

Spotlight 11.1

Official Public Art, 16 February 2011

Elizabeth Breeden gives an overview of the *Art in Place* program (www.artinplace.org), funded through the city's *1% for art* fund. The monies were originally designated for art (that was never realized) at the Water Street parking garage.

She explains a rule of official public art: publicly-owned pieces must be maintained in their original form of creation by the owning entity, or they must be returned/destroyed. This leads to a discussion about Tom Givens' *Whale Tail* on the 250 bypass, destroyed by a microburst storm. The sculpture was replaced by a new generation of three smaller whale tails, at the time and expense of the artist. Also the notion of temporality of public art and its dependency on engineering and materials. Rick Brown's tree sculpture in McIntire Park, visible from the 250 bypass, is an example: formed from a fallen tree, it is ephemeral.

More practicalities of *Art in Place*: the artist retains ownership of his/her piece and is responsible for insuring it, generally with a 1-2 million dollar liability policy. There is no formal selection process for the city to purchase *Art in Place* pieces. Selections are generally based on the number of positive emails the city receives about each piece.

Breeden introduces another program she's currently working on—a public art project in conjunction with the Jefferson School and Vinegar Hill, an historically African-American community in Charlottesville that was razed during “urban renewal” of the 1960s-70s. The art project is slated to launch on Juneteenth (June 19th, emancipation day) 2012. Also mentioned is a UVA student-made memorial in the works to honor the enslaved laborers

Beth Turner talks about UVA's commitment to public art. She's on the advisory committee to UVA's president. She had much to do with the Calder Foundation's lending of a Calder sculpture for Central Grounds. Shares that a Henry Moore bronze will be coming to the terrace of the Bayley Art Museum grounds.

Brings up considerations of public art—the effect on and relationship with contextual space of a work. Then there are the “care and feeding” considerations like lighting and security. Discussion about the Sanda Iliescu piece, *Lines of Darkness and Light*, an installation of black fabric on the columns of the Rotunda. President Sullivan wants UVA's public art to open up the dialogue for change.

Turner emphasizes the value for artists of walking through an application process. UVA's public art application exists online and any artist may apply. <http://www.virginia.edu/arts/> (click on Resources link). She suggests looking at the NEA application as a model, and making a specific plan to present, then gathering supporters and stakeholders to help see it through.

Peter Krebs brings up the issue of the public artist's need for project management. Discussion about artist as project manager, Michaelangelo and Richard Serra as models of artist-managers, and the need for education on the subject for artists.

George Sampson, head of the Arts Administration program at UVa, talks about the program. It began in Spring 2006 and has graduated 1000 students so far. He announces the *Design Thinking mashup*, a symposium at UVa School of Architecture Feb 22-23 2011. Its purpose is “to explore collaboration, creative research, and community in creative problem solving techniques.”

<https://secure.arch.virginia.edu/groups/designthinkingmashup/>

Aaron Eichorst, an artist and arts educator, describes his current public art project involving elementary school students. The piece will be a mosaic covering a bridge at a Habitat for Humanity site.

Brings up discussion about artist as facilitator and agile thinker. The importance of the way artists approach and process a problem, and the inherent value of the artist’s thoughts. In Seattle, the city officially places an artist on every aspect of city planning.

Maggie Guggenheimer, director of Piedmont Council of the Arts, shares some of her experiences with public art administration. In 2008, PCA began the *Storyline Project* in Charlottesville, as an expansive, creative solution to a Cville Parks and Rec bus needing a new paint job. <http://charlottesvillearts.org/blog/checking-in-with-storyline-2010/>

Since then the *Storyline Project* has implemented a collaborative public art piece on the free speech monument on the downtown mall, a history walk, a Belmont wall project, and presently a Rivanna river walk. Guggenheimer describes the project as providing transformative experiences for both the participants and the artists/designers involved. She reminds us that the free speech wall is a readily available public resource for anyone—just contact the city. Brings up an op-ed piece in the *Hook* about a recent drawing and erasure on the free speech wall that some may consider pushing the boundaries of acceptable speech and of censorship:

<http://www.readthehook.com/88870/wall-scrawl-city-censors-image-free-speech-monument>

Discussion of the artist’s loss of control once art is put into the public context. An example is Nini Baekstrom’s public sculpture *Terra Woman*, which has been added to by individuals, thereby changing the artist’s intent. Is it an inherent aspect of public art or is it just bad manners? Breeden notes that all vandalism she knows of on the *Art in Place* pieces has been alcohol-induced.

Discussion of the meaning of official public art. Some ideas: public art as a dialogue between artist/architect and the landscape to achieve a harmonious interaction with a space; public art as the visual expression of a community’s heart.

Compiled by Lindsey Mears