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Contemporary Public Arts and the Contested Urban Public Space

Editorial

Tijen Tunali	6
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Articles

Contemporary Public Arts and Dialectical Aspects of the 'Democratization' of Urban Public Space Tijen Tunali	10
---	----

The Post-Political Urbanity: Art and Protest in the Public Space Cristina Moraru	18
---	----

Contentious Walls: Inscribing Conflicts into Vancouver Chinatown Murals Friederike Landau	28
--	----

Between Official Propaganda and Street Art: Counter-representation of the Female Figure on the Iranian Wall Rassa Ghaffari	42
---	----

Clashes Over Soviet Relics in Vilnius: Artistic Activism as a Way to Establish Public Space Lina Michelkevičė	60
--	----

Art Project

The Art of Uneventful Every Day in the Public Space of Delhi Revue Collective	84
--	----

Photo Essay

Temporary Monument: A Portrait of Urban Time in Philadelphia's Public Spaces Emre Çetin Gürer	100
--	-----

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Tijen Tunali

Editor

The new forms of agencies and strategies of urban public arts in the form of interactive sculptures, graffiti, street art, wheat pasting, yarn bombing, stickers, urban gardening, street performances, tactical art, creative campaigns and theatrical actions, among others, demand active spectatorship and have a growing power to renegotiate public space for new forms of participation. This special issue elaborates on the thesis that public art is not merely art in the urban public space but art that institutes a public place—a place of encounter, interaction, dialogue and common action among city dwellers. Our task is to discuss issues of political aesthetics surrounding public art in urban spaces from various theoretical perspectives and with examples from different parts of the world.

The authors test the hypothesis that through the establishment of a certain type of public space, public art contributes to the creation of a determined public—a specific audience. How can we establish a multidisciplinary criterion to determine what does and does not count as ‘public art’ for a democratic urban space? Which potentials, dilemmas and challenges characterize public art’s role in transforming urban cultural and social landscape? To what extent can public art increase social empowerment and be an important resource for enabling civil society engagement? Currently, there is a pressing need to challenge the dominant arguments that reduce the complex and contradictory role of public art to a straightforward occurrence in a continuously evolving neoliberal urban landscape. The authors of this issue challenge this view by addressing a variety of social and political faculties of public art in the contested urban space namely citizen participation, cultural cohesion, po-

litical consensus and dissensus, aesthetic domination and resistance, participatory citizenship, artistic resistance and community empowerment.

The issue opens with editor’s theoretical article that lays out the claim that every open space is not a democratic space and the plurality of voices does not mean a plurality of discourses and democratic political existence. Tunali discusses why it is important to always take into account the dialectical dimension of the urban space and public art and points to the perils of the ‘democratization’ of the public space. She alerts us that some public arts are directly commissioned by the government for a more ‘democratic city’ and there are also those artistic projects that confront government-supported public artworks for the ‘democratization’ of the urban space, but actually display even more autocratic or exclusionary tendencies. She argues that, despite their radical potential, public arts as the consolidator of political publics, do not simply concede the democratization of the public space. These publics can as well be constituted by neoliberal agendas, and even worse, authoritarianism. In the light of this critical perspective, Tunali asks: What kind of public art can then be appropriate for a democratic public?

Cristina Morraru’s theoretical article builds on Tunali’s arguments on political aesthetics in the urban public space by discussing the artistic protests. For Morraru in the actual political configuration of the public space, art and protests remain the only non-consensual space of discourse. She argues that protest-art can deconstruct the arguments of formal politics, especially those that aim at globalizing the economy, and it can reveal our current post-political condition in which we approach politics as a suspension of polit-

ical choice followed by a delegation of political decisions to technocratic experts.

Friederike Landau sketches how commissioned public art contributes to making space for historically marginalized communities such as the Chinese-Canadian community in Vancouver. Landau discusses the political implications of public art commissions in Vancouver within a two-dimensional conceptual trope: first, by examining the contours of institutionalized 'politics' of public art, manifest in creative city strategies, cultural planning and policy documents, and second, by unpacking the multiple-layered, socio-spatial, affective and aesthetic dimensions of 'the political' in and of public art.

The organization of public space has always played a central role in the Islamic Republic of Iran and in its management of an Islamic space inhabited by the ideal Muslim citizens. Yet, so far, the visual representation of social roles has focused essentially on the male figure, namely martyrs, national heroes, and religious icons. Rassa Ghaffari's article analyses the female image as represented in the Iranian public space through two media: the official posters, murals and banners sponsored by the Iranian State, and the illicit street art created by young street artists on public walls. She investigates the femininity models conveyed by these kinds of public arts and the functions they are responsible for, focusing on some contradictions and more recent cases. Through her analyses, Ghaffari questions whether these works contrast the state's gender ideology and what are the alternative responses they propose.

Lina Michelkevičė analyses two cases of urban resistance

in Vilnius, Lithuania: Pro-test Lab project from 2005 against the demolition of the Lietuva Cinema, and the activism against a reconstruction project of the Reformist Square from 2018. Both of them were protests against tearing down architectural structures from Soviet times and along with other cases mentioned in the essay may represent the second wave of revisionism over the last fifteen years that has been restructuring the city landscape by cleaning it of Soviet legacy. Michelkevičė investigates in what ways urban protests are able to remake a particular understanding of public space and public interest, what kind of positions cultural professionals take in these disputes, and whether the artist's work may contribute to their efficacy.

Revue Ensable's artists Sreejata Roy and Mrityunjay Chatterjee question the everyday based on two art projects in which dialogue has a central place and is utilized as a central instrument, uses different media forms to creatively express the dynamic of everyday life and its 'uneventfulness.' This philosophical framework pushes back against convenient canonical schemas of what constitutes appropriate subject matter for public art. The two art projects analyzed are located in two different sites in Delhi, and one is in the project Axial Margins-Urdu Park located next to Meena Bazaar and the Jama Masjid. The other project they implemented is called the Museum of Food: A living Heritage, which is located in an urban village, Khirki and HauzRani. This socially engaged art project looks into the journey of food with refugees and asylum seekers to Delhi through creating a space for collective cooking and discussions. With those two socially engaged projects, Revue worked closely with the women in those localities and the artists

tell us that through the daily painting and other activities, those women reclaimed their living space uniquely.

Emre Çetin Gürer's photo essay documents the Monument Lab in Philadelphia, which emerged from the discussions held by Farber and Lum with university students on the subject of public art in 2015.

With his photographs, Gürer shows how the Monument Lab tried to establish a dialogue about the history, reimagining the possibilities for ways to present collective memories in Philadelphia's public spaces through temporary, site-specific works.

