

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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Honors theses

PUBLIC ART WORK SITES. Construction of contexts of social interaction and methodologies of territorial reappropriation

by Ambra Micheletto

Tutor: Elisabetta Forni

Co-tutor: Lisa Parola

This dissertation explores art projects that address public space through the study of practices applied from the turn of the millennium until today, with an emphasis on current developments in Italian practice. The choice of case studies is based chiefly on thematic parameters around which a critical and narrative discussion is built, characterized by a combination of the roots of selected expressive modes and the development thereof. The artworks and artists mentioned are not necessarily the most representative of recent art history, but have been chosen in so far as they are exemplary cases of the production of local territorial values and of the alternative modes of cultural and artistic expression, capable of strengthening community identity and creating a sense of belonging.

It becomes clear that contemporary art has for some time explored semantic areas, methods of action and communication concerning the public realm, focussing on process and public participation. I have researched those public art projects that address community participation, while opportunely discarding monumental or commemorative approaches, in order to express shared and communicable values. That is to say, those projects that propose an economic approach that is the result of the sustainable dynamics of demand instead of those following a logic of supply. My research is primarily aimed at a local dimension where an urgency to implement new processes, capable of collecting, researching, and protecting the interaction of relationships that are explicit in contemporary territories, bestows new meaning upon the locus.

The navigation of public space with the intent to acquire a greater awareness for a given territory does not produce decisive action in relation to a precise purpose, nor do they yield objectively recognizable results. Through the redefinition on a local scale of the locus and the building of the contexts for interaction – what in this dissertation is referred to as a public art work site– these artistic practices offer (although not always successfully) a gateway to alternatives in the management and use of collective space and put forth the motion that public space is viable, and more so when it constitutes a complex issue. Although proximity to a specific region is not a sufficient condition towards re-establishing social relations and coexistence in an urban context, the activation of awareness for collective spaces through art can be a way to allow individual and collective imagination to manifest itself in a flexible dimension and prevents the locus from losing its meaning.

By operating within micro-contexts and small communities, the forms of action at public art work sites tend to produce a self-governing locus that conveys the feasibility of an active citizenship and is capable of responding to important issues by confronting conflicts with a plurality of intent.

In the first chapter, my research engages the major critical points inherent to the question of public urban space; in the second chapter the historical evolution of public art is analyzed and in the third its inseparable links to territorial practices, examining above all those practices that compare concretely with reality. The fourth chapter focuses on the situation in Italy with a case study on *Nichelino Base Alpha*, a public art project curated by Maurizio Cilli, *Eco e Narciso* (Rebecca De Marchi) and *a.titolo* (Lisa Parola) in the framework of the *Nuovi Commitenti (New Patrons)* program. As a result of this project, which I have experienced and documented personally in each of its phases, I was able to study the question of public space and to verify in which ways a methodology where the artistic product is placed central to the collective locus can add new meaning. Moreover, I examine how applied participatory dynamics consolidate social ties and activate a process of territorial reappropriation.

For further information, e-mail:

Ambra Micheletto: ambra.micheletto@gmail.com