



**A
PUBLIC
ART
NOTICES**

PUBLIC (ART)

A PUBLIC (ART) NOTICE:

How can public art be made more sustainable? This collaboration among the Synthetic Collective, Centre for Sustainable Curating, Evergreen Brick Works, and The Bentway took place in the warm spring of 2023, and coalesced around a series of conversations with architects, public art commissioners, conservators, artists, curators, and arts managers, leading to in-depth discussion of what sustainability means for public art (scan the QR code for further details). The conversations led to this initial list of best practices and an idea that sustainable public art reflects and nourishes the communities that live with it, causing no harm in its making or presence.

Often, public art is defined as permanent and unchanging. We resist this notion. Increasingly, public art works are temporary or performative. But even monuments and statues are always changing due to exposure to unpredictable weather, as well as the whims of passersby, pets, salt trucks, construction, graffiti, and relentless processes of chemical and physical degradation. Public art works are never static. They disperse, rust, break, crack, and degrade.

Public art responds and also is responsive to its environs. Temporary or permanent, it is connected to land, air, water, and community. Sometimes it is welcomed for its ability to create place for community. Other times it is deeply critiqued. Public art can be a signal of displacement, upholding developer agendas and, in the words of artist and activist Judith Baca, providing “something beautiful to stand in for the loss of public space.” In considering public artworks, the colonial histories of the land must be acknowledged. Sustainability must consider all of these elements, with the understanding that public art is many things: a memory made static, a beautiful stand in, possibly **A ROCK WHERE IT ALREADY IS.**

This Public (Art) Notice opens a conversation and shares an initial list of best practices in order to encourage sustainable approaches to the making of public art. Sustainable choices aren't always clear. Sharing knowledge is key.

BEST PRACTICES, AN EVOLVING LIST:

Build capacity (and expense lines!) to support the administration and background labour involved in making projects less wasteful and more sustainable. Making public art sustainable requires system changes in the commissioning, budgeting, and management.

Consider the carbon footprint of shipping material choices, especially for large-scale art works. Choose local where possible.

Consider if degradation can be built into the project. How long does the work need to last?

Create an afterlife plan for the work: does it tour to locales within a reasonable distance to amplify the artist's work and sustain them through additional artist fees? Does it get installed again somewhere else in the city? Can local partnerships be forged to donate used materials? Can a circular economy of material exchange amongst artists and organizations be supported?

Research the forms of extraction, manufacture and/or emissions that are embedded in materials.

Invest in quality material options that enable repurposing. For example, high-quality screws allow for easier removal and re-use of wood.

Reserve some of the budget for a future maintenance plan and/or allow for the use of ephemeral, eco-friendly, and reused materials.

Be as involved as possible in the making of the work. Communicate goals clearly with fabricators and actively research sustainable alternatives. Outsourcing to fabricators is often necessary for the scale involved, but it can result in the cheapest method taking precedence over the most sustainable.

For performance or event-based works, create budgets, environments, and generate resources that prioritize the needs and safety of performers and audiences.

Practice reciprocity. As a traveling artist, do not be opportunistic or extractive of local communities.

MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

PLASTICS

will not last well (migration of additives, oxidation, hydrolysis). In outdoor environments, weathering can cause discolouration, cracks, and crazing. This includes fiberglass and spray foam insulations.

STEEL and CONCRETE

have very high embodied energy (meaning the total sum of energy required throughout all stages of a material's production). If using stainless steel, high grade 316 lasts the longest compared to lower grade stainless or mild steel. If using concrete, think carefully about how it could be used more minimally/efficiently, or, if structurally feasible, replaced entirely with reclaimed concrete blocks or concrete alternatives (such as natural plasters or hempcrete).

PAINT

is often a form of plastic and can fade and break down into microplastics over time. If it must be used, can it be repaired and sourced in the future?

POWDER COATING

is plastic-based and chips easily. Repairing requires the entire piece to be sandblasted and coated again in a specialized facility; spot-touches are not possible.

ANTI-SLIP

measures are a requirement for certain public artworks that get walked upon. When designing pedestrian surfaces, avoid the use of coatings by integrating anti-slip treads and patterns.

NATURAL MATERIALS

can have a big impact. Local rock is an excellent example of a long lasting, low maintenance, sustainable alternative. Mass timber is also gaining in popularity (although it involves polymer-based glue and industrial processing). Consider reclaimed hardwoods from damaged trees if available.



EVERGREEN

the bentway



Canada Council
for the Arts



Conseil des arts
du Canada

NOTICE