

Spatiality of Public Monuments In Public Spaces.

Cyril S. Kpodo¹, Selasi A. Sosu², Reuben K.A. Glover³

¹Dept. of Art Education, University of Education Winneba, Ghana.

²Dept. of Art Education, University of Education Winneba, Ghana.

³Dept. of Book Industry. College of Art and the Built Environment. KNUST. Kumasi, Ghana.

Abstract: *This paper discusses issues concerning commissioned monuments and the way they are permanently exhibited. Quite often, the sculptor has no control over siting of commissioned monuments. Sometimes, he does not even have rights over the pedestal on which the statue rests. This invariably “kills” the work as soon as it is “out-doored” after birth in the sculptor’s studio. As though that was not enough, much consideration is not given the environment (space) in which some monuments are sited. Unfortunately, some are planted amidst the debris of foliage, bill-boards, electric pylons and “concrete jungles.” Monuments struggle for attention and get drowned in the sea of space designed, constructed and occupied by man. Not only that, some statues are subjected to retouches as soon as the out-dooring ceremony is over, to the displeasure of the sculptor. They are given finishes that may displease the sculptor but may please a select community. In so doing, the sculptor is bemused as to still claim rights of creativity or not. This paper explores the issue with primary and secondary data. (Visuals taken of some selected works in selected locations in Ghana.)*

Keywords: *Ghana, pedestal, monuments, statue, space, siting, creativity.*

INTRODUCTION

This is a Qualitative Research paper that shares the experience of the authors in the siting of monuments in inappropriate spaces and client alteration of commissioned works that affect aesthetic appeal.

A monument is a building, column, statue, etc. built to remind people of a famous person or event (Hornby, 2010). In the context of this discourse, theoretically and practically, the term “Public Monument” denotes any work of sculpture which is designed for and sited in a space accessible to the general public. Public works of sculpture are prominent in cities and places throughout the world. Unlike private works of art, viewing public art is free and nonexclusive; you just have to be where the art is. Public works of art aim to enrich the community by evoking meaning and purpose in the public setting. Spatiality relates to space and the position, size, shape etc. of things in it (Hornby 2010).

Greek cities were early advocates of the edifying virtues of religious and social art (predominantly sculpture), capable of being viewed and appreciated by the community at large. A supreme example of public art in Ancient Greece is the Parthenon (c.447-422 BCE) on the Acropolis at Athens. Later, Roman authorities erected mass-produced statues of the Roman Emperor in all corners of the empire, in order to demonstrate the majesty of Rome. This concept of communal aesthetics or propaganda was vigorously implemented by Pagan as well as later Christian communities. The golden era of public art however, was the Italian Renaissance, whose artworks were sponsored entirely by the church or civic authorities. Donatello's bronze statue David, and Michelangelo's marble sculptures Pieta and David, bear witness to this upsurge in Christian art.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, partly due to the reduction in patronage by the Catholic Church,

public art in the West was largely confined to the commemoration of Bishops, Kings and other secular heroes. In the 20th and 21st century, political developments widened the function of public art for propaganda purposes.

Public Sculpture could be partitioned into five: integrated, semi-integrated, discrete, community sculpture and ephemeral sculpture. Integrated public sculpture draws inspiration from the location and could not exist anywhere else. Integrated public sculpture uses the location's history, culture and social circumstances that make the work of sculpture distinctly a part of the community. Semi-integrated public sculpture gathers its inspiration, to a certain degree, from the location, but is not necessarily mutually exclusive to that area; the piece of sculpture works in different locations, provided the locations share the same conceptual and physical locations. Ephemeral public sculpture is temporary, is designed specifically for an occasion or event and is transitory in nature.

The notion of displaying public art often stems from the philosophy that all people should have access to art. If art enriches life and helps people to think critically about social issues, it follows that art should be made public. Many other reasons prompt people to make art public, such as involving the audience in the artwork, for instance. Rather than viewing it in an austere museum setting, it becomes part of the community, and the community could become part of the art, interacting with it instead of just looking.

Sculpture has been a prominent form of public art for many years. From ancient times to today, people have made statues and placed them around their cities and palaces. Through these statues, sculptors can also reach people who might not ordinarily step into an art museum. Their sheer form often cause people to stop and look at them. They might tell a story about a people or a town,

helping people to connect with the past and take pride in where they live.

Whatever the artist's intent, sculptures can improve the aesthetics of an environment.

FORM IN SPACE; SPACE OF FORM

Space is an amount of an area or of a place that is empty or that is available for use. Lawson (2001) is of the view that at its most basic, we have our own ways of sensing space and of moving through space. At the more sophisticated level, we have our own ways of making meaning of space. Robertson (2004) writing on Space, Objects, Minds and Brains deliberates further thus:

Yet space is also a thing, and regarding perception, it is a special kind of thing. Unlike outer space, perceptual space is not infinite. It has boundaries. When we look upward toward the sky, space has an end. It stops with the day's blue sky or the night's black background behind the moon and stars. Space is not a void in our mind's eye. Its depth, volume, and boundaries are all part of the brain's creations given to us in perceptual awareness. Just like objects, spaces have form and can be conceptually and physically different.

Many sculptors, formally trained or not, are at least once in their careers, commissioned to make public monuments of various themes and dimensions. Many at times, the primary focus here is to produce and deliver the work as scheduled. Some sculptors may not even visit the proposed site to ascertain the suitability of what the client desires so as to advice concerning dimension of work and its suitability for the intended space to occupy. That aside, some clients and some sculptors, regrettably, simply do not understand that sculpture is beyond the physical product itself. This paper will discuss issues concerning the poor display of some public monuments, and issues of alteration of some commissioned works.

In our environment today, many commissioned statues take a purely material/formal approach with little or no consideration for the space around or within the forms as part of the work. However, sculpture thrives within space. The space in which a work of sculpture is exhibited is as equally important as the sculpture itself. Space here refers to the physical surrounding and includes lighting, artificial or natural. For public sculptures to be denied space for a formal encounter and suitable appraisal makes this a fundamental problem. Morgan (2010) sums up this idea as follows. "Sculpture requires a context, and that context exceeds the presence of the work. It requires a sense of space or a conceptual framework in relation to space." He goes on to add that this extended context has been the bane of three-dimensional art since it began to vacate the cathedral façade in the early Renaissance. That aside, Lawson (2001) adds that if then we are to consider how we relate to space and its role in our lives, we can see a wide range of types of behaviour comes into play. We drive and walk around in space; we are affected by the atmosphere of places which lift or depress our spirits; we need to find our way about in the world and solve problems of navigation using mental as well as physical maps. We cannot escape the surprise and instinctive reaction to sudden changes in the world around us. Since of all human life is lived in space, it inevitably forms one of the most vital and yet most neglected of the influences upon us. Space is thus physical and present although might seem abstract in the context of form.

The absence of this consideration invariably results in outdoor monuments being poorly displayed in the midst of billboards, pylons and concrete jungles. Aside the sculptor who is expected to educate and steer the placement of the statue, others involved such as civil engineers and construction workers sometimes insist on exhibiting their importance by offering counter suggestions that may not augur well for the

concept of the statue. Senie (2003), although conceding that different models prompt distinct criteria, is of the view that three basic questions should be asked, and probably in this order. Applying art-world standards: 1) Is it good work, according to its type: art, urban design, or community project? 2) Does it improve or energize its site in some way—by providing an aesthetic experience or seating (or both) or prompting conversation and perhaps social awareness? 3) Is there evidence of relevant or appropriate public engagement or use? In her opinion, of which I strongly agree with, successful public art has to score on all three or it isn't. These, to her estimation and mine, are high but reasonable expectations.

The following images depict a commissioned work executed for a client. The concept behind this statue is to commemorate a legendary founder of a group of people who migrated and settled in their present habitat. During deliberations for the work, it was agreed verbally that the area earmarked to site the monument would be cleared of all "debris," including billboards and pylon. This was after some effort had gone into securing an appropriate location for the monument. To our chagrin, we were compelled to install the monument within the rubble of all the structures that were supposed to have been relocated. Prior to this disappointment, we had resisted attempts by a relative to the client who doubles as an "artist" and mason to work with an image he had created that depicted the legendary founder. It took a lot of education and resolution to convince interested parties that not all that is painted or drawn was appropriate for sculpture. It is of interest to note that, we did not design nor construct the pedestal. It was constructed by the "artist/mason" after we had vehemently protested and our suggestions for an improved version had been accepted.



Fig 1.



Figure 1a.



Figure 1b.

Figure 1, 1a, 1b: Cyril S. Kpodo. Monument amidst pylons.

As shown in the figures, the spatial setting of the statue of “Nana Kome,” the legendary founder of the people of Komenda is drowned in the space that was supposed to keep it aloft for the unobstructed view and visual dialogue with his descendants.

A second example is “Lions Duo,” a pair of ferocious looking lions executed to be placed in front of a palace in Accra, Ghana. The researchers duly visited the site and designed the statues to suit already existing platforms at the gates to the palace. The work was finished by bronzing and upon delivery, everyone expressed satisfaction. Again, the researchers were unpleasantly surprised when they visited the lions to take pictures of them on site, since we were not involved in the installation. The eyes of the lions had been painted glaringly black and white, teeth sparkling white (as though they brushed them daily) and mouth dripping red, to depict blood. We were deflated and wondered if we could still lay claim to the work.

Figure 2. Cyril S. Kpodo. *Lions Duo* installed.

Figure 3. Cyril S. Kpodo. Close-up view of painted teeth and eyes of bronzed lion.

Questions may arise concerning what a community wants in their public sculpture. So long as the depiction of eyes, teeth and bloody mouth satisfies the public, what is our problem? The researchers problem is, if that was what the client requested, we could have done it to their satisfaction and to our satisfaction. As it stands, it is not to our professional expectancy.

CONCLUSION

Rather than treating public monuments as innocent aesthetic embellishments of the public sphere alone, recent scholarship has emphasized the political and cultural meaning attached to them. Indeed there is increased attention being paid to the spatiality of public monuments where the sites are not merely the material backdrop from which a story is told, but the spaces themselves constitute the meaning by becoming both a physical location and a sight-line of interpretation (Johnson, 1994, 1995), as quoted in Johnson ,2002.

Some sculptors might not be bothered by all that, so long as they get remuneration for work done. Are we as sculptors only satisfied with the monetary gains of commissioned public monuments or we should be concerned with the image of art we put out there and our own images as sculptors? We conclude, quoting Morgan (2010) who postulates that “When it comes to public art, everyone pretends to be an expert, whether they know anything or not. Art becomes an emotional issue, and everyone wants to become a part of it.... It is important to make a clear argument not only in terms of popular opinion, but also through a clearly informed and educated point of view.”

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