



INTRODUCTION



TITLE PAGE: *Wave*
Forms, Dennis
Oppenheim, 2007,
University City.

WHAT IS PUBLIC ART?

Like the artistic process itself, “public art” is dynamic and always changing. Philadelphia as a canvas shows how public art has evolved over time, from the grand statues located in Fairmount Park to the murals and mosaics that enhance thousands of blank walls to the “guerrilla” installations that once lined the now-demolished South Street Bridge. What distinguishes public art from other forms of art is not only that it is free and accessible to everyone, but also its connection to urban design and quality of life — “how [public art] is made, where it is, and what it means” is inherently interactive, engaging and oftentimes controversial because it sits in the public realm for all to see.³ Though not always produced by the community in which it resides, “the art is there for everyone.”⁴

For the purpose of this study, “public art” is considered any form of art that can be accessed free of charge by the public, not contained in a museum or gallery. This study mainly focuses on public applications of visual arts, but free performance art in the public realm is an important part of the local arts scene and should be considered in the broader picture as well. There are many different definitions and applications of public art within Philadelphia alone, all of which are valid and should be noted by the Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy going forward.

WHY IS PUBLIC ART IMPORTANT?

Many cities commission public art projects for a variety of different purposes, as they realize its potential to contribute to the city’s community and economic development. At its core, public art strives to change undifferentiated “space” into a dynamic

“place” that engages its audience and promotes new interactions among different publics. It is used as a strategy to enliven a public space, to attract tourists or to cultivate stewardship in a neighborhood that has fallen on hard times.⁵ It can establish an area’s identity, improve quality of life for passersby, and make its community a more attractive place to live, work and visit. It is central in “shaping the contours of urban culture,” adds meaning to cities and becomes a piece of our collective memory.⁶ At its most basic level, public art represents a “tangible commitment to the public environment,” so the level of public sector contribution is an important indicator of how much a city values creativity and “understands the essential public role in placemaking and private investment.”⁷

Public art is just one facet of an increasingly prevalent understanding that arts and cultural assets are key drivers in economic revitalization processes that can create jobs, increase the tax base, build wealth and enhance the overall well-being of residents. Particularly in older cities looking to revive their economic bases by investing in physical, social and economic infrastructure, investing in the arts is a core strategy for attracting coveted knowledge workers, growing innovative industries and creating interesting places to live and work.⁸ Many cities have proven that culture can drive tourism, anchor redevelopment projects, enhance a city’s image, add to an amenity portfolio, catalyze innovative production and drive community development, and have done so by using the arts to jumpstart or stabilize economic growth.

Consequently, public art has the potential to play a role in economic development policy. Public art, defined as any free and accessible cultural event, can directly or indirectly stimulate neighborhood

revitalization, offer a range of opportunities to experience culture, help strengthen the tourism industry, solidify a city's cultural identity and provide opportunities for artists to create new work. In this context, public art is no longer the sole purview of cultural affairs departments or outside players but spans across economic development, workforce development and urban planning, to name a few.

The economic development benefits of public art projects have been demonstrated in other cities. The New York City Parks Department estimates that more than a million people came to Central Park to see *The Gates*, a two-week-long temporary art installation by Christo and Jeanne-Claude in 2005, and more than 2 million additional visitors came for the *Cows on Parade* exhibit in Chicago in 2000.⁹ Chicago officials also

RIGHT: Seventy-five hundred saffron-colored “gates” were installed throughout Central Park in February 2005. Though *The Gates* opened to mixed reactions, it generated millions of dollars for the city and shows the potential for public art to help us rethink even our most sacred public spaces.



demonstrated with Millennium Park that a significant investment in public art — \$23 million for Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* and \$17 million for Jaume Plensa's *Crown Fountain* — can return considerable tax revenue within just a few years of opening.¹⁰ The park has become the top tourist destination in the country with its main attraction being the iconic public art. A 2005 study revealed that Millennium Park is expected to yield \$5 billion in job growth (by attracting new employers to the area) and tax revenue between 2005 and 2015.¹¹ Total visitor spending at Millennium Park over the same period is anticipated to range between \$1.9 billion and \$2.6 billion.¹² Larger cities with significant cultural assets like Philadelphia have a unique advantage in promoting public art as one element of a tourism strategy, especially since the diverse stock has the ability to attract a wide range of interests and allow visitors to experience the art in different ways. For this reason, it is easy to imagine public art becoming a more prominent aspect of the Philadelphia tourism strategy.

Arts and cultural resources in general are critical to attracting what is now called the “creative economy,” defined as “for-profit and nonprofit businesses involved in the creation or distribution of the arts.”¹³ According to Innovation Philadelphia, the creative economy represents a \$60 billion industry in the Philadelphia region.¹⁴ In fact, Philadelphia is enjoying a 71 percent increase in both arts-centric business and employment statistics since 2004. The City of Philadelphia reports that there are 14,000 “direct nonprofit cultural jobs” in the region, plus a large number of for-profit as well as “undocumented individual artists, entrepreneurs and creative workers.”¹⁵ In fact, Bucks County recently allocated money to the arts from a hotel tax that funds

economic development, showing an understanding of the connection between arts and economic development. Austin and Denver's economic development divisions have created a series of small business loans tailored to cultural entrepreneurs.¹⁶ Further, Washington, D.C.'s comprehensive plan recommends offering incentives for cultural organizations and private investors to create cultural enterprise zones that cluster offices, rehearsal and performance space, retail boutiques and galleries. It is important for Philadelphia to think of public artists and art organizations in this way as well. The organizations that support public art are part of the cultural industries, which are important to the overall metropolitan economy, and these projects hire cultural workers who are key drivers of innovation and whose employment experiences generally span a mix of commercial, nonprofit and community opportunities.¹⁷

To attract these highly coveted knowledge workers, cities typically use what is called the "amenities approach," which usually focuses on creating fine-grained neighborhood experiences and marketing an urban lifestyle to revitalize neighborhoods.¹⁸ Public art, depending on its program design, is an important piece of the amenity strategy because free, visible activities have the potential to bring street life, enliven open space and create interesting places to live. In essence, they are largely about diversity of opportunity and experience. The new Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy's connection to the creative economy demonstrates the Nutter administration's belief that encouraging economic sectors whose growth is focused on innovation and creativity is crucial to making a great 21st-century city. Additionally, it acknowledges that the citywide

enrichment value of art and art institutions contributes to our overall financial strength.

Community-based art organizations have a unique form of economic and social benefit. From a community development perspective, recent research convincingly demonstrates that access to cultural arts opportunities leads to powerful community benefits related to cultural vitality, civic engagement and social capital (particularly for new immigrant communities).¹⁹ A recent study by the Reinvestment Fund states that "cultural engagement indicators" such as public art installations and community-based art organizations are important predictors of real estate market improvement because they increase social capital, which in turn has development benefits.²⁰ Neighborhood art institutions and art events are often

BELOW: Chicago's Millennium Park features signature public art such as Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* and Frank Gehry's music pavilion that has helped make it one of the most popular tourist destinations in the country.



viewed as the church parishes of the 21st century, providing a new form of social interaction and civic culture. Researchers have demonstrated the importance that small arts centers have played in catalyzing neighborhood growth by participating in physical upkeep, social engagement, arts space projects and community arts opportunities, among other benefits.²¹ Between 1995 and 2004, the number of nonprofit arts organizations in the five-county Philadelphia region increased by 91 percent, and gross receipts more than doubled.²² Public art is a key driver of neighborhood revitalization and community development for all these reasons. The cultural activities provide opportunities for citizens to participate in events that may lead to social capital and civic engagement, which can have catalytic outcomes for residents and for the city as a whole.

But perhaps most important, public art incorporates art and beauty into people's everyday lives. Philadelphia's extensive collection has been named a "Museum Without Walls™" by the Fairmount Park Art Association, available to all without a ticket. Public art can surprise people, comfort people, and inspire discussion or random interaction. It is often an entry point that introduces people to the world of art, and may even be a person's primary exposure to art in their lifetime.