

Innovating Public Art:
An exploration of digital animation as public art

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A thesis submitted to the faculty at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Media and Journalism in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media.

April 2022

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ABSTRACT

Public art can be a fascinating mix of cultural, social, and political commentary that has the power to impact a community, and community spaces, in multiple ways. Public art can establish a sense of connection and identity of an area among the community. So as technologies advance, how do our needs for creative expression evolve? This thesis will explore the historical and cultural contributions of contemporary public art, and examine how immersive digital art could be the next modernized innovation of public art installations in Raleigh, North Carolina. This non-traditional multimedia thesis, rooted in interactive and graphic design, with elements of videography and photography, will consider how neurographica art styles can be combined with digital animation as public art to aid in the nurturing of community mindfulness and inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

Following the death of George Floyd and subsequent protests, amid the Coronavirus Pandemic, artists and muralists decided to convey a need for change through creative activism. A mass of murals, depicting victims of police violence and denouncing systematic racism, sprung up on walls across the United States. In North Carolina, many local artists used their skills to show the importance of voting, expressed the desire for justice, and equal protection under the law. These efforts could be recognized as a revival of street art but is merely a continuation of rich artistic tradition among artists who use outdoor canvases to convey political messages.

“Artists functionalize the discarded, animate the forgotten, politicize the ordinary. It is the artist’s work to build, and invite others into, the worlds we imagine.” (Ritchie, p.1) “By bringing visibility to these sites of imagination, artists impact the cultural, social, and economic value of the actual places around them.” (Ritchie, p.1) According to the Americans for the Arts report titled *‘Why Public Art Matters: Green Paper’*, artists can be social and civic leaders, advocating through art for alternative perspectives that can challenge assumptions, beliefs, and community values. (p.1) “Community murals seem to flourish as forms of popular expression in periods of social crisis and transformation, or civil unrest.” (Sieber, p.265) During social crises throughout history, like “the Great Depression... and... Ghana’s post-colonial struggles of the Set/Setal youth movement to define national culture and identity... were usually patent in community murals, in terms of messaging and appropriation of public space.” (Sieber, p.265) “Some neighborhoods in today’s U.S. inner cities with murals are also in a condition of social crisis and immiseration, one that has arguably been chronic for many decades.” (Sieber, p.265) “Murals can have many sources of sponsorship and their production can be a matter of individual,

group, or institutional action.”(Sieber, p.265) Not all are products of collective action or sentiment that engages a broader community. (Sieber, p.265) “They can be completely commercial or state-driven in content and execution, and not in any sense have community or grassroots origins.”(Sieber, p.265) Efforts in urban planning, public policy, and arts advocacy have recognized the strength of the creative economy, and municipalities increasingly “leverage the economic potential of the arts to attract new residents, business owners, and tourists into downtown areas.” (Ritchie, p.1) This includes the renovation of industrial spaces for creative use, “the production of public creative placemaking projects, the clustering of creative organizations in the formation of arts districts, and the instigation or institutionalization of arts and cultural festivals.” (Ritchie, p.1) “These initiatives mark a notable shift in urban planning priorities aimed at attracting specific populations instead of generating more industrial infrastructure.” (Ritchie, p.1)

Americans for the Arts’ report ‘*Why Public Art Matters: Green Paper*’ stated, “American cities and towns aspire to be places where people want to live and want to visit.” (p.1) Having a particular community identity, especially in terms of what our towns look like, is becoming even more important as “places with strong public art expressions give communities a stronger sense of place and identity.” (p.1) Community murals can represent an example of a kind of local response, through the medium of public art, aimed at countering the stigmatization of the neighborhood in local media and popular perceptions, along with attempting to bolster local self-esteem, especially among underrepresented youth. (Sieber, p.268) Globally and historically, *public art* is an umbrella term that includes murals, sculptures, memorials, architectural and landscape work, crowdsourced community art, digital new media, experiential art,

performances, and festivals that are “commissioned by cities or property owners, and is considered culturally enriching and socially acceptable.” (Imam, p.20) In Raleigh, North Carolina, there are several public art installations across the city, with over 140 mural and street art compositions.

“In the 1960s and 70s, murals were often fashioned as a self-conscious alternative, and resistance, to traditional venues of art-making and display that communities of color are usually excluded from, leading to the transformation of streets into galleries.” (Sieber, p.266) In discussing public art It is important to differentiate the understandings of *street art* versus *mural art*. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, a mural is “a large painting on a wall or ceiling, either inside or outside of a structure.” (p.1) A mural is typically created with paint or mixed media elements by a trained artist, is often executed with permission or by commission from the city or property owners, and is integral to the wall. Street art implies something less formal and less permanent, is often considered rebellious or illegal, as it is often executed without official permission, and can sometimes be representative of a social or political message. Succinctly, artists who create large-scale commissioned public works of art are considered muralists, and public works of art that are created without permission or commission are considered street art.

There is overlap in the context of graffiti and street art due to the compositions usually lacking authorization before being created. *Graffiti*, is a drawing, painting, or engraving that is done without permission. According to the Eden Gallery, graffiti was once “synonymous with vandalism” and has become more “widely recognized as a type of artwork.” (p.3) The distinction between Graffiti, concerning vandalism, and graffiti art is usually used when the composition

allows for the artwork to be “sold, exhibited, and displayed in other environments.” (p.5) Graffiti has existed in many forms throughout history, and become a widely visible and well-known phenomenon referred to as hip-hop Graffiti. (p.5) According to the Eden Gallery, “Graffiti flourished in major American cities, particularly in Black and Latino neighborhoods, and grew in popularity alongside hip-hop street subcultures. Most historians pinpoint either Philadelphia or New York as the birthplace of modern Graffiti.” (p.18) “The nation’s major cities, including Philadelphia, Los Angeles, San Francisco-Oakland, Chicago, and New York” were home to the U.S. community mural movement born in the “turbulence of the 1960s urban crisis, emerging as a popular art form” in most of developing, especially vibrant, traditions. (Sieber, p.265) “Today, Philadelphia’s streets alone reportedly contain over 3000 murals.” (Sieber, p.265) The Eden Gallery stated, “Graffiti can be criminal, political, humorous, or even beautiful. It challenges societal norms and laws, and it does not aim to be legal. The thrill and risk of creating Graffiti are part of the culture.”(p.26) In Raleigh, North Carolina only two public works of art, represented on the Downtown Raleigh Alliance website, seem to align with the aesthetics or techniques of graffiti. Raleigh has a strict Graffiti Prevention and Removal Policy, stating that there's no room for vandalism in the city.

“Graffiti remains the scapegoat for all manner of urban ills, from burglaries on one extreme to gentrification on the other.” (Cathcart-Keays, p.1) “This *gentrification graffiti* is representative of the cycle of transformation in cities across the world, whereby artists are caught up in contributing to their displacement.” (Cathcart-Keays, p.19) “Places infused with creative production are marked as ripe for investment and remarketing to a new kind of customer, thus contributing to an artist’s demise in the name of improving, or rather financially gaining

from, the city.” (Cathcart-Keays, p.20) “Graffiti has developed into a bona fide art form, a legitimate force for economic, cultural, and social good,” as urban environments become more palatable for incoming populations and consumers. (Cathcart-Keays, p.21) Graffiti, street art, murals are some of the ways communities can respond to their surroundings in an expressive and public way. As city landscapes and communities change, so does the representation of public art.

The Triangle has become a tech hub, as Apple and Google announced plans to come to the area, and is home to companies like RedHat, IBM, SAS, and more. The Business Insider explained that Apple’s move “will create about 3,000 new jobs in machine learning, artificial intelligence, software engineering, and other fields.” (Sweeney, p.2) As part of the investment, “Apple plans to set up a \$100 million fund to support schools and community programs across the state. The company will also contribute more than \$110 million for infrastructure, including broadband and roads.” (Sweeney, p.2) Two of the “largest tech companies in the world” are working together “with local universities, nonprofits, and the private sector to build a tech-savvy workforce,” and are prioritizing innovation in Raleigh-Durham. (Sweeney, p.4) nontraditional public art, like digital new media, “emanates from not only trained fine artists, but in some cases from technology engineers, software developers, and even curators.” (Favermann, p.6) Could digital new media and animation be the best way to unite the tech world and the art world in The Triangle? Art is fundamentally subjective and the intention and meaning behind public installations are manifold. So how might we create and showcase public artwork that is focused on collective mindfulness and inclusivity? Can digital animation as public

art be an effective tool in nurturing civic conversation and interaction among community members, while simultaneously strengthening the creative economy?

The “increased access to the latest technology, suggests that there are no borders to art’s possibilities.”(Favermann, p.6) In recent years, several “stunning examples of nontraditional public artworks have become part of the environmental experience in cities like Boston.” (Favermann, p.7) For example, “the Rose Kennedy Greenway in Boston has served as an outdoor showcase for cutting-edge temporary forms of art.” (Favermann, p.7) The park continually commissions artworks and sponsors Augmented Reality (AR) projects. The IBI group explained that “the possibility for interactivity is far greater with digital installations. Unlike a traditionally static sculpture or mural, technology allows a user to see the art change or to participate in the making of the art piece.” (p.2) Tangible Interaction has created a huge assortment of interactive technologies, from “digital graffiti walls” to artworks that adjust their colors according to the ambient noise around them. The IBI Group mentioned that not requiring “permanent infrastructure” and having lower-cost ways to engage citizens, allows for the addition of technology to transform under-utilized space and “existing infrastructure into a public place.” (p.3) These installations can fundamentally change the public space they are put into and make spaces more functional.

This project aims to examine the evolution and cultural significance of public art, which will better inform the creation of visual representations of digital animation as public art. Working in collaboration with existing muralists and street artists, this project will create animated murals out of existing compositions, as well as original designs. The original designs, also created as visual representations of digital animation as public art, will explore and utilize styles of

Neurographica. Neurographica is the method of creating mind and body connections through a combination of art and psychology. Neurographica, known as "the creative method of world transformation", is an artistic method used among art therapists to help understand reality by engaging our emotional and aesthetic intelligence for finding solutions to a variety of problems. This thesis interviews relevant experts and local artists to provide perspective about the perceived contributions of public art, and how digital animation as public art might be beneficial within North Carolina. Many tragedies and hardships were experienced locally and globally throughout the past two years, from a controversial presidency to millions of lives lost during the pandemic, one of the positives was a sense of collective empowerment and a revived appreciation for public art. This thesis project aims to hone in on those aspects and seek to understand how public art may contribute to a culture of collective mindfulness through public innovative and immersive means.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Art has served many different functions throughout history and has unique reasons for being created, which makes its purpose difficult to specify to any single concept. In the *Philosophy Now Magazine*, a participatory writer shared the idea that “art is an expression of our thoughts, emotions, intuitions, desires,” and is a method of “sharing the way we experience the world, which for many is an extension of personality” and identity. It is the communication of intimate concepts that cannot be faithfully portrayed by words alone.” (p.1) According to Claude Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist and ethnologist whose work was key in the development of the theories of structuralism and structural anthropology, the main functions of art include expression of the imagination, ritualistic and symbolic functions, communication, entertainment, political change, social causes, psychological and healing purposes, and propaganda or commercialism. (Fosmire, p.1-9)

Through the concept of ‘Expression of the Imagination’, “art provides a means to convey a perspective of things, places, ideas that are unreal or unknowable through a range of non-grammatical forms, symbols, and ideas with meanings that can be determined by the artist to create visual imagery unique to their creative mind.”(Fosmire, p.2) In its simplest form, art is a means of communication to convey information, stories, emotions, and more. As art brings out particular moods and emotions from its viewers, it has also served primarily for entertaining the viewer. Immersive art is “arguably a central feature of the human ability to imagine,” because as far as “history permits us to ascertain from images and written words” we have witnessed “an evolving apparatus for the imagination itself.” (Beugnet, p.1) “The pursuit of

experiences that transcend reality has been the driving force of cultural production and a myriad of related technologies.” (Beugnet, p.1) “The pairing of art and immersion is hardly new, yet from the 19th century onwards the increasing combination of art with technology has given immersion a progressively more fundamental and structural dimension.” (Beugnet, p.1)

In comparison to modern art, the components of digital art are not all that new. With the advancement of the internet as a big factor, artists can now put anything they create online and develop an audience. Artists are beginning to question the traditional roles of presentation within the gallery environment, and even push the boundaries of how their art is made. When it once took graphic designers 10 hours to create simple illustrations on earlier versions of Mac computers, it can now take a remarkably short amount of time to make amazing things with just entry-level software. “Digital technologies and new media art have expanded, challenged, or even redefined concepts of what constitutes public space, the public domain, and public art.” (Paul, p.1) Today’s culture mostly revolves around “data (texts, images, and sounds), technologies, communication, and interaction,” which are playing a major role in our economic, political, and social life. (Paul, p.1) “Digital art has used electronic networks to redefine the notion of public space by enhancing possibilities of various kinds of interventions.” (Paul, p.1) “These interventions can take the form of an archiving and filtering of public contributions; a merging of physical and virtual space; an augmentation of physical sites and architectures; social software, or collectivist and activist strategies and tactical response.” (Paul, p.2) “Electronic networks have brought about formal redefinitions of what we understand as “public” and opened new spaces for artistic intervention.” (Paul, p.3)

Public art has a long history, and the term has “traditionally been used for art that is displayed in public spaces existing outside of a designated art context” or for “public performative events.” (Paul, p.4) “Public artworks range from Michelangelo’s ceiling for the Sistine Chapel to murals and sculptures in public spaces created by artists including Diego Rivera, Pablo Picasso, or Claes Oldenburg. Public art is usually authorized and sometimes financed by the government or authority administering the respective space, and has frequently been used by totalitarian regimes for propaganda. An important element in all public art is the varying degree of audience participation and agency. Agency manifests itself in the possibilities for influencing, changing or creating institutions and events or acting as a proxy. The degree of “agency” is measured by the ability to have a meaningful effect in the world and in a social context, which naturally entails responsibilities. The fact that digital art is inherently interactive, participatory, or even collaborative and potentially open to exchanges with trans-local communities, makes questions surrounding agency and the authority of authorship a central element of new media art practice.” (Paul, p.4)

Justification for Digital New Media as a Focus Regarding Public Art

The concept of interactivity in visual arts became popular in the 1950s with the realization that interactive art could serve as a bridge connecting artists and audiences in new ways. More importantly, audiences were able to become part of the artwork through their experience within the artistic process. The application of traditional interactive concepts today is often seen as conventional within galleries, yet remains unconventional when presented in public, such as on streets and in abandoned buildings.” (Zhou, p.1) Terms to distinguish when discussing digital

interactive art includes *digital art* and *interactive art*. “According to the Tate Museum, digital art includes artworks that are either made using technology or shown in a digital format.

Interactive art relies on audience participation.” (Zhou, p.2) It is important to note that digital art and interactive art are independent art forms. “Not all interactive art must be digital art, and not all digital art is interactive.” (Zhou, p.2)

Digital art as public art is a means of “generating new forms of artistic creation, appreciation, consumption,” and increases arts enterprises. (Zhou, p.3) “The rise of the digital age began between the 1950s and 1970s, marking the period where artists, engineers, and scientists began to work in tandem to create and install tech-drive arts exhibits. Since then, artists have sought unconventional tools to express their artistic principles, often leading them to explore and embrace technology as a new medium. The rise of digital art has created a path for artists to promote their work to broader audiences because it can be exhibited globally, eliminating the need for transportation and travel. Digital art makes art more accessible to new audiences by offering experiences that allow almost anyone to participate. These experiences also have a deeper impact on audiences through allowing personalized expression and the creation of memorable, poetic, and immersive experiences.” (Zhou, p.10-11)

“A major concern with the rise of digital and digital interactive art is its validity as “real art.” This argument derives from the fact that the work is often computer-generated or driven, thus creating difficulty in detecting the originality and uniqueness of an artwork.” (Zhou, p.14) This concern poses a question of the public assumption of art, and if the continual innovation and integration of technology, will redefine what defines art. “The growth of technology has played

a critical role in reshaping society, connecting to the outside world, and perceptions of others. Most importantly, digital art has endless potential and is likely to become a more desired preference in the future, providing an avenue for digital art installations to have greater possibilities for interactivity.” (Zhou, p.16)

The Supernova Digital Animation Festival is an example of digital art as public art growing in popularity and positioning digital animation and motion-based art as a viable new form of public art. The Denver Digerati published an article stating, “the Festival brings an explosion of digital animation and motion art to the public” in downtown Denver, Colorado. (p.1) According to the Denver Digerati, the festival also presents “short-form animation and motion art created by individual artists or teams using computer software as the focal development of their work”; Some of the genres include “narrative, abstract, experimental, playful, mind-bending, music video, and more.”(p.2) This example of how immersive art and media offers a new practice of public art and experience with people engaging the artwork. Examples of digital art like this, exemplify how the conceptual boundaries of the way we interpret and analyze our relation to visual culture at the intersection of art, media, technology, and cinema.

In downtown Raleigh, North Carolina one of the first murals to push the boundaries of immersive digital art is “a 40-by-60-foot mural that springs to life with the help of an augmented reality (AR) smartphone app.” (Menconi, p.1) Believed to be the first of its kind, the mural titled ‘Abstract Motion’, by Artist Taylor White in partnership with Google, “comes alive as a three-dimensional image you can film, alter or edit in your phone” with the help of a google play app. (Menconi, p.4) Immersive public art can build deeper emotional connections with

users and community members. “Businesses and entrepreneurs in the real estate, tourism, and entertainment space are using this technology to better connect with customers and increase brand value.” (Hughes, p.26) This thesis project will explore how digital art can enhance and complement the experience of viewing and interacting with murals and public art. With a growing appreciation for public art and the fast rise of technology, like the implementation of VR/AR technology, there’s no doubt there will be a continued collaboration between technologies and art. Digital art as a means of public art can create “immersive experiences that can be used to engage and inspire local communities, and be a way to create attention and energy on a development project. (Hughes, p.42)

Justification for Using Neurographic Art (Neurografica) Methods for Mural Series

Neurographica combines art, art therapy, science, and psychology. “This creative method stimulates new neural pathways by combining art and psychology and is a simple way to work with the subconscious mind. Simply stated, connected neurons process information received.” (Kriz, p.6) This enables “people to interact, experience emotions and sensations, create memories and enable learning.” (Kriz, p.6) “Neurographic artists know this type of art is a way to offer someone to transform one’s stress and fear by drawing freeform lines and then later using a specific algorithm to transform the stress into a beautiful work of art.” (Kriz, p.6) “Russian psychologist Pavel Piskarev coined the term Neurographica in 2014. He describes the process as a creative method of transforming the world.”(Kriz, p.6) This process uses a drawing technique that links the conscience with the subconscious. “The link is made by activating

connections between brain cells and neurons. The result is an awareness and mindfulness that helps turn stress into calm.” (Schukei, p.4)

“An appealing characteristic of neuro art is that it does not require any drawing skill. If a student can hold a drawing material, they can participate. While we value the final product, the process of artmaking is also beneficial. Research shows that the act of making art is good for the brain because it decreases stress levels and increases focus.” (Schukei, p.5) “Neurographica art can look abstract or realistic. It doesn’t matter what style the result is; what matters is how one approaches the activity. The goal of neuro art is to promote mindfulness and intentionality at a slower pace”. (Schukei, p.6) By utilizing this art style as a form of public art, and then enhancing the experiences with digital art, I hope to explore how methods of mindfulness-based art therapy (MBAT) can be used within public space through a series of mural designs. “The concept of mindfulness originated from Buddhist practice and reflects a focus on awareness of emotions, physical sensations in the body, and consciousness. When you are being mindful, you have an enhanced ability in terms of your self-awareness and capacity to reflect on your experience and daily life.” (Cuncic, p.3) Some of the specific psychological benefits of MBAT have been increased emotional awareness, increased sense of control and ability to share inner thoughts, increased self-esteem and self-acceptance, improved attention span, and more. (Cuncic, p.13) I will use my knowledge of creating murals, and digital art, in combination with instruction from certified neurographica instructors and art therapists, to showcase how public art may be able to bridge a connection between public, and social-emotional learning. The neurographica artwork created for this project will emulate the five Socio-emotional learning

competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions:

- How might we utilize the artistic aesthetic of Neurographic Art with digital new media and animation to create a mindful-based, and interactive, public art experience?
- How might we use digital animation as public art to be an effective tool in nurturing civic conversation and mindful-based thinking among community members?

Approach:

For this non-traditional thesis, I want to deliver a “package” in the form of a website that explores 3 different facets of public art.

Part I

Social Commentary Interviews (approx. 5):

I will conduct filmed interviews with various community leaders, experts, and artists involved in the local public art scene to better understand the overarching question, *Why does Public Art Matter?* through their perspective and experience in the field.

Areas of focus/themes for interviews:

- Cultural Value and Community Identity

- The Artist as Contributor to Cultural Value
- Social Value and Placemaking
- Social Value and Collaboration
- Economic Value and Regeneration

Part II

Turning Existing Murals into Digital Art (approx. 5):

In this portion of the thesis, I will explore what existing murals in Raleigh would look like as Digital Art. I will use motion graphics and animation skills to recreate the overall composition of the existing murals. The animated versions of existing downtown Raleigh murals will be a 30-second loop.

Potential Murals of Focus (subject to change):

- 'Do Good' by OG Designs Creations + Community Volunteers
- 'Green City, USA' by The Mural Project + Raleigh Murals Project
- 'E' by Morgan Cook
- 'Raleigh Pride' by Miriam Bonana
- 'Thank You' by Gina Franco

Part III

Neurographica as Public Digital Art (approx. 1)

This portion of my thesis will produce at minimum one digital art representation of a mural design using neurographica art style. Additional designs may be included in the completed project. I plan to consult with an art therapist and/or professionally trained neurographica artist to provide perspective and insight into the art style.

Story Partners:

At this current point in my production timeline, I have identified 11 potential characters to interview for the filmed (part I) portion of the project. I have reached out to all of them; currently, I have completed 2 interviews, have 3 scheduled, and am continuing correspondence with the remaining 6 interviewees. While I do not think all interviews will be represented within the final project, I want to make sure I have ample commentary and insight. I have already spoken to Morgan Cook, a local graffiti artist and muralist, as well as, Maurice Green, CEO of the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation who created a Public Arts Initiative Program that funded over 10 murals across North Carolina. I am also creating illustration components for the animations.

Timeline:

January - February

- Schedule and film all interviews
- Gather supporting B-roll
- Start creating sketches and mock-ups for animation materials

February - March

- Finish/finalize edits for filmed interviews
- Create illustrations and motion graphics, and send drafts to committee members (make

any necessary changes/edits)

- Organize all written content, plan website layout
- By the end of March, start putting everything together on the website

April

- Where can I pitch/ distribute the project?
- Find sponsorship to create a digital art mural?
- Convince Google to help create more AR Murals?
- Pitch/ organize a Digital Art Festival in Raleigh?

Budget:

Neurographic Art Classes: \$300

Transportation/Gas - \$200

Per-diem during production - \$150

Total: \$650

OUTCOMES

The Triangle is growing, changing, and finding its unique identity. As a muralist, I have contributed to this development of the Raleigh-Durham identity along with many other artists.

The experience of creating these projects allowed me to see firsthand that public art plays a

major role in the way people feel, interact with the environment, and understand the reputation of the area. I hope that this project aids in the conversation about the importance of public art, and the possibilities when it comes to using modern technologies as a resource. I think using more digital new media-based public art projects in the city could set it apart from the rest.

DELIVERABLES

My main deliverable will be a website, that will essentially house a package of information and projects. I will be creating animations of existing murals, original designs for digital animation as public art, and filmed interviews with relevant experts and artists who can share insight into the topic. Accompanying these projects will be written stories and information, providing more information about the project and elements.

OBSTACLES AND CHALLENGES

My main obstacle is creating animations of caliber as I do not have extensive experience, however, I did take motion graphics during the program and feel fairly confident in my illustration skills. Even though this process is new for me, I am eager to learn and apply some of the skills I have acquired throughout the program. I think a package, representing multiple skillsets, is the best way to convey this story and I plan to get advice and guidance from professionals in the field and my committee members. As a muralist, I am excited to shine a light on the field of work that doesn't seem to be discussed often in this way. I want to make

sure that in my production and reporting I am objective and show all the nuances of the public art sector.

THE STORY

Hey Raleigh.

I love sipping a latte in the park and getting a really good parking spot, but it's even better when I'm next to a work of art that's inviting and inclusive. It's easy to overlook the public art when we're rushing to a destination or fumbling with a parking meter. But when you finally get a chance to look around, you'll notice that the artwork is telling us something about the place we're in. Whether the art is talking about a social issue, recalling history, or simply sharing a kind message; it can be an indicator of community identity and an invitation for deeper conversation. All around this city you can find statues, sculptures, murals, and even murals with Augmented Reality. I've done a few public art projects around Raleigh, and I'm interested in digital animation as public art and if it has the potential to nurture civic discussion and inclusivity. To discern the potential influence or implications of digital animation as public art, we must also consider the many facets of the local creative economy. If you're interested in the importance of prioritizing opportunities for local artists and community engagement, then stick around as we consider.

Innovating Public Art:

An Exploration of Digital Animation as Public Art

There are over 140 public art projects in downtown Raleigh. You'll come upon statues in parks, murals on sidewalks, and artwork in places you least expect - but what is it supposed to do? Is

there more to public art than just making something pretty? To better understand the purpose of public art, I thought I'd ask a few experts.

“My name is Kayla Coleman. I am the executive director at VA Raleigh.

It becomes a kind of like the symbol for a neighborhood or an icon, it becomes a landmark, a gathering place of measurement space, communities tend to adopt the piece as their own, especially if it's something that's going to be there for some time. So it becomes like an emblem for what that community could be.” - Kayla Coleman, VAE Raleigh

An emblem that, for many people, is the first or only art they will experience in their lives. Not only does public art help beautify a city or town, but it can also add to the cultural and economic vitality of a community.

“Art will always usher in displacement because art falls into a space of luxury.” - Dare Coulter, Artist

I spoke with Dare Coulter, an award-winning artist, muralist, sculptor, and North Carolinian who explained that everyone is an artist in their way, but access to create and perceive art can be an experience of leisure.

“Hi, I'm Laura Ricci, I use she/her pronouns, I live in Durham, and I'm an arts organizer and a curator.” - Laura Ritchie, Art Curator

Laura explains that public art can sometimes be perceived as, or be, a harbinger of gentrification.

“There are, unfortunately, a lot of examples where private and publicly funded public art projects have not taken the time to build relationships with the members of the communities in which they want to put a piece of public art. And that is where art can become harmful, you know, where art can be weaponized in this process of gentrification.” - Laura Ritchie, Art Curator

Many artists find inspiration in the authenticity of urban spaces, while developers maximize the appeal of public art to transform neighborhoods which often contributes to the gentrification process and the displacement of communities.

“I do think that there are ways, to do it better. I think that always centering the voices of the community that you're working within is like, you must if you're going to say something about a place, you need to be from that place.” - Laura Ritchie

Many people do not have the means to collect art in their homes or visit an art museum, public art is influential in democratizing that experience.

“My name is David Moore, Director of Community Engagement Artspace. I feel like there's so much history here, good and bad. But we also have new people moving in every day adding to our local flavor. So I find that just to be interesting. I feel like we are at a crossroads where it's time to kind of come together and decide what we want Raleigh to be And I think it's been mostly defined by development. But I think it's, it's the people that define the city, right? It's the culture is the food, it's the music, it's the art. And so I think, you know, moving forward, we need to have city leaders listening more to everyday citizens.” - David Moore, ArtSpace

Listening to more everyday citizens, and reflecting on that effort through public art can be built with more opportunities for participatory public art and by prioritizing local artists.

“I also see a stronger need for communities to be more engaged in the process, especially when it's meant to be for them. And I think communities have the power in the voice there, to tell, you know, city and cultural leaders, this is what we need, this is what we want.” - David Moore, ArtSpace

“We need to shift the priority to make sure that the opportunities for creating public art are first available to the artists who live in the community in which the public art will be located.” - Laura Ritchie, Art Curator

I was one of the artists with OG Designs & Creations that collaborated with the non-profit organization Activate Good, and Raleigh Murals Project to create the 'Do Good' mural with help from over a hundred volunteer community members. The 'Do Good' mural project sparked my interest in participatory art and how we could take the message of inclusion one step further through digital animation.

“we've become all the more attached to our phones more skillful at relating to each other virtually. So I think that there's a ton of potential in that digital space to engage a larger group of people rather than exclude them.” - Laura Ritchie, Art Curator

Digital new media art refers to all forms of contemporary art that are made using forms of media technology, including digital art, interactive art, animation, and more.

“We're in a space where science and technology are so valued here, I want to see more artists collaborating with programmers, engineers, and whomever to really elevate digital art as a public art form.” - David Moore, ArtSpace

Public art involves participation from artists, civic leaders, community residents, and many more. The challenge of this communal process is to enhance rather than limit the artist's involvement and the voice of the community.

“And all of those voices are great and but you cannot forget the most important voice which is that community and ensuring that artists have a dialogue with that community and they do their best to, you know, honor them and make sure that what they are considering would fit into that space.” - Kayla Coleman, VAE Raleigh

Public art is a major part of our history and our evolving culture by creating a perpetual reflection of our society’s interests and values. As public art gives a voice to the community, it contributes a unique testimony to our public experience.

CONCLUSION

How we create and experience art has advanced with the developments of technology. Artists are now able to experiment with various forms of technology to create artwork that can initiate participation and interaction with the public. In this way, interactive art can bridge a gap between the physical world and the imagination. Technologies including the internet, computers, software and many other forms of technology and electronics enable artists to make their artistic expressions come to life with the participation of the viewer. Participation is crucial to the experience of interactive art. Viewers are no longer just observing the artwork to find meaning and understanding in the artists' purpose because interactive art requires the viewer to actively engage with the artwork. Digital animation as public art presents many opportunities for interactivity.

When I first started this project I thought the conversation would delve into immersive and interactive experiences utilizing digital animation. However, my focus was more rooted in the cultural, social, and economic impact of public art. In understanding the nuances of public art, and the entities involved we can understand how to get the most out of the public art around us for the community's benefit. In conversations with community leaders and arts professionals, I learned that many public art processes are managed by a wide variety of companies and people. There are multiple people responsible for a public space, which can include cultural offices, parks and recreation departments, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and sometimes private developers.

The entities have selection processes that include direct commissions and create a competitive or sometimes strained dynamic between artist, community, and organization. In the goal to achieve more public art, it is important to consider the how and the where because the answers influence the way the community perceives the project.

When completed thoughtfully, public art, in general, is a great tool for connecting the community and driving engagement, especially when considering participatory art. Participatory public art describes the community having influence and impact on the creation and sometimes implementation of the public art. This type of involvement enables a better reflection of community identity, culture, and history. This is because the shared experience of creation and interaction with public art builds community and amplifies the sense of safety and comfort.

Digital animation could have a vital role in being a form of public art, however, the main focus should be on how to make it participatory. Digital animation as public art is a great tool to engage the audience by visually storytelling a message and connecting with the way people feel. With this effect, there should always be an element that engages the community and is influenced directly by them.

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