

Art in Urban Public Space

Dynamics in Intentions, Production and Reception 1945–Present



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Public Art: Definition

Public art—synonym: *art in public space*—generally describes either permanent or temporary works (objects and/or processes) commissioned for sites of open public access which are located outside their conventional, hence, museological locations and settings. Namely, city squares (see photograph), parks, buildings' exterior, infrastructural sites such as railway stations, roundabouts and airports, and the like. In this research, public art essentially refers to the intentions, production and reception regarding suchlike works.

Project Description

The changing intentions, production and reception (c.q. experiences) of public art from 1945 till present are studied both as a reflection of and reaction to (deeper) social changes in society like states reformulating their roles in the public domain and increased city marketing. Hence, the development of public art policies and practices – as well as reactions regarding public art as expressed in locales, local media and art reviews – are analysed in detail for four case-study cities in two quite different institutional contexts: the Netherlands (Amsterdam and Rotterdam) and Flanders (Antwerp and Ghent).

Methodology and Techniques

This research includes literature study; (visual) fieldwork; archive studies; theory-based selection of public art projects in the four cities concerned for thorough study; expert interviews and in-depth interviews with public space's users; (local) media research; and discourse analysis. This research employs NVivo 7, advanced research software for qualitative analysis. Essentially, this hermeneutic research focuses on exploring and understanding the subject matter rather than explaining it.

Knowledge Gap

This research project is challenging since it analyses and documents shifts in the intentions, production and reception of public art. Contrary to the semiotic and productionist context of public art, a generally neglected area of study is the public reaction to art in public space. This dimension is explicitly included in this study through the analysis of mediated public reactions.



Contested public art:
Arc de Triomphe (2003,
Salzburg) by the artist
collective Gelitin.

Photograph by Gelitin.

Geographical Relevance

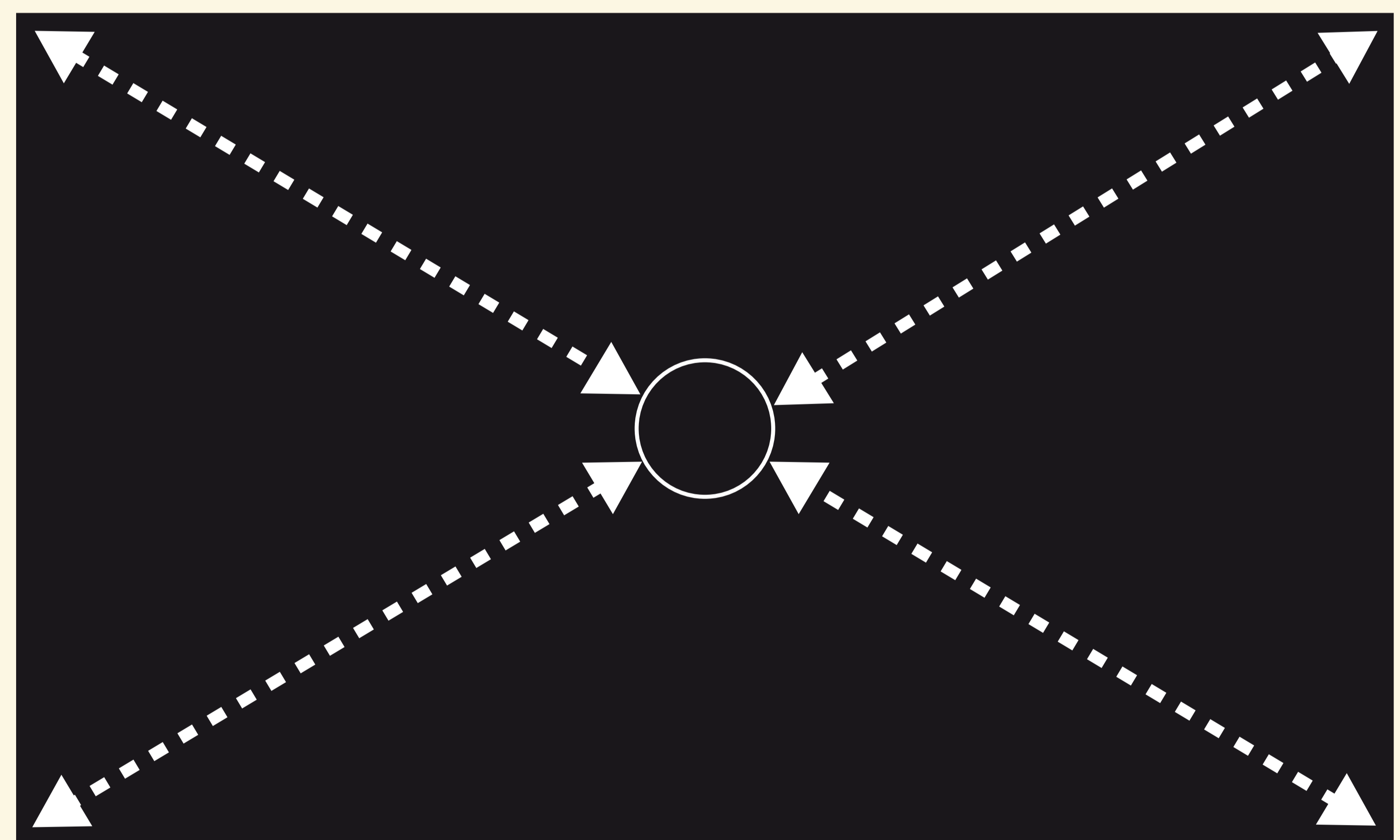
Public art is often endowed by urban planners with its alleged ability to enhance city's *spatial quality*. The geographical relevance of public art is encompassed by the basal question *why* what spatial quality of public art is interpreted by whom and regarding which urban spatial dimension(s)?

Research Aim

To provide insight into changing intentions, production and public's reception regarding art in urban public space from 1945 till present.

Basic Research Questions

- How can the changing intentions regarding public art be spatiotemporally identified at the level of urban policy and public art practice (production)?
- How can the changing public's reception regarding public art be spatiotemporally identified throughout mediated reactions?
- How are the dynamics in intentions, production and reception of public art related to sociospatial changes?



Typological hermeneutic paradigm to public art: art *in* space; art *of* space; art *as* space; space as art; and/or art *for* space.

Urgent Quest

How to perform sound hermeneutic research into the public's reception of public art so as to unravel reflexive / intersubjective perspectives to public art by juxtaposing them as well to mediated reactions in (local) newspapers and other archival material?

*Gazing encounters raptured
geographic eyes*

Personal aphorism

March 2008