

Major theme 2: Challenges

Both Astman and Nicholson's commentary illustrates the intimate relationship between principle and process. A principled commitment to public art of multiple durations cannot be maintained without a process that supports it. We therefore were very interested in interviewees' opinions about the process of public art creation in Toronto, and how it supports or stymies their visions of high-quality work.

Funding

One of the most widely shared perceptions was that the current tools that Toronto uses to fund public art need to be expanded and reformed. Many acknowledged the tremendous contribution that developer-funded public art has made to Toronto.

Still, a number of respondents expressed concerns regarding the dependency on a development boom and the lack of other sources to support public art in Toronto. For example, both activist artist Luis Jacob and development industry representative Danielle Chin expressed largely similar sentiments (although for different reasons). In Chin's view, since public art is a public good, it should be funded by the public, not primarily (or only) by one sector:

“ *If we collectively as a society value public art, then collectively everyone should be paying for it....It's already paid by developers and builders, whether a portion of that is shared by the tax base...or shared by grants, I think that it shouldn't be on one interest group because the benefit is to everyone.* **”**

From Jacob's point of view, a central challenge of the current system is that it gives undue weight to the interests of developers because they have a “hand” in the commissioning process and approval of the choices of artists and works.

However, despite concerns regarding Section 37's limitations, there was overwhelming sentiment that Toronto must continue to encourage developers to invest in public art in the context of ongoing development expansion, and that many excellent projects have resulted from the Percent for Public Art program. What most of our respondents wanted was an opportunity for better process and wider investment in Toronto's public art.

Respondents believed that developer investment should not release the city from commissioning significant public art works on its own sites. Councillor Krystin Wong-Tam notes,

“ Even in the Official Plan, we have some language about public art, but the formula is so loose and discretionary, that it ends up being no one's responsibility. In 2016, the city had about \$200,000 in their budget for public art for the entire city....Therefore, the wealthiest city in Canada really had no public art program and collection to pursue [on] their own.”

Many interviewees pointed to the need for increased public funding and public accountability as a counterweight to the expanding role of the developer-based program. While we see significant value in developer-driven public art, we also make a strong recommendation that public art contributions from City capital projects be aggregated into a central fund, with a view to supporting work in underserved areas.

Others interviewed underscore the potential importance of private philanthropy. Art consultant Brad Golden noted that compared to peer U.S. cities with initiatives such as Millennium Park and Olympic Park, public art private philanthropy in Toronto is poorly developed for public art. He notes a few exceptions, such as Judy Matthews's sponsorship of St. George Street improvements and the Under the Gardiner project. Our recommendations take this sentiment seriously in proposing new partnerships with civic groups. Philanthropic support for public art should fall within Canada's definition of charitable donations.

Frustration with “Let's make a deal” public art

As noted in previous chapters, a distinctive feature of Toronto's public art policy is its heavy reliance on case-by-case negotiations around the allocation of public art as a Section 37 “community benefit.” As Jane Perdue, Public Art Coordinator in Urban Design, noted, Toronto's recognition of public art as such a benefit has produced widespread acknowledgment of the importance of public art in the planning process: “Planners know that public art is very high on the list [of Section 37 benefits]...Developers are really interested and so are the politicians...Yes, it competes with other requirements, with community centres, with social services, with a whole bunch of things. But, given that it really is a small amount it...is sitting pretty high on everybody's list of priorities.”

Still, some interviewees lamented the fact that making this process so central to the City's overall public art policies has subjected public art to restrictions imposed by the Ontario Planning Act. Despite the fact that public art is often recognized and funded as a “community benefit,” they were concerned with the fact that this requires pitting public art against other community benefits, such as community housing; that any pooled funds generally must be spent within the same ward, rather than taking a city-wide, needs-based, or impact approach; and that the personal interests of local councillors become paramount. Mark

Mandelbaum of Lanterra Developments recognizes that “Whether public art is or is not a part of that package really depends on the appetite of the local councillor and also what the needs are of the community.”

For these reasons, our recommendations include measures designed to support public art through mechanisms that operate outside the Section 37 process. These are meant to supplement rather than supplant Section 37, offering alternatives to compensate for its shortcomings while recognizing its importance and continuing impact.

Complex administrative process

As Mandelbaum indicates, the Percent for Public Art program is a very complex affair. One per cent is rarely achieved. Beyond the specific negotiations among developers and councillors, the complex administrative process of procuring and managing public art throws up additional challenges. In many cases, those who are nominally in charge of the process feel that their creativity and know-how is sometimes thwarted by complex procedures.

Catherine Dean describes some of the challenges that she has faced in putting the Percent for Public Art program to innovative uses, in part because of risk aversion on the part of government and the lack of curatorial authority vested in city staff. There are currently unallocated Section 37 funds that could be applied to sites, but there is not a clear method with which to allocate these funds (for example, through the curatorial authority of the City staff, all of whom have extensive curatorial experience).

Our recommendations therefore include proposals for simplifying the administrative process and vesting the City’s public art professionals with more authority to utilize their professional judgment in deciding how to utilize public art funds.

Lack of diversity among selected applicants and opportunities for emerging artists

Many interviewees felt that the public art process is open only to a small group of “privileged” people. There is a general desire to widen the pool of artists, consultants, and curators to enable diversity and create more opportunities for emerging artists. At the same time, there was a perceived need by many that arts professionals could play a larger role in the selection of artworks and in supporting artists through the process. Some interviewed suggested that new guidelines, unconscious bias training for juries, outreach, and open calls could strengthen the diversity of the pool, noting that public artists are overwhelmingly

male, white, and of European descent. Outreach to emerging artists was also advised.

Interviewees variously stated that increased cultural diversity, Indigenous artworks, public accessibility, collaboration, and community involvement would be important success factors for public art projects in the future, and would better represent Toronto. In addition, several stakeholders stressed that emerging artists and curators need more opportunities to break into the public art process. We not require that the private developer program have open competitions, although this remains one of their options. However, our recommendations for new types of programming and funds respond to these opportunities.

Attracting well-known artists

Several interviews identified an opposite challenge of the current commissioning process: it has difficulties attracting the work of renowned and international artists to Toronto. According to Mark Mandelbaum of Lantera Developments, who worked with Vito Acconci on a major commission, high-profile artists often do not wish to jump through the hoops of submitting a proposal, and instead expect to be curated. While officially developers are free to commission public art through competitions, invitation, or direct commission, the view that they were informally pushed towards a more “regimented” process by city officials was reinforced by several other developers and public art consultants that we interviewed. The flexibility to commission directly exists, and this route can be more proactively used.

Maintenance

Beyond challenges in the selection and creation process, other interviews pointed towards maintenance challenges. Alka Lukatela, Director of Urban Design at the City of Toronto, describes the unfortunate reality of how successful public artworks suffer from lack of maintenance. She notes that the complex ownership structure of public art in Toronto makes it difficult to clearly delineate responsibility for maintenance. Mike Williams, General Manager of Economic Development & Culture of the City of Toronto, emphasizes the need for public artworks to be built to withstand the elements from the onset of the installation.

Our recommendations recognize the importance of healthy maintenance budgets, both for the City of Toronto works and those commissioned through the developer process.

The value of aggregation

Several respondents remarked on challenges relating to difficulties in combining funds and projects into larger aggregates that could become something more than the sum of their parts. These range from the more general aesthetic and conceptual challenges of reimagining public art beyond a specific site or stand-alone project to the more mundane challenges of designing policy frameworks that permit public art to operate across sites and scales.

Alfredo Romano of Castlepoint Numa, a private development group, highlights the importance of rethinking public art in terms of how it interfaces with an entire community or area and is accessible:

“ [It’s] not just about that specific space, that specific building, but how it disseminates through the entire community and through the city at large. We’re also interested in making sure that if we’re going to have strong public art, [it has] to occur in places where people gravitate to, you want to create crossroads. ”

Some interviewees noted how larger-scale, more ambitious works can achieve a wider reach and draw new audiences. Louise Garfield from Etobicoke Arts discussed how “when it’s really big and really successful,” public art is “more accessible to more people. More citizens of the city who [do] not ever want to go into a gallery or look at art in any other way.”

Many referenced Chicago’s Millennium Park as a model that Toronto should emulate in its combination of green space, public realm, and large-scale works. While several interviewees pointed to some examples in Toronto of moving beyond an individual, autonomous project, they also noted how rare this type of thinking is here. Terry Nicholson underscores that public art in Toronto is “under scaled” compared to Chicago. Ilana Altman, who is now the curator of the Bentway project, notes, “In New York there [is] a much stronger mentality and conception of the block as an entity.” She singled out Toronto’s “Canary District or the Pan Am Village” as examples “where the public realm was considered from the start as something that was cohesive and the public art program within it was [part of] a curatorial vision for the whole.”

Danielle Chin from BILD also thought that “It would probably be more beneficial to have larger-scale projects” in Toronto. Yet she was skeptical about the realization of large-scale projects: “A lot of developments that are happening now,” are restricted “because of land constraints.” Priorities such as “the function, livability, and efficiency or a new residential tower, for example,” could rule out significant projects.

Our recommendations build on existing movement towards larger-scaled and district-based approaches in Toronto, with a view towards making them an ongoing and regular feature of Toronto’s public art policies.

Sites unseen

While our interviews revealed a number of crucial challenges facing public art in Toronto, sometimes they are also important in revealing blind spots in the public art community or field. One example of such a blind spot concerns the heavy concentration of public art in the downtown core of the city and its corresponding underdevelopment elsewhere. Spaces outside of the downtown core become sites unseen, and are, in effect, “public art deserts.” This situation was rarely remarked upon as a major challenge by our interviewees.

To be sure, the emergence of “public art deserts” has not gone totally unnoticed. Alfredo Romano emphasizes the need for regulations to “catch up” and encompass a broader, “living” definition of public art.

“ *I think it’s actually the regulatory framework that needs to catch up and recognize and understand how art disseminates itself...Obviously in the downtown core, because of the institutional presence and artists who live in those communities, it’s much more vibrant. That doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist in the other parts of the city that are less urban, less contextually urban. Art also exists there, it just needs to be mined and promoted....Public art has to be part of an ongoing narrative that exists in a community, is living in the moment, and will project into the future.* **”**

It has also been a major topic of concern in many of the commentaries published on *The Artful City* blog series, especially because Ilana Altman’s mapping efforts have made the spatial concentration of public art so abundantly clear. This is what makes it all the more surprising that this situation was not more central in our interviews.

This blind spot points towards another major challenge public art policy faces. As urban historian Richard Harris recently demonstrated (2015), Toronto’s intellectual, planning, and artistic elite are heavily concentrated in the downtown core. He argues that they develop a corresponding downtown-centric outlook, making it difficult or unlikely to see the city from the point of view of its inner suburbs — where, in fact, the large majority of its residents live, along with the vast majority of newcomers.

Because public art by its very nature is supposed to serve the city as a whole, being cognizant of how this downtown-centrism potentially affects public art

thinking and policy is an important challenge to face going forward. Our recommendations recognize this situation and seek to remedy it by creating and expanding funds and programs geared towards underserved areas outside development centres. A new City vacant property tax could provide resources earmarked to support these endeavours.

Major theme 3: Future directions for public art in Toronto

While it is easy to criticize, it is more productive to provide a vision for a way forward. Our interviews therefore were careful to ask respondents to outline their future vision for public art and to articulate concrete proposals for achieving it. Many people suggested that a comprehensive new public art strategy and accompanying implementation policy is needed at this point in the City's history, particularly given the absence of public art within the recent TOCore report, and the nascent initiative for a new Culture Plan at the City of Toronto. Our recommendations support this view, and propose as an immediate action creating a Public Art Working Group with a new Public Art Master Plan as a crucial objective.

The fundamental question, however, concerns not only the principles on which a new strategy should be based but also how to realize them. Indeed, Toronto has not lacked for visions in the past — achieving them has been the problem. Bruce Kuwabara, partner at KPMB Architects, highlights Toronto's "history of incomplete visions":

“ *The city has grown almost unconsciously, just development after development which has raised all these questions about how we live in cities and what the quality of life is. Before you get to the art, I think you actually have to have some integration with the consumption of public space at a larger metropolitan scale, and then probably see all the things that have already occurred. Otherwise, you'll be chasing it development by development again and again, right?* **”**

Kuwabara's evaluation of the state of public space in Toronto stresses that public art is only one component in a broader discussion about the future development and the quality of life in the city.

On the other hand, some interviewees saw public art as a spark that could transform the urban sphere. Still, beyond the challenges and the different approaches towards city-building, there were some wide agreements about how public art in Toronto could and should be redefined.

- **Expand the definition of public art.** Most interviewees hoped that the definition of public art would evolve to include work of differing durations,

executed in diverse media. They often pointed to the success of such public artworks in other jurisdictions, especially Montreal.

- ***Simplify and clarify the process.*** Many believed in the need for a more open, simple, and transparent commissioning and funding process in Toronto.
- ***Involve artists earlier and more deeply.*** Many participants stressed that involving artists and curators far earlier in the process would be beneficial. Artists would ideally work closely with architects, engineers, developers, and city planners throughout the entire project. Many also discussed the need for artists to be part of an interdisciplinary team of architects, landscape architects, and engineers.
- ***Explore new funding tools and increase public accountability.*** A number of people proposed new funding tools, ranging from dedicated taxes to public-private partnerships, to arm's-length foundations, to dedicated Arts Council funds, in order to increase funding for public art.
- ***Expand outreach.*** Across most stakeholder categories, interviewees remarked that more promotion and interpretation of our public art assets would benefit the local public and help create a stronger cultural tourist destination.

Our recommendations reflect these concerns and offer proposals for implementing them.

Finally, there is the question of who should lead this process. Some interviewees recommended that the City coordinate the public art process, remove roadblocks, and better harness the deep expertise and resources of local cultural institutions — from museums to festivals, arts councils, artist-run-centres, universities, and the developer community. Public art thrives as part of a rich and complex ecology. The City is one central player, which can do much more to coordinate and spark the entire system.

Chapter 6: Public Forums on Public Art in Toronto

In order to open up a broader dialogue about public art in Toronto that could inform our research, team members collaborated with the AGO to convene two public forums in March 2017, one at OCAD University and the other at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

The goal of the forums was to reflect on the current situation of public art in Toronto and to imagine how public art might constructively contribute to Toronto's future. A major topic was how public art could provide a counterweight to the homogenizing forces of large-scale downtown condominium development by enhancing the diversity and texture of the urban fabric. Another major topic concerned access: how to open up opportunities for emerging and diverse artists to participate in Toronto's public art scene, and how to engage diverse publics.

After inviting a creative and engaged circle, the panels surveyed new social and economic models for public art space and site in Toronto.

This chapter provides brief overviews of the two panels.

Session 1

Session 1 included the following panelists: Rebecca Carbin (Waterfront Toronto), Aisha Sasha John (Artist), Kari Cwynar (Evergreen Brickworks), Catherine Dean (City of Toronto) and Ben Mills (Public Art Management), moderated by Jacob Zimmer.

Session 1 explored public art in Toronto from a variety of angles. Key themes included inclusivity, site specificity, and cultural difference. The discussion also reflected on the impact of colonialism, immigration, and generational differences. At the same time, it sought to look forward, asking: What will the public art landscape in Toronto look like in 20 years? What kind of narrative will we choose to be our legacy? What does sustained public engagement really look like?

The following are some of the key points that emerged from the discussions:

- ***The definition of public art.*** Defining public art/art in the public realm and understanding its critical role within the fabric of the city is central and must be a continuous and iterative process that responds to the city as it evolves and changes over time. A need to redefine public art is essential and is a creative collective process.

- ***The practice of public art.*** Public art practice is becoming much more of a dialogue. It is much more about art in the public than it has ever been. We must keep encouraging and fostering the dialogic aspect of public art.
- ***The experience of public art.*** A real value of public art is how people encounter it within their own lives and on their own terms as they go about their business in public space. This creates a very different relationship between audience and artwork as compared to the traditional format of actively choosing to visit a gallery or an institution. Art has the possibility to become an integrated part of everyday experience and daily rhythm.
- ***The scale of public art.*** It is important to rethink and consider scale when it comes to public art — large-scale work is not always the best way to create the most impact. Think beyond object-based large-scale sculpture.
- ***The responsibility of public art.*** There is a responsibility and sensitivity that comes with public art. There are ethical concerns because there is a public audience. And public art can also be effective when it challenges the audience.

A series of crucial questions emerged to frame the challenge facing public art:

- ***Diversifying the field.*** How can we rethink the process of public art competitions to encourage more applications and increase the diversity of the type of artists that participate and the types of work that is implemented?
- ***Responding to diverse publics.*** What type of public artwork can serve an audience that is less definable as a single body but is instead marked by plurality and diversity?
- ***Diversifying the work.*** How can we encourage temporary, smaller-scale, more dynamic, and changeable projects that really listen to the fabric of the city?
- ***Sustaining opportunities.*** How can we think beyond Section 37 and utilize other more sustainable funding opportunities that will outlast the current construction boom?

Session 2

Session 2 included the following panelists: Helena Grdadolnik (Workshop Architecture), Alex Josephson (Partisans) and Maxwell Stephens (Hadley+Maxwell), moderated by Jacob Zimmer.

Session 2 built on the first session by articulating possible future trajectories for public art, highlighting a creative and socially conscious agenda. Key themes included revising current policy and practice to complement the City's diverse sociocultural geography and to incorporate new mediums and debates about public art. Ilana Altman (KPMG Architects) from *The Artful City* opened the session with a presentation on public art and art in the public realm in Toronto.

The following are some of the key points that emerged from the discussions:

- ***Understanding policy and practice.*** It is of critical importance to better understand the Ontario Planning Act and municipal public art policies. It is also important to find creative ways to maximize the opportunities that are presented rather than being discouraged by what is in place.
- ***Public art beyond the core.*** Our current policies do not support a balanced planning model and an integration of public art within the entire city of Toronto. It is important to foster public art beyond high-density development zones.
- ***Seize existing opportunities.*** Public art created through the City's own capital projects offer opportunities to realize projects beyond sculptural work and so redefine the notion of permanence when it comes to public art.
- ***Revise policy to reflect contemporary practice.*** Policy should reflect the fact that contemporary public art practice includes a range of durations.
- ***Move beyond the dichotomy of infrastructure and art.*** Infrastructure and public art do not always need to be separated. Public art should be integral, not an add-on to building or infrastructure planning and budgets.
- ***Think beyond individual sites.*** The ongoing development boom should result not only in a series of disconnected works, but could also produce an organically interconnected set of interventions that adds to public life and civic identity.
- ***Encourage collaboration among design professionals.*** Great creativity and opportunities can emerge if a range of creative talent is involved from

the early stages of a project. Artists, curators, and art consultants can enhance the work of engineers, architects, and landscape architects — and vice versa — if they work closely together from the outset.

- ***The importance of site.*** Site should be critically considered. Public art can address the specific needs of a site and be developed for a specific context. At the same time, opportunities should be available for artists to proactively choose sites suited to their public art practice.
- ***Public art and city building.*** Creative city building requires making public art an integral part of urban forms and functions as a means to express our diverse values.