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Roles of Public Art in Malaysian Urban Landscape towards Improving Quality of Life: Between aesthetic and functional value

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Abstract

Public art defined as artwork that is placed externally in public areas and mostly accessible for public appreciation and viewing purposes. The public art practice involves collaboration of stakeholders, promotes a sense of community and contributes to a substantial public realm. Therefore, to investigate the aesthetic and functional values of public art in the local context, this paper reviews several public art projects in Malaysia, as reference studies; examines the various typology and roles of public art installation. The outcome of this paper is hoped to provide a better understanding of public art for better quality of public realm.

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Keywords: Public art; roles of public art; urban landscape; urban quality of life

1. Introduction

According to Chang (2008), public art is an artistic expression of artist and community that can found in a variety of forms, materials and processes, either permanently or temporarily installed in public space. It included

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freestanding sculptures, monuments, archway and artist-designed street furniture and artwork integrated with building such as murals, architectural details and digital display. In general, the practice of public art involves collaboration of stakeholders, including ruling authority, policy maker, built environment professionals and visual art experts, and promotes a sense of community. It contributes to an enhancement of the public realm, successful place making and the development of cultural and social capital (Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture, 2010). Most public art in western countries celebrates the local culture and re-instate the sense of history and remarkable event, whilst public arts in China, Japan and Korea, are often influenced by their belief and religion, and at the same time, preserving the city’s identity.

Meanwhile, in Malaysia, there is an unprecedented interest and awareness of public art, and its installation are being mostly found in the main cities including Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Perak, Selangor, and Johor. Notwithstanding the interest, however, the installation, locality and placement of public art are often misguided and widely debatable. This scenario is contrary to the guidelines provided by Cardiff County Council (2005) that public art should be placed in publicly accessible area, which is open to the appreciation of everyone. The rationale for public art incorporated as part of the urban landscape and to what extent does it contribute towards improving the urban quality of life and the city itself is often questionable. The incorporation of public art should respond to the particular setting of a public place, such as its use, significance or history (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2008). Therefore, the objectives of this study are (a) to examine the typologies of public art installation and (b) to investigate the aesthetic and functional values of public art in the local context. Thus, this paper reviews several public art projects in Malaysia as reference studies.

1.1. Public art: An overview

The term ‘public art’ is widely open to diverse interpretation and has been referred to an artwork that located externally; from national statue or monument to a mural or graffiti painted on the wall by the public. Frequently, public art being used as an umbrella term covering any artwork that not displayed in the formal museums or art galleries (Hunting, 2005). Hence, the term ‘public art’ in this paper refers to the artwork with the participation of community members and selected artist that located in free accessed spaces. This paper differentiates the types of public art based on the justification by the Portland Public Art Committee (2009), Tyler (2013) and Nurul Izzah et al. (2014) summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Typology of public art

Type / Descriptions	Supporting image
<p>a. Artworks of remembrance</p> <p>Artworks of remembrance are used to commemorate an important historical figure or event of public significance. It can consist of figurative or abstract statues, monuments, memorials, and historical markers.</p>	
<p>b. Expressive artworks</p> <p>Expressive artworks integrate objects into public spaces with the primary intention of introducing a sense of an artistic liveliness, playfulness, delight, fantasy, spirit, and joy into the daily lives of the citizens.</p>	

Public art as figurative statues

Public art as free standing sculpture

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