



PARTICIPANTS' ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES



u Public Art Administrators	15
u Public Artists	16
u Elected Officials	16
u Public Art Jury	17
u Municipal Agency Representatives	18
u Neighborhood Representatives	18
u Design Professionals	19
u Public Art Advisory Committee	19
u Public Art Colleagues	20
u Museum Professionals, Curators, Collectors, and Gallery Directors	20
u The Media	20
u Others	21

Overleaf:
Jessie Pitts, Jr; Huddie Ledbetter; sculpture, bronze;
northeast corner of Texas and Marshall Street; Shreveport, Louisiana

Participants' Roles and Responsibilities

There are many players in the public art arena, each with an important role. The public art

administrator's job will be easier if he or she can articulate these different roles clearly to each participant. Here is the cast of characters:

- u the public art administrator
- u public artists
- u public officials
- u the public art jury
- u municipal agency representatives
- u neighborhood representatives
- u design professionals
- u the public art advisory committee
- u public art colleagues
- u museum professionals, curators, collectors, and gallery directors
- u the media

Projects will run more smoothly if all participants understand what their roles are and how their individual contributions mesh with others.

Public Art Administrators

The role of the public art administrator is to create opportunities for public art projects that can be carried out within the constraints of the site, the budget, and the

community's standards as well as any artistic or administrative constraints.

Public art programs are usually supported by either of two types of community agencies: nonprofit arts agencies, usually governed by a board of directors; and municipal agencies, located with municipal government. The public art administrator will represent the agency in the community and interface with all other players in the public art process.

An effective public art administrator is a skillful negotiator, detail-oriented and a good fact finder, a careful listener, and an effective public speaker and communicator. The public art administrator must be an educator of the community, a facilitator, a community planner, and sometimes a hand-holder or even a lightning rod of public opinion.

The administrator should be

- u acquainted with various methods of construction, artistic media, and fabrication techniques
- u experienced in working with budgets and schedules and working with artists, governments, media, and communities and
- u able to identify artistic potential from one discipline and suggest its application to other areas.



Lynda Benglis; Odd's & And's #1, sculpture; 204 W. Sallier Street; on the grounds of the Imperial Calcasieu Museum; Lake Charles, Louisiana

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The administrator must be creative in

- u defining projects
- u locating funding
- u building community support
- u identifying partners and
- u bringing diverse groups together.

A sense of humor is essential. These skills are often learned not in the classroom but from various life experiences. Often, public art administrators come from academic training in one arts-related or design-oriented field and life experiences in others such as arts education, planning and design professions, arts-related businesses, and community involvement, advocacy, and development.

Public Artists

The public artist is a problem solver on many different levels and should be able to:

- u address the artistic program as described by project statements with his or her unique artistic vocabulary and expression and
- u work with different constituencies and program participants to resolve issues that emerge during the progress of the project.

The artist must be able to work with relevant specifications and requirements and involve other people (neighborhood representatives, political leaders, governmental agencies, other design professionals, etc.) in the creative process. In addition to being skilled as an artist, the public artist must be able to meet budget requirements and project timetables, communicate ideas to different participants, and work within the bureaucracy of bewildering permits, permissions, and approvals. The public artist should not expect the program administra-

tor alone to resolve all problems that may arise; nor should the artist expect a public art program to have additional sources of funding to compensate for things he or she may have neglected to anticipate and budget for. The public artist should be a team player, willing to leave ego and artistic temperament at the door.

Not all artists who want to work in the public arena will have all of these qualities, but part of the administrator's job is to help artists develop their skills in these areas.

Elected Officials

The role of elected officials is crucial. It involves

- u learning about the public art process,
- u endorsing that process through public policy
- u supporting arts agencies that initiate public art projects and
- u advocating public art initiatives in the community through expenditure of public funds.

Elected officials, like everyone else, have artistic opinions based on personal preference. Yet public officials should understand that election to public office is not usually based on artistic qualifications. Public art, though supported by public funding and located in the public arena, should be as removed from the political process as possible. When an elected official advocates a certain artistic style or a favorite artist, the public art process is compromised making fair solutions difficult if not altogether impossible. The role of elected officials is to ensure that art for public places is adequately funded and is selected through a legitimate and equitable process.

Elected officials should realize that public art initiatives may produce artworks that are not universally liked. The important thing is for the public art process to be respected as one of inclusion, participation, and community involvement. In public art, artistic resolution informed by as much information as possible remains the artist's responsibility, and here is where political leadership may be required. Elected officials must be prepared to say, "I may not like the color purple and this piece is purple; but I do endorse the process through which determinations about color were made."

The elected official's role is crucial in the public art process because it is the political "seal of approval" for public art initiatives. A public art program supported by public funds is impossible in a politically hostile environment. Elected officials can appreciate the community development benefits of public art. The increased interest in the community and the positive economic impact of public art projects are of lasting value and should be stressed and reinforced whenever possible. These impacts may not be immediately apparent, but they are significant nonetheless.

Public Art Jury

The public art jury has a vital role to play. The jury must

- u evaluate information collected and presented by the administrator
- u bring personal and professional experiences into the decision-making process
- u create opportunities for an artist to get involved in a community-oriented project
- u discuss relevant issues objectively, with the aim of arriving at consensus and

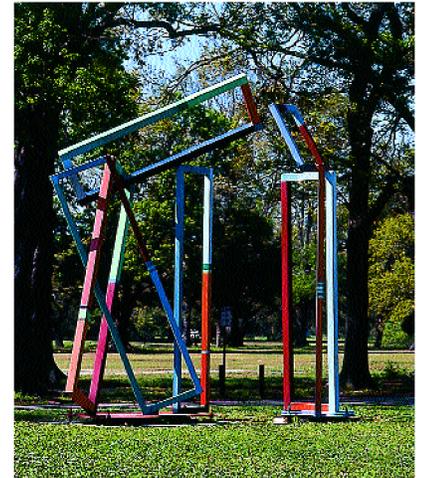
- u make decisions that are fair and well considered.

A jury can only respond to what it knows; therefore having well-informed and experienced jurors is a must. Jurors must understand that their service on a public art jury is a commitment of time and active involvement in the public art process. A good jury member will attend all jury meetings, ask probing questions, participate in discussions, and make decisions based on public interest rather than personal bias. Public art juries, when organized properly, are carefully constructed so that each member brings a unique perspective to the table. The jury member must realize that all opinions can be considered, but decisions must be made, and if possible consensus would be reached.

Several important criteria should be considered in selecting jurors:

- u *visual art and design expertise* in the form of academic training or professional experience, a qualification shared by the majority of jury members in some cases
- u *diversity*: geographic, racial, ethnic, gender, and age
- u *regional representation* from throughout the community the public art serves
- u *experience* in the public art process or community development and consensus building
- u *group representation* of public agencies, neighborhoods, and organizations with an interest in the project.

Sometimes political situations necessitate the participation of representatives appointed by elected officials. These representatives may be named for political reasons rather than for design or public art expertise. Ideally, such representatives should be



John Scott; Street Windows; sculpture, metal; City Park, Golf Drive, New Orleans, Louisiana



Titia Barnett-Gudde;
Conversation 2; Clay; LSU
Sculpture Park, Baton Rouge,
Louisiana

involved as *nonvoting* advisors to the jury: their voices can be heard, considered, and evaluated by the jury, but the political considerations will not necessarily color the jury's decisions. Artistic decisions are best made by those acquainted with artistic issues, but public art involves other issues as well, and voices representing those concerns, which may be represented by nonvoting project advisors, should be part of the discussion.

The administrator may have a challenge if a politically appointed juror without art experience serves as a voting member of the jury. In such a case it may be helpful to increase the jury size, as inexperienced jurors, including politically appointed ones, can learn a lot by serving with those who are more knowledgeable. The administrator can also create opportunities for converting inexperienced jurors into public art advocates by spending time with them on a one-to-one basis in informal, non-threatening settings and talking with them about public art and the benefits it offers the community. Ideally, the administrator will have some time to lay the groundwork before the jury first convenes. Enlist the help of others more acquainted with public art to bring less experienced jurors along in the process. Spend whatever time it takes. If a juror has political ties, your program can always use a new political friend, and the extra effort will pay off in the enthusiasm you generate among the converted.

Public art programs are best served when the jury is informed on a broad range of art and design issues, has experience in public planning, and is as removed as possible from political agendas. But public art administrators should be prepared to work with

less-than-ideal situations.

Municipal Agency Representatives

Public art projects supported through public funds go in public places; this means that public agencies must be informed early of the potential for a public art project and involved from the outset in the process. The municipal agency representative should bring his or her agency's agenda, plans, and mission to the table for inclusion in the public art process. Agency representatives are often technical advisors to a public art project and may not be voting members in the selection process. Nevertheless, the agency representative should be involved in planning from the outset. Ideally, the agency's agenda and function will be incorporated in the program or project statement. The municipal agency's agenda may not always be a written "master plan" or detailed list of projects or goals, and some communities may have plans based on broadly defined goals rather than on specific projects. Whatever the case, a public art program or an individual public art project should involve representatives of the city agency or agencies that have oversight of the project's site or involvement with the intended audience.

Neighborhood Representatives

Neighborhood representatives have one major responsibility: to bring neighborhood issues to the attention of other participants. People who live in an area must be involved in what happens in their front yards. They are also the ones who know best what happens in the neighborhood twenty-four hours a day. This is important information for the artist to know. A neighborhood-oriented public art project cannot succeed

without the active involvement of neighborhood representatives.

Design Professionals

Design professionals—landscape architects, architects, urban designers, interior designers—are necessary to the public art dialogue because they are often the lead professionals in capital projects, and their professional lives are involved with the design, construction, and use of public spaces. Public art projects are much more likely to succeed if the professionals involved are receptive to the concept of public art. This may take some negotiating on the part of the administrator, but the rewards are worth it. Certainly some design professionals are artists in their own right, but some may be familiar with only the basics of visual art, and they may have had relatively little involvement in producing artworks.

The design professional's role is to

- u help define, with the administrator and others, what the public art opportunity is
- u be willing to include artists as full team members in design discussions
- u articulate issues and considerations artwork should respond to
- u provide technical assistance as necessary and then
- u stand back and let the artist determine the solution.

This will be a new role for many design professionals, and for those inexperienced in including public art components in larger projects, adding public art may seem an unwelcome intrusion. Design professionals may be reluctant to administer public art components of larger projects, particularly if they have never done this before,

but the rewards can be great. Design professionals should not hesitate to seek the involvement of artists for their projects or to involve experienced administrators as advisors. Public art components of a project can be handled more effectively and efficiently by an experienced public arts administrator, thereby freeing the design professional to deal with other aspects of project management.

Public Art Advisory Committee

A public art advisory committee will govern most public art programs. Its roles are to

- u set policy
- u oversee administrative operations
- u support administrative staff and public art program activities
- u participate in community education and public relations
- u ensure that the overall mission of the public art program is being accomplished and
- u act as public spokespersons for the program.

In some programs, the advisory committee makes decisions about artwork, serving as a jury established for a predetermined length of service. Other programs limit the advisory committee to policymaking decisions and leave artistic decisions to individual project juries. This approach can encourage greater diversity in the program. Whatever approach is followed, consistency and continuity are important, together with the capacity to revise and fine-tune the program as it develops. A public art program should evolve over time in response to changing community, political, and environmental conditions as well as to the artistic characteristics of the community.

Creating media interest builds community support and enthusiasm during a project, and media contacts bring their background and prior knowledge of the community to any discussion of the project.

Elected officials should realize that public art initiatives may produce artworks that are not universally liked. The important thing is for the public art process to be respected as one of inclusion, participation, and community involvement.

Public art program advisory committee members are similar in many ways to board members of a non-profit agency: they should be appointed for the expertise they bring to the discussion as well as for the constituencies they represent. Advisory committee members may need to provide information sessions and prepare program notebooks. Committee members should clearly understand their roles, and there should be staggered term limits. These and other administrative details are best determined by the public art program administrator and the staff of the agency that supports the program; often the agency's general policies and strategies can simply be replicated for the public art program.

Public Art Colleagues

Public art colleagues can provide a critical support system for the public art administrator. The administrator should not hesitate to seek the support of colleagues from other communities, organizations, and state arts administrators as well as arts leaders and artists from the region and nation. Most are generous with their time and experience and are eager to share their knowledge and advice. It is easy to get so involved in the specifics of your individual situation that you lose sight of the big picture. Talking with public art colleagues (administrators as well as artists) from other communities will restore your energy and set you back on track.

Museum Professionals, Curators, Collectors, and Gallery Directors

Museum professionals, curators, collectors, and gallery directors can add credibility to your efforts, though

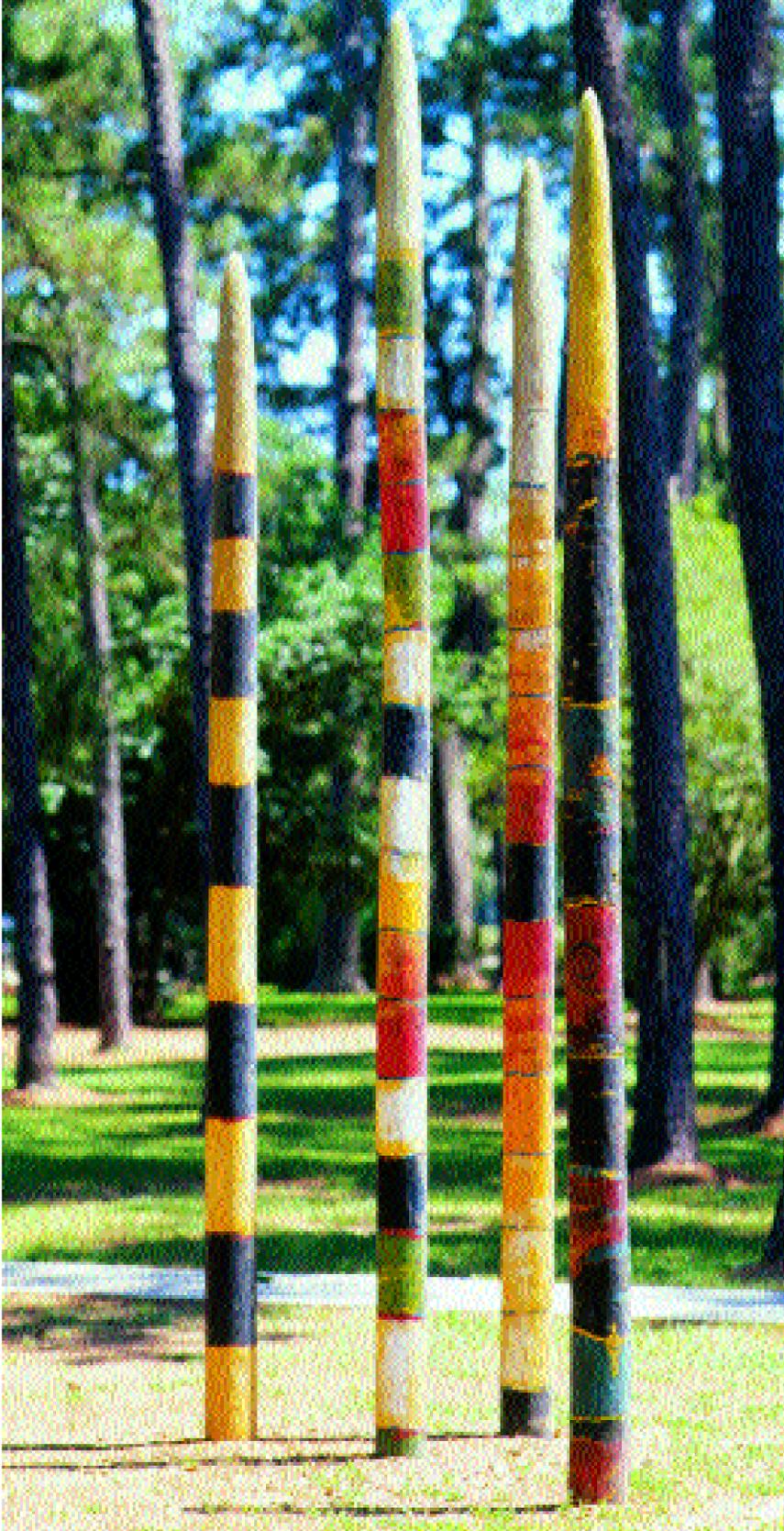
their backgrounds may give them a different perspective: they tend to have a more curatorial or object-oriented outlook as opposed to the more participation-oriented approach of public art. Initially, the differences between the two approaches may be discouraging, but persevere in your efforts to enlist their support. An active public art program will increase exposure to art in your community and will inevitably lead to more public interest in the projects of museums and galleries.

The Media

The media cannot be overlooked. Their role in explaining public art to the community is vital. Don't forget that most people get their information from the media: television, print, and radio. A successful program must have the active participation of the media. Administrators should spend time with media representatives, providing human interest stories and background information on projects and program activities. Creating media interest builds community support and enthusiasm during a project, and media contacts bring their background and prior knowledge of the community to any discussion of the project. Remember to think in terms of sound bites (condense your story into just a few well-chosen words) and what would make an interesting story. And don't forget to thank the media for their coverage—they rarely get this and seem to appreciate it when they do!

Others

Finally, administrators should not forget all the others who may have a role to play in public art programs. These are the people in your



John Geldersma; Spirit Poles; wood; Southeastern Louisiana University; Hammond, Louisiana

community that only you will be able to identify. They will vary from community to community, and they may or may not be elected or appointed officials. Nevertheless, they are important, and their participation in the public art process will be a validation of the program. Remember the tradition of setting an extra place at the table for the “unexpected visitor”: in public art; it is often the “unexpected visitor” that can make or break a project. Be sure your process can include them when they appear!