

Geography of art



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Public Art: Dynamics in Intentions, Production and Public Reception, 1945–Present

Public art describes artworks, either permanent or temporary, commissioned for sites with open public access. These are located outside conventional [museological or private] locations and settings: city squares, parks, buildings' exteriors, and infrastructural sites such as railway stations, roundabouts, and airports. Public art is a visual practice in that it integrates, represents, and communicates vision, image, and space, and is therefore an innately pertinent subject field in geography.

Research Aim

To provide insight into changing intentions, production and public reception regarding art in urban public space from 1945 to the present time.

Research Questions

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

Project Description & Methodology

The changing intentions, production and public reception as to public art from 1945 to the present time are studied both as a reflection of and reaction to (deeper) societal changes 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 to public art as expressed in documents and interviews – 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). This research includes literature study, (visual) fieldwork, archive studies, theory-based selection of public-art projects for thorough study, expert interviews and in-depth interviews with public space's users, media research, and discourse analysis.



"Sluit Je Ogen / Verbeeld Je Kunst"* (2005) by Jan Christensen, Ghent *Dutch for "Close Your Eyes / Imagine Your Art"

Current Project: Does Institutional Context Matter in Public-Art Practice?

Main diachronic differences in 'governmentalities' between the Netherlands and Flanders, 1945-present

The Netherlands	Flanders
Strong tradition of public intervention, yet a break from the mid-1980s onwards	Continuing strong laissez-faire policy and municipal autonomy
Continuing non-regime judgement of taste ('Thorbecke principle'): 'state at distance' in the cultural domain	Continuing integrated and integral art policy: cultural domain with political primacy

In juxtaposition to Flanders, to what extent does the strong Dutch national incentives policy result in more, more dense, and more diverse local public artworks?

To what extent is public-art practice a self-arranged sociospatial entity, and what does this say for urban futures? And does art go where institutional money goes?

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