

Public Sculpture in the Expanded Field

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Is public sculpture part of the 'expanded field'? In its forms, public sculpture is largely governed by persistent traditions and conventions: the use of the figure, the statue on a pedestal, and the medium of bronze. Even in its modern incarnations, public sculpture still seeks to fulfil the promise of permanence in the public sphere. Responses to public sculptures tend to oscillate between indifference and moments of highly charged debate, often evidenced by actions that seek to destabilise sculpture's authority. As a locus of political unrest, sculptures might be variously decorated, dressed up, vandalised, or removed, thereby interrupting the stasis of their presence and meanings.

This interdisciplinary session seeks to draw upon the energy of current debates about the role of public sculpture to develop new frameworks for interpretation. How does art history intervene in understandings of public sculpture that mediate between past and present? What is the role of museums and collections, beyond serving as repositories or graveyards for contested statues? How can we connect the temporal and geographic dimensions of the often fierce debates about public sculpture taking place across the globe?

Speakers and Abstracts

The Displaced Monument: A public object on the move

Nickolas Lambrianou (Birkbeck College & the British Academy)

The giant Granite Bowl in Berlin, commissioned by Schinkel as part of his re-imagining of the Lustgarten in the 1820s, is a monumental public object conceived as a symbol of emergent Prussian cultural identity. Its origins lie in a particular combination of aesthetic, technological and pedagogical impulses. The symbolic extraction of the granite from German soil, its transportation across the landscape and the final polishing meant it was as much public spectacle or event as it was permanent monument. I want to argue that the subsequent *displacements* and *misplacements* of the object reveal an even more complex set of temporalities at play. Its very mobility and malleability – the *temporalisation* of both the inorganic and the monumental which occurs here – are pertinent to more recent debates around the 'expanded field' of public sculpture.

However, its 'afterlife' is important too. In 1830, the bowl found itself misplaced in front of the new national Museum (the *Altes*), when it was meant to be inside as a contemporary counter-example to the ancient artefacts contained within. One hundred years later, it was displaced to make way for the Nazi rallies which took place in the Lustgarten after 1934. With the collapse of the GDR, it was finally replaced back to its current site. I want to argue that this exemplary yet ambiguous cultural object belies the tensions between stasis and impermanence at the heart of the concept of an 'expanded field' of public sculpture.

Ephemeral Monumenta: Paradox of the Public Commission of Installation Art

Jeeyoung Kim (Université Paris 8, France)

Since the seventies, when Rosalind Krauss mentioned sculpture in the expanded field, not only the concept of sculpture but also the notion of the public has been reconsidered from various aspects. Artists have constantly questioned the relationship between artwork and its historical and spatial context and the experience of viewers has become a crucial element of artwork. Public institutions, which once considered art as a means of edification, memorisation, and ostentation, also had to modify their strategies. However, although modern sculpture seems to have lost its monumental character for the past century, the remains of the monument still exist, despite the change in its appearance in this postmodern era.

Through the case study of *Monumenta*, launched by Minister of Culture and Communication of France in 2007, this paper focuses the intrinsic contradictions of a public commission of installation art from an aesthetic and social perspective. Offering a commission to an artist to create an artwork for the immense space of Grand Palais, *Monumenta* reveals the desire of public institutions involved in art projects. Besides, joined with mass culture and coalition with private investments, installation art also seems to have become the most institution-dependent art form among others. To emphasise the considerable evolution of the status of installation art, the paper brings the critical installation project of Michael Asher on the occasion of the '73rd American Exhibition' at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1979 to mind for the comparison with *Monumenta*.

Toppled Symbols and Fallen Idols: Seeking a transformative role for Afrikaner nationalist sculpture on South African campuses

Brenda Schmahmann (University of Johannesburg)

In *As by Fire: The end of the South African University* (2017), Jonathan Jansen, former vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State (and its first black vice-chancellor) observes that one of the directions that a call to 'decolonise' the curriculum has taken is less concerned with 'replacing the existing curriculum than with empowering students to engage that knowledge by asking critical questions such as: Where did this knowledge come from? In whose interests does this knowledge persist? What does it include and leave out? What are its authoritative claims? What are the underlying assumptions and silences that govern such knowledge?' (p. 161). This approach, he notes, has implications for debates about what to do with public art associated with values and ideas now considered problematical in the sense that removing such monuments from access prevents their enabling these kinds of critical questions.

Through an examination of creative interventions to monuments associated with Afrikaner nationalism on three university campuses, I develop this observation. Proposing that such interventions can prompt students to reflect critically on how unequal relations of power have shaped commemorative practices themselves, I suggest that, rather than being removed because it is perceived to hamper transformation, public art associated with individuals and movements whose values are repugnant and right-wing might be left visible but actively deployed to assist in transforming campuses into spaces welcoming of diversity and difference.

Ephemeral Monumentality and the Art of the Future: Kara Walker's *A Subtlety*

Rebecca Peabody (Getty Research Institute)

In 2014, American artist Kara Walker attained a new level of visibility with her public sculpture *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* – an enormous monument to the victims of the global sugar industry installed inside an abandoned warehouse. The main component of the artwork was a 70-foot long, 35-foot tall sculpture of a nude female figure – a 'mammy-sphinx' as the work has been described – that embodied numerous racialised and sexualised identities, and elicited wildly divergent responses from viewers. *A Subtlety* represented a creative leap into several new media for Walker, including monumental sculpture, public art, and ephemeral art. At the same time, however, it crystallised a number of themes that have been part of her practice from the beginning: using colour and form to problematise racialised identity, blurring the lines between history and fantasy, and implicating viewers within her work. At the conclusion of the exhibition the sculpture was dismantled, as was – in turn – the building in which it had been exhibited. All that remains are the myriad digital traces captured during its brief moment of physical display. In this talk, I suggest that the work's monumental power is fundamentally connected to its ephemerality – and that moving beyond the sculpture's mediation between past and present allows us to consider the ways in which *A Subtlety* also reaches into the future.

Spiral Jetty: Complexities of collective stewardship

Kelly A Kivland (Dia Art Foundation)

In 2002, an iconic, if remote, example of public sculpture re-emerged. The waters of the Great Salt Lake in Utah receded during a drought and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* became visible for the first time since its creation in 1970. Just three years prior, the artist Nancy Holt, Smithson's widow, donated the large-scale earthwork to the New York-based Dia Art Foundation. Within a decade of Dia assuming ownership of *Spiral Jetty*, two significant incidents prompted a re-examination its role and responsibility as steward. In 2008, Holt informed Dia of an application by a Canadian energy company to drill within a few miles from *Spiral Jetty*. Concerned about the drilling's potential damage to the environment and the work's sightlines, Dia coordinated a letter-writing campaign to the Utah government. The drilling proposal failed, yet Dia's appeal lead to discord with state officials. A few years later, Dia's lease of the lakebed on which *Spiral Jetty* sits was in jeopardy due to a default in the renewal process with state of Utah. As a result, Dia formed partnerships with Utah-based organisations to address the care of and local advocacy for *Spiral Jetty*. In addressing these incidents, this paper will advance a notion of collective stewardship of public works. I discuss stewardship as an active practice that requires comprehensive relationship-building in the local community. In doing so, I argue that institutional acts of conservation must prioritise social relations that both inform and influence the mediation of public sculpture.

Response and Discussion