

Call for Papers

Double Conference Session: The Uses of Art in Public Space

Chairs: Julia Lossau & Quentin Stevens

International Geographical Congress

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(See Calls - Commissions and Task Forces - Stream C08.07 Cultural Approach in Geography)

With the emergence of public art as a distinct form of art practice in the late 1960s, and the subsequent explosion in its varieties of medium, form and location, geographers began examining the complex spatialities of public art's conception, production and reception. This interest has intensified through the cultural turn in the social sciences, the increased interest in utilizing qualitative data and methods, and in particular through the strong links established both theoretically and empirically between art and urban gentrification. Another strong thematic link between public art and geographical research agendas is the ways that these artworks might connect to memory and sense of place. The vast majority of existing research into public art has focused on the aesthetic, cultural and political intentions and processes which shape its production. The art object is often viewed in terms of an instrumental or symbolic role within a particular ideologically-driven activity, such as affirming class or ethnic distinctions, or assisting city marketing and gentrification. What remains relatively understudied is how various kinds of public art are actually received by the public, and the material landscape within which that reception occurs. Much analysis dwells on theoretical discussion of the potential representational capacities of artworks as texts, with too little empirical analysis of their actual 'use', which may not be discursive, and which may not be as the artist or sponsor intended.

The aim of this session is to examine various geographical aspects of public artworks from the perspective of their everyday use. We take public art in a broad sense to include commissioned and unofficial artworks, memorials, street art, advertising, and street furniture. We are interested in the rich diversity of people's engagements with public artworks across various temporal and spatial scales. We particularly encourage the submission of papers which explore the following themes:

- different modes of use of public artworks: passive, active and interventionist; through the various senses
- different understandings of use within the overall development process for public art: its conception, funding, procurement, development, construction, unveiling, and aftercare. Does the public only 'use' public artworks as finished products?
- conflicts between everyday practices around public art and the expectations of designers, sponsors and site managers
- the encouragement or management of specific user behaviors around public artworks
- how everyday practices around public artworks relate to their meaning, history and their modes of representation
- how these practices vary according to specific social factors such as gender, age, and cultural background
- how notions of 'use' and 'mis-use' can be conceptualised convincingly in the case of art, which is typically defined in opposition to practical utility

Abstracts are to be submitted directly through the Congress website by 15 December 2011, but the chairs welcome correspondence about potential contributions in advance of formal submission.

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