



ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE SERVICES

JOHANNESBURG: “RECLAIMING PUBLIC SPACE”

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A POLICY FOR PUBLIC PERFORMANCE AND PUBLIC ART

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Public Performance and Public Art

PUBLIC PERFORMANCE AND PUBLIC ART

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of public art in South Africa and more specifically the city of Johannesburg, can be described in terms of four broad areas: Firstly there were monuments commissioned by the Apartheid government. Most of these were installed in Pretoria, Cape Town and Bloemfontein because these cities were all seats of national government. The City of Johannesburg installed a few monumental sculptures and those that were commissioned celebrated the role of gold in the city. These were generally sculptures cast in bronze and realistic portrayals of heroic or historic moments. Secondly there was a fair amount of public art commissioned by private developers. A number of buildings included public art commissions and some banks ran big public art competitions to select pieces. These were generally abstract and symbolic in form. Thirdly there were the creative activities of communities in particular the 'people's parks' and 'people's monuments' and murals, built at the height of the resistance to the Apartheid state in the 1980's. Most of this was destroyed. These works were often produced using recycled materials. Finally there is the work that has taken place in the new democratic South Africa, post 1994 which includes community based projects in Alexandra Township and a number of commissions funded by the Johannesburg Development Agency as well as corporate commissions by the private sector. The use of mosaic, wood and steel has emerged as common materials. There has also been, over the past decade, a number of temporary public art installations linked to the Johannesburg Biennale and various other projects sponsored by the private sector and foreign embassies or initiated by independent artists and artist groups.

The history of public performance is overshadowed by the particular colonial and apartheid history of South Africa. These political and social agendas dominated all aspects of public life, for three centuries. Public culture was controlled, restricted and closely managed. Despite this there were a greater predominance of street artists than there are today. There were at a very limited scale, drummers, guitarists, squash-box players, who could be seen and heard walking down the streets of Johannesburg. Groups of drummers would play in the townships in their specific ethnic groups and dance competitions were held in workers hostels. These were usually rural migrants newly arrived in the city. Student 'rags', which were carnival processions, were annual events. There were even sporadic incidents of 'guerrilla' theatre performed by politically inspired actors.

There are many factors that impact on public performance. One of these is the escalation of crime in the City of Johannesburg. This has had a damaging effect on public life and public space. The City was forced to remove a number of public sculptures from public parks where they were being vandalised or stolen. In

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recent years the City has restructured its City policing and by-law regulations and is beginning to win back control of precincts and areas of the City. This allows for new forms of public performance to emerge.

We are living in a time of opportunity, an opportunity to develop new forms of public performance and social discourse as well as new forms of public art.

The current discussions in Johannesburg provide a new focus on public space. Issues around public artworks and performance should be seen in relation to the spaces in which they are located. The development of public art and performance should should/encourage the reclaiming of public space.

Recent years have witnessed profound shifts towards privatising of public space. This can be seen in:

- Shopping malls that serve as all-embracing entertainment centres
- The proliferation of gated communities
- The rise of privately managed improvement districts

Private sector-funded Civic Improvement Districts (CIDs) have succeeded on a number of many levels. They offer spaces that are relatively well serviced, clean and safe. CIDs have been developed as public spectacles, with displays and public art an important feature. Improvement districts offer secure locations for cultural property that otherwise would be at risk. This is for instance why the Langlaagte Stamp Battery was recently moved to the Main Street Mining Mall.

Improvement areas can however also be seen as sterile and sanitized, more concerned with business interests than free expression. Critics also argue that problems of poverty, crime and decay are displaced to neighbouring areas.

More affluent consumers are encouraged, while unwanted elements (read: urban poor) tend to be filtered out. Some CIDs are less elitist than others. Gandhi Square is for instance used each day by thousands of schoolchildren from the Inner City and the townships. We do need to consider which sections of the public are served by privately managed “public” space – which do they attract and who might be excluded?

ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED IN DEVELOPING A POLICY FOR PUBLIC ART AND PUBLIC PERFORMANCE IN THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG

World-class cities are characterised by numerous opportunities to enjoy public art, public performance, cultural events and unique architecture within a vibrant urban environment. The following are a number of points that the City of Johannesburg will need to consider when adopting a policy for the promotion and development of public performances and public art events:

1. Public performance and public art cannot take place without an interaction

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between citizens and the state at the local, provincial or national level. The private sector and government are usually both involved in the funding, the facilitation and the implementation of safety procedures in the delivery of public art and public events.

2. The way in which the state allocates the significant resources at its disposal also influences the formation of a newly emerging local and national identity.
3. The public art and public performances that are being commissioned on a regular basis at celebrations such as the Ten Years of Democracy celebrations or the Cricket World Cup opening are beginning to forge our new cultural and creative identity.
4. The rules and regulations and conventions and practices that deal with safety, disaster management and crowd control etc are contained in a body of legislation.
5. The department of Arts, Culture and Heritage services has a particular responsibility to ensure that the legislation is adhered to but to also look at ways in which the legislation may in fact be placing constraints on our ability to develop a vibrant public art and public performance that reflects our distinctive African cultural identity.
6. It also needs to be acknowledged that there is a significant part of this area of human activity that cannot be legislated. This has to do with the cultural identities and the creative practices that are at the heart of public art and performance. The nature of the visual imagery, the dance and music forms and the performances which are often based on tradition or are newly created by a range of artists and creative individuals and groups. These are evolving and developing along with the development of our new democracy and are increasingly part of the process by which we take back public space, and make it accessible and safe for all people to enjoy.
7. There is also the issue of sensitivity to particular places of significance. For example, what kind of performances should be allowed in front of the Hector Pieterse Memorial, or the War Memorial? As a public space are there certain kinds of music, events etc that are not appropriate?
8. Therefore we can conclude that the participants who contribute towards public performance and public art are divided into those who deal with regulations and legal compliance and those that deal with content and logistics.
9. National and local regulation and legal compliance is addressed through the following legislation:

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Legislation:

- Section 13(a) of the Local Government Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act No. 32 of 2000), publishes the Emergency Services By-laws for the City of Johannesburg as approved by its Council, as set out.
- Regulation of Gathering Act, NO 205 of 1993
- Noise Control Regulations, 1999
- Public Road and Miscellaneous By-Laws
- Section 13(a) of the Local Government Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act No. 32 of 2000), publishes the Public Road and Miscellaneous By-laws for the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, as approved by its Council and as concurred with by the Premier: Gauteng Province in terms of section 80A of the National road Traffic Act, 1996 (Act 89 of 1906) as set out.
- Public Open Spaces By-Laws
Section 13(a) of the Local Government Municipal Systems Act, 2000 (Act No. 32 of 2000), publishes the Public Open Spaces By-laws for the City of Johannesburg as approved by its Council, as set out.
- Disaster Management Act, 2002
- Safety at Sports and Recreational Events Bill

10. Content is dealt with through the participation of some or all of the following role players:

11. Cultural organisations

They often represent particular cultural groups with a specific ethnic or artistic identity.

12. Creative industries

Business entities and consultants that work in event design, industrial and corporate theatre, stadium events, public art events etc. This would include marketing, promotions and advertising companies.

13. Artists, performers, directors

In particular creative individuals who are experienced in planning and managing major public events.

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14. Departments of Communications

Most government departments locate the responsibility for public events to their communications departments.

15. Political representatives

When government departments commission public events, oversight committees comprising of political representatives are usually appointed and they engage in logistical and content issues.

ISSUES SPECIFIC TO PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

16. There is a need for reflection and public discourse on the way in which we are building a new South African identity and the manner in which existing policy, legislation and procurement processes influence the formation of these new identities.
17. Public performance is about forms of human activity such as street parades, carnivals, stadium theatre, sports events, military parades, street theatre, busking, praise poetry, etc. It also includes events such as the opening of Parliament, the inauguration of the President and the commemoration of national holidays. The way, in which these activities take place, helps to define our local and national identities. When we attend civic functions, arts and sporting events, and even political meetings, we see manifestations of diverse South African cultures. This takes the form of various forms of dance, song, costume, oratory, pageantry, parades, costume and
18. Body language. The nature of audience response is also diverse. Within this diversity a South African identity is in the process of being forged. This was not always the case. The public identity of the nation prior to 1994 was very different. Many laws restricted the participation of all South Africans in public cultural, sporting and political events.
19. The purpose of this document is to reflect upon the new and emerging identity or identities. We need to look at images, which show examples of this new and emerging national identity and local identities and how it is influenced by various forms of public performance.
20. Further research will need to be commissioned in order to debate the following questions:

Who is conceiving, directing and imaging these public events? What is the role of the various government departments in this process? To what extent do protocol, by-laws and regulation influence the way in which these events communicate and construct an identity? Who is leading this process? Is there any training that

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takes place in schools, tertiary institutions, and colleges relevant to public performance? Where is this taking place? Do we image ourselves in a distinctly African way? What is the iconography and what are the influences? Do we use technology and develop our own technologies? Do we build on traditional forms of pageantry, public display, and costume? Looking at the major events that we have hosted where did we succeed in representing the entire nation?

21. The state can only regulate within the bounds of our Bill of Rights and our Constitution but it nonetheless is one of the major sponsors of public events and therefore has a major responsibility in how it commissions individuals, companies and community representatives who take the lead in forging this national identity.

22. We need to understand how we currently look in public performance, the way we use decoration, backdrops, artists, religion, venues etc to construct our collective identity. We need to look at images and recordings of a number of events that have taken place over the past 10 years. This would include aspects of pageantry and political symbolism such as:

- The Inauguration of the President
- A political march
- A military parade
- A street parade

As well as events of a more artistic and performance nature:

- A carnival
- A street parade
- A stadium sports opening
- Street buskers
- A festival
- A heritage event
- Cultural dances
- World cup soccer bid announcement

23. What traditions do we borrow from and what are the influences?

PUBLIC ART

24. Public art takes many forms and is found in a number of different locations.

25. The following is a list of different forms of public art:

- Murals
- Sculpture
- Outdoor advertising
- Graffiti
- Buildings

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Cemeteries
Landscaped gardens ('People's Parks')
Monuments
Temporary Installations

Within these forms one also finds particular categories such as:

Corporate
Government
Commissioned
Civic
High Art
Low Art

26. All public art has an impact on the spatial aspects of a town, city, streets and street corners and gives specific identity to place and space. Place making and the feel and texture of urban space is greatly influenced by works of public art. Public art helps to humanise urban environments and create physical links between people and buildings.

There are many works of 'public' art that are in fact located on private land, and which can be removed without any consultation even if they have become significant city place markers.

27. Public art is located on public land as well as on privately owned land with open access to the public. The use of walls that are boundaries onto public spaces for the purposes of murals, graffiti, posters or advertising, is controlled in terms of City by-laws.

28. The responsibility for the maintenance of public monuments, sculptures and murals is currently not adequately addressed by any department in the City. The Department of Arts, Culture and Heritage, together with Johannesburg City Parks both carry responsibilities for maintaining these items:

- City Parks is responsible for monuments located in parks, cemeteries and other open spaces.
- Arts, Culture and Heritage has a small budget for "Fountains and Statues" (R17, 000)
- The formation of a Committee on Public Art and Performance will need to be investigated.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING PUBLIC ART AND PUBLIC PERFORMANCE:

1. Institute the capacity across a number of departments to manage and maintain new and existing permanent and temporary public art, through

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the establishment of a Committee on Public Art and Performance.

2. Begin planning the stadium event for World Cup Soccer.
3. Develop a distinctive carnival and carnival arts skills.
4. Promote paid for and free public art events throughout the year.
5. Introduce more public art and arts events into public spaces and parks with City Parks and other departments.
6. Develop a plan to manage unwanted graffiti.

For each of the above recommendations a report with a strategy and a business plan will be submitted. The first report will address the Carnival Strategy.

Bibliography

The Johannesburg Art Gallery Library has the following publications:

- Public Sculpture and Reliefs. Cape Town by Alan Crump and Raymond van Niekerk. Clifton Publications 1988.
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