfgang Krause, an artist living near the school, was shocked to learn of the planned closure, having already been witness to some of the more salient changes in the area since the late 1980s. Without further ado he decided to use this development as a subject for his teaching



figures 15

bp-wir-AG, "Verpackungsskulpturen"  
("Packaging Sculptures"), 2003. Repro

figures 16

Inge Mahn, "Betreten Verboten"  
("Do Not Enter"), 2005. Repro

figure 17

Arnold Dreyblatt (supervision) and Wolfgang Krause et al., "Die verschwundene Klasse"  
("The Vanished Class"), workshop and installation accompanying the project "Schulschluss"  
("End of School"), Berlin, 2004. Repro



at the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weissensee. In late 2002, he got in touch with the governing board of the school and education officials in the local authority. The school principals, in particular, responded very open-mindedly to his initiative.

From early 2003 on, art students were given a chance to develop projects within the day-to-day context of the school. By the end of the school year in June 2003, they were able for the first time to take charge of the school building and grounds for interim artistic use with actions and installations. Yet the school closure did not happen as soon as anticipated, thus enabling interested art students to make repeated use of the building and its standardised classrooms during the summer break in 2004, and finally again in 2005, to develop works and site-related installations that dealt with the ways this quarter of Berlin had changed.<sup>8</sup> The departure of the pupils and teaching staff thus

became a process that was artistically accompanied. Even after the complex was privatised, one result of this exchange still remains on view in the lobby on the first floor: a four-part wall piece documenting a disappeared school class, the "7d/1961". The wall newspaper style of the work is a little at odds with the building's chic new interior. It now stands as testimony of the artistic outcry against the transformation of an entire neighbourhood, a process also generally known as "gentrification". (figures 15–17)

In 2008, the Berlin artist Rolf Wicker took part in an open competition "Art for Villages – Villages for Art" held by the Deutsche Stiftung für Kulturlandschaft (German Foundation for Cultural Landscapes). As one of three prize-winning artists, he was given a modest budget to implement a project in the Mecklenburg village of Lelkendorf. His attention was caught by an unoccupied house in the cen-

tre of the village, which he made the lynchpin of his artistic strategy. Rather than undertaking collective bricolage with the villagers, Wicker transformed the empty building into the “Temporary Kunsthalle Lelkendorf” – after all, a no less temporary art museum had just been opened in the centre of Berlin (figure 18). For this venture to succeed, he required the wholehearted support of the residents of Lelkendorf. As a “special task force”, the voluntary fire brigade secured the opening and closure of the project, which ran from February to September 2009. In the period between, seven Berlin artists were invited to contribute installations and actions, converting the little house in the middle of the village into an unexpected treasure trove and showcase for contemporary art. (The participating artists were: Pfelder, Rainer Ecker, Jörg Schlinke, Katja Pudor, Leni Hoffmann, Matthäus Thoma, and Jan Philipp Scheibe.) During this time, visitors were not actually allowed to enter the house – they could only look in from the outside. Wicker’s activity gave rise to a number of discussions about art with residents of Lelkendorf and other interested visitors from the area, who soon joined forces to launch an association in support of the project. Their commitment did not relent until they had raised enough money to finance a publication documenting the project. But it was not only local residents who profited from the project and broadened their experience. The project proved rewarding for the artist Rolf Wicker too: In 2010 he moved his studio to Lelkendorf.

Empty buildings are the most obvious symptoms of changing circumstances. The tenant of a shop moves out, giving notice on time, but the landlord fails to find a new tenant. So the premise stays vacant

and, as time passes, it becomes a problem. Where economists immediately latch onto the unseen maintenance costs of an unoccupied property, artists are likely to see the creative potential of such vacancies. Through actions developed by artists during a period of interim use, public attention was drawn to the way a neighbourhood had been changed by the school closure. For the village whose population was shrinking, a vacant gatehouse temporarily became a point of communication. In situations of this kind, solidarity and social cohesion can be fostered, with artists offering crucial impetus through their perspectives as outsiders and their works and initiatives. They too may not be in a position to arrest fundamental social and economic developments, but at least they can intervene and underline disappearing social contexts. And occasionally, their unconventional and unexpected approaches prove persuasive and can effect change where previously there had been no sign of an alternative.

#### COMMENTARY – ARTISTIC APPROACHES IN PUBLIC SPACE

In response to a decision reached by the German Bundestag to dedicate a monument in the centre of Berlin to the memory of the murdered Jews of Europe, conservative circles, largely consisting of Christian Democrat (CDU) party members, called for a monument to celebrate freedom and unity, in turn dedicated to the peaceful revolution of 1989/1990. The proposed site was Berlin’s Schlossplatz and the adjacent square called the “Schlossfreiheit”, which was once graced by the vast Kaiser Wilhelm National Monument built by Kaiser Wilhelm II. In an increasingly divisive society, the aim was to trumpet a final hurrah to national unification and

figure 18

Rolf Wicker, “Temporary Kunsthalle Lelkendorf” – vernissage happening by Pfelder “Kunsttransport” (“art transportation”), 2009. Repro



figure 19

Victor Kégli and Filomeno Fusco, “weiss 104” (“white 104”) – a temporary national monument, Berlin, September/October, 2000. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



the German state in the form of a celebratory monument. In 2000, with the monument's design still far from being found, the project's initiators had already come up with a suitable epigraph for the plinth: "We are the people, we are one people!" The inscription was indeed incorporated into the winning design proposal for a giant seesaw, which was developed 11 years later by Milla & Partner.

Against this backdrop, in September/October 2000, the artists Victor Kégli and Filomeno Fusco created a "temporary national monument" titled "weiss 104" ("white 104") consisting of 104 washing machines that they installed on the same terrain earmarked for the future monument.<sup>10</sup> (figure 19)



Anyone was welcome to visit the site and wash their previous days' dirty washing and, as they were doing so, tell the project's initiators what they associated with the site and its meaning. Accompanied by concerts, readings, and discussions, the action was an artistic commentary on the current political situation and the growth of nationalist sentiment in Germany. In this manner the artists sought to exemplify that the purpose behind most monuments and their sites is to sanitise and sanctify the country's by no means glorious past. Their washing machine installation served as a critical commentary exposing the monument scheme – already 10 years before the competition was carried out – as a restorative, hence affirmative project. Kégli and Fusco's installation

figure 20

msk7, "blümerant", temporary installation, Gendarmenmarkt, Berlin (Mitte), 2007. Photo: Martin Schönfeld

turned out to be a truly prophetic "counter monument".

The paucity of remaining evidence on the Gendarmenmarkt square in Berlin's historic centre of the once considerable presence of Huguenot immigration in the 17th and 18th centuries, prompted the group of seven women artists msk7 to create their installation "blümerant" (an old Berlin word meaning queasy).<sup>11</sup> They transformed the paved square of the Gendarmenmarkt into a crossword puzzle composed of French words that have entered into the Berlin vernacular. The letters were created with sections of grass mats, transforming the striking stone-paved plaza for six weeks into a landscaped terrain. This in turn inspired visitors to spend time in the square and use it however they felt – a place that in the summer months is usually rendered unrecognisable by festivals, making it impossible for people to frequent and enjoy the square without first buying entrance tickets. The temporary greening of the site was also a reminder that it was first paved by the Nazis in 1936 to make it more suitable for political rallies. By contrast, the "blümerant" installation returned this area of urban space to public ownership, temporarily wresting it from the prestigious and exclusive pretensions attached to it. (figure 20)

With the intentions and statements they voice within contemporary debates, artistic installations in public space are free to align themselves as they wish, thus transforming (mostly temporarily installed) public art into a standpoint in its own right. These works – installations, interventions, actions, performances, and configurations of various kinds – depend predominantly on their location for their thematic sub-

figure 21

Christoph Schäfer and Cathy Skene, "Park Fiction", Antonipark, Hamburg, 1994–2005. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



stance and meaning. If their character were unrelated to any particular spatial and temporal setting, they could just as well be presented in a "white cube" and would not need to lay claim to public space. The character of art as a public commentary depends on the connotations of its location and the eloquence of its pictorial language. It can be both subtly and poetically articulated, as in the case of "blümerant", or portray itself as a demonstrative gesture, as does the action "weiss 104" by Kégli and Fusco.

#### INTERVENTIONS IN URBAN POLITICS

A long-term project was initiated by the artists Christoph Schäfer and Cathy Skene when, in 1994, they were invited to participate in the art in public spaces programme that was still being run by the culture department of the city of Hamburg (the programme was abolished in 2000). In their preliminary research, they came across a plot of fallow land in the St. Pauli district close to the Elbe that was under considerable pressure to be sold to private inter-



figure 22

Kai Schiemenz, “The Empty Dwelling, the Vain Tower and the Mad Colonist”, *Skulpturenpark Berlin Zentrum* (Sculpture Park Berlin Centre), 2008.  
Photo: Martin Schönfeld

figure 23

Valeska Peschke, “und er kommt nicht allein” (“and he is not coming alone”), *Skulpturenpark Berlin Zentrum* (Sculpture Park Berlin Centre), 2007.  
Photo: Martin Schönfeld

ests. Against this, they pitched their project “Park Fiction”, in which residents of the neighbourhood were asked to formulate their wishes and ideas for possible uses for the still disused plot of land. Subsequently, the artists and local campaign groups managed to modify the project to suit public planning requirements, making way for the hoped-for park, which was named “Antonipark” and completed in 2005.<sup>12</sup> The artificial palm trees installed along the park’s promenade became its emblem. The project attracted keen interest both within and beyond the art scene and was presented at *documenta 11* in Kassel in 2002. (figure 21)

In early 2006, the association KUNSTrePUBLIK (consisting mainly of the artists Matthias Einhoff, Philip Horst, Markus Lohmann, Harry Sachs, and Daniel Seiple) initiated a temporary project in an unusual and almost forgotten place in the very heart of Berlin. Using its own location as an example, the project explored the commercialisation of urban space and prime inner-city sites. Up till autumn 2010, the “Skulpturenpark Berlin\_Zentrum” (“Sculpture Park Berlin Centre”) was located on land that had once been the “death strip” along the Berlin Wall dividing East and West, and thereafter fuelled the lofty dreams of luxury building projects entertained by one investor after the next. (One such investor’s dream is grandly called the “Fellini Residences”).<sup>13</sup> But only a few of these fantasy buildings have so far succeeded in establishing themselves in the gradually overgrown belt of urban wasteland. Instead, the land was taken over by artists who used it for temporary artistic installations. These were flanked by lectures, workshops, and guest projects, often conducted by outside art institutions and visiting groups of

art college students. In addition, there were annual theme-based series, which addressed the relationship of the project’s participants to the site and were aimed at generating a continuous reinterpretation of the location. Some of the projects were determined by means of a selection process that also included external jurors. In early 2008, the “Skulpturenpark Berlin\_Zentrum” was even appointed as a satellite venue of the Berlin Biennial. The treatment of the site referred back to the principle of temporary, interim use. The “sculpture park” in the project’s title traded on traditional forms of sculpture display, but in practice sculptural work here shifted to become process-oriented project work. The aim was not simply to install and present sculptures. (figures 22 and 23)

The game of Monopoly being played with the city and urban space was the issue explicitly addressed in “Park Fiction” and “Skulpturenpark Berlin\_Zentrum”. Whereas the property situation in Hamburg still afforded possibilities for public intervention, in Berlin this had been irrevocably clarified, meaning that the question of power – who does urban space belong to? – had to be explored from a theoretical and ludic angle. At the same time, this question became an object lesson in the worst excesses of land and property speculation and the all too evident proliferation of cloud castles in the real estate business, where the progressive chain of shifting ownership simply further inflates the bubble of promises and fantasies. Artists in both projects demonstrated their response to such developments by articulating “utopias” of an evidently far more realistic nature, since these were based on the day-to-day experiences of actual people living in the city, as opposed to first

Schirin Kretschmann, “Sand Promenade”,  
temporary action on the Mahrzahner Promenade,  
Berlin (Marzahn), 2011. Photo: Martin Schönfeld

projecting a still non-existent social class that was supposed to fulfil the investor’s dreams.

#### ART IN INTERACTION WITH A CULTURE OF PUBLIC INTERESTS

In the course of urban planning and building management projects, art in public space and “percentage for art” usually come at the very end of the line. They are meant to happen just before the project’s concluding statement of accounts – but, if you please, should always be completed and installed on time for the public handover or the inauguration ceremony. Public art thus accompanies the transfer of possession of a new site to its new user. The focus of the institution then quickly latches onto these unorthodox artistic “add-ons”, in many cases suddenly and unexpectedly thrusting them into the limelight of a discourse issuing from within these institutionally defined micro-publics. At this point, artists and clients are required to explain their works and intentions. With respect to the functionality of the sites and buildings, art maintains its strangeness.

Whereas new architecture soon becomes established and its spatial structures internalised, art stems itself against the drift of habit even after many years, grabbing attention, sparking astonishment, and making itself felt as an aesthetic thorn in the daily bustle of the site. The “thornier” art is, the more it attracts attention and features in public debate. In this way art fosters the exchange of ideas, inspires questions and reflection about institutions and their operations, and generally contributes to their public visibility. This happens in clearly defined facilities such as kindergartens and schools, research facilities and universities, as well as in more complex public

configurations in towns and cities. It is particularly through urban discursive contexts that artistic activities achieve an impact that is quickly felt in broader dimensions, gaining importance throughout society, if not an entire country. Their appeal and meaning increase the more the issues and problems they address are in tune with the present. If artistic activities of this kind hit the mood of the moment, they are able to spawn numerous opportunities for action and change. In such circumstances, public art can soon reach beyond its own local or municipal context and provide stimulus for social and political initiatives or join hands with broad social movements, offering them inspiration or critical support.

The public is constantly put to the test by art in public space. What kinds of freedom will it tolerate, what is admissible, and where are the boundaries to art? The scope of possible artistic activities is a measure of the state of development in public culture. Can art adopt an autonomous status in public culture and thereby become a factor of development, or is it only conceded a decorative function on the periphery?

The more the public sphere comes under pressure from commercial exploitation and privatisation, the greater the urgency for artistic action in public space. Artists operate parallel to new social movements or in conjunction with protest culture. In this context artists have become important protagonists and potential allies; with their actions they promote the culture of public life.



- 1 Cf. Stefan Krüskemper, Air Borne, Kunst im Aerodynamischen Park in der Wissenschaftsstadt Berlin-Adlershof, Berlin-Adlershof (Berlin: Verlag für integrative Kunst, 2006). <http://www.air-borne.info>.
- 2 Cf. <http://www.josefineguenschel.de/de/aussen/aussenhaut.html>.
- 3 Cf. Florian Matzner (ed.), Empfangshalle, Between Private and Public (Heidelberg: Kehrer Verlag, 2007).
- 4 Cf. Bezirksamt Neukölln von Berlin Fachbereich Stadtplanung (ed.), Seraphina Lenz – Werkstatt für Veränderung (Cologne: Salon Verlag, 2011).
- 5 Cf. María Linares, Hirsch Rot, Kunst am Bau von, mit und für die Nutzer des Funktionsgebäudes auf der Julius-Hirsch-Sportanlage in Berlin (Berlin: Vice-Versa-Verlag, 2010).
- 6 Cf. <http://www.denkzeichen-am-murellenberg.de>.
- 7 Cf. Andreas Schmauder, Paul-Otto Schmidt-Michel and Franz Schwarzbauer (eds.), Erinnern und Gedenken, Das Mahnmal Weissenau und die Erinnerungskultur in Ravensburg (Constance: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2007). <http://www.dasdenkmaldergrauenbusse.de>.
- 8 Cf. Wolfgang Krause and Peter Müller (eds.), Schulschluss, ein Prozess am Standort Kastanienallee 82, 2002–2005 (Berlin: Vice-Versa-Verlag, 2007). <http://www.wolfgang-krause-projekte.de/schulschluss/index.html>.
- 9 Cf. Rolf Wicker and Freunde der Temporären Kunsthalle Lelkendorf (eds.), Temporäre Kunsthalle Lelkendorf, ein Kunstprojekt von Rolf Wicker (selfpublished, 2010). <http://www.kunsthalle-lelkendorf.de>.
- 10 Cf. <http://www.weiss104.de> or [http://www.filomenofusco.de/index.php?article\\_id=15&clang=0/](http://www.filomenofusco.de/index.php?article_id=15&clang=0/).
- 11 Cf. msk7 (ed.), blümerant, eine temporäre Installation der Künstlerinnengruppe msk7 auf dem Gendarmenmarkt Berlin (Berlin: extra books, 2008). <http://www.msk7.org/pages-d/bluemerant.html>.
- 12 Cf. <http://www.parkfiction.org>.
- 13 Cf. KUNSTrePUBLIK e.V. (ed.), Skulpturenpark Berlin-Zentrum (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung König, 2010).

# ISTANBUL

## WHERE IS THE PUBLIC SPHERE?

On the historical development and present state of Turkish art in public space based on the example of Istanbul<sup>1</sup>

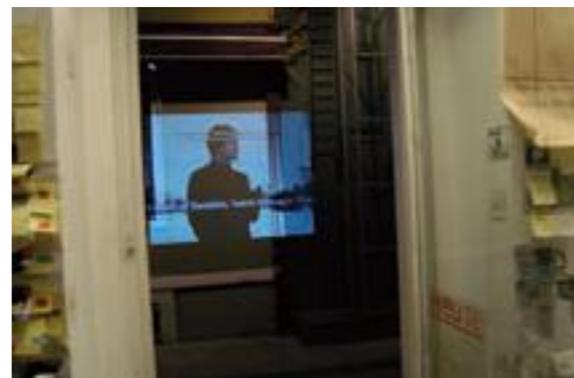
by Marcus Graf

### INHIBITION AND DELAY

Since the turn of the new millennium, the arts scene and artists in Turkey, especially artistic activity centred on Istanbul, have been attracting growing attention in Germany and – even if to a somewhat lesser degree – other European countries too. The history of Turkish migration and contemporary art’s prevailing preoccupation with urban issues are two key factors in this development. The particular attraction of this Bosphorus metropolis of 15 million residents lies precisely in Istanbul’s specific character, with its pre-

vailing urban and social structures so unlike those in other Western cities. In addition, from the early 1990s onward, the geopolitical changes brought on by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the secession of its Baltic neighbours have buttressed Istanbul’s position as a pivotal hub between the Balkan region and Western Europe, on the one side, and the Near and Middle East on the other. Indeed, since it adopted a neo-liberal economic course in the mid-1980s, Turkey has maintained a closer relationship with its neighbours and sought membership in the EU. A similar expansive momentum and mood of optimism can currently be witnessed in Turkey’s art scene.

In the late 1980s, the *Istanbul Biennial* allowed contemporary art to be seen for the first time in public venues and outdoor locations throughout Istanbul. Later on, in the 1990s, integration of contemporary art in the public domain and its conveyance to a younger audience were boosted by the founding of



figures 1 and 2

View of the exhibition *Everything Is Gonna Be Alright* at Apartment Project, Istanbul, 2006/2007. Photo courtesy of Selda Asal



non-commercial artist-run galleries such as Apartment Projesi (Apartment Project), (figure 1) İstanbul Yeni Sanat Müzesi (New Istanbul Art Museum), and Istanbul Contemporary Art Projects (ICAP). These exhibition projects have acted as important factors in the democratisation and diversification of the Turkish art system and have been met with considerable enthusiasm, particularly among young artists and art students. Since the turn of the new century, there has been a marked rise in the number of artistic actions in public space and of new “alternative” or artist-run spaces. In the meantime, there are several international exhibition projects such as *Yaya Sergileri (Pavement Exhibitions, in 2001 and 2005)* (figure 2) that focus exclusively on public art, and over 20 alternative or non-commercial galleries whose exhibition projects frequently address audiences of a broader range than just the usual crowd of gallery patrons. Nonetheless, for all their importance in terms of artistic innovation, numerically these

figures 3 and 4

Callum Morton, “Stonewash”, in *2. Pedestrian Exhibitions, Istanbul, 2005*. Photo courtesy of Fulya Erdemci



projects represent a relatively minor counterpoint to Istanbul’s private or company-run galleries and museums, which afford sponsors an almost overwhelming influence. (figures 3 and 4)

Exhibition culture in Istanbul has become highly varied over the last 10 years, although it has still not made sufficient inroads into society in general, since exhibitions are held on the whole in galleries, exhibition spaces, and museums, with a clientele drawn mostly from the relatively small coterie of educated elite. In relation to the city’s size and the range of culture on offer, art in public space is almost non-existent. Above all, disinterest on the part of the political class, meagre public awareness, an underdeveloped art market, and the infrastructural shortcomings of the exhibition domain have all contributed to impeding the development of the Turkish art scene into a social system and stifled the expansion of contemporary art outside the traditional presentation venues.

Dependent as it is mainly on support from private or corporate sponsors, the exhibition system in Turkey is similar to that in North America. Hence, Istanbul's public space is marked by a paradox: While exerting a strong attraction on visual artists at home and abroad, it is almost never embraced as a site for presenting and producing contemporary art.

"Public space" here is taken to mean the plethora of places that are freely accessible to the public and not tied to commercial, political, or economic interests, subject neither to their restrictions nor their objectives. Besides streets, squares, and other outdoor sites, I would include in this definition naturally grown and man-made locales such as woods or parks. I would also like to extend this concept of public space somewhat further to encompass non-commercial galleries and exhibition venues. In my essay, I also wish to examine alternative and artist-run projects and galleries as public art venues because, by and large, the exhibition projects hosted there are not commercially motivated but seek to foster direct ties and dialogue with society as a whole. In many cases, alternative or independent galleries also act as the starting point for art projects in public space. Since, historically speaking, these exhibition spaces were derived from the anti-museum activities in the arts scene in the 1960s, their approach is inherently anti-elitist, which is the reason why they are almost always driven by socio-political objectives and try to address a broad audience. Such activities have abandoned the white cube and now take place in the street and other public locations. In addition, I would like to extend my notion of public space to include virtual space, which since the 1990s has gained increasing importance in the production

and presentation of art.

In my study I explore the question of why a metropolis as inspirational and attractive as Istanbul is home to so few artists and art projects that work in or with public space. Following a few introductory observations about the state of art in public space in Turkey, I will present cases of artists and exhibition projects that are important in the development of contemporary public art. But from the outset it should be stressed that, with the exception of the Ankara-based group *Küf*, all the examples I cite are based in Istanbul, which simply underlines that the city on the Bosphorus is not only the centre of economic and cultural life in Turkey but also of art in public space.

During my research it became clear that the marked differences between how art in public space has developed in Turkey and how it has developed in Western countries have art-historical and socio-political roots. In art-historical terms, Ottoman and later Turkish salon and gallery art was strongly influenced by Western art. The development of art in public space, however, diverges in key aspects from developments in Western art centres. In addition, the changes that took place in the 1980s in the socio-political structure of public space – which was wrenched from being highly politicised to being apolitical, and where any form of socially critical activity was countered with severest punishment – played a major role in the emergence of an entirely different notion of the public realm.

Hence, it is barely surprising that still today, art in public space – echoing official ideology – is understood to mean sculptures of Atatürk (figure 5), war

figure 5

Pictro Canonica, Atatürk sculpture (Ordular İlk Hedefiniz Akdeniz'dir İleri), Izmir, since 1932. Photo: Marcus Graf

memorials, statues of important figures, or, alternatively, apolitical sculptures depicting animals or even foodstuffs as emblems of the city. (figures 6)

With few exceptions, such as certain site-specific works installed in the Istanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı, İMÇ (Istanbul Textile Traders' Market) towards the end of the 1960s, there is very little evidence in Istanbul of modern or contemporary works in public space. In Anatolian cities, they are as good as nonexistent.

#### THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC ART IN BRIEF OUTLINE

In comparison with the rest of Europe, publicly displayed figurative art first arrived in the Ottoman Empire and the subsequent Turkish Republic after a delay of some 2,000 years. While citizens of Greek and Roman cities had already been used to seeing figurative statues in public locations since antiquity, the history of monumental art in the Ottoman Empire did not begin until after the mid-19th century. Art and culture were largely isolated from international influences and characterised by the Islamic proscription of figurative imagery. Change gradually came about in the mid-19th century when the Ottoman Empire began to open up to Western Europe, its art, and its culture. In 1839, Sultan Abdülmecit issued the reformist measures *Tanzimat-i Hayriye* (Beneficial Reforms), which were intended to align the Ottoman Empire more closely with Europe, especially as a means of keeping up with the rapid progress of the West in technical fields.<sup>1</sup> Ottoman artists travelled to France to study under various artists such as Jean Léone Gérôme, Gustave Boulanger, Alex-

figure 6

Sculpture in Alibeyköy, Istanbul, 2011. Photo: Yavuz Tokmak



andre Cabanel, and Gustave Courtois.<sup>2</sup> In 1882 the Sanayi-i Nefise Mektebi (State School of Fine Arts) was founded, offering students training to paint in the Western style. A sculpture class was also set up. One of the first sculptors in the Ottoman Empire was Oskan Yervant Efendi, but access to his work, which was steeped in Classicism and Orientalism, was granted only to a small social elite. Overall, art in public space in the Empire is mainly taken to mean architecture and its ornamental decoration. Interesting exceptions to this are Ottoman gravestones (figure 7). The contemporary artist Günnur Özsoy recently told me that when she was a student in the 1990s, the large cemeteries in Eyüp always struck her as open-air museums. Due to the lack of places exhibiting sculpture, she frequently visited cemeteries for study purposes. Indeed, the influence of these forms can be observed in her work and that of other contemporary artists.

The founding of the Turkish Republic in 1923 was accompanied by a state-driven modernisation process throughout the country, in which, from the outset, art and culture played an important role as a tool for promoting and cementing Kemalist thinking. The founder of modern Turkey, Mustafa Kemal (Atatürk), considered art an essential cornerstone in the drive to build a modern society, a motor of progress that was meant to propel the country into a modern future. With the aid of art and culture, Turkey was to be reformed and assume its place alongside modern Western states.<sup>3</sup> This approach underscores the educative function ascribed to national culture, art, and creativity, and which was also to play such an important role in the country's Turkification. Hence, the first large sculptures that were

installed in public space in this period were strongly characterised by ideological purpose. This was why, up till the 1980s, sculpture in the public realm was considered synonymous with "Atatürk sculpture".

This explains how, in contrast to the West – where alternative strategies diverging from the traditional art establishment had, from the early 20th century onwards, gained increasing popularity by the mid-20th century – certain art-historical and socio-political obstacles had seriously restricted the free development of art in public space in Turkey.

A further critical obstruction to art in public space occurred in the early 1980s. On 12 September 1980, with the spate of political murders and terror spiralling out of control, the military seized power for the third time in the Turkish Republic's young history. The reason given for the coup d'état was the need to end the fighting between rightwing and leftwing groups, which had claimed over 5,000 deaths by the end of the 1970s, and that the civilian government was incapable of offering any visible solution to the ongoing violence and the economic crisis. Parliament was dissolved and the constitution suspended. The 1980s were marked by the harsh repression measures against press freedoms and free speech that were unleashed with the military takeover.<sup>4</sup> All political parties were disbanded and any form of political debate or meeting banned. Even today, the events of September 1980 are still spoken of in Turkey as being a severe blow against civil rights and as being responsible for the eradication of the Left. It remains a collective social trauma.<sup>5</sup> Between 1980 and 1984, 178,565 people (of which the majority were leftwing intellectuals) were arrested, 64,505



were charged, 41,727 convicted, and 326 sentenced to death – of whom 25 were executed.<sup>6</sup> Torture and murder were commonplace in the country's prisons, prompting repeated protests by Europe during the 1980s as well as prompting charges against Turkey for violating human rights. There was also talk of a general suspension of public space due to the illegality of engaging in any form of socially critical activity in public.

The September 12 coup d'état is considered a trauma by many artists and intellectuals, since in the following years every kind of political, critical, or philosophical discussion, whether in verbal or written form, was declared illegal. In the aftermath, a highly politicised younger generation and its arts scene underwent a process of total apoliticisation. For the 1,150-day duration of the military junta, a state of emergency and a curfew after dark prevailed for most of the time. Over 300 party leaders were jailed, books were confiscated, newspapers banned. Thousands of intellectuals were expelled from the country, street names changed in honour of Kemalism, and over 4,000 university lecturers and school teachers suspended. Strict press censorship was imposed proscribing any form of political commentary or critical discussion of everyday events. Fear of censorship and arrest forced the Turkish arts scene to focus its debates on solely formal issues. Against this backdrop, Turkey saw the emergence of an apolitical and uncritical art scene, which turned its back on the current social and political situation at home and post-modern developments in Western Europe and wrapped itself entirely in formal debates.<sup>7</sup>

According to the Turkish curator Erden Kosova,

art during the 1980s also fully withdrew from public space. It soon became impossible to establish any kind of social or political context in art.<sup>8</sup> Artistic production was regulated and restricted through the requirement that all forms of creative expression conform to the official Kemalist ideology propagated by the military.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, a new generation of artists evolved for whom self-censorship was ingrained and a matter of course. Artists with the courage to critically explore their context and question prevailing conditions ran into problems with the law. For instance, the acclaimed artist Gülsün Karamustafa was arrested and charged, first in 1971 for being a member of a socialist organisation, then in 1980 for belonging to a political artists' association. Works by conformist and apolitical artists went largely unnoticed by the state. As can be seen, the impact the traumatic experiences of the 1980s made on the Turkish art scene was immense and a further significant reason for the very hesitant progress of art in public space.

Although in the 1990s the development of an independent contemporary art that had cut itself free from conventional academism and salon painting gradually gained pace and increased its influence on the art scene and society as a whole, the realm of public art was still slow to evolve. Typically, in 1994, in response to the concept for a sculpture by Mehmet Aksoy ("Periler Ülkesinde", "Land of the Fairies"), the mayor of Turkey's capital Ankara, Melih Gökçek, publicly declared that he would "spit on art like that", which, in his mind, was tantamount to obscenity. The sculpture was then removed from public view. In 2010 the artist befell the same fate again. This time, Aksoy's monumental sculpture "İnsanlık

Heykel" ("Monument of Humanity") was called "freakish" by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and then dismantled. There are frequent reports of artistic works being removed from public sites when there is a change of municipal administration. All in all, state censorship and self-censure are still acute issues in Turkey, posing an important constraint on people working in the arts.

#### THE STATE OF THINGS AT PRESENT: MAJOR PROJECTS AND ARTISTS

A lack of awareness of and a reluctance to appropriate public space on the part of the general public and artists meant that up till the end of the 1990s, public space as a venue for exhibiting and producing art remained utterly ignored. In addition, as my own research confirms, at the outset the idea of working with and in public space was pursued not by artists but largely by curators and art managers. It was they who recognised that the conservative attitudes towards contemporary art held by Turkish society and the local art scene could only be overcome by displaying examples of such art in public locations. As a result, in the late 1980s, the first exhibition projects, seminars, and discussions exploring the idea of art in public space started taking place in Istanbul. Besides addressing aesthetic aspects and objectives, these projects also dealt with socio-political and educational themes.

An important role in this context is played by the *Istanbul Biennial*, which, since starting up in 1987, has repeatedly used public space to show work. Organised by the *İstanbul Kültür ve Sanat Vakfı*, İKSUV (Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts), the Biennial's aim is to foster dialogue with the international art

community and improve Turkish artists' access to it. In addition, the Biennial offers a platform for communicating contemporary art as well as helping to present Istanbul – the meeting-point between the Orient and the Occident – as an attractive and up-to-the-moment centre for art and culture.<sup>10</sup> The first *Istanbul Biennial* hosted thematic group exhibitions as well as spotlighting artistic production in different countries. As the general coordinator of the first *Istanbul Biennial*, Beral Madra's particular concern was to promote international art of the present, since – apart from a small informed coterie – both the broad mass of the population and the conservative-thinking local art scene held hostile views of contemporary art.<sup>11</sup> Oya Eczacıbaşı, a member of the Biennial's executive committee, has also emphasised how closely the exhibition was integrated into the city<sup>12</sup> – a factor that has remained fundamental to the *Istanbul Biennial* till today. One particular formal and conceptual feature of the Biennial was the exhibition idea implemented between 1987 and 2003 of "contemporary art in historical spaces and in traditional places", prompting artists working, for instance, in the Hagia Irene or the Hagia Sophia Hamam to develop site- and space-specific works and installations. (figure 8) Beral Madra has pointed out that this exhibition strategy sought to compensate for the lack of suitable exhibition spaces and to attract artists and the public. Yet from the outset, one inherent problem of this principle was that most Turkish artists were painters in the classical sense. As a result, having had little familiarity with the development of site-specific spatial installations, they simply hung the canvas paintings they were showing at the Biennial on walls, as in a gallery. For all its various organisational and infrastructural shortcom-

ings, however, this exhibition model is a particular formal and conceptual feature of the *Istanbul Biennial*. For contemporary Turkish art, this represents a significant shift away from the traditional formats of gallery shows and studio production towards using public space as a context for producing and exhibiting art. At subsequent Biennials, artists such as Ayşe Erkmen and Gülsün Karamustafa developed works that can by all means be considered the early examples of Turkish site-specific art.

Whenever art is presented in public space, there is always a danger of vandalism. This happened at the second *Istanbul Biennial* when a sculpture by the Turkish artist Metin Deniz – installed on the historic Sultanahmet Square, consisting of 70 chairs and 13 female figures (“İsimsiz”, “Untitled”, 1989) – was damaged. (figure 9) An unknown person destroyed the face of one of the figures. As the Biennial proceeded, various newspapers with conservative or religious leanings launched inflammatory campaigns against the installation. One article, for instance,



titled “Eyesore in Sultanahmet” and published in the newspaper *Zaman*, lambasted Deniz’s sculpture as an offence to public decency, claiming it was intolerable to residents of the old quarter of Sultanahmet with its numerous mosques.<sup>13</sup> The outdoor sculpture “Yunusların Çaresizliği” (“The Hopeless Predicament of Dolphins”) by Erol Eti was also vandalised at the 1989 Biennial. The artist cites the general plight of education in Turkey as the reason for its destruction.<sup>14</sup> For Aydın Gün, the then director of the *Istanbul Biennial*, this act of vandalism showed that with its mentality Turkey was still not ready to join the European Community.<sup>15</sup> The leading gallerist at that time, Yahşi Baraz, blamed the generally poor level of education for these attacks on works of art. In an article in the Istanbul-based art magazine *Sanat Çevresi*, Baraz noted that not only was art in Turkey set back in time from the West, but it was also isolated from the rest of society. In his view, communicating contemporary art at that time was a sheer impossible endeavour that met with nothing but incomprehension and rejection. He considered Turkey still unready for the highly conceptual art and the intellectual debates of the Biennial.<sup>16</sup> In this, the gallerist thereby showed an acute grasp of the state of Turkish contemporary art in the late 1980s and of the difficulty, but also necessity, of integrating contemporary art into the public sphere.

The *Istanbul Biennials* staged from the mid-1990s onwards were among the most outstanding platforms for the presentation of art in public space. For instance, Maria Eichhorn’s work “Billboard” (1995) highlighted taboo and censorship in Istanbul’s public realm when she had poster hoardings erected in Taksim Square in the city centre, which offered a forum

figure 8

Ömer Uluç, installation in the Hagia Sophia Hamam, in 1. *Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, 1987. Photo courtesy of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts

figure 9

Metin Deniz, “Untitled”, in 2. *Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, 1989. Photo courtesy of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts

figure 10

Maria Eichhorn, “Billboard”, in 4. *Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, 1995. Photo courtesy of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts



to NGOs such as local anti-nuclear protest groups, Greenpeace, or gay and lesbian groups that otherwise had no officially sanctioned means of making their presence visible in the public realm. Needless to say, as the German daily *TAZ* reported, the artist encountered problems with municipal authorities, who ordered her to shift the billboard further away from the square’s Atatürk monument. (figure 10) In the following Biennial in 1997, Istanbul’s hallmark “bridge situation” inspired curatorial thinking in the choice of Istanbul’s Atatürk Airport and the main stations of Sirkeci and Haydarpaşa as exhibition locations. For the curator Rosa Martinez, Istanbul represented a symbolic meeting point between East and West, making the city particularly well suited to fostering an intercultural dialogue between the various artists participating in the Biennial.<sup>17</sup> Thus, she sought to intensify the relationship between the festival and the city.

This Biennial included artists such as Carl Michael von Hausswolff, who developed site-specific works for Haydarpaşa main station (“Asyalılaştırıcı”, “Asians Maker”) and Tracey Emin, who conceived a performance piece for a hotel room in Pera Palace Hotel (“Ölüyle Konuşma”, “Speaking with the Dead”). (figures 11 and 12) In a work he made in 2001 titled “İsimsiz – Sakın bir meydan için sinema” (“Untitled – Cinema for a Quiet Place”), Rirkrit Tiravanija developed the idea of an open-air cinema on the square in front of the TÜYAP exhibition centre, where feature films were screened that had previously been chosen by the residents of Istanbul. (figure 13) In “Bugün Doğanlara İthaf Edilmiştir” (“Dedicated to Those Who Are Born Today”), Alberto Garutti created an interactive light installation on Bosphorus Bridge, in which for each



newly born child, a light was illuminated on the suspension bridge. (figure 14) In 2007, the curator Hou Hanru took the concept of incorporating public space into the Biennial even further and developed the mobile video programme *nightcomers*, with which video works were projected on the walls of houses at 25 peripheral sites on 25 nights. With this project, he attempted to liberate the Biennial from its narrow local context by also presenting contemporary art and culture in the outlying districts of Istanbul. This choice of locations for showing art publicly underscored the agenda of the Biennial to address the broadest possible audience. The programme took its lead from the concept of *dazibao*, a strategy of undirected and democratic communication practised in China during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s via public posters and wall newspapers. Hou Hanru's idea was to create a video version of *dazibao*, as for him video represented a contemporary means of expression and criticism, which, unlike the "wall democracy" of the *dazibao*, could lead to a "screen democracy" of the camera.<sup>18</sup> Hanru invited several curators working in Turkey – Övül Durmuşoğlu, Borga Kantürk, Pelin Uran, Adnan Yıldız, and myself – to assemble a programme selected from 750 submitted videos. For *nightcomers*, the Dutch artist duo Bik Van der Pol designed a mobile projection device and scouted 25 sites where the videos could be screened. (figure 15)

The call to submit videos for the programme was publicised worldwide and set no formal or thematic requirements. The only provision was that the videos should be no longer than five minutes. The invitation was addressed to artists and amateurs alike, with the aim of making *nightcomers*, like YouTube or Myspace,

a modern open-access video forum in keeping with the times. The videos by the 116 selected artists were divided into two programmes, which were shown alternately between 8 and 10.30 pm. Each curator compiled and presented his own programme independently of the others, with the effect that – in thematic and formal terms – rather than pursuing a homogenous overall structure, the different sections of the programme generated rich variety. Nonetheless, one underlying feature of *nightcomers* was its political orientation, blending a mixture of social themes, private narratives, and socio-political problems. The selected videos also manifested a general climate of criticism and opposition to the prevailing clichéd aesthetics of television. The project included overtly participatory aspects, which both shaped the exhibition's overall approach as well as defining the formal and conceptual style of *nightcomers*. This participatory approach not only addressed the ways in which video art is conveyed outside traditional exhibition venues, but also sought to involve (artistically) interested amateurs who produce visual work with their video cameras. Hence, besides its focus on opening up new locations as venues for alternative strategies of presenting art, the project also reached out to new social spheres.

While there is no documentation or statistics detailing the audience's response, from empirical observations it must be concluded that visitor numbers were low. The aim of encouraging non-artists to participate was to expand and integrate this Biennial project into the broader public domain. Ultimately, however, most of the submitted videos came from professionals or students of art, film, or design, with the consequence that the project's participatory

figure 11

Carl Michael von Hausswolf, "Asians Maker", in 5. *Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, 1997. Photo courtesy of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts

figure 13

Rirkrit Tiravanija, "Untitled – Cinema for a Quiet Place", in 7. *Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, 2001. Photo courtesy of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts

figure 12

Tracey Emin, "Speaking with the Dead", in 5. *Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, 1997. Photo courtesy of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts

figure 14

Alberto Garutti, "Dedicated to Those Who Are Born Today", in 7. *Istanbul Biennale*, Istanbul, 2001. Photo courtesy of the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts





aims could no be fulfilled. With the mobile projection format they developed, Bik Van der Pol placed emphasis on the aspect of temporariness. Each location was to be used just once, with the accompanying set-up – seating, generator, and projector – delivered by minibus. The screen was simply a large sheet of paper pasted onto the wall of a house. Once the two-hour film presentation was over, the equipment was swiftly dismantled and driven away. The only remaining evidence of this “hit and run” action was the large piece of white paper stuck to the wall – and this too became erased over time by the effects of the weather. Thus, *nightcomers* was transitory in character, contributing to the processes of urban upheaval in Istanbul, which have, in turn, led to permanent radical changes in the city’s appearance.

Apart from the *Istanbul Biennial*, since the late 1990s a number of other artistic strategies have also made an important contribution to the development of art in public space. Besides the exhibitions *Anı / Bellek 1 (Recollection / Memory 1, 1991)* and *Anı / Bellek 2 (1993)* in Istanbul, there was also a landmark exhibi-

tion in Ankara in 1995 titled *Gar (railway station)* in a building of the main station. Yet even in this – for Turkish conditions – relatively early example of art being presented in public space, the project ran into difficulties. For instance, Selim Birsel’s work “Kurşun Uykusu” (“Sleep of Lead”, 1995) was removed from the exhibition at the behest of the station management. (figures 16–18)

Of key importance has been the founding of the independent and non-commercial art space Apartman Projesi (Apartment Project). Located in the heart of the Beyoğlu district, the venue was initiated by the artist Selda Asal in 1999 and continues to show exhibitions of contemporary art today. The Apartment Project was the first artist-run space to be set up in Istanbul and marked the start of the alternative exhibition scene in Turkey. (figures 1 and 2) In 1997, given the complete lack of a museum for contemporary art at that time, the artist Genco Gülan founded the İstanbul Çağdaş Sanat Müzesi (Istanbul Contemporary Art Museum, iS.CaM) with official backing and approval, as an artistic project and an actual institution. (figures 19 and 20) The iS.CaM still holds exhibitions and seminars, and since 2003 has been the organiser of the world’s first and only virtual art biennial on the internet, *Web Biennial*. The participatory aspects of iS.CaM evolved in response to the lack of contemporary art museums in the Turkish art context. The aim of Genco Gülan’s commitment, both artistic and political, is to open up new cultural and social realms for the production and presentation of contemporary art. His actions should be viewed as a challenge to the then prevailing exhibition context. Shedding critical light in particular on the overall concept of

figure 15

Bik Van der Pol, “59 Locations – A Format for Nightcomers”, in *10. Istanbul Biennial*, Istanbul, 2007. Photo: Bik Van der Pol

figures 16–18

Selim Birsel, “Sleep of Lead”, in the exhibition *Railway Station*, Ankara, 1995. Photo courtesy of Selim Birsel



the art museum, the project has also fostered debate about how contemporary art should be conserved. Since museums are essentially places of memory designed to preserve artefacts considered significant by society, iS.CaM has made a productive and creative contribution towards enhancing the status of contemporary art in Istanbul's art world. Above all with the *Web Biennial* – which is intended not only as a platform for exhibiting web art but also as a means of conserving it in the Biennial's internet archive – iS.CaM plays an active part in publicising and preserving digital art. In the process, Genco Gülan's museum deliberately shuns all orthodox forms of institutionalised organisation in favour of a temporary and ad hoc organisational form. In his attempt to remain as independent as possible, he has so far succeeded in doing without sponsors, thus making *Web Biennial* a no-budget exhibition series.

In addition, 1999 saw the first of three exhibitions in the *İstanbul Yeni Sanat Müzesi* (New Istanbul Art Museum). This exhibition space is a container built by

Erden Kosova, Vasıf Kortun, and the artist Serkan Özkaya in the kitchen of the alternative space *İstanbul Contemporary Art Projects* (ICAP), itself founded by Kortun. To see the exhibition, visitors have to poke their heads inside the box, conceived by the organisers with the aim of challenging traditional conventions of producing and presenting art. (figure 21) In particular, the regularly held discussions at the ICAP and the exhibition projects *One Special Day* (1999), *Birdenbire Türkler* (*Suddenly the Turks*, 2000), and *Karışık Sergi* (*Mixed Exhibition*, 2000) were significant actions that created platforms for conveying contemporary art to a young audience of artists, art students, and people interested in art. These alternative, artist-run exhibitions have made an important contribution to the democratisation and diversification of the Turkish art system and have received an enthusiastic response, especially among younger art students. In 1997, for instance, with the support of Vasıf Kortun, three young artists – Özge Açıkkol, Seçil Yersel, and Güneş Savaş, already frequent visitors at the ICAP – founded a group of women artists



figure 19

Genco Gülan, *Istanbul Contemporary Art Museum*, New York, 1998. Photo courtesy of Genco Gülan

figure 20

Genco Gülan, *Istanbul Contemporary Art Museum*, Istanbul, 1997. Photo courtesy of Genco Gülan

figure 21

New Istanbul Art Museum at the Istanbul Contemporary Art Projects, Istanbul, 2000. Photo courtesy of Vasıf Kortun

figure 22

Nadin Reschke, "So Far So Good" at the exhibition space of *Oda Projesi*, Istanbul, 2004. Photo courtesy of *Oda Projesi*

called *Oda Projesi* (Room Project), which today still stages impressive artistic actions and exhibitions, both in established art institutions and alternative projects and public spaces. (figure 22) The exhibitions *Yaya Sergileri 1* (*Pavement Exhibitions 1*, 2001) and *Yaya Sergileri 2* (2005), initiated by the former director of the *Istanbul Biennial*, Fulya Erdemci, presented contemporary sculpture and installations in outdoor urban surroundings and made a significant contribution to the debate about art in public space.

In 2003, the artist Genco Gülan launched the first *Web Biennial*, which is conceived as a platform for the production and presentation of web-based art. Up till its most recent edition in 2010, the *Web Biennial* dispensed with set themes and curators and was organised instead through an open call procedure conducted on the internet. Gülan regards this model of a biennial without recourse to a large budget and physical locations as an alternative to traditional biennial forms. (figure 23)

In 2004, in collaboration with the SMART Project Space in Amsterdam, the Platform Garanti Güncel Sanat Merkezi (Platform Garanti Contemporary Art Center) organised the exhibition *Hit & Run*, which

has come to consist of a series of contemporary art performances, events and initiatives, taking place in Platform's gallery space and out on the streets of Istanbul. [...] During conversations on the subject of public engagement, questions regarding the political and cultural discourse set amidst this backdrop, the relation between art and audience at venues such as Platform, it became apparent that there has been a sparse tradition of interventions or performance events sited within Istanbul's public domain. Platform's exhibition space is nes-



bled between shops on one of the busiest streets in Istanbul and could be considered an extension of the shopping street itself. This gave the impetus to extend the project's realization over the gallery threshold, allowing the artist to draw attention to the structure of the city.<sup>19</sup>

In 2005, I developed an exhibition series for *Trendsetter*, a magazine for fashion, lifestyle, and the arts, titled *Sanat Sayfası (Art Page)* that, on a run of six pages, held solo exhibitions of work by Istanbul artists. This project was conceived as an alternative public domain for art, which, unlike an exhibition catalogue, did not simply reproduce works of art but also conducted site-specific shows on the streets, in woods, and in a toy shop, then presented them in the magazine.

Also in 2005, I initiated a mobile exhibition space in Istanbul titled *Under Construction*, consisting of two cargo containers with a floor space of 50 sq. metres. (figures 24 and 25) Between 2005 and 2007, this art space hosted 10 exhibitions with Turkish and international artists who created site- and time-specific installations in changing locations throughout the city. The project developed into an alternative exhibition space for installation artists, filling a serious gap in Istanbul's art world, where there are few locations suitable for producing and showing installation art. The idea behind *Under Construction* was to create a new venue for installation art. At the same time, by integrating the exhibition space into the public domain, the project attempted to attract a new audience. One of its underlying motives was to foster a broader acceptance of contemporary art – clearly a reason why public participation was expressly desired. Rather than presenting art in highbrow or

exclusive galleries in the city's well-to-do districts, the changing locations (building site, school yard, public park) and unusual architectural character of *Under Construction* allowed a great number of people of different ages, and from different social and educational backgrounds to experience contemporary installation art. A major factor in this was the project's temporary nature, since it was by shifting locations within the city that the exhibitions became accessible to a constantly changing and expanding audience. The project was supported by the Turkish construction company Tepe İnşaat, which provided the containers and funded the exhibition budget.

Besides the *Istanbul Biennial*, since 2006 a further biennial has come into being called *Sinopale*, which takes place in the harbour town of Sinop on the Black Sea coast. Initiated by the artist and curator T. Melih Görgün in his home city, this biennial differs from others in that it manifests a strong socio-cultural commitment, viewing Sinop as a direct platform for producing and presenting site-specific works of art in public locations. The exhibition treats the city as a work and exhibition context and incorporates its residents into the production processes of the exhibiting artists. Hence, the concept underlying the *Sinopale* is of an "artistic action in civil society" (T. Melih Görgün). (figure 26)

A further example of a mobile exhibition venue is *Masa*, an exhibition project run by the artist and designer Vahit Tuna, which started up in 2006. *Masa* is the term for a kind of table that holds a glass display case. Since the venue is mobile and not fixed in any particular site, it can be set up in various places around the city. The formal character of this micro

figure 23

View of the exhibition *Regeneration.011*, a selection of net art works from the Web Biennials between 2003 and 2010 at the exhibition location of Plato Sanat, Istanbul, 2011. Photo: Aydın Gökay

figure 24

Mehmet Ali Uysal, "Changing Space" at *Under Construction*, Tepe İnşaat exhibition space, Istanbul, 2006. Photo: Tuba Özkan Bakırkaya

figure 25

Uluç Ali Kılıç, "Translocation Nr. 1 – Permanent Clash" in the context of the curatorial project *Art Page* in the magazine *Trendsetter*, Istanbul, 2006. Photo: Tuba Özkan Bakırkaya





exhibition space gives it extreme flexibility in the choice of location. As a result, *Masa* can access new spaces for art in constantly shifting places within the art context, allowing it to explore alternative methods for exhibiting and conveying art. Consequently, participatory aspects are also evident in the project's basic motives. As in many of the examples cited above, one crucial aspect of *Masa* is its temporary character. A variety of artists are shown at a variety of venues to varying audiences. Thus, *Masa* can be said to be in flow with the prevailing surge of Istanbul's urban chaos. (figure 27)

In 2007, Sylvia Kouvalis initiated the project *Yama* in the Beyoğlu district, the artistic heart of Istanbul. *Yama* consists of a huge 50 sq. metre screen installed on the roof of the Pera Palace Hotel, on which, when

night falls, video art by international artists is shown. (figure 28) Since 2008, *Manzara Perspectives* has been organising exhibitions on the premises of Manzara Istanbul, a holiday apartment complex built by the architect Erdoğan Altındış and conceived as a place for fostering intercultural networking between the Orient and the Occident. The first exhibitions were curated by Kristina Kramer and Anna Heidenhain, but since then, the organisation of the project has been transferred to visiting curators from Germany and Turkey. In addition to the project's own gallery venue, contemporary art is also displayed in the holidaymakers' temporary lodgings. Thus, the semi-private space of the holiday apartments is turned into a location for presenting art that has been created, in many cases, expressly for this context. With its exhibition series, *Manzara Perspectives* wishes to "ques-

figure 26

Monali Meher, "Three Departures" at *Sinopale 1* exhibition, Sinop, 2006. Photo courtesy of Sinopale

figure 27

Seref Erol, "Maximum Pragmatism" at *Masa Art Space*, Istanbul, 2007. Photo courtesy of *Masa*

figure 28

Glen Fogel, "With Me ... You" at *Yama* exhibition space, Istanbul, 2011. Photo courtesy of *Yama*

figure 29

Gamze Özer, "This Is a Sausage, and I Do Not Want It" at *Manzara Perspectives* exhibition space, Istanbul, 2009. Photo courtesy of Manzara Perspectives

tion how the ideas and intentions of the artists can be transferred into habitation contexts without appearing stabled or being reduced to a pleasant blur of colour. And we want to question how contents can assert themselves in determined spaces or even find their ideal context/field in these surroundings."<sup>20</sup> Works usually remain on display in the apartments for several months. (figure 29)

In 2008, Nancy Atakan, Volkan Aslan, and I founded the art space 5533 in a former shop in the İstanbul Manifaturacılar Çarşısı, İMÇ (Istanbul Textile Traders' Market), where we presented international projects and exhibitions of contemporary art. Many of the exhibitions addressed socio-political issues as well as exploring the question of art's function in the public realm. Accordingly, 5533 integrated in its projects its immediate neighbours from the adjoining shops on the commercial block no. 5. The venue has also served repeatedly as a point of contact and

a project space for artists' groups from abroad that produce work focussing on Istanbul, such as *Public Idea* from Kiel.

In 2007, the young Turkish curator Gökhan Toptaş developed an exhibition project called *Kara Tabta (Board)*, in which artists were given a school blackboard to use as a work surface that they could treat visually however they wished. Once the image on the board was finished, Toptaş strapped it to his back and set out walking through Istanbul. He had thereby instantaneously created a mobile exhibition platform that offered the city's residents unexpected artistic visual experiences. (figure 30)

Likewise in 2007, a group of women artists founded the year before called *Atilkunst* began each Friday to assemble a JPG photo collage titled "Gündem Fazlası" ("Surplus of Agenda"), which they sent to thousands of email addresses. The number of JPG

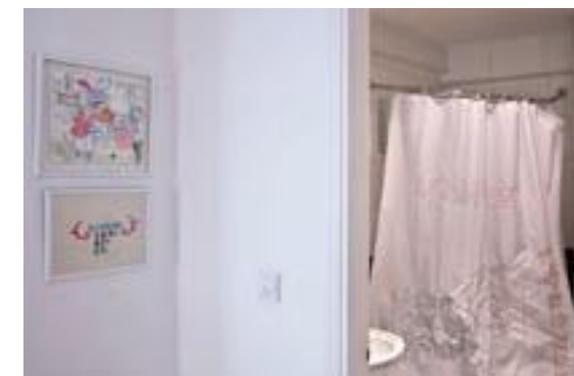
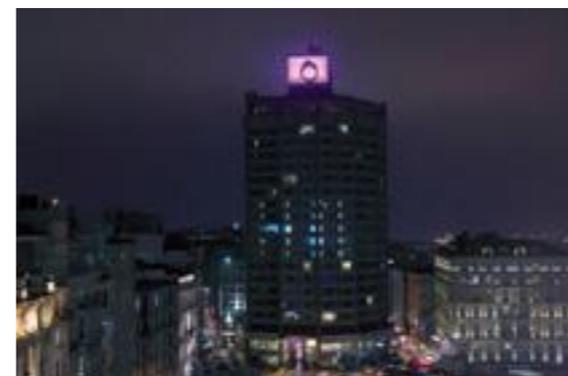




figure 30

Sema Karapınar, *Blackboard Project*, Istanbul, 2008.  
Photo courtesy of Gökhan Toptaş

figure 31

Atilkunst, "This World Annoys Me", installation in the exhibition *Your Eyes Are Bigger Than Your Stomach* at Hafriyat exhibition space, Istanbul, 2007.  
Photo courtesy of Atilkunst

figure 32

Atilkunst, "Stamp Regulation" in the exhibition *When Ideas Become Crime* at Tobacco Warehouse exhibition space, Istanbul, 2010.  
Photo courtesy of Atilkunst



works the group has created and distributed via email in the public arena of virtual space has now reached well over 400. In addition, the group has also appeared in exhibitions or in public spaces with actions such as "Derdim Dünya" ("The World Is My Problem", 2007). In this particular work, which was installed in the toilet of the non-commercial art space *Hafriyat* as part of the exhibition *Dünyayı Yesen Doymazsın* (*Your Eyes Are Bigger Than Your Stomach*), the group first inscribed words and slogans they had found in public toilets on the walls of *Hafriyat's* toilet and then combined these with words and slogans uttered by politicians, emphasising the similarity of the language used in both contexts. In addition, the group urged exhibition visitors to add their own words to the walls of the gallery toilet, which resulted in an infinite loop of private and public statements. In a similarly interactive work titled "Damga Ayarı" ("Stamp Regulation", 2010), *Atilkunst* responded to the 2010 referendum held to decide on changes to the constitution. "As the referendum for our new constitution was approaching, we played with the word

yasa (right). We chose a few words and prepared big stamps for them so that people could stamp them on the wall. With few words and so little to choose, we emphasised how we had become pushed into a very tight corner with very few options."<sup>21</sup> (figures 31 and 32)

In 2010, the Kiel-based art project *Public Idea – Artistic Approaches to the Urban Sphere of Istanbul* began working exclusively with and in Istanbul's public realm, recognising from the outset the need to foster collaboration between participating German artists and local artists and experts. Instead of producing drop sculptures or top-down projects, the artists from Germany sought direct contact with the resident art scene, enlisting the help of locals to gain greater insight into the city. Project initiators and directors Antje Feger and Benjamin F. Stumpf made several research trips to Istanbul prior to taking the entire project team to the metropolis of 15 million people, where they established their own network as a platform to look beyond neo-orientalist clichés



figure 33

Antje Feger, Benjamin F. Stumpf, “Park Hotel”, in the context of the project *Public Idea*, Istanbul, 2010. Photo: Franz von Bodelschwingh

figure 34

Patricija Gilyte, installation in the context of the project *Art Homes*, Istanbul, 2010. Photo courtesy of Art Homes

figure 35

Exhibition shot of “Temporary Harassment”, Istanbul, 2009. Photo: Marcus Graf



of Istanbul as a bridge between the Orient and the Occident. In addition, the project is also process-oriented and, together with Turkish artists from Istanbul, has gradually accrued intimate knowledge of the city through workshops, lectures, and walks. (figure 33)

In 2010, *Art Homes*, a project initiated by the Munich-based Turkish curator Mehmet Dayı, developed a compelling alternative model to the familiar range of artist exchange programmes. Involving 10 artists from Istanbul and 10 from Munich, the project enables a pair of artists – one German and one Turkish – to share an apartment in Istanbul for the period of a month. Since the aim is that the twinned artists should live, work, and exhibit in the apartment, the space is fused into a symbiosis of living, artistic production and presentation, thereby erasing the conventionally rigid division between private and public realms. The project is *Art Homes*' contribution to the

debate about possible strategies for emancipating the production and presentation of art from the institutional constraints of established art spaces. (figure 34)

The wide-ranging arts programme *Istanbul 2010 – European Capital of Culture* went to immense efforts to integrate contemporary art into public space. A particularly prominent role in this was played by the project *Taşınabilir Sanat (Portable Art)*, whose declared aim was to show young art in the peripheral areas of Istanbul in an attempt to make contemporary art more accessible to a broader audience. Altogether 20 exhibition projects were presented in 39 arts centres around the city, whereby each of the exhibitions went on display in three different locations. (figure 35)

Having taken off as an established form of street art in Western Europe during the 1970s, graffiti in



Turkey only gradually took on after the mid-1990s. Today, there are still far fewer street artists in Turkey than in the United States and Europe. Hence, *Street Soul: Graffiti from Turkey*, published in 2009 by Tunç Dindaş is an important book on the history and current situation of this art. In this context, a prominent role is also played by the *Street Art Festival* (held in 2009, 2010, and 2011), as it offers both international artists such as Loomit and Turkish sprayers an opportunity to show their work. As modest as its impact might be, this festival has nonetheless contributed to the growing approval and awareness of graffiti.

In 2011, Istanbul for the first time hosted the street art project *Papergirl*, which had been staged in Berlin since 2006. In an open call, artists were asked to submit illustrations, which were then distributed to passers-by in a bicycle action as well as being shown in an exhibition in the Milk gallery. Of the some 2,000 submitted works, about 250 were given away. As an imaginative and light-hearted way of communicating art, this action provided passers-by on the

street with an impromptu and unexpected artistic experience. (figures 36 and 37)

Finally, I also wish to introduce the artists' group *Küf*, which since 2010 has been engaged solely in producing art in public locations in Ankara. As such, the group currently occupies a special position in the Turkish art scene. In the works it has produced such as "Tosun Paşa" or "Pac Man", *Küf* treats the city as a starting point for its installations, working with or commenting on fixed elements in the urban environment – street signs, bollards, concrete pillars, or entrances to the city metro. The aim of the group – whose members wish to remain anonymous – is to puncture the depressing monotony and drabness of the city by means of artistic interventions. With the irony and humour that mark their works, the members of *Küf* seek to inject a more colourful mood and atmosphere into Ankara's overcrowded streets. (figures 38 and 39) So it verged on the tragicomical when their sculptural installation "Büyükşehir Küçük 1 TL" ("Big City Small 1 Turkish Lira")

figure 36

*Papergirl* project, Exhibition Shot, Gallery Milk, Istanbul, 2011. Photo courtesy of Papergirl Istanbul

figure 37

*Papergirl* project, Bicycle Action, Istanbul, 2011. Photo courtesy of Papergirl Istanbul

figure 38

*Küf*, "Peace", Ankara, 2010. Photo courtesy of *Küf*

figure 39

*Küf*, "Pac Man", Ankara, 2010. Photo courtesy of *Küf*



was destroyed by a special police unit after it was suspected to be a bomb. The heavy-handed response by the authorities indicates yet again how vexatious and narrow-minded official attitudes to public space in Turkey can be.

### CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES

My inquiry into the historical background and the present situation of art in public space shows that – although Istanbul has evolved since the late 1990s into a metropolis of immense fascination and popularity on a global scale, and while it has witnessed a rapid growth in newly founded museums, galleries, and exhibition venues over the last 10 years – the number of exhibition projects that engage with public space and the number of artists working in or with public space is still relatively small, compared with art scenes in other Western countries. As the evidence above suggests, there are art-historical and socio-political reasons for this situation. By the mid-19th century, the Ottoman and then Turkish art scene had begun seeking orientation in the art and culture of the West, prompting the introduction of the salon tradition and salon painting into the Ottoman Empire and later the republic of Turkey. Yet, during the early stages of Turkish modernism, there were no signs of the usual avant-garde alternative strategies of production and exhibition associated with classical modernism that offered models diverging from the traditional patterns of academy-trained and salon art. Equally, the cultural policies of the young republic calling for a vigorous ideological approach to sculpture in the public realm inhibited art from developing freely and independently, both in and outside traditional exhibition venues.

In the West, the accumulating anti-museum move-

ments of the 1950s, which paved the way for the institutional critiques in art in the 1970s, only began to surface in artistic practice in Turkey towards the end of the 1970s. In the field of artistic presentation, it took another 10 years again before the first alternatives to galleries and museums began to emerge. Thus, in art-historical terms, public space was discovered relatively late on.

This delay and the overall climate of inhibition have a socio-political background too, since after three military dictatorships (1960, 1971, and 1980) the (artistic) treatment of public space has been extremely cautious. With the trauma of 12 September 1980, the highly politically charged public arena of the 1970s was violently transformed into one that was apolitical and wholly free of art. It was only after the removal of the military regime in the late 1980s – accompanied by an opening up and internationalisation of the Turkish economy – that the first exhibition projects took place that were focussed on working with public space. As this essay argues, it was predominantly art managers and curators rather than artists who, as in the case of the *Istanbul Biennial*, realised that efforts to increase awareness of contemporary art should not be restricted to traditional exhibition venues alone.

The inception in the 1990s of artist-run and non-commercial exhibition spaces and alternative projects has paved the way for a greater presence of contemporary art in the public arena. Since 2000, this development has been gaining ground and has led to a significant increase in alternative exhibition spaces and projects. However, in comparison with other art centres in Western Europe, the situation of

art in public space remains very tenuous and involves only a small number of artists and exhibitions. But it should also be borne in mind that the contemporary art scene in Turkey is still young and has only had the means to develop in relative freedom over the last 15 years. The infrastructural conditions and the socio-political and cultural circumstances surrounding contemporary art continue to be difficult. As a result, artists and curators are frequently compelled to develop temporary or mobile exhibition projects in order to eke out possibilities for working within the confusion of permanent urban changes. In spite of this, Istanbul holds great appeal for artists both within the country and abroad. In this megacity where everyday life is infused with chaos and driven by unpredictable movement, cracks and blank spaces are constantly erupting through the urban fabric of public space and being used by artists and curators to produce and present art projects. Thus, it is altogether foreseeable and desirable that the number of art projects in public space in Istanbul will continue to grow. While still weak, social integration and popular acceptance of contemporary art – in addition to the consolidation of art education in and outside schools – can only benefit from establishing a broader artistic presence in the public arena. Hence, public space should be seen as a place where art can not merely be presented but also conveyed and mediated. In these terms, besides having an art-historical dimension, public space also carries socio-political weight.

- 1 Sections of this text are based on my research into the Turkish art scene, undertaken as part of an academic artistic and cultural study of the Istanbul Biennial. Cf. Marcus Graf, *Istanbul Biennale – Geschichte, Position, Wirkung* (Berlin: KV Kadmos, 2011).
- 2 Udo Steinbach, *Geschichte der Türkei*, 3rd edition, (Munich, 2003), pp. 18 f.
- 3 Doğan Kuban, *Çağlar Boyunca Türkiye Sanatının Anahtarları* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004), p. 204.
- 4 Ahmet Kamil Gören, "Cumhuriyet'in İlk Yıllarında Sanata Yaklaşım ve Sonuçları", *Sanat Dünyamız*, No. 89, spring issue, 2003, p. 82.
- 5 Udo Steinbach, op. cit., p. 53.
- 6 Vasıf Kortun and Erden Kosova, *Jahresring 51: Szene Türkei: Abseits aber Tor* (Cologne, 2004), p. 91.
- 7 Nicole Pope and Hugh Pope, *Turkey Unveiled* (New York: Overlook Press), p. 150.
- 8 Vasıf Kortun and Erden Kosova, op. cit., p. 13.
- 9 Ibid., p. 18.
- 10 Oktay Özel and Gökhan Çetinsaya, *Türkiye'de Osmanlı Tarahçılığının Son Çeyrek Yüzyılı: Bir Bilanço Denemesi*, <http://www.bilkent.edu.tr/~oozel/osmanli.doc>, 25 July 2008.
- 11 Beral Madra, *İki Yılda Bir Sanat* (Istanbul: Norgunk, 2003), pp. 13 and 32.
- 12 Beral Madra, "Contemporary Art in Traditional Spaces", 1987, in: Cem İleri (ed.), *Time Present Time Past* (exhib. cat. Istanbul Museum of Modern Art) (Istanbul, 2007), p. 38.
- 13 Oya Eczacıbaşı, "Foreword", in: Cem İleri, op. cit., p. 9.
- 14 Unknown author, "Sultanahmet'te Çirkinlik", *Zaman*, 30 September 1989, no page.
- 15 Ayşe Yıldırım, "Yunuslar Bir Simge", *Cumhuriyet*, 10 October 1989, no page.
- 16 "Erol Eti'nin Bienal'deki Yapıt ...", *Milliyet Sanat*, 15 October 1989, no page.
- 17 Yahşi Baraz, "2. İstanbul Bienali'nin Gündeme ...", *Sanat Çevresi*, October 1989, no page.
- 18 Rosa Martinez, "Bir Kent, Bir Kapı, Bir Bienal", *Özgür*, 12 June 1997, no page.
- 19 Hou Hanru, "nightcomers", in: Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts (ed.), *The 10th International Istanbul Biennial* (exhib. cat.) (Istanbul, 2007), p. 458.
- 20 [http://platformgaranti.blogspot.com/2004\\_06\\_01\\_archive.html](http://platformgaranti.blogspot.com/2004_06_01_archive.html).
- 21 [http://www.manzara-perspectives.com/?page\\_id=2](http://www.manzara-perspectives.com/?page_id=2).
- 22 Atilkunst in an email interview I held with the group, 2011.

# LISBON

## ART IN PUBLIC SPACE:

From an Extended Perspective  
on the European Periphery

by Jürgen Bock

### DEFINITION

The present text not only discusses whether Lisbon may be classified in terms of local praxis – both past and present – of developing art projects in public space, but also addresses fundamental questions about art in public space. Now that cultural studies have been positioned as correctives for established disciplines – such as art history<sup>1</sup> – rather than as a discipline in its own right, we have learnt that in discussions about art, it is helpful to first clarify the notion of art.

Seen in the light of the international development of art over the last 40 years, the concept of “art in public space” is charged with a number of different meanings. Three paradigms, as defined in 1997 by Miwon Kwon, attempt to introduce clarity into the concept:

1) *art in public places – typically a modernist abstract sculpture placed out-doors to “decorate” or “enrich” urban spaces, especially plaza areas fronting federal buildings or corporate office towers;*

2) *art as public spaces – less object-oriented and more site-conscious art that sought greater integration between art, architecture, and the landscape through artists’ collaboration with members of the urban managerial class (such as architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban*

*designers, and city administrators), in the designing of permanent urban (re-) development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighbourhoods, etc.; and more recently [1997],*

3) *art in the public interest (or “new genre public art”) – often temporary city-based programs focusing on social issues rather than the built environment that involve collaborations with marginalised social groups (rather than design professionals), such as the homeless, battered women, urban youth, AIDS patients, prisoners, and which strives towards the development of politically-conscious community events or programs.*<sup>2</sup>

It might have been a result of the prevailing *zeitgeist* in Lisbon that at approximately the same time Miwon Kwon published these reflections on art in public space – in conjunction with an exhibition in Hamburg curated by Christian Philipp Müller – an exhibition was being held in the decaying “backyard” of Lisbon’s impressive city centre around the square Praça do Chile on the Avenida Almirante Reis. It was an exhibition that sought to explore new approaches to art in public space, albeit only through temporary installations. As part of his teaching activities in the Independent Studies Programme at the Escola Maumaus, the South African artist Roger Meintjes had developed the exhibition *Projecto Almirante Reis* in 1996 in collaboration with the artists Alban Chotard, Fernando Fadigas, Ester Ferreira, Teresa Fradique, João Pisco, and Luisa Yokochi. This exhibition subsequently came to be regarded as paradigmatic for a broader understanding of art in Portugal.

Since this survey of art in public space in 1996, there has been no further discussion of this concept in Lisbon worth mentioning. In addition, with the exception of Expo ’98, which was staged in an area in the

east of the city, no notable contemporary art intended for the “long term” has been installed on public sites in Lisbon. This fact is not something I wish to classify as being either “bad” or “good”, but instead should be treated – if at all – as a coherent phenomenon in a city that is not, nor was ever, the capital of an industrialised, ultramodern nation. Rather, the visual character of Lisbon’s centre – so admired by international visitors – is derived primarily from its ancient past.

### IN A WEST EUROPEAN CONTEXT

The public art – to use today’s term – that predominates in the city centre is, on the whole, based on allegorical, decorative monuments dedicated to important historical figures: kings, noblemen, scientists, but also freedom fighters (from the civil war in the 19th century) and “discoverers”. They were installed on sites like roundabouts, as the centrepieces of squares or public gardens, and – emulating the Parisian model – had the purpose of adding harmonious accents to their surroundings. Most of these set pieces were erected in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake of 1755. Prior to that, as a city largely characterised by narrow lanes, Lisbon had barely any monuments to speak of, with the exception of the Aquático obelisk in front of the Palácio das Necessidades (by Caetano Tomás de Sousa, 1745). Being the capital of a colonial empire, Lisbon had amassed immense riches. Hence, as in major cities in the rest of Europe, a succession of sculptures and monuments sprung up around the city’s public spaces in the two centuries following the earthquake. The defining aesthetic feature of these monuments was their devotion to idealised beauty. Mimetic in their relation to nature, with references to Greek and Ro-

man schools, the sculptures are evidence of classical influences such as Baroque, Mannerism, and the Renaissance (Raquel de Henriques da Silva, 2005). Knowledge of the fine arts was acquired in the academies of “beaux arts”, first in Rome, then in Paris from the 19th century onwards. In Portugal, art academies were founded in 1836 in Lisbon and Porto. It was here that many creators of public sculptures studied to gain proficiency using bronze and stone as well as to learn how to incorporate noblemen, horses, snakes, and elephants into iconological narratives that featured male and female figures representing triumph and fame. With their references to monumental Roman sculpture, Portugal’s sculptors subscribed to a glorification of history. Particularly during the 19th century, their role model was France and its art capital, Paris, which superseded Rome. The schools they emulated were those of Michelangelo and, later, Auguste Rodin.<sup>3</sup>

### THE NEW STATE AND BELÉM

From the 1930s onward, António de Oliveira Salazar’s fascist “New State”, the Estado Novo, strove to present itself through art in public spaces – although there were virtually no free sites left in Lisbon, since all the existing representative squares were already hosting allegorical monuments of classical origin. What the city required were new locales; previously existing fountains and monuments needed to be moved elsewhere, as was done with the Neptune Fountain (Joaquim Machado de Castro, 1771), which was moved several times by the Estado Novo. The fountain’s final relocation was in 1950, when it was “removed” from the Praça do Chile to make way for a sculpture (Guilherme de Córdoba, 1950) edifying the “discoverer” of the Strait of Magellan, Fernando

Magellan, which was a gift to the city of Lisbon by the Chilean state – consistent with the then prevailing tastes of totalitarian systems. New space was unquestionably created when, in 1940, the Salazar regime hosted a “World Fair” of the Portuguese Colonial Empire in Belém (Bethlehem). This quarter in the west of the city is one of the most historically charged sites in Europe. It was from here that Vasco de Gama set sail in 1497 from what was then the port of Restelo to become the first person ever to sail around the entire African continent and thereby reach India. The expedition returned bearing considerable riches, which gave King Manuel I the means to commission the French-born architect Diogo do Boitaca to build the monumental Hieronymites Monastery in Belém. Four hundred years later, the Estado Novo conceived its world exhibition, the *Exposição do Mundo Português*, around the monastery, creating broad avenues in a modern urban layout with open gardens, monumental fountains, and ornamental pools, in addition to a number of largely temporary pavilions. Exhibited inside the pavilions were sculptures reflecting the aspirations of fascist ideology as well as a resident population of its own, settled into this pastoral “idyll” in true paternalistic fashion. The inhabitants were presented alongside representatives of the colonised peoples, who were put on display in the Belém grounds as bare-chested “primitives” in bush huts – analogous to the zoological gardens of northern and central Europe in the 19th century. Needless to say, this did not happen in a cultural vacuum devoid of *zeitgeist*, for in Portugal, too, as in Italy, modernism<sup>4</sup> had found its voice, particularly through the Futurist movement that emerged in the early 1920s. What is remarkable in this context are the conflicting invocations of Primitivism in Europe.

On the one hand, 20th-century modernism borrowed from Primitivism to support claims of purported authenticity and hence originality, and to evoke it in its art. Masks and artefacts brought back from Africa were inspiration for numerous European artists. On the other hand, Nazi Germany – and to a somewhat lesser degree, the Portuguese fascists – decried and persecuted Primitivist-inspired art as “degenerate”, whereby Portugal was not the only modern colonial power that ended up putting the “Primitive” on display.

The central aspect of this display of Portuguese imperialism by its then still existing colonial empire and the concomitant glorification of its past was the so-called Discoveries Monument, which represents simultaneously a monument, a sculpture, and architecture. With a design based on an idea by the renowned film maker Leitão de Barros, the vast edifice was built in 1940 by the architect Cottinelli Telmo and the sculptor Leopoldo de Almeida as a temporary construction in wood and plaster. In 1960, the monument was rebuilt in stone to mark the 500th anniversary of Henry the Navigator’s death; since Cottinelli Telmo had died, he was replaced by the architect António Pardal Monteiro.<sup>5</sup> The walk-through monument, with a viewing platform at the top, stands 56 metres high, 20 metres wide, and 46 metres long. On the inside, rooms have been built for hosting exhibitions and lectures, with a total surface space of 695 sq. metres over several storeys. The monument represents a stylised bow of a ship with the mast and sails pointing out to sea, or rather the Tagus River, which turns into a crusader’s sword towards its rear end facing the Hieronymites Monastery. Standing in a row along the bow are the major

protagonists of the canonised moments of Portuguese seafaring history. The 33 figures are idealised characters playing leading roles in the epic narrative of the “discoveries” – 16 on the west side, 16 on the east side. And at the monument’s prow, the formation culminates in the figure of Henry the Navigator. The religiously inspired vision of history is echoed in references to religious military and missionary orders added to the monument’s design. Thus, God’s will is seen in comfortable conformity with the atrocious consequences of the “discoveries”: the colonisation of peoples around the world combined with the wholesale trading of slaves, which by then was already based on modern, sober, and “reasonable” ideas of profit and efficiency.

In the same year as its inauguration (1960), a compass rose made of inlaid marble with a diameter of 50 metres – a gift from South Africa’s apartheid regime – was set into the square in front of the monument. At the centre of the vast ornament designed by the architect Cristino da Silva is a map of the world, on which toy-like miniature caravels are depicted sailing along the sea routes opened up by the “discoveries”. There are probably few other constellations quite like this monument, in conjunction with the compass rose, that so eloquently embody the mindset of Portugal’s fascist regime and representatively echo its aesthetic ideals.

#### MODERNITY IN BROADER TERMS: DE- AND RECONSTRUCTION

Large parts of Lisbon were destroyed in 1755 by a severe earthquake and a tsunami. Reconstruction shaped a city centre that, in the hierarchic spirit of the Enlightenment, was built in the form of a grid

on top of the ruins of houses that were once grouped along narrow, winding streets and alleys. The catastrophe “produced” the necessary space for a new city centre consisting of blocks of buildings and defined by streets that intersected at angles of 90 degrees – of the 27 churches that had been destroyed, just two were rebuilt. Thus, in the “old Europe” of the 18th century, an urban layout was implemented in the capital of Portuguese colonial power, much like the layout the Spanish had applied to various cities in South America a century earlier during the reign of Philip II as a rational form of organisation most suited to the exploitation of their colonised territories.

In central Europe, it was particularly the devastation wrought by the Second World War that provided the breakthrough for the modernist vision of a city with wide streets and motorways, large squares, and high-rise buildings of concrete and glass, which were sometimes set in “loose” arrangements within spacious green areas. Rational, car-friendly road networks were now no longer defined according to the given density of urban housing but allied with architecture that championed the notion of “less is more”. However, the architects had the challenging task of creating convincing proportions using just a small number of different interrelated components to design the façades. They were seldom able to do justice to the aesthetic demands upheld by the acknowledged pioneers of this kind of rational architecture. Instead, the resulting buildings resemble industrial architecture, constructed by engineers for functionality and devoid of aesthetic aspirations.

Having remained neutral throughout the Second World War, Portugal was not destroyed. Not a sin-

gle bomb ever fell on the country. Although 20th-century modern architecture made some ground in Portugal in a number of impressive buildings in Lisbon and Porto and is visible in the urban planning of Salazar's "New State", which produced several "traffic axes" outside city centres, modernity was unable to "assert" itself within the city centres themselves – unlike the "masterstroke" designs for the reconstruction of central European cities devastated in the war. Modern Portuguese cities of the 20th century came about instead in the colonies, especially in Maputo in Mozambique. Here, without any consideration for local sensibilities or opinions, urban planners enjoyed freedom of planning and building on a large scale, unchecked by complicated administrative procedures.<sup>6</sup> Much as France had unleashed modernity in Brazzaville (Congo) in a form that had proved impossible to impose on the inner precincts of Paris, colonial Portugal succeeded in erecting its own modern city par excellence in southern Africa, far from the centre of power. In this respect, it is extraordinary how closely the inner-city layouts of Brazzaville and Maputo match the principles of the "International Style", which was universally heralded by authors as the philosophy of modern architecture and definitively embodied by the Weissenhofsiedlung near Stuttgart, built in 1927. The key difference lay in the projects' subtexts. The creators of the Weissenhofsiedlung believed in the possibility of a better world through functional design and good, "rational" architecture. As they saw it, by improving the living conditions of the masses, it offered a chance of creatively investing them with the possibility of emancipating humanity from prevailing circumstances. Political and philosophical issues of this kind were simply brushed aside in the colonies, where 20th-

century modernity was reduced to bare rationality (and thereby cost-saving construction methods) and to aesthetic appearance. The question of emancipation in regard to colonised peoples was out of the question.

#### ÂNGELA FERREIRA: "KANIMAMBO"

In central Europe, the debate waged about post-modern architecture addressed numerous critical views concerning the modern city. It was accused of spawning

*soulless "container" architecture, of the absence of a relationship with the environment and the solitary arrogance of the unarticulated office block, of the monstrous department stores, universities and congress centres, of the lack of urbanity and the misanthropy of the satellite towns, of the heaps of speculative building, the brutal successor to the "bunker architecture" – the mass production of pitch-roofed doghouses, the destruction of cities in the name of the automobile, and so forth.*<sup>7</sup>

These critiques were not noted in Lisbon, even though the same could also be said of specific projects in any town in Portugal, especially on their peripheries.<sup>8</sup>

With the World Expo in 1988, Lisbon acquired a new and spaciouly designed district that did justice to contemporary attitudes in urban planning. Broad areas surrounding the Expo grounds were earmarked for the private housing market. For the first time, public art of an international calibre was commissioned to be installed on both sites, tallying in large part with the second category of public art defined by Miwon Kwon.<sup>9</sup> The art in public spaces programme for the grounds of the Expo, which

figures 1-4

Ângela Ferreira, "Kanimambo", 1998.

Photos: Roger Meintjes



from the very start were wisely conceived by the planners for further use once the event was over, was divided into two areas. The first area was the section that would later replace the fair's temporary national pavilions, transforming it into a district comprising companies, shopping centres, and public buildings (which have since been built). The second area chosen for public art projects was the adjoining residential quarter, which includes small businesses. National and international artists such as Pedro Cabrita Reis, José Pedro Croft, Ângela Ferreira, Antony Gormley, Carsten Höller, Fabrice Hybert, Susumu Shingu, Jorge Vieira, and Amy Yoes were invited to conceive works for Lisbon's newly created quarter.

With her work "Kanimambo", (figures 1–4) intended for a residential section of the Expo site, Ângela Ferreira created one of her first works of art for public spaces. The artist was born and grew up in Mozambique when the country was still an oppressed Portuguese colony. She later studied art in South Africa, where she became politically socialised, especially through the brutal conditions under apartheid. From a very early stage, the artist began to explore Western discourse, and in particular the production of meaning in art history, methods of art criticism, definitions of artistic concepts, and various forms of modernist art in terms of their relevance to African contexts. Similar to how modernism in the first half of the 20th century took advantage of African primitivism, Ferreira appropriates modern and late-modern forms of Constructivist, Abstract, and Minimal art, quoting from them in contexts of her own making by transplanting them into situations that are often alien to art and, from a Western perspective, could be read as conflicting with dominant

artistic discourse. In doing so, she evidently articulates herself in her art according to the "grammatical" rules of each respective artistic "language" as classified by art history; at the same time, she subverts and modifies them by means of slight ruptures (choice of materials, place of presentation, etc.), subtly undermining the idea of a Western purity of style. Ferreira is not anti-modern; on the contrary, she believes in the utopian visions of modernity, in modernity as an *incomplete project*, and as a possible solution for the African continent in regard to questions of democratic representation and civil rights. But her ideas go beyond the discourse of Western modernity as established by colonial power, predicating a discourse of *various forms of modernity* that are defined in terms of local geography. Her work examines the different ways in which these have been – and still are – articulated, not only within Europe but also throughout the world. Hence, viewed from this perspective, a "universal international style" in the Western manner is not tenable.

For the residential quarter of the Expo site, the artist created an installation composed of various elements. All four components oscillate between the possibility of contemplating these elements as constituent parts of a work of art, and a non-artistic purpose that the artist has "added" to the objects. Composed of constructivist elements in the style of Gustav Klutssis,<sup>10</sup> Ângela Ferreira's sculpture serves as a climbing frame for children with its horizontal design. Minimalist metal furniture, benches, and tables offer visitors a place to hang out and relax; yet at the same time, the objects' perfect execution in enamelled metal and their well-considered proportions bring to mind the Minimal art of Donald Judd.

figure 5

Allan Sekula, *TITANIC's wake*, 2000–2005, installation view, Project Room, Centro Cultural de Belém, Lisbon. Photo: Mário Valente

In a further component of the work, which echoes the modern methods of concrete construction design that typify the quarter's appearance, Ferreira has created a watering place. Taking into account Lisbon's hot Mediterranean climate, it is accessible for everyone to "use" and has the shape of a fixed hydrant with a flexible tube attached to a tap or spout that snakes round to end on top of a broad rectangular concrete plinth. With her installation, the artist makes reference to the act of work *per se* and to the very act of building the "whole thing", that is Expo '98. She does this through the association evoked by the watering place, which reflects the standard building procedure of moistening freshly laid concrete surfaces. The aspect of labour is also referred to in the title of the artwork, which is the fourth part of her installation. The title has been meticulously inscribed and cemented into the walkway using small pebbles of limestone and basalt rock, which are traditionally used in Lisbon to embellish pavements with mosaic-like words and ornaments. The title of the four-part work is "Kanimambo", meaning "Thank you" in Shangaan, the language spoken by the majority of the Mozambican workers, who comprised one of the largest groups of foreign labourers to construct Expo '98.

Through her oeuvre, Ângela Ferreira has made internationally important artistic contributions towards broadening the understanding of the complex relationship between Africa and Europe. She explores issues such as the nature of *shared heritage* in relation to colonial legacy on both continents, but also questions related to European modernity in the 19th and 20th centuries and its colonial history. At the same time, her works also frequently address the prevail-

ling amnesia in Portugal regarding the country's own colonial past.

#### ALLAN SEKULA IN BELÉM

In 2001, the American artist Allan Sekula presented his exhibition *TITANIC's wake* (figure 5) at three different venues in the district where, as described above, the *Exposição do Mundo Português* had been held in 1940, organised by Salazar's fascist regime Estado Novo. In the early 1990s, the Portuguese state constructed the Centro Cultural de Belém (CCB), designed by the architects Vittorio Gregotti and Manuel Salgado. It was built on the site where the central pavilion of the 1940 fair had stood – almost all the pavilions had been designed as provisional structures in wood and plaster and were dismantled after the fair. In 2000/2001, a Project Room intended for a series of six exhibitions conceived specifically for Belém was installed inside the area of the CCB complex. In spite of the CCB's available floor-space of 8,000 sq. metres, the exhibition space was deliberately reduced to just 120 sq. metres. The programme



focused on possible associative readings of artistic practices in a designated place, be it in a typical arts centre of the 1980s and 1990s, or in a certain quarter of Lisbon with its particular (world) history, history *per se*, and the urbanistic forms used by Portuguese fascism to stage this history in Belém.

Allan Sekula was the final artist to be presented in this exhibition series, which was planned to run for one year. Based on a notion of art that challenges the musealisation and attendant de-politicisation of his photographic works, or at least seeks to subvert these tendencies, the artist accepted the invitation to show an extensive, previously compiled exhibition (which, in addition, also comprised three groups of works) in the far too small Project Room gallery in the CCB. In other words, the idea of breaking loose from the museum and infiltrating locales that were not dedicated to art had been in Sekula's mind from the very outset. The lack of space in the project venue in the CCB gave the artist freedom to work according to the conditions of presenting art both within and outside museums. In doing so, Sekula not only took his exhibition out of the Project Room into other areas of the CCB, but also even out of the CCB itself. In addition, showing his works in carefully selected locations not intended for art enabled him to contextualise these works specifically through the respective site of each presentation.

Sekula's exhibition in Belém made reference to the circumstances governing the production of meaning in museums, as well as to the psychological resonances of other public sites in Belém that he appropriated for an associative reading of his works in the places where he was presenting them.

The central group of works was displayed in the Project Room. However, as it was the most voluminous body of works in Sekula's presentation, it "overflowed" beyond the confines of the project space and spread into the foyers – those "neutral" zones of sublime emptiness between exhibitions that "prepare" visitors' minds for the following exhibition. Yet the purpose of this "overflow" was to sacrilegiously expose and call into question modern museum architecture and the philosophy of art it is founded on, as well as to reveal the pretentious pathos this architecture needs to draw on to "elevate" art.

Allan Sekula showed the work "Dear Bill Gates" (1999) in Belém's Maritime Museum in the section of the permanent exhibition dedicated to maritime salvage, a setting that offered an appropriate context for the components of his piece. (figure 6) The central element is constituted by a photography triptych showing the artist (self-portrait) swimming at sea in front of the coastal villa that belongs to the software magnate Bill Gates. A further element is constituted by a framed typewritten letter from the artist to Gates, in which, in an ironic but nonetheless poetic tone, he gives details of his attempt to approach Gates's villa from the sea, referring to the underwater sensors as having "worried the artist to get closer". The letter also makes reference to the painting "Lost on the Grand Banks" by Winslow Homer from 1885, which shows two fishermen in distress at sea, and which was bought by Gates at an auction for \$30 million, making headlines at the time for being the highest price paid for any American painting. Questions are raised concerning how nationalism can engender meaning with the help of "national" art; or rather, the question of how art *per se* is appropriated

figure 6

Allan Sekula, "Dear Bill Gates", 1999,  
installation view, Museu de Marinha, Lisbon, 2001.  
Photo: Mário Valente

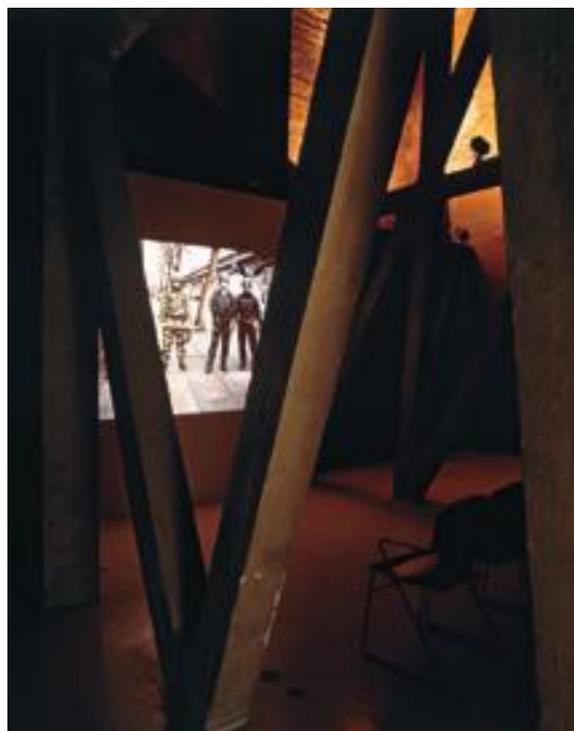


by the art business, and how the artist is usurped by the collector. Sekula's probing extends further still to delve into the superlative dimensions of sky-high profits and capitalism's ownership culture, not to mention the system's inherent imperialism.

Sekula incorporated photocopies of Homer's painting as connective elements: in the Maritime Museum (as part of "Dear Bill Gates"), in the Project Room

(as part of *TITANIC's wake*), and in the Discoveries Monument, in conjunction with his slide projection "Waiting for Tear Gas".

Allan Sekula presented "Waiting for Tear Gas [white Globe to Black]" (1999–2000) in an immense 15-metre-high venue inside the Discoveries Monument. On the inside, the space inversely mirrors the exterior's allegorical depiction of a ship's bow made of fair-



faced concrete, and is not usually accessible to visitors making their way to the viewing platform on the monument's roof. (figure 7)

The work documents moments from the protests and clashes between demonstrators and police during the 1999 World Trade Organisation Ministerial Conference in Seattle. The events reflected the explosive level of social tensions that were then developing and are still on the rise in capitalist countries throughout the world. The Seattle protests represented the most serious disturbances in the United States since the Vietnam War period, when demon-

rations were sparked by political discontent. Apart from civil unrest dominated by race issues (such as the riots that broke out in Los Angeles in 1992, when police officers were acquitted of assaulting Rodney King), it had been almost 30 years since the National Guard had been dispatched into a large American city.

The extent of the protests and police deployment in Seattle was nowhere near as drastic as the anti-war demonstrations of the 1960s. Nonetheless, the unrest signalled a renewed interest in political and social issues among working people and the young in the United States. Those who arrived in their thousands in Seattle raised countless questions concerning the environment and the exploitation of child labour and workers in the Third World. The overwhelming majority of protesters were united in their concern about the growing divide of social inequality and in their hostility to the power that transnational corporate behemoths wielded over working people – not only in America but also throughout the world.

These themes also repeatedly find their way into Sekula's work. As a "photographer" recording the events, he joined the demonstrations without wearing a gas mask, photographing from within the crowds as they were being pressed back by the police. Eighty-one of the shots he had taken were shown in a looped slide sequence projected in the Discoveries Monument. In his slide series, Sekula formulates a critical correspondence between current issues of globalisation and the "epos of discovery" so uncritically invoked throughout history; in regard to the globalisation initiated by the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope 500 years ago, questions are raised about

figure 7

Allan Sekula, "Waiting for Tear Gas", 1999, installation view, Discoveries Monument, Lisbon, 2001. Photo: Mário Valente

the repercussions of these "discoveries" for millions of people on various continents. With his work and his choice of a specific location for its presentation, Sekula links the present-day moment of globalisation manifested in Seattle with another moment that lies in the past: the rounding of the Cape of Good Hope by Vasco da Gama. Yet at the same time, the artist also critically challenges this mode of imputing meaning through a monistically reductive historiography. The psychological resonances of the building emanating from the intellectual climate of the Estado Novo era when it was built, and the related view of history championed by the fascist regime – which, in terms of the moment of "discoveries", still prevails today in Portugal – were strongly highlighted in Sekula's presentation and conveyed to visitors with vivid effect and from a critical perspective. For a limited period, the monument in Belém became part of Sekula's work. Inversely, Sekula's work enabled people who were visiting the monument "merely" as a tourist attraction to acquire a more differentiated perception of the architecture, of the way in which a monument appropriates a historical moment, and how this moment itself might be reassessed through a broader interpretation in the light of changes in the modern world. Hence, viewed in conjunction with Sekula's work, visitors were enabled to experience the monument as a form of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a "total work of art" in public space.

With the three elements of *TITANIC's wake*, Allan Sekula was working in the margins of art in public space. All three groups of work were staged in semi-public contexts with qualified access. One reason Sekula showed his works in the rooms of the museum intended for exhibiting art was to raise questions

about the museum per se. He used them precisely because this allowed him to exhibit his departure from the prescribed exhibition rooms and show work in other areas of the CCB that are accessible to everyone without paying admission. He made use of areas that curators and museum professionals would not consider "worthy" of art. In the Maritime Museum and the Discoveries Monument, he reached two different audiences: an "informed" audience that came to these non-art spaces specifically in search of Sekula's exhibition; and the audience that would normally visit such places with expectations related to a Maritime Museum or a Discoveries Monument, and during their visit accidentally encounter the works of Allan Sekula.

With its project space, the exhibition centre Centro Cultural de Belém was the organiser of the exhibition(s). A key factor in the partnerships with the city of Lisbon as the official "operator" of the Discoveries Monument and with the Portuguese navy as the body responsible for the Maritime Museum, was the institutional weight of the CCB as one of the most important exhibition venues in Portugal. Characteristic of Sekula's photographs is an ambivalence that is finely calibrated by the artist,<sup>11</sup> but to what degree the political implications of his works were grasped in all their facets by those responsible for the exhibition is a moot issue. At each of the three venues, however, and especially in the Discoveries Monument, Sekula gave museum administrators and curators a demonstration of enlightening alternatives to the frequently orthodox and indiscriminate "loading" of culturally dedicated public infrastructures.

*Projecto Almirante Reis*, advertisement display incorporating information on the exhibition, Praça do Chile, Lisbon, 1996.  
Photo: Mário Valente



#### AVENIDA ALMIRANTE REIS

In 1996, a group of six artists developed an art in public spaces project while studying on the Independent Studies Programme at the Escola Maumaus. As previously mentioned, the project with the title *Projecto Almirante Reis* arose as part of a seminar taught by the South African artist Roger Meintjes. Unlike the works presented by Ângela Ferreira and Allan Sekula, where institutions guaranteed the funding of their temporarily or permanently installed exhibits, the group began their project without any exhibition budget at their disposal. The idea sprang from the group's interest in developing an exhibition based on "alternative" forms of art in public spaces. The choice of the location was determined primarily by the proximity of the Escola Maumaus to the Avenida Almirante Reis, in conjunction with the depth of historical, political, and sociological themes associated with the avenue.

From January 1996 onward, Alban Chotard, Fernando Fadigas, Ester Ferreira, Teresa Fradique, João Pisco, and Luisa Yokochi met regularly at different significant spots on the Avenida. The treatment of research into themes unrelated to art as an essential part of artistic practice was a notion shared by all members of the group. The permanent exchange of research findings in the course of the exhibition's development and discussions among the participants about their individual projects played a decisive role in the exhibition's final form. Through this, the exhibited works showed an unusually consistent level of quality, despite the broad variety of themes addressed. The group agreed not to place sculptures or installations in the public space on the Avenida; instead, they looked for communication media al-

ready in place that would be suitable as vehicles for artistic works.

The exhibition opened on 19 July 1996. While it related thematically to the whole of the 2.6 km-long Avenida Almirante Reis, a considerable part of the works was concentrated around the Praça do Chile – a square that divides the avenue into two distinct socio-cultural and economic sections. Its northern part is dominated by ostensibly homogenous middle-class living in spacious flats built in the Estado Novo period, while in the southern section of the Avenida a large number of immigrants have taken up residence in cheap hostels and decrepit buildings often in need of refurbishment. Topographically, the Avenida Almirante Reis runs up one of the two valleys that distinguish Lisbon as a city of seven hills. Both valleys were created by rivers that today are channelled beneath Lisbon's streets and flow down to the Tagus River.

In the course of the exhibition's development, all four district boroughs that adjoin on the Avenida were persuaded to contribute to the funding of the projects, whereby the exhibition concept was extended to include the Martim Moniz Square at the top of the Avenida and Rua da Palma, as a logical continuation of the main thoroughfare. Conducting research entailed making a number of contacts as well as entering into repeatedly difficult negotiations with institutions and public figures who had serious misgivings about the artists' ideas for a public art project, if not about art altogether. The key to success was the close cooperation between the Escola Maumaus and the district administration of Arroios – the municipal authority responsible for the Praça do Chile

Square. The president of the authority supported the exhibition project and mediated between the various institutions involved. Also tied into the project were the operating company that runs Lisbon's metro network, the National Theatre Museum, the owner of a (at that time deactivated) advertisement display, a large number of kiosk proprietors, the Municipality Photography Archive, Lisbon's authority responsible for leasing advertising space, the outdoor advertising company JCDecaux, and five portrait photographers who run studios around the Praça do Chile.

The exhibition's location (as its theme) spawned a plethora of motifs, among which were:

- the proclamation of the Portuguese Republic in 1910 – whereby Fleet Admiral Carlos Cândido dos Reis, who openly opposed the monarchy, wrongly assumed that the revolution had failed and committed suicide. This happened close to the avenue that is now named after him, but at the time was still called Avenida Dona Amélia, in honour of the then queen;
- the urban development of the northern section of the Avenida: Its design was conceived as an



figure 10

*Projecto Almirante Reis*, advertisement display incorporating information on the exhibition, Praça do Chile, Lisbon, 1996. Photo: Mário Valente

figure 11

*Projecto Almirante Reis*, exhibition publication at newspaper stand, Praça do Chile, Lisbon, 1996. Photo: Mário Valente



expression of the political system of the Estado Novo, with architectural features that reflected its ideological aspirations;

- the Avenida as a major demonstration route both during the period of unrest between 1908 and 1910 prior to the proclamation of the Republic, and in the present on May Day;
- the socio-cultural phenomena of the very diverse population groups who live in different parts of the Avenida, where they constantly intermingle.

An important conceptual aspect of the exhibition was the transfer of auxiliary resources that are generally required to generate meaning in art – such as lists of works, commentaries and documentation, invitations, and exhibition maps – into the specific context of an exhibition intended for temporary installation in public space. Accordingly, in their individual projects the artists did not rely simply on the

media they “found” in situ as vehicles of their work, but also went about appropriating other kinds of readily available infrastructures as means of distribution and announcement to promote the exhibition.

A disused advertisement/information display standing in the Praça do Chile – once used to indicate nearby shops whose addresses, at the touch of a button, were lit up by small lamps on a street map – was put back into service as a centrally located information point for the exhibition. (figures 8-9) The rear side of the panel, facing an entrance to the metro, consisted of an illuminated showcase for advertising posters. For the project, the facility was put back into operation and the map replaced by a new, detailed site plan – printed using the same silkscreen technique as the old one. Instead of the names and addresses of shops and businesses, the map now showed the names of the artists and information about their exhi-

bits – similar to how works are labelled in museums – as well as indicating where the works were located. The exhibition invitation card was a postcard with of view of the Praça do Chile and the information display, which at the same time also alluded to the total lack of postcards depicting this part of Lisbon. (figure 10)

In a reference to the way publishing houses used to display their latest newspaper editions in their windows to be read freely by passers-by, the group mounted the pages of their exhibition newspaper inside the illuminated showcase intended for adver-

tising posters on the back of the information display. The artists were each allocated a page to design and contextualise their respective interventions, and the publication also contained a more comprehensive text about the overall exhibition. In addition, the newspaper was displayed and available for free at kiosks in the Avenida. (figure 11)

For her work, Teresa Fradique used two adjacent billboards that were available free of charge to any institution publicising cultural events. (figures 12 and 13) This facility had been set up by the city throughout the metropolitan area following the 1974 revo-



figure 12

Teresa Fradique, “Untitled”, photocopy of photograph on notice board (detail), 1996.  
Photo: Mário Valente

figure 13

Teresa Fradique, “Untitled”, photocopy of photograph on notice board, 1996.  
Photo: Mário Valente



lution in an attempt to curb the rampant fly-posting at that time. The artist went to the Municipality Photography Archive located on the Avenida to research historical photographs from the period when the so-called Neptune Fountain was still standing in the centre of the Praça do Chile. The fountain in the middle of one of Lisbon’s main traffic arteries was an altogether pleasant feature, especially given the city’s climate, but it was felt by the Estado Novo to be unrepresentative. It had to make way for a monument in honour of the seafarer Fernando Magellan, which was more in tune with the tastes and the ideological view of history held by the regime. Fradique presented two historic photographs, one of the Praça do Chile with the Neptune Fountain, the other of the fountain being pulled down. The pictures were reproduced onto large-format posters so they could be pasted onto the billboards. Her page in the exhi-

bition newspaper consisted of a reprint of the front page of the *Diário Popular* from 17 October 1950, featuring an article that describes the Fernando Magellan monument’s unveiling.

Ester Ferreira conducted research into the Teatro Apolo that once stood at the top end of the Avenida and was demolished by the Estado Novo. The theatre was known for staging revues that were unsympathetic to the regime, so the fascist government clearly had few qualms about tearing it down to make way for the new parade square called Martim Moniz. The fact that the streets in a recently built nearby quarter were named after celebrated actors who through this action had just been put out of work is not without a certain irony. Ferreira’s contribution to the exhibition newspaper consisted of a detail of a map of this quarter alongside an advertisement an-

nouncing a forthcoming auction of the furnishings from the theatre that was due to be demolished. For her work of public art, she used two illuminated display panels in the Praça do Chile provided by the company JCDcaux, which normally carry advertising posters. The artist designed and printed two theatre posters in the characteristic style of the Estado Novo, announcing two fictitious stage productions in the long since defunct Teatro Apolo, featuring the actors from the cast who were sacked and have long since died. (figures 14 and 15)

Luisa Yokochi worked in collaboration with portrait photographers whose businesses at that time were located on the Praça do Chile. Having first ordered a portrait of herself from each of the photographers, she won them over as “co-authors” of her project by giving them a free hand in how they executed her assignment. The shop owners hung the artist’s portraits for the duration of the exhibition in their shop windows, alongside the other portraits one would expect to see there. In the exhibition newspaper, Yokochi reproduced all portraits, naming the photographers and the respective index numbers of the shots. (figures 16–18)

All the works shown in the *Projecto Almirante Reis* evolved discreet and subtle forms of articulation, disguised as advertising media, shop window displays, or newspapers. Each of the artists had appropriated already existing modes of communication, turning them into vehicles for art. An informed audience started out by acquiring an overall impression of the exhibition at the information display; they then might have procured the exhibition newspaper at one of the kiosks; the newspaper contained a further

map that visitors used to find and view the works. In many cases, observant passers-by regularly frequenting the Avenida Almirante Reis around the Praça do Chile only gradually began to notice the shift in the messages being voiced by the familiar image carriers and other media in their urban surroundings.

#### ART IN PUBLIC SPACES AS AN EXTENDED CONCEPT: “PÚBLICO (CENTERFOLD)”

In 2001, the Portuguese artist Susana Mendes Silva produced a work for the Lisbon daily *Público* – a newspaper that since its launch in 1989 has become known in Portugal for its broad critical coverage of cultural events of all kinds. Each week for the duration of year, the newspaper reserved a double-page spread in its Saturday arts supplement for invited artists to use it entirely as they pleased.

In the light of Mendes’s work for *Público* and the crucial question it raised about the (lack of) creative opportunities at the disposal of contemporary artists outside Portugal’s museums, it might be necessary to generally rethink how museums foster meaning in art. The fact that museums have their own particular rules of operation already conditions how art is viewed; but at the same time this also provides a decisive context for the kind of art which only inside a “white cube” is capable of generating a game of “playful” intellectual exchange between author and viewer. It can be assumed that the museum offers specific conditions conducive to art’s unfolding in the same way as specifically cinemas, as opposed to television or the internet, stimulate the specific unfolding of film as a medium. The museum offers itself as a place that guarantees artists a free zone to mount any kind of potential provocation, which will still be funded by

Ester Ferreira, “Vem Ai o Teatro do Povo!” (“Here Comes the People’s Theatre!”), silkscreen on paper in advertisement display, 1996.

Photo: Mário Valente



figure 16

Luisa Yokochi, "FOTOQUITOS 40134-1", 1996, colour photograph in shop window display. Photo: Mário Valente



figure 17

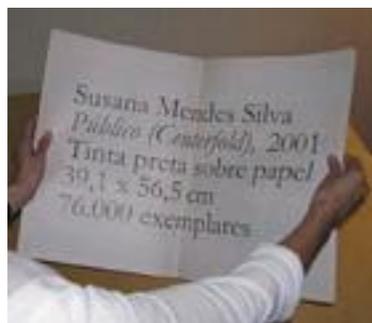
Luísa Yokochi, "EUROCOLOR Video print", colour inkjet print in shop window display, 1996. Photo: Mário Valente



figure 18

Luísa Yokochi, "INSTANTÂNEO", 1996, colour photograph in shop window display. Photo: Mário Valente

Susana Mendes Silva, “Público (Centerfold)”,  
black ink on paper, 39.1 × 56.5 cm, 76,000 copies,  
2001. Photo: Susana Mendes Silva



the museum, however critical it is of society. The modus operandi of artistic production and the manner in which museums function according to their own specific rules of use are mutually dependent.

Many artists who in the course of their careers have been given the opportunity to successfully compound the “vocabulary” of their artistic practice under the conditions for producing meaning in museums and galleries, and then try to “blindly” transplant this practice as their “brand” into the public realm, run the danger of losing their conferred effectiveness once outside the museum.

Art that positions itself outside the museum and refuses to be yoked to the tradition of measures for embellishing the city, but instead defines itself in its discourse according to contemporary artistic practices negotiated in the museum, cannot simply cast aside the body of rules governing the museum. Susana Mendes Silva’s work explores the tension between the museum’s canon of rules and the kind of art that needs to articulate and assert itself in the public realm in fundamentally different ways and outside the

familiar institutional framework. In her contribution to *Público*, Silva carried the inherently self-referential aspect of art, of authorship, and of the medium to the extreme: She adopted the site of her art in public space “Público (Centerfold)” as the title of her work. (figure 19) The total number of her multiple edition is correctly stated at the end of the piece, coinciding with the print run of the newspaper, while the work’s dimensions (those of the newspaper) are given in the correct museum method (height × width) at the bottom of the label, in other words of the artwork. The label itself in fact becomes the work of art, yet also continues to function as a label by dint of its transfer from the museum into the public sphere of a newspaper. Such a paradigm shift of a medium that is familiar to us results in a work that, as art in public space, stems from the conditions governing art in the museum, but only in order to deconstruct these same rules in an unexpected context.

#### FROM THE ARTWORK TO TEXT

The purpose of describing these artistic practices cited here as examples of “a broader understanding of art” (with regard to the public realm and art in public spaces) is not to place them in hierarchical rivalry with more classical forms of art. The degree to which viewers perceive art in public space as relevant, or are willing to engage in a *playful exchange* with this art – either in approval or rejection – is dependent neither on when the work was produced nor on the intentions of the artwork’s producer.

On his flight from the Nazis, the author Alfred Döblin spent several months in Lisbon in summer 1940 before finally departing for the United States. In his memoirs,<sup>12</sup> Döblin writes about the “interesting”

monuments in the city. Besides various equestrian statues and pompous buildings, Döblin also comments on a bronze figure depicting the then typical newspaper vendor of the *Diário de Notícias*, “barefooted” and in ragged clothes, located at the viewpoint of São Pedro de Alcântara. Döblin highlights the ironic contrast between the precious material used to make the sculpture and the shameful failings of a social system incapable of providing its children with adequate clothing. Döblin voices a further line of thought about art in public space in his remarks about the monumental statue celebrating the Marquis of Pombal. In monistical historiography, the marquis is generally described as an enlightened reformer of Portuguese society; his Machiavellian and often brutal manoeuvres to keep hold of power are mostly mentioned only in passing. Döblin notes that the monument dedicated to Pombal as a “benefactor of humanity” and an “enlightened despot” standing at the end of the Avenida de Liberdade could also be viewed in an ironic light: “For this is the world history that some humorists have called the Last Judgement.”<sup>13</sup>

Döblin took an active approach to the monuments and memorials in Lisbon and assessed them in a contemporary light from the perspective of a refugee persecuted by a criminal regime. In his manner of exploring associations with these monuments that were generally perceived as “edifying” the city, Döblin could be said to have “read” them as *texts*, in the sense formulated by Roland Barthes. For the distinctions Barthes makes in his perception of literature and art in works and texts<sup>14</sup> are not hierarchically structured – in other words, not in the sense of better or worse, of older or contemporary art – but con-

cern possible modes of reading, exploring different cognitive processes in the viewer on encountering a *work*. Barthes speaks of a *game* that presupposes the viewer’s active involvement. In his definition, *works* can be passively experienced while *texts* can only make an impact if they are animated through active reflection. Text can by all means be discerned in older art, whereas contemporary art is not automatically available to be experienced merely by dint of its contemporaneity. Text always transpires when the viewer him/herself becomes the “author” of the work of art. These processes presume visual literacy on the part of the viewer, and the capacity – derived from his/her own knowledge and experience – to produce associations at the moment of encounter with the work of art:

*The infinity of the signifier refers [...] in the field of the text (better, of which the text is the field) is realised not according to an organic progress of maturation or a hermeneutic course of deepening investigation, but, rather, according to a serial movement of disconnections, overlappings, variations. The logic regulating the Text is not comprehensive (define “what the work means”) but metonymic; the activity of associations, contiguities, carryings-over coincides with a liberation of symbolic energy (lacking it, man would die); the work in the best of cases – is moderately symbolic (its symbolic runs out, comes to a halt); the Text is radically symbolic: a work conceived, perceived and received in its integrally symbolic nature is a text. [...] In fact, reading, in the sense of consuming, is far from playing with the text. “Playing” must be understood here in all its polysemy: the text itself plays (like a door, like a machine with “play”) and the reader plays twice over, playing the Text as one plays a game, looking for a practice which reproduces it [...].<sup>15</sup>*

Roland Barthes' theory is one of a number of different propositions about the decentred subject formulated in the same period (by Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault, among others), in which "the result is a resolutely anti-hierarchical conception of a production of meaning, rather than a grasping of the author's Truth: the false truth, as it were, of authority."<sup>16</sup>

In view of this perception, when it comes to the reception of a work as text and the attendant necessity of the viewer's *practical collaboration*, coupled with the requisite preconditions on the part of the viewer, it would also be useful to take note of Adrian Piper's doubts about the prospects of achieving effective change through a "global political art":

*Representation of political content alone is unlikely to be successful in effecting political change in the viewer, because it directs the viewer's attention away from the immediate politics of her own situation and toward some other space-time region that may have only the most tenuous connection, if any, to the viewer's immediate personal circumstances.*<sup>17</sup>

A common element among the works described earlier by Ângela Ferreira, Allan Sekula, the participants of the Independent Studies Programme of the Escola Maumaus, and Susana Mendes Silva was their awareness of the phenomena formulated by Piper and Barthes. The artists all conceived their works as texts, as defined by Roland Barthes, and were interested in releasing symbolic energy through their art and thereby emancipating the viewer to play his/her own associative *game* with observable contiguities and possible transfers. In this respect, the key elements of their works were the forms the artists adopted to incorporate the general psychological

resonances of the respective sites where they were being presented. These elements had been conceived by their makers as "entrance points" aimed at the personal situation of the viewer/reader, in order to empower him/her as an active *reader* and *author*.

The gamble taken by the artists in abandoning the position provided for them by art history represents perhaps one side of the coin; the other is that the game of emancipating the viewer from the author's "claim to truth" is categorically open for all to play. Yet the work "symbolically conceived" by the author of a work of art is not automatically perceived as text by the viewer. The *game* that the "authors" aspire to play, which goes beyond the passive consumption of art and literature, is dependent on the visual literacy, the capacities, and availability of the viewer.

The question of whether art – be it on temporary or permanent display, in public space or in a museum – is also able to assume the task of communicating such differentiated interpretations of its own activity and impact, as Roland Barthes himself did in his own "text" *From Work to Text* in 1971, can in one sense still be considered relevant. Namely, in terms of whether such art in its inordinate explanatory zeal to produce the envisaged interpretation, or in the conceived logic of understanding, can succeed in being perceived "merely" as a work and precisely not as text. In other words, whether this art might not be doomed to fail by its own "good" will.

- 1 Douglas Crimp asks in his essay "Getting the Warhol We Deserve: Cultural Studies and Queer Culture": "What is at stake is not history per se, which is a fiction in any case, but what history, whose history, history to what purpose." Available at: [http://www.rochester.edu/in\\_visible\\_culture/issue1/crimp/crimp.html](http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/issue1/crimp/crimp.html).
- 2 Miwon Kwon, "For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities", in: Christian Philipp Müller, *Kunst auf Schritt und Tritt* (Hamburg, 1997).
- 3 Cf. Raquel de Henrique da Silva, "Estatuária académica: entre a norma, a história e a sensibilidade romântica", in: *arte pública – Estatuária e Escultura de Lisboa – Roteiro*, Câmara Municipal de Lisboa (Lisbon, 2005).
- 4 Based on the distinction between modernity and modernism formulated by Zygmunt Bauman.
- 5 Besides having been a renowned architect, Cottinelli Telmo is also part of the history of Portuguese cinema. He designed the building of the Tobis Film Studios in the outskirts of Lisbon and directed the country's second talkie feature film. Bearing in mind that the first version of the monument was erected in wood and plaster, it might not be a coincidence that it appears today as a one-to-one copy in stone of a former gigantic film set.
- 6 Paradigmatic for colonial administrations and for the colonising West in general is the assumption that the colonised countries have no history or sensibilities of local provenance. They are thought to be "empty" and simply waiting to be filled with history and culture by the colonial power.
- 7 Heinrich Klotz, "Tendenzen heutiger Architektur in der Bundesrepublik", in: *Das Kunstwerk* 32, 1979, pp. 6ff.; and Jürgen Paul, "Kulturgeschichtliche Betrachtungen zur deutschen Nachkriegsarchitektur", *ibid.*, pp. 13ff.
- 8 After the "Carnation Revolution" of 25 April 1974, which forced the Salazar/Caetano regime into exile after 50 years of fascism, there was a sudden explosion in house building on the peripheries of Lisbon and Porto. With the patina of time they have since acquired, these satellite and dormitory towns that were built ad hoc and often without

serious planning now seem less brutal than the suburbs of London, Paris, or Berlin that were systematically designed on the drawing board. In Portugal, modernist high-rise buildings were often conceived to fit in with more irregular, meandering roads than being marshalled into kilometre-long layouts of straight lines and rectangular blocks. This is partly a consequence of the country's rather challenging topography.

- 9 "... less object-oriented and more site-conscious art that sought greater integration between art, architecture, and the landscape through artists' collaboration with members of the urban managerial class (such as architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban designers, and city administrators), in the designing of permanent urban (re-) development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighbourhoods, etc ..."
- 10 In South Africa, Ângela Ferreira conducted detailed studies of the Russian Constructivists as a 1920s artistic movement in pursuit of a symbiosis of cultural, political, and social utopias. Quite early on, Ferreira's interest was sparked in particular by the multi-functional artworks called Screen-Tribune-Kiosks, designed by Gustav Klutssis (1895–1938) in around 1922, which she saw as offering ideas and practices with relevance to the

South African context.

- 11 An important reference for better understanding Allan Sekula's photographic works is a commentary Bertolt Brecht wrote about photographing factories: "A photograph of the Krupps factory or the AEG works tells us practically nothing about the institution. True reality has slipped into the functional. The objectification of human relations, as for example the factory, is not made visible. So there is indeed a need to 'construct something', something 'artificial', 'contrived'." Bertolt Brecht, "Der Dreigroschenprozess", 1931, in: Dreigroschenbuch: Text-Materialien-Dokumente (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1960), pp. 93–94.
- 12 Alfred Döblin, *Schicksalsreise – Flucht und Exil 1940–1948* (Munich, 1986), pp. 224ff. In English: *Destiny's Journey* (New York, 1992).
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 228–229.
- 14 Roland Barthes, "De l'oeuvre au texte", in: *Revue d'esthétique*, no. 3, Paris, 1971.
- 15 Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text" (trans. Stephen Heath), in: *Art in Theory 1900–1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992), pp. 941–946.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 941.
- 17 Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), II, p. 177.

# RAMALLAH

Detail from The Partition Wall at Qalandia Checkpoint. Photo: Tina Sherwell

## CONTEMPLATION ON PUBLIC ART:

Snapshots from Palestine

by Tina Sherwell

### WALLS

If you travel from Jerusalem into Ramallah and take the route that runs through Shufhat and Beit Hanina and get caught in the bottleneck of one-lane traffic caused by the construction of the light railway, you are confronted suddenly with The Partition Wall running parallel to the road at the end of Beit Hanina. The areas known as Al Ram and betunia have been transformed as a result of the segmentation created by The Partition Wall, which has split and severed districts from one another and forces Palestinians to circumnavigate The Wall in order to get from one side to the other. The thoroughfare provides one of the main arteries between the two main cities, Jerusalem and Ramallah. Very little graffiti art or signs can be found on this side of The Wall. A few commercial sign posts are dotted here and there, but otherwise the 8-metre-high wall, recently crowned with barbed wire up to the major terminal entrance at Qalandia Checkpoint, looms high above. Qalandia is the main entry and exit point between the two cities.

*The main reason for where it is located is that it sits on larger strategic crossroads – a point at which the main North-South artery in the West Bank crosses the main East-West artery. Thus, within the overall spatial regime (varying between 450 and 650 roadblocks and checkpoints), Qalandia has not just*

*divided East Jerusalem from its West Bank hinterlands, but has completely isolated a number of surrounding communities from each other, while serving as a strategic bottleneck for the larger population needing to move from one side of the West Bank to the other.<sup>1</sup>*

Only those who hold international passports, Jerusalem IDs, and/or a *tasireb*<sup>2</sup> can pass in and out of the West Bank. Coming through the main junction, you cannot miss the palimpsest of graffiti art on The Partition Wall: the youthful Yasser Arafat, the imprisoned Marwan Barghouti – both drawn on a cinematic scale (figures 1 and 2). Significantly, it is the youthful image of Arafat that is represented, heralding the past and tapping into the nostalgia for the early days of the revolutionary struggle before his incarceration in Ramallah and the erosion of his popularity. Significantly, too, it is Fatah<sup>3</sup> leaders who are portrayed here. The Wall at this junction is layered with images and texts, each layered on top of the next. What is now probably one of the most famous interventions, Banksy's girl floating with balloon (figure 3) has become part of a large bric-a-brac mural of declarations of solidarity with the Palestinians. In fact Banksy's intervention used to sit lonely on The Wall, with the girl floating upwards with her balloons, served up for passers-by like myself, stuck in queues of traffic, a scene from a childhood fairytale, a moment of escapism. Since then, inscriptions have littered The Wall: "Imagine War is Over" another text reads in inverted letters, quoting John Lennon's famous song. New inscriptions continue to appear at what has become an important landmark in the Palestinian landscape, which has been created predominantly by internationals and some Palestinians. Interestingly, however, drawings and statements do



Detail from The Partition Wall at Qalandia Checkpoint. Photo: Tina Sherwell



not appear on both sides of The Wall nor cover it,<sup>4</sup> but rather are dispersed across a variety of locations, specifically linked to the visibility of the works, at junctions and entrances to checkpoints and towns; hence, stretches of The Wall are unhampered.

Several years ago, an artist project reached my desk that envisaged what to do with all the concrete from The Wall if it were to come down – it was almost too far ahead to dream of. Apart from its major role in fragmenting and segregating the West Bank and Jerusalem, The Partition Wall performs another important role, less discussed, which is that it serves a major function of erasing Palestinians from the

Israeli field of vision. Not only is it a separation device, but it also blocks visibility. Palestinians become those “over there”, an unidentifiable mass behind The Wall. Strategies concerning visibility and invisibility are central to colonialist projects – the ability to erase the presence of inhabitants from a landscape was one of the central premises behind the envisioning of the State of Israel (“a people with no land for land with no people”). This vision was not without a historical trajectory in which travel literature, paintings, and photography pictured Palestine as an empty landscape with a scattered peasant population that was predominantly represented as living relics from the biblical age who continued to practice ancient tradi-

tions, but who were also seen as unable to be guardians of the holy legacy of this historic terrain.

The graffiti art on The Wall of course raises an interesting question for Palestinians about the whole premise of creating works on The Wall: Should Palestinians in fact put any work on The Wall? Is it an action of beautification? And why are the majority of works on the Palestinian side rather than the Israeli side? Should artists engage with The Partition Wall or leave it as it stands: a construction of severance?

#### GRAFFITI

Graffiti played a significant role during the 1980s and during the First Intifada of 1987–1993 as a means of resistance by the population. It informed the community of strike actions, closures, and demonstrations. Graffiti, along with leaflets, were important forms of communication, long before messaging and the internet were available to Palestinians. Israeli soldiers worked to paint over these signs, pulling young men out of their homes to paint over the inscriptions, whitewashing the walls, but sometimes also painting them over with tar as in the Gaza Strip, only to find they had reappeared over night. Graffiti appeared on a daily basis on shop fronts, the sides of buildings, main entrances, and areas announcing schedules for activities. This form of messaging, temporary yet effective, was an important tool in sustaining collective resistance, along with other strategies. It is this element of temporariness in reclaiming public space that is key in the context of a landscape under occupation. This is important in considering how public art is used by a population under occupation, and how we can think about addressing examples of public art in this context.

Of course, graffiti itself – its content and imagery – has been transformed across the decades. It can be found throughout the West Bank and Gaza and is a populist form of expression. It is common when individuals return from the Haj pilgrimage to adorn the doorways of their homes with coloured patterns, combining moons, stars, hand prints, and images of the holy shrine at Mecca. The brightly coloured and ornamented doorways would announce the return of the individual to the whole neighbourhood, for whom it is traditional to go and celebrate their return. Today painting has been replaced with large printed banners and strings of festive lights. Similarly, wedding celebrations, in particular the stag night party, are held in the street of the bridegroom’s local neighbourhood. The street is also adorned with lights and brightly coloured fabric drapes, and temporary stages are built for the musicians to play on. This is common practice in villages and refugee camps in particular. Similarly, public space is also used for the three-day period of mourning for after funerals. Hence public space in neighbourhoods is regularly transformed, temporarily, for family events.

Returning to the issue of graffiti it has been – and continues to be – tied to the expression for or against political parties. In more recent instances, parties have erased the works of each other, as during recent conflict in the Gaza Strip, but graffiti has also developed into an art form. Graffiti serves also as a voice of individual expression, on positions of politics and views against occupation. Inscriptions can be found both in Arabic and English, with the English texts often intended to engage international visitors. Interestingly, however, the temporary element has slowly disappeared and graffiti works have become

permanent statements – a form of public echo, covered up by layers of other statements and fading with the passage of time. In the growing urban spaces of the Palestinian cities and camps, there is noticeably little graffiti in comparison to earlier years. In fact, art students wishing to create interventions in the street contemplate gaining permission from the municipality or attempt to secretly create inscriptions.

Thinking through the question of public art in Palestine, I would argue that it necessitates a consideration of the methods in which the public reclaims space through gestures, in which meaning of space is both temporarily transformed, and the way in which space is utilised as an articulation of identity that challenges the order of things. In that regard, can we consider demonstrations as creative interventions? Strategies employed for the display of identity have continued to be creative. The power of occupying space displays the understanding of the importance of the physical space and its occupation as an articulation of identity, and a tool in challenging authorities. The use of public space has played a central role in resistance strategies of Palestinians. In the First Intifada, demonstrators would wear the colours of the banned Palestinian flag, and even walk with watermelons (which contain all colours of the flag). Their intimate knowledge of passageways and streets in the camps and old cities enabled them to move agilely through the spaces during confrontations with soldiers. Mass gatherings and demonstrations would march while stone-throwers were organised; groups would protest, fall back, and regroup after injuries. It is important to take into consideration the multiple uses of public space by Palestinians in relation to considering art interventions today as public space

has been and continues to be used creatively for articulations of identity by communities.

Under occupation, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, manifestations of Palestinian identity were met with serious reprisals. It is now almost a forgotten fact that the display of the flag or its colours were banned by the Israeli military authorities; art exhibitions and theatre plays all had to receive permits and were subject to censorship; artists, writers, and political activists were regularly imprisoned for their work. Manifestation of national identity was part of an occupation resistance strategy by Palestinians, both in the interior and those in Diaspora, and were important methods for binding and articulating community. Under occupation, the military were present in their outposts and during patrols on the streets, as is still the case in East Jerusalem. Looking back to this context of the First Intifada and the stringent rules during the early 1980s with the absence of art spaces, galleries, museums, etc., this meant that artists would hold their exhibitions in schools and local community halls. Temporary exhibitions would move from place to place, as artists themselves moved their works. These years are now recalled with nostalgia by an older generation of artists, who assert a close affinity with the public and their engagement with the work. Sliman Mansour, known for his iconic imagery of the Palestinian people, says of that time “Art was not for art sake but for giving them pride in their culture.”

These temporal exhibitions were mainly organised by a collective called The League of Palestinian Artists. Their focus was not on the works of individual artists but the collective. Thus, temporary inter-

figure 4

Sliman Mansour, “Camel of Hardships”,  
Oil on Canvas, 1974. Photo courtesy of artist

ventions into the public space by artists were a key strategy in ensuring that their work was seen. Significantly, the first gallery that was opened, Gallery 79, in Al Bireh, Ramallah, was swiftly closed down by occupation forces, and became an underground space for artists during the 1980s. Access and the circulation of art was a key concern, and works were reproduced on postcards and in posters, enabling the general public to purchase and own the imagery – hence, art works could be found in homes and offices, probably one of the most famous being “The Camel of Hardships” by Sliman Mansour (figure 4).

#### CITY SPACES

The establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, and the increasing expansion of the NGO sector working in culture and the arts, has had an impact on public art and public art interventions. In the areas of PA control, Palestinian identity was no longer contested. While Jerusalem increasingly became an isolated centre that remained under military occupation, various art initiatives have taken place over the years initiated by institutions, the PA ministries, municipalities, and individual artists in which a diversity of public art practices by Palestinians can be observed.

In 2007, the Al Mamal Foundation for Contemporary Art began what was to become an annual event, *The Jerusalem Show*. The uniqueness of the event spreads across the old city of Jerusalem in a range of locations each year, from community centres, hospices, shops, streets, as well as to locations not often open to the public, like old library buildings and bath houses. The exhibitions regularly combine international and local artists under a curatorial



theme, which have included: “Outside the Gates of Heaven” (2007), “The Jerusalem Syndrome” (2009), “Exhaustion” (2010), “Language On/Off” (2011).

A central part of the exhibition is the tour within the city and the movement across the city space from location to location. Works are placed in non-traditional art spaces, and are often site-specific installations. The exhibition itself allows for the re-exploration of

the city space and collective experience of viewing the works. In the context of a city under occupation, the annual event is a way of temporarily re-occupying and transforming the meaning of the spaces. Displaying works in the street and public spaces is more complicated than areas under Palestinian Authority control, and the organisation is often confronted with difficulties, but it is easier within Palestinian institutions. Performances in public space are also held as part of each exhibition.

From the exhibition in 2008, Nida Sinnokrot inserted a series of blue lights in the cracks and crevices of the old city wall. This minimalist intervention can be understood as an important act of re-appropriation and an opportunity to venture through the city space, re-reading the space, through the discovery of these minimalist interventions. The work needs to be understood in the context of the tension within the city walls and the political focus on Jerusalem, in which Israel employs specific policies aimed at the transfer of the Arab population from the city, its isolation from the West Bank and Gaza, and the transformation of the old city into an exclusively religious site for worshippers and tourists, thereby slowly erasing the multiplicity of everyday life in the city. Jawad al Malhi explored the histories of the Hamam al Ein bath house, which is no longer in use, and which was next to the Hamam Al Sharif. The bath house was traditionally used by bridegrooms to bathe before their wedding night. Al Malhi conducted interviews with elderly men, many of whom cannot reach the hamam. In their accounts, the men explore the memories of community, the space of the body, the hamam, and their rite of passage. The sound installation in 2008 created layers of memo-

ries in the space, with which the audience interacted via their movements as they triggered different narratives of the past, accompanied by isolated dripping taps. The work suggested the lost communal space within the city walls. Emily Jacir “Untitled” (servees) created a sound installation at Damascus Gate, but it was swiftly removed by the Israeli authorities and re-installed at a nearby café. Working with servees drivers, Jacir recorded the place names of destinations, for which there was a transport network from Damascus Gate in Jerusalem, with cities as far away as Damascus and Ramleh. The work highlighted the severance and dislocation of Jerusalem and “recalls the once fluid space – of movement, connection and exchange, and attempts to make visible the fractures and interactions of everyday life within the disintegrating urban landscape.”<sup>5</sup> Both Jacir and Al Malhi’s works served to re-inscribe the past into the city space through the auditory.

The loss of history through the daily transformation of the city under political policies that aim to erase the Palestinian peoples places these abovementioned works and the initiative of *The Jerusalem Show* in sharp relief. The importance of narratives and oral testimonies becomes pivotal in holding on to memories of city, and “the practice of everyday life” that took place in this city. The transformation of the physical space and the confiscation of property slowly erase memories and the knowledge of how this was a vibrant cultural and social hub. Oral narratives become one of the few forms (as so many archives are dispersed and fragmented) available to Palestinians to hold on to the identity of the city.

The Art and Ethnographic Museum at Birzeit Uni-

versity initiated a series of exhibitions in 2010 called *The Cities Exhibition*, starting with Ramallah in 2010. In 2011, the city of Nablus was the chosen city in the exhibition entitled *Between Ebal and Gerzim*, in which the event was taken to the city space itself. In a similar form to that of *The Jerusalem Show*, the works were distributed across the city, in baths, old houses, a flour mill, the municipal library, old soap factories (where they produced olive oil, which the city was famous for), and the site of the old train station. All works explored the theme of the city and its history. The curatorial statement suggests that the exhibition is an “endeavour to respond to the city’s contemporary challenges through reconnecting the current contemporary social practices with the historicity of the geography and its collective memory.”<sup>6</sup> Curators Yazid Anani and Vera Tamari suggest that as a result, the isolation “has caused a change in the value system; a disconnection from the landscape, the corrosion of heritage and the social isolation of cities from each other.”<sup>7</sup> The trail through the city was a key aspect of the exhibition, as well as engagement with its rich architectural history.

Samira Badran’s intervention in the Onion Market was a series of shades, in which cut patterns drawn from the rich Islamic heritage of the city created light and shadow on the market space. (figure 5) Beatrice Catanzaro’s work at the municipal library drew attention to collections of prisoners’ books, which included 8,000 books read by Palestinian prisoners between 1972 and 1985. Catanzaro spent a year conducting interviews with the prisoners’ librarian in an exploration of its organisation and the important social history of libraries in prison. The architects Iyad Issa and Sahar Qawasmi created a site-specific

installation and performance work in a pickle factory that was the site of the railway station, revisiting the lost history of the railway networks in Palestine, whereby the audience purchased tickets for travel and listened for the announcement of trains and the stations. Video projections created a virtual arrival and departure in which the audience was left standing on the platform, as Raja Shedadeh articulates:

*More than one hundred years ago, the Ottomans built a vast train network throughout the Middle East, first connecting Jaffa and Jerusalem and eventually linking the main cities of the Arab Middle East Amman, Basra, Beirut, Cairo, Damascus, Jerusalem and Medinato Istanbul. Construction on the Nablus-Jerusalem segment was interrupted by the outbreak of World War I, and the Nablus train station was largely destroyed during the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. Today, no train crosses the borders of our tiny territory. The only Green Line we know does not connect the capitals of the Middle East; it divides them.<sup>8</sup>*

While two examples discussed above are of exhibitions initiated by NGOs and universities and funded through international and local donors, the Palestinian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities with the Jericho municipality and the International Academy of Art, Palestine, created a series of public works in celebration of 10,000 years of the city of Jericho. The project involved Palestinian artists creating works that celebrated a range of sites and locations, with the intention of bringing art into the city space of Jericho. The Ministry of Culture in 1999 commissioned artists to undertake a series of murals across the space of the city and its new recreational park to create public works. In 2005 the Ministry of Culture also initiated an International



Artists Workshop in the village of Jifna for the creation of public art works. It brought together artists from across the West Bank, Jerusalem, and international practitioners. While many artists worked in stone carvings, creating works which the Ministry of Culture would later distribute to various locations, other artists chose to create more temporary works that addressed the specificity of place. The workshop highlighted divergent methodologies of Palestinian artists and notions of works for public

spaces. One of the major difficulties these projects/initiatives faced regarded the question of preservation of the works. Projects now have these issues built into their concepts. However, vandalism and general wear and tear affect the works, thus the Jericho murals have faded and worn away, and elements of other abovementioned projects have deteriorated and been destroyed. Like many public art works all over the world, the same problems are occurring in the areas under Palestinians Authority control.

figure 5

Public Intervention by Samira Badran, Onion Market, Nablus, 2011. Photo courtesy of artist

figure 6

Memorial Garden at the entrance of Qalandia Refugee Camp. Photo: Tina Sherwell

#### OFFICIAL REPRESENTATION

The discussion presented above focussed on the question of public art amidst the constructions of occupation and the interventions and initiatives taken by Palestinians in such a context. With the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip were handed over to Palestinian control. With Palestinian identity no longer in contestation, and national and cultural identity finally recognised, what have been the identifiable public works by the Palestinian Authority? Significantly, it has been the work of different municipal councils that have worked on the creation of public art works and, as suggested, various initiatives by different ministries, although no clear strategic direction in relation to art in public spaces is identifiable. Perhaps the most apparent are the memorials to Palestinians who have died in the Second Intifada, sieges of the cities, and Israeli military incursions. (figure 6) There are memorials at the entrances to camps at roadsides and across the urban spaces. These memorials, often carved in stone, show inscriptions to the dead and are adorned with flowers. At the entrance at several camps across the West Bank and Jerusalem, one will find a small gated garden memorial, cornered off from the chaos of everyday life and the continually transforming space of the camps – a space for remembrance. A recurrent image is the carved image of the map of Palestine. These popular memorials have been instigated by political parties and municipalities and they provide narratives of loss across the landscape in the aftermath of the Second Intifada. On a larger scale, a major mausoleum to the late President Yasser Arafat is one of the main public monuments constructed in Palestine on the grounds of the presidential com-

pound and is the site of annual remembrance for the late president and a tourist stop for visitors. The cubic form recalls Islamic architecture, and its inscription sits on a tranquil pond. It is one of the few in public spaces in Ramallah that has water. As part of Ramallah's urban planning, numerous commemorative roundabouts are in their vision for the city in this new century.

One of the official murals stands less than 500 metres from the Presidential Compound entrance on Irsal Street in Ramallah. It was created by the artist Jamal Afgani and his assistants. The work, entitled "Mural of Life", celebrates the role of Palestinian women in society in their roles as strugglers, captives, labourers, and mothers. The mural celebrates traditional roles of women – as valorised in national discourse – and its sculptured forms are in expressionist style cast in relief. At the unveiling ceremony, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad stressed the importance of women's roles in education, in particular their nurturing of the new generations. Future planned murals also include one dedicated to the declaration of



human rights, and another to the poetry of the late Mahmoud Darwish. One of the difficulties of public art in the Palestinian Authority areas is the history of the sites and property, which are often private property or religious endowments. Hence the actual availability of public space is considerably limited. Khaled Hourani created an ongoing public work for Jerusalem Arab City of Culture, in 2009, in which milestones were placed in selected locations that mark the exact distance from the chosen site to Jerusalem. The project enables people all over the world to acquire a milestone. In so doing, Hourani created a radius around Jerusalem pinpointing the distance and severance of Palestinians from the city and its symbolic location in people's imaginations.

Significantly, as the Palestinian Authority works to make Ramallah its representational capital, young artists are creating temporal and performative interventions in the city space that are often aimed at challenging status quo ideas in society. Dima Hourani undertook a project of covering up all the billboards and street signs in the main streets in Ramallah to draw attention to the visual bombardment that the everyday passer-by experiences from the plethora of signage, pointing to the increasing commercialism and consumerism in the city. (figure 7) Salam Safadi also worked with billboards, exploring a notion of the modern day Christ figure hanging on road signs that refer to historic spaces and locations in an unreachable landscape, while re-inscribing this



figure 7

Dima Hourani, "Untitled", still from public intervention, 2009. Photo courtesy of artist

figure 8

Razan Ekramawy, "Scare Crow" (still from video 9"), Jerusalem, 2011. Photo courtesy of artist



history into the visual field of the city. Noor Abed has explored conceptions of women in works that allows the public to draw on the white dress she is wearing. She has also walked through centre of the city in a wedding dress with a gigantic trail, which is inevitably stepped on by the public as she challenges the notion of a bride. In Jerusalem, Razan Ekramawy positioned herself as a scarecrow on the rooftop of an Arab house in a gesture of protecting the site whose neighbouring building was occupied by settlers, (figure 8) only to find that settlers came to mimic her actions. Bisan Abu Eishah chalks the walls in Jerusalem with instigative comments in an interac-

tive work that invites the public to write on the wall in response to his comments. It is evident, therefore, that Palestinian artists are increasingly moving out of institutional spaces and conceiving their works in the public space for the general public.

The discussion above highlights the transformation and diversity of creative approaches in relation to public space, as evidenced in the practices of the Palestinian community during its recent history and in relation to a legacy of occupation, in which different interventions have articulated and brought to the foreground the social memory of Palestinians.

# BEIRUT

- 1 Qalandiya Rema Hammami, "Jerusalem's Tora Bora and the Frontiers of Global Inequality", Jerusalem Quarterly 41 (Spring 2010).
- 2 This is permission for passage.
- 3 Fatah is a political party that holds the majority of support in the West Bank.
- 4 The Wall is estimated to be 800km long, running through the West Bank and occupying 12 per cent of the land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (<http://www.stopthewall.org>).
- 5 Al Mamal Foundation website.
- 6 Curatorial statement, Yazid Anani and Vera Tamari.
- 7 Curatorial statement.
- 8 Raja Shedadeh, Herald Tribune, 14 November 2011.

## ARTISTIC URBAN RESEARCH:

Thinking the city / Acting the city

by Mirene Arsanios

Beirut is a territorial city. The civil war was territorial – through the Green Line, it divided East Beirut from West Beirut. The city’s post-war politics also unfolds territorially – since the official end of the civil war (1990), Lebanon has been subject to a series of political crises due to the opposition of its two main parties, each of which exerts its power in specific areas of the city<sup>1</sup>. Beirut magnifies the way in which public space is *not* neutral or disinterested. In fact, because there is no centralised political authority, power materialises in unpredictable ways and fluctuates in the day-to-day practices within the city’s urban space. One never knows what the city holds for its citizens.

How to work and reflect – or simply live – in a city that inexorably defies all attempts to grasp its urban, political, and military workings? In such a dense assemblage, what space is left to occupy, appropriate, and re-imagine? What space remains that is not subject to the sectarian and tribal workings of Lebanese politics? Such questions are not equivalent to the demand for a public (neutral and disinterested) space for all, but rather they question the existence and possible creation of spaces that are not strictly territorial. Can art play a role in creating these spaces?

The direct post-civil war period of the early 1990s allowed for a vision of the future. The city’s reconstruction was not yet irreversible, and citizens felt they could have a say in that very process. It was a period, in fact, where sentiments about the city and its public spaces were strongly debated. Solidere, the private company that took over the reconstruction of Beirut Central District and privatised what was formerly the commercial and social heart of the city, was the target of vehement critiques from architects and urban planners from all walks. Although the signs of a city falling prey to a neo-liberalist agenda could be sensed, things were still contentious and thus not irrevocably closed off.

In 1995, Ashkal Alwan<sup>2</sup>, the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, now one of the main institutions for contemporary art in Beirut, launched the *Sanayeb Garden Project*<sup>3</sup>, a temporary exhibition inviting more than 30 artists to present their works in the garden. Most works were sculptures commenting on the relation between nature and the city, such as Flavia Codsì’s butterfly installed in reed structure, mechanically manoeuvred to reach out to the passer-by. The garden became a symbolic and idyllic enclave where artists could reconfigure, under their own terms, their relation to a recent history of violence. Besides a few critical exceptions, such as Ziad Abillama, who refused to participate with the production of an artwork, and Walid Sadek, whose piece alluded to an execution that once occurred in the garden, most works did not critically challenge the idea of public space in a post-war society. However, the event was well-attended by the general public, as well as by inhabitants of the neighborhood. When interviewed by Future Television on what motivated the

figure 1

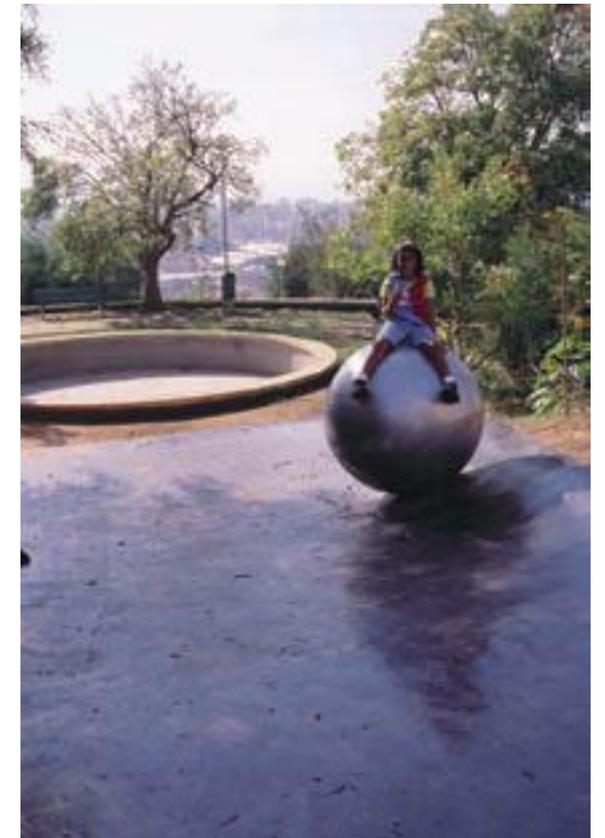
Marwan Rechmaoui, *Sioufi Garden Project*,  
Ashkal Alwan, 1997.

event, Christine Tohme, the director of the association, replied:

“My main motivation was doing something that could respond to the lack of art in our everyday life in Lebanon; art is not in the public space, it is not in the street, it is absent from many spaces we could use, but that we are not using.”<sup>4</sup>

Projects similarly investing in the public gardens and streets of the city followed: the *Sioufi Garden Project*<sup>5</sup> (1997), *The Corniche Project* (1999), and the *Hamra Street Project* (2000). The urge to be in the streets and to re-appropriate a city that had alienated its inhabitants through decades of civil war was pressing. The war history, because it involved territorial divisions, should first and foremost be addressed spatially. However, the difficulties involved in the realisation of public space projects are rarely addressed openly. Countless permissions that are obtained through official and more covert negotiations are inherent to the very process of realising public art projects. In negotiating, one paradoxically slips back into the territorial and sectarian structures one was trying to evade.

It is interesting to note that Ashkal Alwan’s first two projects were garden projects, and that the last two took were placed in pedestrian zones – the legendary Hamra Street and The Corniche (sea side promenade), the only uninterrupted, walkable stretch in Beirut. The shift from the garden to the street signals a will to engage with Beirut’s urbanity and pedestrian culture. Most of the artworks developed for these public projects have disappeared. Many were conceived as ephemeral works, with the excep-



tion of Marwan Rechmaoui’s metallic globe, which stands in monumental oblivion in the Sioufi Public Garden overseeing Beirut’s industrial district. (figure 1)

Ephemeral interventions, however, play a role in instigating debate on the nature of these spaces. For example, Tony Chakar’s work for the *Corniche Project*, “A Retroactive Monument for a Chimerical City”, (1999) placed a classical Greek goddess painted in



gold on a pedestal facing the sea. Little time passed before the artist was asked to remove the statue due to its offensive content. (figure 2)

More than the actual intervention, it is interesting to reflect on the discourses and debates produced by these public art works. Though the history of post-war Beirut is punctuated with few public art projects, the city and its urban space, on the other hand, have been topical subjects in post-war artistic production. I am interested precisely in thinking about the relation between these two poles of cultural production – discourse and research on the one hand, and actual intervention on the other – and wish to ask how these two threads inform our understanding of public space. Although there have been in recent years many public art project in Beirut that are worth mentioning for the record – for example, Nadim Karam’s public sculptures, Nada Sehnaoui’s

installation “Fractions of Memory” (2003), on Martyr Square, and since 2004, the Beirut street festival hosted annually by Zico House<sup>6</sup> – I am more interested in looking at projects that delve into the politics of what it means to live in Beirut. Such projects are often developed discursively, through artistic research.

Since the turn of the millennium, researching and producing discourse on the intricacies of Beirut’s urban space has been one of the prevailing forms of engagement with the city. Tony Chakar<sup>7</sup>, an artist with an architecture background, has written extensively on the city with essays such as “The Eyeless Map” (2003) or “Traces of Life” (2003), which combine in the writing a conceptual take with poetic style.

Artistic research is, in fact, an interdisciplinary research on the urban space. It is a field where architects do not construct physical buildings and where artists produce architectural mock-ups representing iconic war landmarks (Marwan Rechmaoui with his work “Monument for the Living”, 2001–2008). (figure 3) Urban artistic research cannot fall under a single academic discipline. Rather, it challenges the very methods used to understand urban spaces. Urban artistic research is an empirical investigation driven by a singular desire – that of the artist. Its goal is not to prove an overarching and abstract theory on, for example, the relation between gendered bodies and public space. Although it flirts with architecture, sociology, and anthropology and profits from its methodologies, artistic research uncomfortably stands in between different ways of perceiving, processing, and understanding the city.

figure 2

Tony Chakar, “A Retroactive Monument for a Chimerical City”, installation view, Ahskal Alwan, Beirut, 1999. Photo: Unknown

figure 3

Marwan Rechmaoui, “Monument for the Living”, concrete and wood, 230 × 60 × 40 cm, 2002–2008.





Often, however, the resulting work is not conceived as a public intervention, although it borrows its sources and inspiration from the city. The temporality of artistic urban research clashes with the impromptu features of a public intervention, and the form that it adopts often needs to be removed from its place of origin (the public space) in order to be able to comment upon it. The result of a long-term research on the urban space is presented in an exhibition space, lecture, or gallery space. A very recent example is Marwan Rechmaoui's exhibition at the Sfeir-Semler Gallery<sup>8</sup>. Rechmaoui's work dwells on architectural war monuments by reproducing them

in human scale, but also looks at the history and practice of spatial organisation. In the exhibition, he presents a series of imaginative maps developed in Palestinian refugee camps, where residents were asked to map their living environment. These maps are subjective yet rationalised representations of their living space. Throughout his career, which began with Ashkal Alwan's public art projects, Rechmaoui developed a plastic language that singularly mires Beirut's noisy urban history. (figure 4) This urban history and its artistic processing, however, are presented outside the urban space, often in art spaces. It is legitimate to question such separation. What then

figure 4

Marwan Rechmaoui, "Spectre (The Yacoubian Building, Beirut)", non-shrinking grout, aluminium, glass, fabric, 2006.

figure 5

*Home Works V*, Monot Theatre, Beirut, 2010. Photo: Hussam Mchaimch

is the role of artistic research in creating new publics and how do these publics relate to the city?

I would like to go back to the example of Ashkal Alwan to illustrate a tentative answer. Following its initial focus on urban space and the will to re-appropriate a war-torn city. Ashkal Alwan launched its first *Home Works* forum in 2002<sup>9</sup>. (figure 5) Described as an interdisciplinary forum for cultural practice, *Home Works* became one of the most attended international rendezvous for contemporary art in the region. Christine Tohme, the organisation's co-founder and chief curator, described her motivations behind the forum's first edition as stemming from various needs to create "a place to discuss," thereby possibly and metaphorically displacing the city's public places to the agora of the theatre and the formation of a renewed public sphere. Urban artistic research becomes a means to create a public sphere where Beirut can be challenged, re-imagined, and contended, but it also runs the risk of creating a public exclusive to the art world. The discourses produced by artists on contemporary urban conditions often circulate within a restricted group of artists, cultural practitioners, and the like.

On the other hand, public art – as it is being developed today – has become a promotional tool serving private interests. The latest example to date is Solidere's public art commission<sup>10</sup> to renowned contemporary artists. The last commission was a large-scale *Slithouse* by artist Arne Quinze installed in the renewed Beirut souk complex. Such large-scale public art projects want to incorporate the notion of the public, within what was first seen as an entirely private project. The withdrawal of art from

the streets can also be read as the withdrawal of the ability to intervene in a space that is not only politically divided, but also increasingly militarised. The 2006 war triggered an unexampled policing of public spaces; cameras were banned from all places, at all times. Today the situation is bridled, yet "public space" is structured around religious and sectarian divides.

The core question in public art, artistic research, and urban intervention is in fact the question of the public. How is the "public" apprehended differently? What can ultimately expand the notion of a participating public?

The challenge for artistic research is the gap often presented between concepts and their implementation. What might be needed are interventions that intersect, and debates that address more closely the relationship between the auditorium and the field (the city), thereby redefining and challenging the borders of both the city and the agora, and the meaning of public space and the public sphere more broadly.



- 1 The "14th of March" party is associated with the Beirut Central District area, owned for the most part by its former leader, Saad Harriri, the son of the assassinated Prime Minister, Rafic Hariri. Whereas the southern suburbs are essentially linked with the opposition party "8th of March", led by the Hezbollah. In fact, during the 2006 war, the southern suburbs suffered the most Israeli attacks on Lebanon.
- 2 <http://www.ashkalalwan.org>.
- 3 <http://www.arteeast.org/content/files/userfiles/file/Sanayeh%20Project.pdf>.
- 4 My transcription of a televised reportage on the Sanayeh Project, Future Television, 1995.
- 5 [http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2009/kaelen\\_wilson\\_goldie/images/01\\_marwan\\_rechmaoui](http://universes-in-universe.org/eng/nafas/articles/2009/kaelen_wilson_goldie/images/01_marwan_rechmaoui).
- 6 <http://www.zicohouse.org/>.
- 7 Tony Chakar is an architect, born in Beirut in 1968. His works include: "A Retroactive Monument for a Chimerical City", Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (1999); "All That is Solid Melts Into Air", Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2000); "Four Cotton Underwear for Tony", Ashkal Alwan, TownHouse Gallery, Cairo, also shown in

- Barcelona (Tapiés Foundation) and Rotterdam (Witte de With) as part of Contemporary Arab Representations, a project curated by Catherine David (2001–2002); "Rouwaysset, a Modern Vernacular" (With Naji Assi): Contemporary Arab Representations, the Sharjah Biennial and Sao Paulo, S.A. (2001–2003); "Beirut, the Impossible Portrait", The Venice Biennial (2003); "The Eyeless Map", Ashkal Alwan, Beirut (2003); "We Can Make Rain But No One Came To Ask" (with Walid Raad), Frankfurt (2003); "My Neck Is Thinner Than a Hair", a lecture/performance with the Atlas Group (Walid Raad and Bilal Khbeiz), shown in Beirut, Brussels, Paris, Berlin, London, Basel, and Singapore (2004). He also contributes to Al Mulhaq (Annahar's cultural supplement) and other European art magazines, and teaches History of Art and History of Architecture at the Académie Libanaise des Beaux arts (ALBA), Beirut.
- 8 The exhibition runs from 26 November 2011 until 24 March 2012.
- 9 <http://www.ashkalalwan.org/homeworks.aspx>.
- 10 <http://www.solidere.com/project/infra.html>.

# COMMENTARIES

## THE DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLE EMBODIED BY ART COMPETITIONS

by *Elfriede Müller and Martin Schönfeld*

### ORIENTATION

Art and democracy are often purported to be incompatible – this claim is as wrong as the notion that art has nothing to do with skill and can only issue from the lonely and misunderstood genius. At the same time, however, art today is wholeheartedly immersed in social debate and controversy. Today's artists have increasingly become political protagonists whose works offer ideas of creating a more just society, and who advocate social participation by, for instance, defending or recapturing the public realm. The field of art in public space stands at the centre of social struggle for democracy and public participation, yet it is a realm which, while under pressure from free-market forces, is also only indirectly subject to their influence – indirectly, since the issue is whether money is being invested in the publicly commissioned building projects on which “percentage for art” programmes largely depend. Only then can the principle of “percentage for art” come into effect. Art in the urban environment, on the other hand, frequently transpires – for political reasons – on (often) already existing sites of activity and as a result of public, civic, or political pressure. The locations designated for such projects are mostly publicly owned; they come under threat from market pressures if they are due to be privatised and subordinated to city marketing strategies.

Hence, “art in public space” – which as an umbrella concept comprises both project-related “percentage for art” schemes and initiatives for installing art in urban space that are independent of public construction works – constitutes as such an instrument of arts policy pursued by the state and society in general. “Percentage for art” schemes should be viewed as an emblem that represents something, shaping the identity of a place and exerting an impact both on the local community and society at large. Art in public space not only generates an everyday confrontation of an aesthetic nature but also has a political, social, or historical background. This, not least of all, is why it is usually a product of the processes of democratic negotiation in which individual users and concerned parties are also given a say.

Art in public space has now become an established fact in present-day Europe. From Madrid to Moscow, from northern Norway to Sicily, it plays a not insignificant role in the design of buildings, squares, streets, and municipal parks, whether in cities, towns, or suburbs, at airports or railway stations. Its purpose is to lend prominence to individual buildings, to structure urban surroundings, and stimulate cultural debate about specific sites, institutions, and the people who use them.

In many countries in Europe, art in public space schemes are based on traditional “art for architecture” policies financed by percentage shares of public building projects (“percentage for art”). Measures of this kind exist in numerous countries, for example Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Holland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Espe-

cially since the 1990s, in many countries established “percentage for art” programmes have evolved and expanded into art in public space, as has happened in Austria, Holland, and Sweden. This shift has opened up new possibilities for the targeted site-specific design of public space.

By the 1980s at the latest, public art projects in the form of temporary artistic actions had become an integral part of special cultural programmes, such as those funded in relation to the European Capital of Culture. Public art projects are intended to stimulate debate about culture, art, and the city. In this respect, art in public space is also becoming part of the growing festivalisation of urban culture and public event culture of recent years. Today, art in public space in Europe is associated with art education, architecture, and urban planning. It is linked to political representation, as channelled through art and culture, to public debates about identity, and to strategies for marketing public space.

Since the 1990s, the term “art in public space” has come to serve as an umbrella concept defining both art that is tied to specific measures in conjunction with new construction work in the realms of building construction and civil engineering, landscaping, or horticultural projects. The term also defines art that is unrelated to any particular projects, art that has come about through pressure from campaign groups, individuals, and also institutions. Art in public space is now encountered in both permanent and temporary forms.

The way in which public art comes about and whether it is the product of democratic procedures is a fun-

damental issue that sheds light on the social conditions surrounding its development. In Germany, as a federally configured state, publicly commissioned art is supposed to be selected by means of competitions. The specific criteria governing competitions differ from one *Bundesland* to the next, and they have only really taken shape over the last 30 years. In Berlin up till the late 1970s, commissions for building-related public art projects were commonly awarded directly, without any form of competition, either by the buildings administration departments, who were closely affiliated with certain artists, or by the architects themselves. There were frequent cases of inappropriate use when, for instance, funds for public art were invested in new signage systems inside buildings or in interior furnishings. Protests voiced against such misuse by various artists' organisations – in Berlin, the BBK (Berufsverband Bildender Künstler, the Professional Association of Visual Artists Berlin) – succeeded in affecting change: In 1979 new rules stipulating how art for architecture and art in urban space projects are to be awarded were adopted in the official body of regulations governing public building works in the state of Berlin. These guidelines first established the required consultation structures, means of assessing rates for artistic work, and a framework for holding competitions.

On this basis, numerous works of art have been created in Berlin that have gone on to achieve worldwide acclaim. In the GDR, curatorial projects were generally commissioned by the country's association of professional artists, the VBK (Verband Bildender Künstler, German artists' association). There was just one open competition held in 1988 by the municipal authorities to select a work for Koppenplatz square

in the Berlin-Mitte district. The theme of the competition, which was won by Karl Biedermann with a bronze sculpture titled “*Der verlassene Raum*” (“The Deserted Room”) was “Remembering the impact made by Berlin’s Jewish citizens.”

Consequently, over the past 20 years, Berlin has evolved into a major international centre for contemporary public art. Yet, Berlin also offers particularly clear evidence of the problems currently facing art in public space.

#### COMPETITION AS A PRINCIPLE OF DEBATE FOR PUBLIC ART

Competition between different suppliers is a basic principle of the market economy. Competition and the competitive idea are its central categories. But it is also a touchstone for neoliberal thinking, which, starting primarily in Great Britain under Margaret Thatcher’s conservative government, began expanding its influence from the 1970s onwards. In the meantime, it has spread beyond the European Community and become entrenched in many other countries, contributing to the deregulation of key sections of public infrastructure – as witnessed in the privatisation of the energy and water industries, of telecommunications, postal services, and public transport. Embraced as a purely economic instrument, the competitive idea has led to the downsizing of social services, to a proliferation of unprotected working conditions, and to a fall in quality and prices, which has been devastatingly evident in extensive wage dumping, thereby exerting destructive impacts on societies the world over.

Against this background, when it comes to art and

art in public space, it might thus seem surprising that the very principle of competition, of all things, has proved to be such an important instrument in establishing a culture of public art, in promoting public debate about art and equal opportunities among artists of different styles, work methods, and generations, but also in maintaining quality and innovation, irrespective of all strategies of commercial exploitation. But wherever competition in art is not regarded simply as a dumping mechanism but is practised as a means of dialogue about art – concerned not with achieving the cheapest results, but attracting the freshest and most fertile ideas and solutions – it ends up actually producing something capable of withstanding neoliberal tendencies, offering an extraordinary potential for democratic society. When state-funded commissions are to be awarded, official guidelines oblige public authorities to hold competitions. Public commissions generally call for at least three tenders, of which the bid offering the best service at the lowest price usually proves successful. This is the principle on which roads are constructed, pavements repaired, crèches built, and cables laid.

By contrast, when it comes to selecting and commissioning artistic services for art in public space or for “percentage for art” projects, for instance, price alone cannot be the defining factor. Other criteria are involved, such as the most evident solution to a particular task or the suitability and site-specific qualities of a response to spatial or social conditions. Such criteria cannot on the whole be measured in sums of money. Since the quality of commissioned artistic services is not quantifiable in numeric terms, additional aesthetic expertise is required in order to

differentiate between various artistic tenders. This makes it essential to maintain transparency during all stages of an organised competition so as to preempt any suspicion of undue privilege or bias – as had been voiced, not unjustifiably, on many previous occasions – and preclude such misgivings from the outset. By applying competition guidelines to the procedures for commissioning public art, the selection process has truly become considerably more objective. Competition guidelines produce the required transparency, making it easier to comprehend how the panel reached its decision and easier to follow the criteria and arguments on which its recommendation was based.

Art competitions are conducted above all by public authorities. On the whole, private institutions balk at the additional expense incurred by organising open competitions and tend instead to directly commission artists or purchase already existing works. But unlike placing direct orders, art competitions offer an opportunity to select from different designs or proposals and promote the development of solutions perfectly matched to singular spatial or social situations. In this respect, competitions are particularly suited to meeting demands of site-specificity; they call for “custom-made” solutions rather than prefabricated artistic entities or wholesale merchandise. Competitions foster individual and innovative input and not a regurgitation of already existing and established products. By stimulating a broader preoccupation with issues and tasks, competitions epitomise the discursive principle in visual art. As such, they constitute a collaborative work process involving the initiator of the competition, the jury, the representatives of various institutions (“users”),

and finally the artists in a shared working relationship. Above all, for the artists themselves, competitions preserve artistic integrity vis-à-vis the demands of clients and protect artistic autonomy.

#### QUALITY CRITERIA FOR COMPETITIONS

Procedural rules for competitions in the architectural realm have been established for much longer. Hence architecture can already boast of a canon of binding guidelines prescribing how competitions should be conducted. Where such guidelines for art competitions have been lacking, they have often simply “borrowed” the rules guiding architectural competitions. This practice has gradually given rise to new sets of rules for art competitions too. The latest instance of this in Germany was in 2008 with the introduction of the new “Richtlinien für Planungswettbewerbe” (RPW 2008 – Guidelines for Planning Competitions 2008) issued by the Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Development, which states that “these guidelines can also be applied to competitions in the realm of art and design” (RPW 2008, p. 5).

On this basis we can name certain quality criteria that, in general terms, should always be taken into account in competitions for art in public space:

- a detailed call for tenders that names the organisers and all competition participants, explains submission requirements, and offers an extensive definition of the task;
- an independent panel whose members offer technical expertise and specialist competence, in which art-specialist jurors have an overall majority;
- neutral forms of competition organisation and execution that uphold the principle of

Introductory colloquium with participating artists at the start of an art competition for a “percentage for art” project. Photo: Martin Schönfeld

objectivity and guarantee that all competition entries (designs) will be treated equally and discussed in depth;

- explicit reference by the competition to the prevailing regulations (RPW<sub>2008</sub> and “Leitfaden Kunst am Bau”/Guidelines for Public Art).

A crucial benchmark for the quality of any competition procedure is the panel discussion. Comprehensive debate about the available artistic proposals is an essential aspect of the jury’s work. Discussion also acts as an opinion-forming factor within the jury: While a dialogue of opinions and articulated reflection takes place, a selection of the best designs gradually emerges, arguments are sharpened, the pros and cons of each design acquire clearer definition, and the basis for a recommendation is collectively established to implement what is considered the most suitable design. The task of moderating this crucial

panel discussion lies in the hands of the jury chairperson or president who is responsible for mediating between the various aesthetic positions, arousing interest for concepts and approaches that still appear out of the ordinary and representing artistic aspects to other members of the panel.

#### EQUAL OPPORTUNITY – OPEN AND LIMITED COMPETITIONS

In art, competitions stand for the basic principle of equal opportunity. Depending on the importance of the artistic task and the magnitude of the commission, competitions are open or limited (or by invitation only). In the case of limited competitions, a selected circle of artists is invited to submit a design, for which they receive a fixed remuneration. By contrast, open competitions are, in principle, open to any professional artist to participate. Here, it is not about candidates being young or old, male or female, traditional or avant-garde, but simply about

the best solution for a specific set task – which, in theory, can be delivered by any professional artist who intensively explores the theme in question. Each proposal has a right to be studied, understood and assessed. (figures 1 and 2)

Open competitions ought to be held regularly as they offer the appropriate conditions and scope for developing innovative artistic forms and artistic approaches. In general, while limited competitions only have a single stage, open competitions consist of two stages. In the first stage, there is a call for ideas, and from the submissions a number of artists are chosen who are asked to produce more detailed proposals for the second stage of the competition, for which they receive remuneration. Artists submitting proposals for the first phase of the competition receive no remuneration. Such a procedure entails considerable administrative and formal effort. Conducting art competitions according to prevailing guidelines does indeed give rise to considerable work, since these stipulate a clearly formulated and properly observed procedure, a thorough preliminary examination of all submitted entries, and a rigorous panel session that undertakes a scrupulous study of all submitted proposals.

Organising a competition along these lines can quickly incur operational costs of 50,000 euro or more. The greater the number of proposals submitted, the higher the cost. Yet, the less often open competitions of this kind are held, the higher the number of proposals submitted for the few remaining competitions will grow, in turn causing organisational costs to rise even further. Such expense, however, is well-invested money: A properly organised com-

petition process guarantees equal opportunities and is a prerequisite for transparency. Just as democracy with its parliaments and periodic elections costs money, holding a competition comes at a price too. To cut back democratic procedures would be regressive and inevitably lead to cronyism and contract monopolies – in other words, the opposite of public art funding.

Procedural costs cannot be neutralised. Hence it is, of course, only possible to conduct open competitions when sufficient funding is made available for art. An open competition realistically requires funds of 100,000 euro and upwards. The targeted task is a key criterion in the decision whether the envisaged competition should be open or limited. If the objective, say, is simply about creating something artistic for a particular spot in a particular foyer, this is setting too low a demand on the potential of an open competition. But where the task and the artistic field of work require a more ambitious scope, open competitions are capable of achieving far more. This applies particularly to idea competitions seeking to attract outstanding creative input and impulses. Within the framework of an open competition, assignments with a strong thematic orientation also offer an opportunity to highlight a theme from widely varying perspectives and achieve unanticipated forms of representation. Thus, over the last few decades open competitions have proved a success, especially when they involve art projects that address the politics of memory. They have led to innovative forms and artistic strategies that, in many cases, have contributed to controversial and differentiated public debates on the issue of collective memory.



### THE ROLE OF THE JURY

In limited (or invited) and open art competitions, the jury plays a decisive role. Just as public art is not intended for specialists and museums but is about art for the general public – or at least for sections of the public from very varied social spheres – the composition of juries adjudicating these competitions also reflects social parity. Juries for art competitions are arenas of social debate: They assemble people around a table whose paths would seldom cross in their professional lives and offer training in democratic negotiation. Specialist jurors (professional prize judges, artists, and art experts) are allotted one vote more than panel members from a non-artistic background (representatives of the commissioning sponsor, users, administrative officials). Jurors must be sure of their views, give other jury members insights into their special field of experience, and be open for discussion. Representatives of professional organisations should always be consulted for further expert advice as a means of fulfilling the principle of equal opportunity in competition proceedings. (figures 3 and 4)

An insufficiently qualified decision-making process or jury composition carries the risk of seeking consensus rather than fostering true debate and can result in the selection of a mediocre work of art. This occurs when the interests of the sponsor and the users predominate over artistic criteria – evidence possibly that the jurors from the field of art do not have a voting majority. Consequently, the outcome of a competition always reflects the composition of the panel and the structural conditions that allow the panel to perform qualified work. The sheer intensity of the work facing a jury in an art competition is not

suited to the kind of “committee hopping” practised by political policymakers. That kind of constant back and forth by members of a panel would undermine the continuity of discussion and work within a panel. Particularly in light of the high number of submitted proposals, panel members should also have the opportunity to study each entry individually – and in detail – prior to a jury session. This too would enable entries to be treated with greater equity. In limited competitions, panel sessions last at least half a working day, whereas in open competitions – depending on the number of entries – jury meetings can take up to several days.

The willingness of artists to participate in competitions depends on a number of factors. Among these are the objectivity of the competition process, the complexity of the assignment, the scope of the work or services required, the social significance and prominence of the project and its commissioning sponsor, and – above all – the prospective level of funding involved, in other words, the potential earnings for the artist. Clearly, the further afield a competition is advertised, the greater the number of applicants. When, for instance, a call for proposals for concepts about commemoration and remembrance in Berlin’s Bayerisches Viertel district was publicly announced in 1991, there were 96 entries; by contrast, the competition held to design a memorial to the murdered Jews in Europe in 1994/1995 attracted 528 submissions. Similarly, the open “Kunst am Bau” competitions held to choose public art for the Federal Ministry of Economics (in 2000) and the Federal Ministry of Justice (in 2001) witnessed 445 and 427 submissions respectively – a far broader range of participants than a more regionally defined assignment

figure 3

A jury meeting – report of the preliminary review.  
Photo: Martin Schönfeld

would attract. In a competition (in 2010) advertised Europe-wide for proposals for a public memorial in Berlin dedicated to Georg Elser, to commemorate his assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler, 207 artists submitted concepts. On the other hand, there were “only” 59 submissions for the open competition to devise “a concept for the fountain site on the Anton-Saefkow-Platz” in 2005 in the Berlin district of Lichtenberg.

Compared to the 5,201 proposals submitted in the competition for a concept for the World Trade Center memorial in New York, the numbers of Berlin participants are very modest. In terms of topicality and international prestige, the New York competition is, admittedly, impossible to surpass. As this New York example shows, it is possible for selection juries to handle even inordinately large numbers of submissions. To assess the 5,201 proposals for a Ground Zero memorial, the jury gave



figure 4

Artists explaining their designs.  
Photo: Martin Schönfeld

itself an entire week: Given the right organisational framework, even competitions on this kind of scale can be handled.

### COMPETITIONS AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Generally, competitions are not conducted as public events. In particular, crucial jury sessions are held in *camera* (i.e., in private) and panel members are required to treat jury discussions with confidentiality. (figure 5)

It is essential that in each competition, the power of decision be reserved to the competently and legitimately appointed jury. Works of art are seldom chosen by public ballot or referendum, as these are quickly swayed by simplistic populism. In some cases, prevailing attitudes within relevant sectors of the public are gauged either before or after the jury session. Besides, given how often in German history public sentiment (*das gesunde Volksempfinden*) has been



instrumentalised to denigrate or persecute modern art and the artistic avant-garde, the use of polls of popular opinion or among politicians to decide on works of art should be viewed with extreme caution.

Nonetheless, public interest can be incorporated in a variety of ways and already in the run-up to a competition. For instance, a competition and its objective can be opened to public debate prior to its launch, allowing a topic and its purpose to gain a clearer and more concrete focus. This can be achieved through public events, conferences, and debates. Once proposals have been submitted, they can then be publicly exhibited and discussed (on condition that this will not jeopardise key exhibition rules such as participants' anonymity). Besides, additional explanations or commentaries by the artists are only possible if competition procedures do not insist on complete anonymity. Such a framework enables interested members of the public to voice their views and the public response to be introduced as supplementary, advisory evidence at a jury meeting.

Every competition procedure should finish with a public exhibition and documentation of the various proposals, both as a means of keeping the public informed and of publicly voicing acknowledgement for the extensive artistic input into the results fostered by the competition.

A broad-based involvement of public interest of this kind can be incorporated into the competition process, whether the competition is open or limited / by invitation only, and is particularly suited to situations and targets that are still relatively "open". But where

everything has been decided prior to the competition, there is no longer anything an interested public can contribute or influence, so all it can do is give the nod!

#### ONE EXAMPLE OF COMPETITION PROCEDURE: THE ART COMPETITION FOR A MEMORIAL TO JOHANN GEORG ELSE

A competition procedure describes a collaborative work process that – depending on the project's thematic complexity and possible structural openness – might be scheduled to run for just a brief term or for a longer period of time, sometimes even lasting several years. A work process of this nature might comprise the following phases:

- 1 initiation and thematic and conceptual preparation (ascertaining the scope of the task and the possible thematic framework, maybe also by means of public hearings);
- 2 concrete preparations for the competition (deciding on the kind of competition and coordinating the conditions for the competition among all parties involved);
- 3 conducting the competition (public call for entries or invitation of artists to submit proposals; jury recommendation to execute the winning proposal);
- 4 execution of awarded work of art and subsequent documentation, including the publication (exhibition/publication) of all proposals submitted to the competition and the jury's assessments.

A competition procedure of this nature is well illustrated by the example of the open, two-stage competition to design a memorial in Berlin in honour of Johann Georg Elser.

figure 5

A jury meeting. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



figure 6

Discussion about the memorial project for Georg Elser at the Akademie der Künste in Berlin, 22 October 2008. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



In 2006/2007 the author Rolf Hochhuth published an appeal calling for a memorial to be built in Berlin in honour of the resistance fighter Johann Georg Elser (1903–1945) for his attempted assassination of Adolf Hitler in the Bürgerbräukeller in Munich on 8 November 1939. The German Resistance Memorial Center adopted the writer's proposal and advocated locating the memorial on the site of Hitler's Neue Reichskanzlei on the Wilhelmstraße. For the memorial, the kind of design Rolf Hochhuth (born in 1931) had in mind was a bust depicting Elser.

Rolf Hochhuth's initiative became a matter of controversial public debate, especially in the print media. Subsequently, in February 2008, it received a broad show of support in the cultural affairs committee of Berlin's State Parliament, which was followed in March that year by a vote in the Berlin

Parliament in favour of starting proceedings for an art competition to design a memorial in honour of Johann Georg Elser.

The relevant advisory committee for art in the municipal government – a commission of experts that advises the senate administration of the State of Berlin on all matters related to art and architecture and on art in public space – undertook a review of the issue, concluding that further, more detailed study of the commemorative proposal was required. (figure 6)

This was followed, on 22 October 2008, by a specialist colloquium held jointly by Berlin's Akademie der Künste and the German Resistance Memorial Center in preparation for an art competition. The colloquium discussed fundamental issues related



figure 7

Ulrich Klages, “Memorial for Georg Elser”, pavement inscription, Berlin, 2011.  
Photo: Martin Schönfeld

to commemorating resistance against the Nazi regime and examined possible locations where such a memorial could be erected. It also cast critical light on the commemorative project in terms of the problematic construction of heroic images. The event and the attendant debates also involved the active participation of artists, who joined historians, urban planners, architects, and art historians in a shared dialogue about the projected memorial concept.

In its appraisal of the colloquium at its meeting on 15 July 2009, the senate advisory committee for art spoke out in favour of holding an open, Europe-wide, two-stage competition. The competition was



figure 8

Ulrich Klages, “Memorial for Georg Elser”, Berlin 2011. Photo: Martin Schönfeld

launched in February 2010 with a public call for proposals. At the first jury meeting in mid-June 2010, a shortlist of 12 proposals was selected from altogether 207 submitted concepts; in the second competition stage, the chosen artists were asked to flesh out their proposals into a more concrete form. The result of the second jury meeting in mid-October 2010 was a recommendation in favour of a design submitted by the Berlin sculptor Ulrich Klages – a monumental free-standing silhouette of Elser’s profile to be erected on the historic junction of Wilhelmstraße and Vossstraße and which was inaugurated in November 2011. (figures 7 and 8)

The majority of jury members were specialists from an art context. The jury also included the project’s initiator, Rolf Hochhuth, who back in the late 1960s was one of the first authors in Germany to examine the life of Johann Georg Elser. As the actual commissioning sponsor and organiser of the competition, the state bodies were represented on the administrative side of the panel by the state secretary for culture, the councillor for urban development of Berlin’s Mitte district, and a delegate from the department for urban development in the Berlin Senate. By endorsing the jury’s recommendation of the winning proposal, the political establishment also signalled its commitment to the result.

The competition process concluded with a public exhibition of all 207 submitted proposals. (figure 9) A special publication documenting the entire project and the competition is also scheduled to follow. Ultimately, the project will have lasted for a period of four years.

### A FORM OF ART FUNDING

As such, competitions constitute the most suitable procedure for generating art in public space; open competitions are just one variant of this model. Before conducting a competition, commissioning sponsors should consider whether an open competition is the most appropriate solution or whether a limited competition (inviting selected artists) might not in fact be preferable.

Besides their objective procedural form, open competitions also presuppose formal and thematic openness in their projected assignment and artistic orientation. To seek the creation of a pictorial, realistic, or recognisable work of portraiture by means of an open competition would be a waste of its creative potential. An open competition only makes sense where artistic innovation is desired, as well as being possible.

Above all, open and limited competitions constitute

a particular form of art funding and, on occasions, offer a means of supporting as yet undiscovered talent. Open competitions, especially, give younger and not yet established artists an opportunity to prove themselves, to consolidate their skills, and enhance their profile. In view of the particular role played by open competitions in stimulating and supporting art and young artistic talent, they should be considered an outstanding instrument of public cultural policy. Progressive cultural policies ought to remain closely affiliated to the model of the open competition. Accordingly, in the realm of public art it would be desirable to achieve a broader mixture of competition forms. Particularly when it comes to undertaking commemorative projects, open competitions should always be taken into consideration since they are always embedded in a socio-cultural context. What else, after all, could better contribute to this kind of public debate than an open competition with a subsequent exhibition of the submitted proposals and controversial discussion of the result?



figure 9

Exhibition of the competition designs for a memorial for Georg Elser, Berlin, October 2010. Photo: Martin Schönfeld

figure 10

Fritz Balthaus, "Ross und Reiter" ("Horse and Rider"), installation, 2010. Photo: Martin Schönfeld



### PERSPECTIVES

By and large, parliamentary democracy has become the established political system in Europe today. Pluralism, freedom, and market economy prevail. Within this political framework, art should be kept apart from political instrumentalisation and free from authoritarian representational tasks.

- To this end, it is necessary to consolidate the idea of competition on a European and international level.
- To this end, "percentage for art" projects and art in public space need to be treated as two components of a necessary public culture of art within society.
- To this end, with its democratic potential

it would make sense to further consolidate art in public space, since this form of art serves as a constant measure of a society's openness and democratic capacity. In this respect, art in public space acts as an important factor within democratic culture.

- Current attempts to yoke public art to any kind of political and economic agenda pose a serious test for art in general and for art in public space. For this reason, public culture and public art must constantly reassert their autonomy and claim their independence. This is the major challenge presently facing artists whose work contributes to culture in the public realm.

## GRASPING CONTEXTS

by *Susanne Bosch*

The texts in this publication are written from several different points of view – those of artists, architects, art historians, art teachers, curators, and, lastly, members of staff at the Büro für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum Berlin (Office for Art in the Public Space, Berlin), who mediate, support, and advise on projects, set up contacts as well as handle public relations and lobbying. Citing concrete examples, the authors all describe how public art takes place in their particular context, how it is structured, how groups of artists, artists' initiatives, and artist-run spaces work, and how curated projects and competitions are designed. The contexts and standpoints could not be more diverse: towns and cities in Western Europe such as Kiel, Berlin, and Lisbon, but also villages in eastern Germany, border regions in the Palestinian West Bank, regions of conflict like Northern Ireland and Beirut, and the cultural megametropolis Istanbul.

I have been invited to contribute with my reflections, from an artist's perspective on the authors' contributions and the examples described in them, focussing particularly on projects in order to consider in what ways they are different or similar, and to suggest possible reasons for these differences and similarities.

## WHAT INFORMS THIS TEXT?

Meeting in Belfast in April 2011, we – the authors – decided that in our texts we would discuss in-depth

examples of local art projects in the public realm, and write about the artists themselves and the institutions involved.

We discussed what significance art in the public realm can have for society and for public life, what function art can fulfil in different kinds of locations, and what features are shared by art projects in the public realm in different locations. We anticipated that common themes such as conflict, normalisation, the culture of memory, history, urban situations, new media, and public life would come up in all our texts.

It is clear from the submitted texts that most of the authors were concerned with giving a full and nuanced description of the respective locational context, while offering a generally brief account of a variety of contemporary works and events. I will therefore not attempt here to make comparisons between individual projects, but will instead consider how the authors present the locations of the art projects and how they describe the various local contexts.

Jürgen Bock begins by pointing out that in Lisbon there is not much art in public space. His detailed historical account shows the direct connection between Portugal's history as a colonial power and present-day questions relating to globalisation. He gives an account of the architectural character of Lisbon, shaped on the one hand by buildings dating back to feudal times and on the other by the "Estado Novo" of António de Oliveira Salazar (1932–1968), the architecture of which "eloquently embodies the ideology – and thus represents the aesthetic – of the

Portuguese fascist regime."<sup>1</sup>

He describes how two relatively major art projects in public space were realised in 1996 (Projecto Almirante Reis) and 1998 (World Fair) with the participation of artists from Portugal and abroad. His text provides two detailed descriptions of a project by Allan Sekula and one by Susana Mendes Silva, both realised in 2001.

Reporting from Istanbul, Markus Graf begins by noting the art-historical and socio-political differences he sees between the development of art in public space in Turkey and that in Western countries. He discusses in some detail the importance of the emergence of an art scene based on non-commercial, artist-run, or alternative spaces in the 1990s, an art scene which, following three military dictatorships (in 1960, 1971, and 1980), contributed to the democratisation of the relatively new Turkish art scene and the development of greater differentiation within it. In a brief historical outline, Graf describes the emergence of a variety of locations for art – magazines, venues for discussion, art projects, and also a participatory video project realised at the *Istanbul Biennial* in 2007. During the military dictatorship of the 1980s, public life – and with it all socio-political activity in the public realm – virtually ceased. Graf tells about three artists whose works were dismantled and removed or who were arrested. He points to art managers and curators as important initiators of art in the public realm and of platforms such as the *Istanbul Biennial*. They played a part in overcoming the conservative attitudes prevalent in Turkish society and feelings of hostility towards contemporary art. Site-specific art was first produced in Istanbul in

the 1990s. This art is often incomprehensible to the local public, which leads to works being rejected and even destroyed. Graf concludes by saying that in relation to the size of Istanbul, art in the public realm holds a marginal position, and that the movement is still in its early stages.

Martin Schönfeld describes 15 art projects in Germany. With the exception of two or three in northern Germany and Munich, all of the projects were carried out in Berlin or in the new federal states. He sees art in the public realm as being directly related to the way democracy is understood in Germany:

*In the public manifestation of democracy in the form of contemporary art, there are three functions that art in the public realm can fulfil. First, it plays a part in the cultural education of the public and in the mediation of contemporary approaches to art and artistic work. Secondly it is a factor in shaping the public realm through public involvement in participatory projects. And thirdly it becomes a mediator of social values through artistically conceived works that are an expression of the public memory of history and of events a society considers especially worthy of being remembered or regards as having exemplary value. A culture of remembrance is a manifestation of the socio-political consensus and represents a state's and a society's view of itself.<sup>2</sup>*

Most of the art projects are funded by a levy imposed on building projects or by state subsidies. Only a few of the projects described were initiated by artists themselves and privately funded.

In their jointly written text, Elfriede Müller and Martin Schönfeld examine the competition structure established in Germany. They see open and closed

competitions as examples of transparency and of the implementation of fundamental democratic ideas through art projects in the public realm.

Tina Sherwell describes art in public space in the occupied regions of the Palestinian West Bank, starting with the territory close to the wall.<sup>3</sup> Graffiti sprayed on the wall prompt her to discuss the historical significance and cultural use of graffiti. She takes a look at the importance of galleries and art institutions in the 1980s and describes various projects: four carried out in the context of the Jerusalem Show, a festival which – organised by the Al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art – has been taking place regularly since 2007; three associated with *The Cities Exhibition*, an event curated by Vera Tamari and Yazid Anani, realised in collaboration with Birzeit University, and held repeatedly in different public spaces since 2008; a public art event in Jericho subsidised by the city's cultural department; and finally, an event in Jifna, where several works of public art were conceived by West Bank artists, both established ones and members of the younger generation. Her text concludes with a discussion of mausoleums and other public forms of remembrance.

Art in public space such as that of the West Bank prompts many questions. On the one hand, the complex, continuously smouldering conflict takes place in physical space, and on the other it relates directly to the public. As a result, every artistic gesture has an immediate connection with this context. Sherwell addresses topics such as the question of visibility and invisibility occasioned by the wall and by the urban policy pursued in Jerusalem as a colonial strategy. In this context, art in the public realm is a cultural strat-

egy of “making visible” and “becoming visible”.

Mirene Arsanios writes about the territorial situation in Beirut, citing by way of illustration four large-scale projects of the Lebanese Association for Plastic Arts, Ahskal Alwan. She moreover describes two works of art, a gallery exhibition, and major private commissions granted to artists by Beirut construction companies. She draws attention to an artist-writer and an art scene that both address the issue of the public realm in research and illuminate the subject in exhibitions and discussions.

Arsanio's text also shows how a public space that can be seen as neither neutral nor free from political interests challenges an intellectual and reflective art scene to invent in it forms of belonging and involvement. However, such an undertaking is not easy in a situation where there is no central political authority and where at any moment power can manifest itself in unpredictable ways.

My own contribution presents six projects; names several project spaces, initiatives, and magazines launched by artists themselves; and describes a number of occurrences and events. What emerges clearly is the interlinked nature of the various cultural initiatives. I likewise begin by describing public space in Northern Ireland in its historical, social, cultural, and political context. My decision to concentrate on ephemeral projects initiated by artists themselves was based on the observation that in Northern Ireland there are strong, well- (and independently) developed forms of expression. They receive little support from local institutions, or are only marginally embedded in the public context. It

is precisely these autonomous practices that, in my view, represent the seeds of a transformation – from an ingrained social attitude of fear, distrust, and caution in the face of anything unfamiliar to the development of “local and global human communities characterized by respect, dignity, fairness, cooperation, and nonviolent resolution of conflict.”<sup>4</sup>

All of the authors introduce works that correspond to the three definitions of art given by Miwon Kwon: art in the public realm, art as the public realm, and art in the public interest.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore possible to find similarities in the texts. I discuss first and foremost those similarities, but also the differences the texts reveal. I focus on the generally detailed descriptions of places, contexts, and situations.

#### SIMILARITY (1)

WHO MAKES ART HERE?

– *being embedded versus being out of place* –

Art, that is specific to a place is not necessarily produced by artists residing in that place. Many travel to a place for the first time and then develop their artistic work there. In this regard, these texts present two possible situations for artists: that of the resident and that of the nomadic artist. In her book *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Miwon Kwon writes: “The increasing institutional interest in current site-oriented practices that mobilize the site as a discursive narrative is demanding an intensive physical mobilization of the artist to create works in various cities throughout the cosmopolitan art world.”<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, there is the idea of the artist embedded in the local context, the artists whom the art historian Lucy Lippard describes as someone who conceives a holistic vision of the place as a kind of humanistic texture. “Inherent in the local is the concept of place – a portion of land/town/cityscape seen from inside, the resonance of a specific location that is known and familiar. (...) British geographer Denis Cosgrove defines landscape as ‘the external world mediated through human subjective experience’.”<sup>7</sup>

Whether artists – in their places of origin or of residence – belong, or whether they tend to be and remain outsiders, is a historically familiar discourse. The modernist view of the artist's role is that of one who stands on the outside. Artists adopt an external perspective or even offer a bird's-eye view. However, if art in the public realm is associated with the desire to create art in, with, and for society, and it is against this background that artists put themselves into the situations that pertain at the location, then the question as to the artist's position is posed anew.

Where does a human being nowadays feel that he or she belongs? What is that person embedded in? Even if someone has been living in a particular town for 10 years, it does not mean that s/he is really embedded there or understands the town from the inside. S/he may have such an understanding of the district in which s/he lives, but even three blocks further on s/he feels as if s/he were in a strange town. As Miwon Kwon puts it: “In other words, the breakdown of spatial experience in both perceptual and cognitive registers – being lost, disoriented, alienated, feeling out of place, and constantly unable to make coherent meaning of our relation to our physical surround-

ings – is the cultural symptom of late capitalism’s political and social reality.”<sup>8</sup>

Looking at the travel schedules of many artists, one must ask whether they are really able to react to a place directly and adequately in a work of art. The lack of depth and quality in their social contacts is simply due to the often very short duration of their stay.

How do they deal with the sense of being out of place? How does it affect their work? Whatever links the artist may forge with the local community, the phenomenon of “feeling out of place” persists. This is a quandary that artists find themselves in and have to cope with. Have artists not been expected, ever since the days of the early 20th-century avant-garde, deliberately to position themselves in such a way as to appear out of place? Is it not essential to question the rightness of what is “in place” and the prevailing image that people have of themselves, in order to change the world? What gives us food for thought today is the global status quo of nomadic movement, usually following the flow of capital that is spreading everywhere. Finding new forms of belonging and involvement must surely be one of the most important elements in site-specific works.<sup>9</sup>

Nomadic artistic positions use methods such as actively seeking exchange with the local inhabitants, daily activities at the location, or temporarily going to live in the place in order to get to know it and thus be more than merely an observer from outside. “Hence, what emerges through the artworks discussed here is an emphasis on experience as a state of flux which acknowledges place as a shifting and

fragmented entity [...]”<sup>10</sup>

An artist, whether a local or one who has come from elsewhere, requires a particular attitude in order to comprehend the context of a place. Guy Debord described this attitude as one of “playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psycho-geographical effects” in which people “drop their usual motives for movements and actions [...] and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters that they find there.”<sup>11</sup>

The descriptions of the places given in the texts show clearly that the more unstable the situation, the greater the need for a complex understanding that can only be acquired through a long association with the place. When local and international artists invest more time, dialogues can be conducted over an extended period. This enables lasting relationships to develop. It becomes possible to obtain knowledge that goes beyond the information sanctioned by official policy. Grant Kester emphasises that this kind of knowledge is more difficult to obtain and that it takes longer to seek it out.<sup>12</sup>

## SIMILARITY (2)

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?

– *the importance of context* –

“Our understanding of site has shifted from a fixed physical location to somewhere or something constituted through social, economic, cultural and political processes.”<sup>13</sup>

The situations and places described in the texts are

very diverse and certainly not interchangeable. As artists working in public, we are nowadays influenced by other disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, literary studies, psychology, history, architecture and town planning, political theory, and philosophy. We find it almost impossible to identify with Daniel Buren’s description of how, at the beginning of his career in the 1970s, it seemed impossible to visualise a work actually on the spot, at its intended location.<sup>14</sup> The work was created in the studio – far removed from the real-life situation.

When we as artists put ourselves into a new situation, our first task is to gain an understanding of it, using whatever means are available to us. This is never simple. It is always complicated. Taking the context into account when creating a work means more than merely grasping the nature of the place or the situation. It means reacting in a context-specific way in and through the artistic work. All of the authors seem to agree that an artistic work needs to be read in a more complex context than that of its situation in the here and now.

A quotation from Roberto Ohrt describes the uncertainty of the situation: “A situation is always unstable, arranged around turning-points, one stage in a series of on-going transformations, a space exposed to the uncertain timing of events, and a time adapting to the irregularities of the terrain.”<sup>15</sup> Doris Koch, who quotes this sentence, writes of the possibility of changing a situation: “In order to come anywhere near assessing or influencing it [the situation], it is essential to observe the factors that operate in and determine the situation.”<sup>16</sup>

This is what I mean by “grasping” the context. At first sight, understanding a context would seem to have something to do with “knowledge” and with methods of acquiring this knowledge. However, it clearly has to do with far more than that, namely with a kind of social intelligence and an inner comprehension of the world in general. That is why I am here using the expression “to grasp” rather than “to understand”. For in its wider sense, the verb “to grasp” means not only physically “to grasp, to take hold” but also “to grasp with one’s mind, to understand”.<sup>17</sup>

Jürgen Bock describes the work of the artist Ângela Ferreira, originally from Mozambique, whose political attitudes were shaped by the brutal conditions under Portuguese colonial rule and by the apartheid system. Her location-specific artistic work in Lisbon bears the stamp of two experiences familiar to her – dealing on the one hand with the existing “game rules” and on the other with breaches of those rules. Tina Sherwell, by contrast, discusses the work of Nida Sinnokrot, who in 2008 installed blue lights in the cracks of the old Jerusalem city wall. This work is based on the viewpoint of and an attitude towards the city held by a Palestinian who finds himself confronted by a (Israeli) policy for Jerusalem that wants to drive him from that city.

All artists decode a place differently, seeing it through their own personal lenses, as it were, and in the light of what is possible for them. No two artists will react to a place in the same way. To work successfully in the public realm, it is of the utmost importance to be aware of one’s own role and to take up a clear position during the creative process.

**SIMILARITY (3)**

WHO ORGANISES THIS ART?  
– *artist-run / institutionally supported* –

All the authors in this book describe places and write about institutions, events, and festivals that are linked with those places. Here “institutions” signifies both organisations that have an institutional basis and organisations and projects initiated by, amongst others, the artists themselves. In addition, local curators and organisers are presented.

The conditions that prompt artists to establish their own organisation always seem to be the same. Speaking from an early 1990s Belfast perspective, Hilary Robinson cites two reasons for such motivation: “The first, positive reason is that a group of artists conceive a collaborative project. [...] The second reason is essentially reactive: individuals coming together to produce events or organizations as the result of an experience of lack [...]. The impetus for setting up organizations is frequently a combination of these two starting-points – a ‘lack’ is perceived and the group feel that they will bring a unique ethos to solving the problem.”<sup>18</sup>

Robinson identifies the various areas of “lack” as lack of space (gallery and exhibition space), lack of discourse (discussions, debates, criticism), and probably also lack of economic support (financing of projects, fees, bursaries). By “artist-run” she means, in this context, that the artists themselves create an infrastructure to supplement the existing (or supply the lacking) infrastructure. She is not suggesting, however, that the deficiencies can be wholly overcome.

Artists also frequently initiate projects themselves when no demand or invitation is forthcoming from an art institution or from curators. To appoint oneself to the task is one way of actively countering this lack of opportunity.

Marcus Graf describes how in Istanbul in recent years there has been a proliferation of artist-run spaces where no commercial interest is involved and where there is often a direct relationship with the local area. Such spaces are an important factor in democratisation. “Often alternative galleries are also starting points for art projects in the public realm. Since, viewed in a historical context, these exhibition spaces have their origins in the anti-museum activities of the 1960s cultural and art scene, they see themselves as anti-elitist and hence nearly always pursue socio-political goals and hope to attract a broad public.”<sup>19</sup> A similar development has been observable in Berlin in the last 20 years.

Martin Schönfeld sees these self-determined initiatives as a further step in the development of artists who, in their projects, pursue their own interests while engaging with the public realm. It also corresponds to a contemporary form of participatory citizenship in Germany. Unused, empty buildings and wasteland are not just abandoned to their fate: instead, wherever possible, their potential is put to short-term use. “The artistic interest in the public realm finds expression in initiatives whose nature is determined by artists themselves. Such initiatives can, for example, involve unconventional forms of interim use, and temporary and time-limited interim use becomes a working principle that is flexible and appropriate to the situation.”<sup>20</sup>

Most art projects in the public realm have some type of contact partner: institutions, clients, curators. They play a significant part, as they often take on a mediating role in the process. Contact partners on site – be they independently initiated alternative spaces or established institutions – can initiate, mediate in, and maintain relationships even when the artists are no longer present. This shows that such contact partners are essential in order to promote art projects in the public realm. Several of the authors, among them Mirene Arsanios, Marcus Graf, and Jürgen Bock, run art spaces themselves so as to be able to launch projects of this kind.

**SIMILARITY (4)**

WHO OWNS THE PUBLIC REALM?  
– *economic factors* –

The descriptions given in the texts of the commercialisation and privatisation of public space are also interesting, and are virtually the same for every city. “With the present crisis in public budgets, the public realm and public spaces are increasingly being privatised and regarded as a financial reserve to be drawn upon in this budgetary emergency. However, this means that the freedom associated with public space is being increasingly restricted and taken away from society.”<sup>21</sup>

Apparently, it is not only the public authorities’ financial troubles that are leading to the privatisation of public space: Taking possession of such space is in the very nature of the prevailing capitalist order.

Mirene Arsanios describes how a private company

is rebuilding the entire centre of Beirut, and what was previously the commercial and social heart of the city is simultaneously being privatised. Because the political situation is so tense, little can be done to challenge the neoliberal agenda, which promotes a state of affairs in which money flows faster and more freely than dialogue. Under these conditions, art – even supposedly public art – is all too often dependent on the private decisions of investors. Art in the public realm that is not commissioned by an investor, that does not wish to serve as decoration to enhance a piece of real estate, is obliged – in the absence of contractual agreements or public subsidies – to work on a temporary basis and use activist methods if it is to exist at all.

**DIFFERENCE (1)**

WHAT INFLUENCE IS EXERTED BY THE  
GENERAL ENVIRONMENT?  
– *the social parameters* –

The fascinating descriptions of the various contexts make clear what a strong influence these contexts have on local artistic activity. The political circumstances shaping the consciousness of a country or region – former or current occupation by foreign powers, a history of being a colonial power, military dictatorship, a military coup, civil war, or a 60-year struggle to come to terms with the country’s role and responsibility in the Second World War – these are decisive factors.

Of these different background circumstances, some are current, some historical, but usually they can be seen to have a direct impact on decision-making

structures and models of financing in and for the particular locality.

When artistic research about public space – a space defined in terms of territorial segmentation – is organised, as it is in Beirut, as a discussion led by specific people and conducted by specialists more or less behind closed doors, this is an expression of the condition of a state and a society.

Not all of the places presented here can be described as democratic spaces. The authors express their doubts about this in at least three or more cases. The spread of the practice of neoliberal privatisation of public urban spaces around the world makes it harder to engage in debate about the prevailing situation. In many places the situation is determined by governments that clearly do not aspire to democracy, or at best are in the process of achieving it. Spaces are predominantly in the private hands of a few, although the people who make use of the spaces are far more numerous and more diverse, and use them at different times for the most varied activities. As an artist, one would like to ask: For whom and to whom does art speak, what subjects can it address, and whose voice does it represent?

It seems relatively simple when we as artists can assume that our activities take place in a democracy. The Dutch artist duo Bik Van der Pol expressed this in a speech at the Creative Time Summit in New York in October 2009 in the following terms:

*Our engagement with the public realm as a fundamental and shared space of a society that calls itself democratic results in works that we often upload with a programme questioning bis-*

*tory, future, the potential of location, community or area of knowledge. While doing this, we regularly bump into questions such as what is the political realm? Who owns it, who is listening and is what we do as artists, as human beings, enough? What about expectations? Do they need to be fulfilled? Or is creating an experience of the lack, the missing, more opportune to activate thinking and feeling?*<sup>22</sup>

In democracies – so it seems – it is relatively easy to act, for they do after all provide a basis that allows the artist to insist on any social, legal, and political position, to voice criticism, or to question the dominant culture while drawing attention to parallel cultures. According to Martin Schönfeld, art in the public realm also provides a framework in which it is possible to argue out conflicts relating to democracy and participation. That is why in Germany, art of this kind has its place in official cultural policy.

The political and legal basis for such art may be different in societies that have a different structure; it may be less firmly embedded and sometimes lack official political support. Markus Graf describes how the Turkish government welcomes a particular kind of art in the public realm as a decorative element and to enhance the public environments, yet publicly vilifies everything else. Whether this means that the role, function, and responsibility of site-specific art in this context are necessarily different is open to question. At any rate, there is a very great difference in the circumstances in which the art is produced.

## DIFFERENCE (2)

WHAT POTENTIAL DO PLACES  
AND SITUATIONS OFFER?  
– the degree of opportunity –

It is probably because of the aforementioned conditions governing the appropriation and use of the public realm by artists that some places have a relatively large amount of activity of this kind, while others offer very limited opportunities. The latter situation is very evident in places like Beirut. Mirene Arsanios describes complex bureaucratic procedures for obtaining permission and realising a project that, in fact, make that realisation almost impossible. This is often the case where many other socio-political activities take place in the public realm.

Since site-specific projects often run over quite a long period, they need infrastructures that make a corresponding length of commitment possible. In places lacking highly developed structures, international involvement accordingly diminishes. It explains why we therefore often know less about the public realm in those places. Dialogue takes place only locally, if at all. Conversely, many organisations and even countries have recognised how, by means of art in the public realm, it is possible to focus international attention on (political) deficiencies. In connection to this, I would like to refer to the Jerusalem Show and the ARTifariti Festival<sup>23</sup> initiated by a Spanish NGO. In a number of Sahrawi refugee camps, this NGO has mounted an art project every year since 2007 that has generated ever-increasing international attention and participation. It is the expressed aim of the NGO to draw attention to the political situation and the human rights abuses in the

western Sahara by means of art events at the relevant locations. In 2012, partial projects from the ARTifariti Festival as well as projects from the West Bank will be presented at Documenta XIII in Kassel.

## CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

All of the contributions offer insights into the various contexts and situations in which art in the public realm is planned and realised. Sometimes the contexts could hardly be more different in nature. Even so, there are some identical phenomena and examples of similar features, despite geographical distances. I have also attempted to show what aspects are strikingly different and what the reasons for those differences might be. The conjecture that common overarching themes would emerge turned out to be only partially justified. In the case of broad concepts such as conflict, the culture of remembrance, history, urban situations, and new media, this was the case; but in matters of detail, I would say that it was only partially correct. A significant work is only created when artists have fully grasped the specifically local, situational, or contextual aspects of a conflict, a history, an urban situation, or a culture of remembrance and are conscious of their own position within it. The approach taken by Allan Sekula in his project *TITANIC's wake* in Lisbon in 2001 illustrates this admirably.

The question remains as to whether the art projects in the public realm in all these different places reveal common features. The question seems significant, particularly given that those creating projects are often artists who work in more than one country. Art in the public realm exists nowadays in the context of architectural and urban design, political repre-

sentation, public discussion of identity, and marketing strategies relating to public space. On this point the curator, author, and researcher Claire Doherty writes: "As cultural experience has become recognized as a primary component of urban regeneration, so the roles of artists have become redefined as mediators, creative thinkers and agitators, leading to increased opportunities for long-term engagement between an artist and a given group of people, design process or situation."<sup>23</sup>

As an artist, I have a strong interest in discussing publicly the toolkit required for this complex work. How are such works created? What provided the impetus for a given work in the public realm? What was the procedure for inviting the artists to produce a work? Is the content of the work more historical, political, or social in nature? What kind of link is there with the particular place? What media are used? Are the distinctive aesthetic features or the character of the work as a process sufficiently pronounced?

Details that make the project or the process transparent for the reader often provide a clear and direct insight into the complexity of artworks in the public realm. Descriptions and questions relating to interactivity, collaboration, responsibility, authorship, sustainability, or the participatory character of such work are helpful for exploring the details. For hidden in the details are topics that are common to all public space projects. These topics are: the application of negotiation and communication strategies; questions about the role of the artist and the role of others taking part in the process; questions about the dynamics of leadership; the time taken in preparation and planning; the use of particular instruments and

skills to enable the project to succeed; the involvement of a number of people in the most diverse roles and relationships; and finally questions relating to the documentation, evaluation, and discursiveness of such projects.

Another complex area is the question as to the communication of artists' experiences in and with public processes. What abilities and what qualifications does one need in order to instigate such processes and successfully perform the roles associated with them? Where do artists learn this? Can this range of skills be taught? In site-specific art in the public realm, how are methods, aims, and objectives geared to one another to achieve the desired effect in that particular setting? The answers to these questions can be found in the details of each of the projects examined.

1 See Jürgen Bock, pp. 127–154.

2 See Martin Schönfeld, pp. 71–96.

3 Sherwell is referring here to the part of the wall erected by the Israeli government (at the Khalandia checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah), which separates Israel from the Palestinian autonomous areas.

4 Jean Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 22.

5 Miwon Kwon, "Für Hamburg: Public Art und Städtischen Identitäten", 1997, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0102/kwon/de> [accessed 8 December 2011].

6 Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), p. 46.

7 Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Sense of Place in a Multicultural Society* (New York: New Press, 1997), p. 11.

8 Miwon Kwon, "The Wrong Place", in: Claire Doherty (ed.), *Contemporary Art: From Studio to Situation* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004), pp. 34–35.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid, p. 10.

11 Claire Doherty, "The New Situationists", in: Doherty, *Contemporary Art*, p. 11. The complete sentence reads: "Though this may not always reveal itself as a process of derive, described by Guy Debord of the Situationist International as 'playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psycho-

geographical effects' in which persons 'drop their usual motives for movements and actions ... and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters that they find there', all artists and collectives here maintain that their status as artists allows them to circumnavigate predictability."

12 See Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), p. 172.

13 Kwon, *One Place after Another*, p. 10.

14 Doherty, *Contemporary Art*, p. 9.

15 Doris Koch, "Über die Verbindung sozialwissenschaftlicher, künstlerischer und partizipativer Praxis in der Forschung", *Journal für Psychologie* 19(2) (2011): p. 10.

16 Ibid., p. 10.

17 See "Autorenkollektiv des Zentralinstituts für Sprachwissenschaft der Akademie der Wissenschaften der DDR unter der Leitung von Wolfgang Pfeifer", in *Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989).

18 Hilary Robinson, "Artist Run", *Circa* 66 (Winter 1993): pp. 41–43.

19 See Markus Graf, pp. 97–126.

20 See Martin Schönfeld, pp. 71–96.

21 See Martin Schönfeld, pp. 71–96.

22 The video can be viewed at: <http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2010/summit/WP/2010/09/03/bik-van-der-pol/>.

23 Doherty, *Contemporary Art*, p. 10.

## BIOGRAPHIES

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**JÜRGEN BOCK** works as a curator, publisher, and art theorist. His curatorships have included the *Project Room* at the Centro Cultural de Belém in Lisbon in 2000/2001 (Eleanor Antin, Harun Farocki, Renée Green, and Allan Sekula among others), and the 2003 Maia Biennial and the German participation in the 2005 Triennial of India in New Delhi (Andreas Siekmann). In 2007 he curated the *Portuguese Pavilion* at the 52nd Venice Biennial (Ángela Ferreira).

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**MARTIN SCHÖNFELD** is an art historian who was born in Berlin in 1963. He studied art history and sociology in Heidelberg, Bonn, and Berlin. Since 2000 he has been a member of the project team of the Büro für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum, Kulturwerk GmbH, bbk Berlin. He co-edits the specialist journal *kunst-stadt/stadt-kunst*. He has published various works on the relationship between art and the public domain and on the culture of remembrance in Berlin. Among other things, he co-authored the book *Kunst in der Grosssiedlung* (2008) and published documentation relating to commemorative plaques in Berlin.

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*Rainer W. Ernst / Anke Müffelmann (editors)*  
 thinking the city – acting the city  
 art in urban public space

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 Judith Rosenthal (pp 192–203)  
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 Anke Müffelmann

#### LAYOUT

amatik Designagentur | Florian Riedel  
[www.amatik.de](http://www.amatik.de)

#### PRINTED BY

Neue Nieswand Druck GmbH, Kiel 2012

© The authors and Muthesius Kunsthochschule,  
 Kiel 2012.

[www.muthesius-kunsthochschule.de](http://www.muthesius-kunsthochschule.de)

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 kunsthochschule



Published by Muthesius Academy of Fine Arts  
 and Design (Kiel, Germany) as part of the EU  
 project research-based art / art-based research in  
 cooperation with “radius of art” (Heinrich Böll  
 Foundation Schleswig-Holstein and Department  
 for Culture and Further Education of Kiel,  
 Germany); Interface; University of Ulster (Belfast,  
 Northern Ireland); Office for Art in the Public  
 Space / “Büro für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum,  
 Kulturwerk des bbk” (Berlin, Germany); Maumaus  
 School of Visual Arts (Lisbon, Portugal); “5533”  
 (Istanbul, Turkey); International Academy of Art  
 Palestine (Ramallah, PA); and “98 Weeks” (Beirut,  
 Lebanon)

The “Deutsche Bibliothek” (German National  
 Library) documents this publication in the  
 Deutsche Nationalbibliografie. For detailed  
 information please see the free database  
<http://dnb.dnb.de>.

A German Edition is in preparation.

ISBN (English Edition) 978-3-98 13 781-7-7

ISBN (German Edition) 978-3-98 13 781-8-4

With the support of



Education and Culture DG

Culture Programme

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

In light of regional contexts and the accelerating pace of globalisation, we would like to contribute with our book towards an intercultural exchange on art in urban public space and aim for ascertaining differences, trading ideas and experiences, and propagating support and commitment for this field of activity.



BELFAST/BERLIN/ISTANBUL/LISBON/RAMALLAH/BEIRUT