

Public Art

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is about public art. By the end of the lesson, you'll be able to describe the philosophy behind public art and identify examples of public art. Public art can refer to any work of art in public space and is often used to create a sense of place in a spot that seems to lack individuality. You will cover:

1. "Tilted Arc"

One of the great things about living in large urban areas is the availability to experience and appreciate public works of art. **Public art** can refer to any work of art in public space, but generally refers to **percent for art** programs, beautification programs, and other attempts to alleviate the bleakness of the urban landscape resulting from modernist architecture and urban design.

Placemaking, as it is loosely known, is a process where public works of art are placed in a location in order to create a sense of identity or individuality in that place that didn't exist before. Because of this, there's a communal element to this type of artwork that has arisen in the last several decades, as well as an idea that they're made to benefit the community.

That doesn't mean that these works are received with no controversy. Even the best intentions may go unrealized, depending upon the experience of the public. The "Tilted Arc" that was placed in the Foley Federal Plaza in Manhattan was constructed in 1981 but only lasted eight years. It was eventually dismantled after some sizable controversy about its effect on the population that used the public space.



Tilted Arc by Richard Serra

1981

Manhattan, New York

The sculpture literally bisected the plaza. In Richard Serra's attempts to create an experience in which passers-by would interact with the sculpture, he also inadvertently created an experience of isolation and alienation as people felt cut off from each other.



TERMS TO KNOW

Public Art

Works of art installed in the public domain.

Percent for Art

A building development program that funds public art.

Placemaking

The design and administration of public spaces that promote community.

2. Vietnam Veterans Memorial

Controversy also surrounded the construction of the now world-famous Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. The design is minimalistic. It's composed of two monumental slabs of polished gabbro, or black granite, with names of victims of the Vietnam War inscribed into them. They're arranged in a "V" shape, like two massive arms embracing the visitors.



Vietnam Veterans Memorial by Maya Lin

1982

Washington, D.C.

For those fortunate enough to visit it, the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Where's the controversy? Well, the final design for the monument was chosen based on a blind contest where only design submissions were considered. Not the names or backgrounds of the individual designers.

The winning design was by Maya Lin, an undergraduate student at Yale University, and a Chinese American. Despite the beauty and simplicity of design, opponents objected to her design based solely on her heritage. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed, and the memorial remains in Washington, D.C., as one of the most visited works of art in the United States.

3. Project Row Houses

Rick Lowe's Project Row Houses are a type of **new genre public art**. New genre public art is made through a complex process of interaction with the public, with the intention that the finished product will benefit the community in some way.



Project Row Houses by Rick Lowe

1990s (restored)

Houston, Texas

Rick Lowe came up with the idea for the row houses when he was approached by a group of high school students about creating a solution to the problems facing the community, rather than creating a work of art to bring attention to a problem everybody was already aware of.

The solution became Project Row Houses, which serves the dual function of providing space for artists to use, as well as low-income housing for poor families.



TERM TO KNOW

New Genre Public Art

Experimental art practices.



SUMMARY

Now that you've seen the lesson, are you able to identify and define today's key terms? Can you describe the philosophy behind public art? You looked at three examples of public art: the **"Tilted Arc"**, the **Vietnam Veterans Memorial**, and **Project Row Houses**. Public art can refer to any work of art in public space. Public art is often used to create a sense of place in a spot that seems to lack individuality.



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