

Permanence of an artwork in public areas and a design project: Draw and Erase (Yaz-Boz)

Arzu Çevik *, Department of Ceramic, Faculty of Fine Arts, Mersin University Mersin, Turkey.

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Abstract

There are three elements that come to the forefront while questioning the permanence of an artwork: The artist who plays a role, although indirectly, in individuals' establishing a direct relationship with the artwork; the political authorities and city administrators who have effective power on the permanence of artworks, and the watchers/users who realize conscious or unconscious vandalistic behaviors to artworks in public areas. While, at times, emerging as a consequence of a systematic destruction of the cultural structure of societies and a dogmatic thinking, the vandalism can also emerge in the form of destructive actions of individuals provoked by psychological and sociological causes. Users who are consciously or unconsciously injurious behavior to the artwork in the public areas is starting point of the project. At the same time, this interactive project was born of necessity as a result of human – behavior – environment interaction. This project aims the protection of the artwork in public spaces and bring together people with interactive art.

Keywords: public art, sculpture, vandalism, design, interactive Art

*ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Arzu Çevik**, Mersin University Fine Arts Faculty , Ceramic Department Çiftlikköy Campus, Mersin- 33000, Turkey. E-mail address: arzucevikk@gmail.com / Tel.: +90 5305109010

1. Introduction

When questioning the durability of an artwork, three issues become prominent. The artist who plays a role (though indirect) in establishing true relations between individuals and artworks. Political authorities that hold influential power on the durability of artworks, municipalities and viewer/user who consciously or unconsciously adopt a destructive manner (vandalism) toward the artworks exhibited in public spaces.

Being one of the today's urban problems, vandalism is a critical issue that, due to its social aspects, has become a particular concern for municipalities as well. While negatively affecting urban esthetics with its psychological and physical reflections, vandalism increasingly causes material and socially significant damages. Although considered an attack toward and violation of individuals' common rights, it manifests itself in two forms, namely conscious and unconscious destruction of artworks in particular. The first form contains violence and an urge to destroy, the second form, on the other hand, manifests itself as such actions as reminding oneself, giving a message or playing a game (Burcu, Danacioglu, Vazsonyi, 2007).

When reviewed in terms of the durability of the artwork, the first form creates an irreversible destruction or a damage that is almost impossible to reclaim or repair. The second form, on the other hand, aims to impair the environmental quality and urban esthetics.

Vulnerability of an artwork that is placed at a public space compels the authorities to take into consideration such actions as inscribing, engraving and scratching and the transformation caused by this interaction should be deemed as the natural course of this process. This transition can be seen as an analogy to the natural or mechanical abrasion of all organic and inorganic structures on Earth. The untouchable status of the artwork may lose its meaning through this process.

Damaged artwork can make it clearly visible that the mankind is capable of destroying much faster than the nature itself and the climatic conditions. Especially, tendency of the youth to inscribe and sketch is quite perplexing. While essentially a variety of different feelings are being inscribed, such inscriptions as "Ali loves Ayşe", "If you're young, this nation cannot be separated "T.C." (Republic of Turkey) or "Dersimli" (The one who is from Dersim) are everyday symbols that actually represent the scribe and give us clues about her/his personality. Being an indispensable habit for humans for centuries, tendency to inscribe and sketch manifests itself in the cave paintings from Paleolithic Age, the symbols and inscriptions left by Ancient Egyptians while traveling and the wall inscriptions and drawings from Ancient Greece. Today, you can find them on artworks, objects, urban furniture in public spaces even on freshly poured concrete. While the impulse of the mankind to "leave its mark" releases the urge to inscribe, it is basically an evidence of the man's efforts to express himself, to acknowledge or prove its durability. Furthermore, choosing public spaces as the stage to share feelings, even creating and promoting a personal trademark may be considered as a method of communication.

Although authorities state that inscribing, sketching or carving is a less damaging act, such actions are still deemed as vandalism. In this respect, awareness of the adults who are bereft of urban awareness and the youths who are deemed to impel this transition should be raised starting from an early age.

Thus the measures taken to protect vulnerable public artworks will surely contribute to the communal lifestyle and visual urban design.

1.1. Objective of the Project

Set out to benefit from role of the art as an instrument to achieve various objectives, this project is designed to satisfy people's instinct to inscribe and sketch and keep them from damaging other

artworks thus protecting them. Arising solely from necessity, the project provides, as an alternative art-design object, walls and sculpture-like structures on which people can freely inscribe or sketch.

1.2. Project and interactive art

The "Social Sculpture" concept that was created in 60s by Joseph Beuys, an artist influencing other artists who sought new approaches in public realm and applied different works of art, is expounded as, instead of keeping away from community, involvement of people in the art in person. The "Social Sculpture" concept of Joseph Beuys changed the perception of sculpture as being a three dimensional object that is placed in a space to be viewed by people. According to Beuys, sculpturing is the way we form the world we live in (Antmen, 2008). Rudolf Steiner's "Lectures on Bees" greatly influenced Joseph Beuys to develop his ideas on the social role of art. Influenced by the division of labor among the bees in the creation of their hive, he liberated the art from being monopolized by one man, the artist, and tried to urge members of the community to participate in the creation of artworks, considering the artwork as a co-creation of the artist and the audience. That is, artist should contribute the whole and form life in art.

Examining the formation process of the contemporary art, Sezer Tansug emphasized the subject in his book, "Herkes İçin Sanat" (Art for Everyone), stating; "Focusing on the current problems in the contemporary art requires examination of such problems in terms of not only the artist but also the society" (Tansug, 1982).

Art can form the life only when it develops and transform with man. Today, modernist point of view survives and the number of various artistic approaches that involve the audience and make them a part of it increases.

Adopting an interactive approach beyond the classic ones to examine the relationship between individuals and artworks and the conditions for the durability of outdoor artworks, this project has a functional and experimental character. According to the results obtained from a study of a contemporary fact, conscious or unconscious destructive acts of inscribing and carving are performed mostly by youths between 13-16 years of age. Although designed for this group of youths, this project aims to convene people from all age groups and every walks of life, provoking the urge to inscribe with the motto, "the right place and the right action".

Inscriptions and sketches created freely by individuals shall be combined with the designs on which such inscriptions and sketched are made to create an "artist-designer and audience-user" co-production. Reusable designs will create a different visual language with their ever changing physical features, becoming a living object along with their creators.

Should the design project, which is created in the electronic environment as a reflection of the assessment of the human-action-environment interaction, be implemented in real life, it would satisfy this unrestrainable disposition, making it enjoyable. Three dimensional designs that can be placed in public spaces or selected areas in great numbers to provide "targets" that are "not to be protected" promise a free discovery for everyone with their "democratic stance open to all".

1.3 Importance of the project

Set out to indirectly protect public artworks, the project will contribute to economy and the sustainability of art by decreasing maintenance and repair costs and maintaining material value of such artworks. Furthermore, aiming to manage destructive habits of individuals adopting an expressionist and free approach and using a new and appropriate target without limiting the people's urge to inscribe and sketch, the project will contribute to the social values and the art itself by providing the environment necessary for the socialization of the art, its integration to the daily life and allowing it to exist in public spaces.

1.4 Design and material characteristics of the project

Originally designed for Mersin Cultural Park, the project "Yaz-Boz" (Draw- Erase)¹ is created in three groups. In the first group, a large and flat "classic wall", on which people can inscribe and sketch, is used as the main object without being marginalized and silhouettes of figures taken from real photographs are used to represent park's visitors. (As a result of a survey conducted at the park, drawing or painting eyebrows, eyes, mouths and noses on the faces of abstract human sculptures were identified as the most preferred destructive actions.) In the second group, semi-abstract anthropoid figures that maintain their sculptural forms and special designs for lovers that are based on these inscriptions are exhibited. This design will be dedicated to everyone who cannot cry out but wishes to show his love to the people by inscribing. Designs that are based on the chalkboard constitute the third group.



Figure 1. Wall



Figure 2. Lover



Figure 3. Crowded



Figure 4. Chalkboard

Designs will be made in various materials such as PVC, Betopan (a compound of wood dust and cement), alucobond, concrete and chalkboard. White, chalkboard green, blue and orange are the preferred colors to render the designs attractive and allow audience to establish a bond with them. Inscrutable with any kind of materials, the designs will be cleaned or painted when they become full of inscriptions.

¹ Title of the study that includes the project is "The persistence of the work of art in public sphere and the evaluation of Mersin Kültür Park".

2. Conclusion

"How the audience will adopt the project?", "What materials they will choose?", "What they will inscribe?" and "Will they damage artworks again?" are the main concerns of this experimental work. The results of this study may help further development of the project. The number of these special areas, where people can inscribe out their hearts, can be increased in the future. Like the "Speaker's Corner" in the Hyde Park, London, Turkish communities may also be provided with such special public spaces, where they can freely inscribe their feelings, exploring new experiences.

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