GRAFFITI AND PUBLIC ART

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Paper presented at the
Graffiti and Disorder Conference
convened by the Australian Institute of Criminology
in conjunction with the Australian Local Government Association
and held in Brisbane, 18-19 August 2003
The expanding definition of public art includes community cultural development projects, memorials, murals, outdoor sculpture, art built-in, ephemeral art, community art, and by some researchers and field workers, graffiti art. The New York City Cultural Program for instance identifies graffiti art as “non administered public art”. In this context art practitioners, policy makers, art administrators and graffiti reduction program managers need to consider the methods of developing and evaluating public art projects in their local environment.

I will discuss a method developed with the University of Wollongong, Councils and community for creating and evaluating public art that uses an evaluative framework. The framework identifies key areas of social, aesthetic, environmental and economic values. This method of evaluation seeks to broaden discussion and understanding of the varied methods of public art practice including graffiti prevention through the arts projects. It encourages social interaction and the development of new partnerships in the creation of public art.

The method has been put into practice within the local government areas of Kiama Municipality and Shellharbour City resulting in innovative, cost effective, socially relevant and inclusive public art programs with a strong emphasis on graffiti prevention through the arts.

I will present a number of best practice case studies developed through the framework including legal walls, strategic and targeted public art projects and graffiti prevention programs.

Thank the organisers
Thank the other speakers
Comment on Brisbane city, a city of ideas and great optimism

The main intention of my paper today is to bring graffiti art into the same discussion as public art. As stated in my abstract, public art is seen by some art commentators and art administrators, and in fact the City of New York that Adam Graycer from the AIC spoke of yesterday, as a form of non administered public art. I therefore will discuss public art and graffiti art together and look fundamentally at how the two differ and how we can use the same methodology in creating public art that can be used for graffiti art and sub sequentially vandalism prevention or for anti-social behaviour.

My background is as a cultural planning and development officer with local government in NSW and an academic undertaking a PhD in the area of public art. Many of the projects I manage have a youth focus as well as project managing a number of community art and public art projects. I therefore would suggest the method that I employ in dealing with the problem of graffiti art has come about from a natural attrition from working in the areas of youth, local government, public art and academic practice.

I am mainly concerned with developing practical methods in developing public art that has a number of beneficial outcomes including graffiti prevention, youth engagement, employment outcomes for youth and community capacity building. An important aspect of public art is the fact that it can help to create an engagement with public space and with communities for the all community to enjoy, including youth that live and or visit those places. A valid reason for the growing desire for public art and for that matter graffiti art in public spaces is the need for contemplative and recognisable spaces in our hectic public spaces and lifestyles so we may become more aware of our local area its history and people. This increasing cultural amnesia results in a yearning for an engagement with our public spaces from all communities, youth and mainstream, that relates the notion or idea that so much of once was is slipping away is manifest in that there is so little in our public spaces that speaks of who we are. From this idea of public space it could be suggested that the sign of a graffiti hotspot is a sign of the need for legitimised public art projects.
We should begin then with a quick and by no means comprehensive definition of public art, something that, like art in general, is constantly expanding and incorporating new art forms and practice. Public art refers to works designed and created by artists, art located in, or an integral part of a public space or a facility, in both outdoor and indoor environments. Public art and for that matter graffiti art may be found in public parks, city gateways, streets, recreation centres, foreshores and beachfronts, cinemas, community centres, city squares, the forecourts of public buildings, libraries and shopping centres or any publicly accessible space. Public art though often involves the practice of placemaking, and this is where public art and graffiti art divide. Placemaking is a holistic and integrated approach to designing public environments that balances and combines cultural, economic, social, demographic, ethnic, indigenous, historic and environmental considerations and actively fosters the interactive relationship between people and place. It enriches public environments by integrating site-specific public art with urban design, architecture, and landscaping and fosters collaboration between the community, government, business, creative artists and planning and design professionals. Placemaking aims to enhance or develop a unique community identity by responding to the specific place’s social, economic, historic, environmental and cultural context.

The elements common to all public art and graffiti art is that it is accessible to people and that an artist has been involved in its design or design and fabrication. To further understand public art and graffiti art for the discussion today I would argue it is best approached from looking at the key aspects of the two art practices.

Public art is a juncture or partnership involving:
1. In most cases a level of government or a commissioning body
2. The artist/s
3. The community
4. The site.

Compare this juncture with that of graffiti art.

Graffiti art is a juncture or partnership involving:
1. The artist/s
2. The site
3. Some parts of the community
4. In few cases a level of government or a commissioning body.

Using this simplified yet accurate description of public art and graffiti art we find a commonality and the means to bridging graffiti art to legitimate and legal public art practice. Primarily once we gauge the level of government and community involvement and lack of it in the equation we can begin to address the core issue of graffiti using methods developed through public art practice and policy. Mark Halsey yesterday used the term of a legitimate landscape aesthetic. Put simply, what visual elements do we want to see in our public spaces? This raises another question of what visual elements can we control in our public spaces and more importantly who is the ‘we’ that controls the aesthetic or visual elements in public spaces? In most cases, and the majority of the presentations at this conference, I would concede state that graffiti, like the whether, is one of the visual elements that government and community are unable to control; and that it is the government and the majority of its constituents, excluding graffiti artists who are the ‘we’ that seek to control the landscape or urban aesthetic.
Here lies the problem- creating a legitimate landscape or urban aesthetic. It is not primarily an issue of antisocial behaviour or for that matter criminal behaviour as Prof Graham Martin suggested in yesterdays presentation. It is a problem of developing a socially acceptable landscape aesthetic by involving all levels of community and government in the issue. Furthermore professor Martin alluded to this when he broke down the graffiti art into art or aesthetic styles such as décor, pieces, tags and graffiti art.

How then do we do this, engineer if you like or foster a socially acceptable landscape or urban aesthetic, and why? Firstly I don’t realistically or philosophically think we can or should ever completely do this, however it is worth involving this understanding in your graffiti prevention equation. Noting the methods used by marketing campaigns that help develop a consumerist aesthetic that seem to have universal value in our global market may provide some helpful insights and methods.

**Marketing campaign:**  
Accessibility to product = Located in a public space  
Well-researched product = Community consultation  
Advertising = Public art communication  
Commodity value = Economic and social feasibility and sustainability

Now I should bring this back to a more grounded and real world approach to the 100 million dollar problem of graffiti. I have developed an evaluative method for public art using an evaluative framework that in effect helps to answer the question of why create public art, how to evaluate it and furthermore why strive for a more socially acceptable landscape or urban aesthetic, that in effect will help to find solutions to the graffiti problem.

The framework evaluates public art from the four key areas of

1. Social  
2. Environmental  
3. Economic  
4. Aesthetic vales

This same evaluative method for public art can be applied to graffiti art as a means to developing understating and dialogue and thus assisting in creating a more socially acceptable landscape or urban aesthetic in your local area.

**Social Value**

The artwork relates to the community, its demographic, cultural aspirations and identity The artwork relates to the history and heritage of the local area

The artwork helps build community capacity or what has been termed social capital

The work is valued by the local community and visiting communities.

**Environmental Value**

The artwork relates visually and conceptually to the local environment

The artwork does not jeopardises or put at risk the environment
Economic Value

The artwork helps generate employment for local artists

The artwork adds value to public spaces that equates to desirability of the area for people who already live in the location

The artwork adds value to public spaces that equates to desirability for people who want to buy into area

The artwork adds value to public spaces that equates to desirability for people to visit who go on to spend in the area such as tourists.

The work helps reduce graffiti maintenance spending

The artwork helps reduce community costs such as health issues, social cohesion problems and policing

Aesthetic Value

The work is created using best art practice, using significant form, elements of colour and composition.

The work is visually pleasing to the local and visiting community

I will now discuss three examples that utilise the approach discussed so far.

Warilla Public Art Project- Integrating Graffiti and Public Art

This project involved two mosaics, two aerosol murals, stencil mural and legal wall. The project therefore involved graffiti art in the same way as public art. A high level of community consultation and involvement in all aspects the project involving 2000 surveys on the history of the area since 1956 when housing commission was built in the majority of the area as well as a series of community and youth art workshops. The aspect of displacement or the ‘bulls eye effect’ of graffiti was addressed in this project by the fact that a comprehensive and integrated approach was applied to situating a number of public art projects in the area. A legitimate urban aesthetic was developed in cooperation with local police, a neighbourhood community, local youth, local government and artists.

Sparx Magazine- Communicating Public Art and Graffiti Art

Sparx magazine is a cultural, youth, arts and environmental magazine involving a partnership between three neighbouring local governments. The magazine brings graffiti art projects into the discussion of legitimate public art projects, youth, environmental and cultural issues. It therefore creates a bridges between youth culture and more mainstream culture where young people can see and read about mainstream local culture and adults can read and see what youth culture are engaged in and therefore help to build a socially acceptable landscape or urban aesthetic.
The Good Graffiti Squad

This project is based on the fact that the engineers in Shellharbour City Council were spending thousands of dollars each year on paint over of bus shelters in Shellharbour city. The engineers, cultural and youth programs agreed this money could be spent to create murals in these hot spots and that the sites would be maintained through the youth arts program. To date this has been a great success with a 95% reduction of graffiti instances on these sites and has had a cost saving to council.

To summarise, I would suggest first and foremost talking to the young people who are the so-called perpetrators of criminal activity. Speak to the local government in your area and access what the engineers or works department are spending each year on unproductive and uncreative paint-over programs. Then speak to your constituents who are directly affected by the graffiti and see what they would like, apart from paint over programs. In other words, develop collaboratively a collective a urban or landscape aesthetic with all stakeholders involved. Just think there are 100 million dollars out there just waiting for your creative ideas.