

Research in Context

Question no.2

Exploring art outside the Gallery space, discuss how artists have developed art practice utilising space and or a place.

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Through various theories, the study, and by exploring the development of art practice in public spaces of two extremely valuable and inspiring contemporary artists, this essay will discuss why public art matters in present times by focusing on themes of its spiritual, cultural, social, historical and economic values. It will also introduce the challenges, problems and adversities that an artist faces when he intends to exhibit his art in public space.

I believe in the city as a natural human environment, but we must humanise it. It is an art that will redefine public space in the 21st Century. We can make our cities diverse, inspirational places by putting art, dance and performance in all its forms into the matrix of street life. Antony Gormley (Newman, 2013)

Art is displayed in different forms in public places as well as sculptures, installations, displays, monuments and memorials. Numerous great pieces are found in cities and urban areas, and several are also located in rural sites. Public art can be found everywhere: exhibited on the side of buildings and recreational parks or in unusual places like airport terminals and different business organisations. (Merryman and Elsen, p.656-658). Most of these sites have hidden histories and memories of the people, so they often become 'meeting points' physically and often as the focal point in people's conversations. According to Chipp (2002, p.473), art has not only a decorative value or is just a supplement of life. In a sense, it should be created for a purpose. It should be interwoven with the very stuff and texture of human experience. Furthermore, it should intensify that experience, making it more profound, clear, coherent and rich. He claims that all this can be reached only if the artist functions willingly and freely in relation to society and wants what he can offer.

Therefore, I have explored the practice of Antony Gormley in a natural or urban location. His works are a great example of how art can change society.



Fig.1 Antony Gormley, (1998), *Angel of the North*

Nairene, in her book *Art Now*, states that through the artists' career, "Antony Gormley used his own body as the starting point for creating sculptures that demand a physical and emotional response." Right to the beginning of his practice, the artist tries to use his own existence as an instrument to explore the condition of questioning himself what it means to be alive. Artist states that our spiritual potential and absorption with human forms raise analytical questions about our mind and memory. (Nairene, 2011, p.5). In addition to that, exhibiting such a great piece in a public space deepens the experience by intensifying our senses. Tate says that our brain can recognise experiences by merging the information from all five senses. "Can taste, touch, smell and sound change the way we 'see' art?" (Tate, 2015). The query reveals an accurate observation that we need to open all of our senses to understand and admire art deeply. Indeed, this theory refers to the *Angel of the North* created by Antony Gormley in 1998 and awarded the Turner Prize in 1994. The sculpture of

an angel seen in picture 1 needs to be seen physically to participate entirely. Standing at the top of the mountain with the enormous statue and allowing yourself to touch is a considerable part of the experience. Personal participation in the understanding of communing with the piece is indisputable. (Tate, 2015)

Antony Gormley states: "If your work doesn't speak to people, it's beyond comprehension and risible, but if people engage with it, you become tarred with the brush of populism." (Nairene, 2011, p.16) Beyond the word 'populism,' which synonyms are radicalism and moralism, Gormley desire the artwork to be reachable and appropriate to a bigger group of people, or even to everyone. He states that the experience of looking at a piece physically is much more worthy and can deliver a lot deeper experience than seeing a photo of it. Indeed, a more robust relationship is shaped quickly by making contact with it. Our morals, context and reflection have been settled down onto the piece, and as a result, spectators will recall the time they spent with it and the value of the entire artwork.

The *Angel of the North* (Gormley, 1998) is an attempt of the artist to make a physical statement about his strong memory from an early age and strong feelings about his guardian angel. "I suppose I was trying to isolate that and look at it; even it sounds a bit unkind to everyone else." In this piece, an artist also relates to the broader idea of trying to look again at what the notion of a divine intervener might be. (Nairene, 2012, p.5). Creating this work was a surly act of assertive power, which significantly impacted the landscape and history. The strong connection to the land where the miners had worked symbolises rebirth and renewal. He accepts the challenge with his artistic bravery.

This unique sculpture sets new rules for art in public spaces and makes a provocation to other public projects to create a collective experience. Artist states that "It is an

extraordinary thing that here, you have a physical something and it actually exists in space, but where it lives is in people's memory. The art of our time has failed us if we can't live with it and if it ceased to be intriguing long after it's been erected." (Nairene, 2012, p.20)



Pic.2 Antony Gormley, (2005), *Another Place*.

Another spectacular installation of Antony Gormley, which evokes many thoughts, feelings, and discussions for many people from Merseyside, the United Kingdom, and the world, is a sculpture named *Another Place*, seen on picture 2. Work was first installed on Crosby beach in Liverpool in 2005, and it represents hundreds of iron-casted figures spread over three miles up, made from seventeen different moulds taken from the own sculptor body. They all face the open sea and bring to mind the relationship between the space, human body and nature. The figures have become an integral part of the landscape. Some of them disappear almost entirely at high tide and become submerged. Artist stated that it was essential for him to create the 'open work' that will be accessible everywhere and for everyone ready to be contemplated and spend time with it. He also expresses his dissatisfaction, and there is a conviction that art must earn money and cannot be art in itself without conditions. He

rightly believes that art is an engine for new generations and that being universal and open to the public, it has enormous driving power in social change. (Veasey, 2015)

Gormley has explained the importance of the placement for his work *Another Place*:

I want to see whether art can be everyone's, in the same way, that the sky is, and it still seems to me that that is the most exciting challenge in art. Can you make the conditions that surround us all the time into an arena for a kind of awareness that wouldn't exist before? And I guess *Another Place* is an excellent example of this, where we have a beach, we have tide, we have changing weather conditions and night and day. Into that, you insert these works, but adequately spaced, to allow for people to walk between them, and in fact, it's the space between that is critical always in work. (Veasey, 2015)

The artist shows great empathy for the viewers, allowing them to participate in his work

unconditionally. By filling the places between the figures, they turn the piece into a

performance and make themselves an actor for other spectators apart from their

awareness. Thanks to peoples' participation, work becomes more valuable, contributing to

strengthening the value of the entire city, and people can identify with it more closely.

(Possey, 2015) In addition to this, the exciting fact is that public art can capture the eye and

mind of someone passing through the public spaces, someone who won't be engaging with

art at all. Still, he will be intrigued and stop for a while in the moment of passing by it,

possibly pouring his thoughts into the work. Thanks to the possibility of unconditional and

free of charge observation of the piece, we can pay more attention to our civic environment

and be encouraged to question what surrounds us. Gormley state: "Art doesn't have to have

a special conditions of the art gallery, the private collections, the museum, to give itself a

context in which it work. I'm interested in quality that it may or may not bring." he said.

(Narine, 2011, p.20)

Another artist for that art is a response to every day, and the evocative themes of morality and memory is Rachel Whiteread. Her works are good examples of opposite experiences to the works of Antony Gormley, where the physical connection with the piece was vital. Here artists play with our subconscious and consciousness by creating the negatives of objects. The casting process is the central physical realisation and the process intertwined with the creation of meaning. She made her first cast when she realised that you could change something straightforwardly. Most of her works were autobiographical when she was at the Slade Art School. "I had got this wardrobe, which was very similar to a cabinet that I'd known as a child. I wanted to make somehow this memory concrete of sitting inside the wardrobe." (Nairene, 2012, p.49)

She inverts everyday objects, turning them into negatives of themselves, and like an archaeologist, she always tries to find traces of past life. From small, found objects, through the room, the idea of mummifying the sense of silence was a brave but very successful experiment that she called *Ghost* (1990). All those experiences and an obsessed notion of how to cast a whole house without destroying it push Whiteread to create something much more ambitious. A sculpture titled *House*, seen in figure 3, was built in 1994, and it was the artists' most successful artwork with which she is deeply connected.

This much-discussed piece was formed by using the same reverse technique as the artist used in previous projects by pouring concrete into a Victorian three-storey terraced house. Whiteread chose that particular type because it represented an archetypal with its typical architectural style. Creating a *House* (Whiteread, 1994) takes three and a half years, and all processes of making were exceedingly overwhelming for her, which nearly killed her as she has been exposed to very intense stress for a long time. (Nairene, 2012, p.54).

I just loved the idea of putting something that was incredibly quiet and calm in its chaotic city, in the middle of Trafalgar Square. I hate public sculpture, which sort of sounds ridiculous, considering I make it, but I like the way you can almost make something disappear -states Whiteread. (Nairene, 2012, p.51)



Fig.2 Rachel Whiteread, (1993), *Untitled (House)*,

Still, it ended up with quite extraordinary sculpture, which touched the people on many different levels and whenever they were interested in art, politics, or road building. In the time of two-and-half months that *House* (Whiteread, 1994) stood silently on a Grow Road, but it generated a massive storm of media noise as over 250 newspaper, and magazines articles were written about it. By the time the bulldozers came in on 11 January, thousands

had seen *House* (Whiteread, 1994) of people from around the world. The artist feels a tremendous regret from the moment the work was completed to the moment it was removed, as she didn't have a good chance to see it fully - the media's attack was so intensive, and she feels so overwhelmed and stressed. "It took three and a half years to develop, four months to make, thirty minutes to demolish." (Mullins, 2004, p.55). This piece evoked many questions and discussions and became a telling symbol of the violence done to communities by bureaucratic planning. Rachel Whiteread's art piece is about more than the space inside of some structures because it brings to mind the memory of specific spaces and all episodes around. Differing to many artworks, where the essential part of work is visualised and tangibly present here, hidden, lost or missing is the most valuable part of the work. (Quigley, 2010, p.4)

Alain de Botton reclaims that:

The future artist might be adept with brushes and paints or with film, but they will also have the skills of an architect, a geologist, a public speaker, a politician or a scientist. (...) We shouldn't be surprised if many of the artists of the coming decades do not produce the traditional objects and instead head directly for the underlying mission of art: changing how we experience the world. (Botton, 2011, p.151).

In this quote, we all can find hope that not only artists but every human in this world has massive power and a voice to show a better way of understanding the world. To move the human mind to rethink morals and beliefs and intensify experiences by using different media and utilising other places and spaces. We should find our own way of expressing our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Through bringing personal and distinctive interpretation to each work, site, or collective construct, artists can become social and civic leaders who encourage alternative perspectives which can challenge community values, establishments and faiths. (Walsh, 2018) In addition, places with intense public art expressions give

communities a stronger sense of identity and belonging and break a tendency of dullness and alikeness of place. Quigley (2010) states:

Art can commemorate qualities making one site different from another and creating a sense of local lifelines in the towns, metropolises and societies in which we live. In a spiritual sense, they are places that encourage absorption, reflection, and contemplation and should not preclude active involvement, discussion, and shared understandings.' (Quigley, 2010, p.2)

The universality of public art also has enormous transformative power in creating a social experience as well as new communities. It breaks down the barriers imposing who has access, who doesn't as there is no condition, so it helps people from various social classes connect and start discussion even if they don't know each other. Such a reaction has a tremendous impact on expanding the human consciousness, strengthening the feeling of shared ownership and collective belonging, which are crucial inspirations to finding a common solution to the problems of nowadays' time. (Hickey, 2020).

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Figure 2: Antony Gormley, (2005) *Another place*, [cast iron]. Available from: <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/175851560438152094/> (Accessed: 2 December 2021)

Figure 3: Rachel Whiteread, (2003) *Untitled (House)*, [concrete cast] Courtesy Gagosian Gallery. Available on: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate/modern/exhibitionseries/unileverseries/unilever-series-rachel-whiteread-embankment-1> (Accessed: 2 December 2021)