

Why public art?

The better question is why not? Public art has been with us for time eternal beginning with the cave man. He drew murals on the walls of his cave to illustrate or advertise to others about his fruitful hunt, the size of his family and his day-to-day survival. Early inhabitants of the British Isles built Newgrange and Stonehenge to show their power and to mark their existence. The Egyptians constructed pyramids to honor their pharaohs and in the process created long-lasting reminders of their once great empire. Or consider the Greeks and the Romans, true masters of the carved edifice and statuary, a huge influence still felt today.

As Americans, we've come to this party a bit late and possibly a bit misdirected. Up until the late 1960's, most public art in America was that of creating monuments to our heroes and memorializing wars; there is an important place for this honored art form. But, the 1960's taught us that it is O.K. to make *art for art's sake*, and that we don't have to have a purpose! By the 1980's, many cities and states were forming public art committees and sponsoring sculpture and mural competitions to engage the artists with their communities.

Now, in the early years of the new millennium, the engagement continues with temporary outdoor sculpture exhibits. These exhibits have gained appeal because of their accessibility and affordability (as many municipalities cut funding for the arts). Who benefits from these exhibits? Everyone. The exhibits serve to increase awareness of the visual arts, assert that a community is forward thinking and energetic, improve the quality of life, dress-up the urban landscape and provide artists with a venue to showcase and sell the work. Not to mention the economic impact which can be significant.

It is tough in these difficult times to justify public art in any form, but remember: ***art is created not necessarily to sustain life but to enhance it.***©

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