

Point of View

THE METROPOLIS BLOG

Interdisciplinary Public Art Think Tank

Anita Glesta

SVA Reconfiguring Site student group 2013
Courtesy Reconfiguring Site

Public art isn't what it used to be. Plopping an object on a public plaza or a monumental sculpture or war memorial in a park is not enough. In New York City and elsewhere there are now a multitude of art forms that engage with public spaces. Among them is the "social practice," a form of "art in the public" that's a vehicle for artists to work in an interactive participatory way and it may not include making an object at all. Art works may serve food at a public venue, or there may be a boat traveling on a river with gardens that produce detoxifying agents. Some groups in the Occupy Wall Street Movement include artists, many of whom would consider themselves social practice artists

"Performance art" as intervention in urban streetscapes is another a growing trend. This might manifest itself as dozens of artists doing performances on a busy urban thoroughfare.

In our interconnected social media world art in public spaces can also be thought of making visible, artworks on sites like Face Book.

And since the 9/11 evacuations of Lower Manhattan, many vacant storefronts have been transformed into temporary pop-up galleries or other kinds of performance spaces.

Regardless of how successful these projects may be I believe in artists pushing the constrictions of art-as-object out of the white cube is positive. It is within this rich dialogue about public art that I created the program at New York's School of Visual Art (SVA), called Reconfiguring Site as a "think tank" for public art.

The Public Art Residency Program at SVA is structured around of my experience as an artist in the public realm, in New York and elsewhere. Having had little preparation for the challenges I would face, I often walked into the fire. And as one who has worked for two decades on large-scale, permanent and ephemeral art, in a variety of media, I have come to realize that artists need to be educated about the tools required to “make art” in the public. So the six-week intensive residency I designed, coordinate and teach at SVA is aimed to give each participant an opportunity to engage with many of the concerns of making art in the public.

Our program taps into the wide range of ways in to make public art. We invite high-caliber artists as guest speakers. These artists may not label themselves “public artists” yet their practices include meaningful interventions in public spaces. In addition we ask landscape architects, architects, curators, and public art administrators to speak to the students. Public art administrators can come from the General Services Administration Art in Architecture program to performance-oriented and ephemeral groups such as Art in Odd Places, the Department of Transportation’s Urban Art Initiative program, and Creative Time.

This summer we offered a two-week intensive residency. Our guest lecturers were limited to public art administrators. Organizations like Creative Time, Public Art Fund, No Longer Empty, and the MTA Arts in Transit, Times Square Alliance, and others were represented.

Students gained access and information about the nuances of these

diverse organizations. In addition, Art in Odd Places (AIOP) (Ed Woodham) and public art consultant Kendal Henry were faculty members who offered extra consultation and opportunities for the residents to develop their proposals.

In this year's program, cities like Bangkok, Odessa, Toronto, San Francisco, Calcutta, Hobart, Warsaw, Buenos Aires, Copenhagen among others were represented, making for a diverse demographic. Chemistry!

In addition to working on their own project proposals, all of the students elected to do a work in the street with AIOP. For some, the experience pushed their vocabularies as artists; others recognized their limitations as performers while they clarified their interests.

Understanding the complexity of making a successful work in the public realm is a long and exciting discussion. This summer showed us that artists and architects from all over the world are ready, more than ever, to join forces and think, talk, distill, and make resonant works. This is great news for our cities and their citizens.

Next I will comment on the direction public art is taking today.



Anita Glesta's work has been installed in public spaces as well as galleries, museums, and non-profit spaces in New York City and internationally. She has worked on several large-scale international projects on numerous temporary and outdoor sculpture installations. Her permanent works include the outdoor integrated landscape sculpture for the Federal Census Bureau Building in Washington D.C., commissioned by the General Services Administration Art and Architecture program and completed in 2010. In 2012, GERNIKA/GUERNICA, a public sound work and multi-channel video installation (first installed in 2007 in Chase Manhattan Plaza through the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council) was installed at the Museum of Contemporary Art Krakow (MOCAK). She has collaborated with architects on several projects and has taught at the Sydney College of the Arts, New South Wales School of the Built Environment, Harvard GSD, and the School of the Bellas Artes Barcelona. She lives in Brooklyn and is the creator and coordinator of the Reconfiguring Site Residency at the School of Visual Arts. Find Anita's work at her [website](#) and at [Reconfiguring](#).

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