

Title

Public Arts: the academy engaging with Main Roads WA, industry and community

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Abstract

Public arts

This paper examines two public art works conducted by researchers, Lyndall Adams and Harrison See from the School of Arts & Humanities at Edith Cowan University in collaboration with Main Roads WA (MRWA), CPB Contractors (CPB), the community reference groups, and school children from (St Stephen's School, Carramar and Kinross College, Kinross). The public artworks are site specific: designed specifically for, and responsive to the particular site through scale, material, form, concept and community consultation. The materials and methods will be discussed in terms of engagement between the academy, industry, and community.

The paper will focus in part, on the research end-user's evaluation and expectations of both projects. While the recent Australian Research Council's, Engagement and Impact Assessment 2018–2019 National Report measures 'units of assessment' by effective interactions between researchers and research end-users outside of academia for the mutually beneficial transfer of knowledge, technologies, methods and resources, the bureaucratic foibles inherent inside the academy can add another level of administrative headache to the artist researcher's workload. Industry partners are not free of frustrations given communities and community organisations use of social media as a democratising voice. However, as Senior Stakeholder and Community Relations Advisor at CPB Contractors, Fiona Bell knows only-to-well, Public art can express collective community values; reflecting how we see the world, enhance the built environment, transform the landscape, or question our assumptions.

Biographies

Lyndall Adams

Lyndall Adams, a contemporary artist, is a senior research fellow across the School of Arts and Humanities and the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. Adams predominantly supervises postgraduate

artist researchers with 21 completions and another 14 at various stages of candidature. She is interested in the complex role of narrative structures in positioning visual images of the body in a constant state of flux. Her areas of interest range across feminisms, dialogics, interdisciplinarity, collaboration and contemporary culture. Lyndall has participated in solo, collaborative and group exhibitions within Australia and internationally.

Harrison See

Harrison See, is a contemporary artist interested in symbolism and narrative that transcends cultural difference. His practice-led research explores dialogic collaborative painting across cultures. See is currently a PhD candidate in the School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University (ECU), and assistant artist and research assistant on the Joondalup Wanneroo Interchange public arts project—a collaborative research project between ECU, Main Roads WA and CPB Contractors. See is a New Colombo Plan Alumni and the recipient of a Research Training Program Scholarship.

Fiona Bell

Fiona Bell, a stakeholder engagement professional currently working in the construction industry on a major State Government road infrastructure project. Outside of the construction industry, Bell has worked across numerous other industries including mining, refining, State Government and not-for-profit. Bell's significant expertise in developing and implementing engagement programs, has enabled her to successfully play a key role in facilitating community investment, employee engagement, stakeholder relationships and brand protection.

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Keywords: Public arts, Collaboration, Community, Engagement, Research

This paper examines two public art works conducted by Lyndall Adams (School of Arts & Humanities at Edith Cowan University) in collaboration with Main Roads WA, CPB Contractors (CPB), the community reference groups (CRG), and school children from Kinross College, Kinross, WA and St Stephen's School, Carramar, WA. This cast of characters and voices make for lively projects, albeit with separate concerns. These two case studies grapple with the challenges around commissioned public art in terms of public engagement through the academy.

Questions asked of these projects and public art in general are about making significant relationships between community, industry, the art world (Cartiere, 2014), and in this case academia. Given the location of both projects north of Perth in the electorate of Cowan and Pearce respectively this would seem a pertinent question. People living in these electorates according to the Australia Council for the Arts, visit art galleries approximately half as much as those living in Perth (2017–18). Is public art efficient as an effective transformative bridge in this context that might address for a broad range of the general public; cultural, economic, and environmental issues (Cartiere, 2014). Public art is also sometimes criticised for promoting an abstracting perspective that constructs a depthless, value-free space for its reception (Miles 1997). In this context there are, 'several problems in the advocacy of public art as social good: the exclusivity of taste; the lack of specificity of the public(s) for whom it is intended, and the transcendent aesthetics of modernism which separates art from life' (Miles, 1997). While this paper does not intend to solve all of these concerns it does question that premise.

The Public Arts Projects description

The two projects 1. the Mitchell Freeway Extension and 2. the Wanneroo Road/Joondalup Drive Interchange Project—in collaboration with all stakeholders involved:

1. Mitchell Freeway Extension: Burns Beach Road to Hester Avenue, Department of Finance, Building Management and Works Grant, 2016–2018, \$32,364.

ECU was invited to undertake the artwork. Adams and recently completed ECU PhD Sue Girak collaborated on the project. The project included:

- developing and producing public art for the new Burns Beach Road Pedestrian Bridge (Figures 1 to 5), which involved the design and manufacture of 4 x 3m x 1.5m water jet cut ceramic artworks based on drawings of the local flora undertaken by Kinross College year 8 students and silhouette developed from photographs taken of the students. The pedestrian walkway required the design and manufacture of ceramic artworks set into the walkway (with vertical and horizontal radius and a 7-degree camber from centre). This work incorporates silhouettes of the children and their drawings which were developed into digital matrix suitable for waterjet cutting of tiles. This technology required complex documentation of individual pieces (repeated and unique) across 4 x 3m x 1.5m, creating a large jigsaws puzzle.
- colour schemes and design for the Neerabup Road (Figures 6 to 8) and Hester Avenue overpasses based on the local flora (Figures 9 to 11).

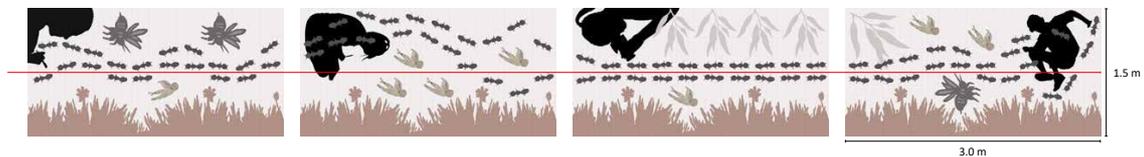


Figure 1: Final design, Burns Beach Road Pedestrian Bridge

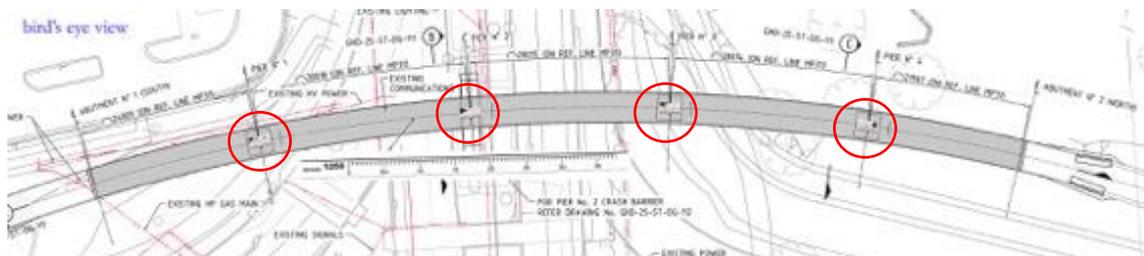


Figure 2: Artwork site location across Burns Beach Road Pedestrian Bridge



Figure 3: Artworks assembly (waterjet cut ceramic tiles). Photography Sue Girak.



Figure 4: artworks installed. Photography Harrison See.



Figure 5: artworks installed. Photography Harrison See.



Figure 6: *Nuytsia floribunda*—inspiration for the Hester Avenue node. Photography Sue Girak.

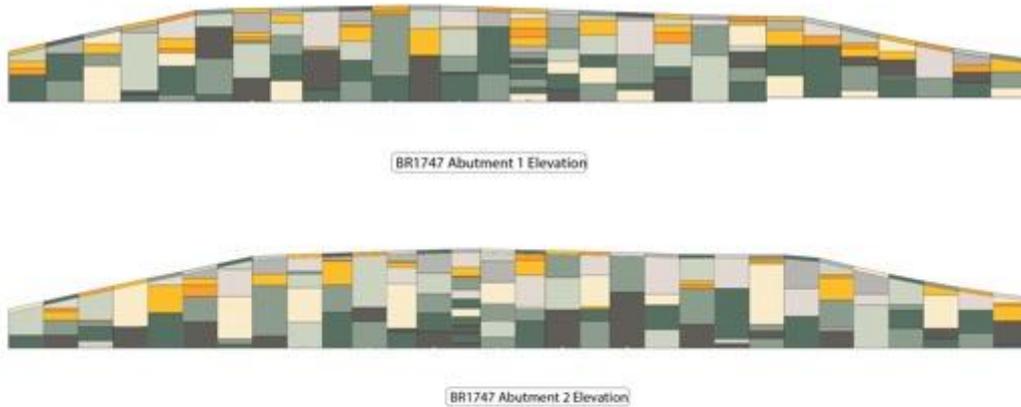


Figure 7: Final design, Hester Avenue node



Figure 8: Hester Avenue node under construction. Photography Main Roads WA



Figure 9: Eucalyptus bark, inspiration for the colour scheme, Neerabup road node



Figure 10: Final design, Neerabup Road node



Figure 11: Neerabup Road node in operation. Photography Harrison See.

2. Wanneroo Road/Joondalup Drive Interchange Project, Department of Finance, Building Management and Works Grant, 2019–2020, \$42,283.

This second project was a less publicly supported incursion in the build environment. Adams was invited by Main Roads WA at the planning stage of the project. ECU PhD candidate Harrison See was engaged as assistant artist and research assistant on the project. The project included:

- one public art component located under the bridge on the east abutment wall (Figure 12),
- select themed colour scheme for the bridge in line with local works already constructed (Figure 12), and
- liaise with lighting specialists, CPB and Main Roads WA to highlight the public artwork (Figure 13).

- An artist's impression was added to the project part way through (Figure 14)—this was released by the WA minister for Transport, Planning and Lands, Rita Saffioti and received warmly by the community.

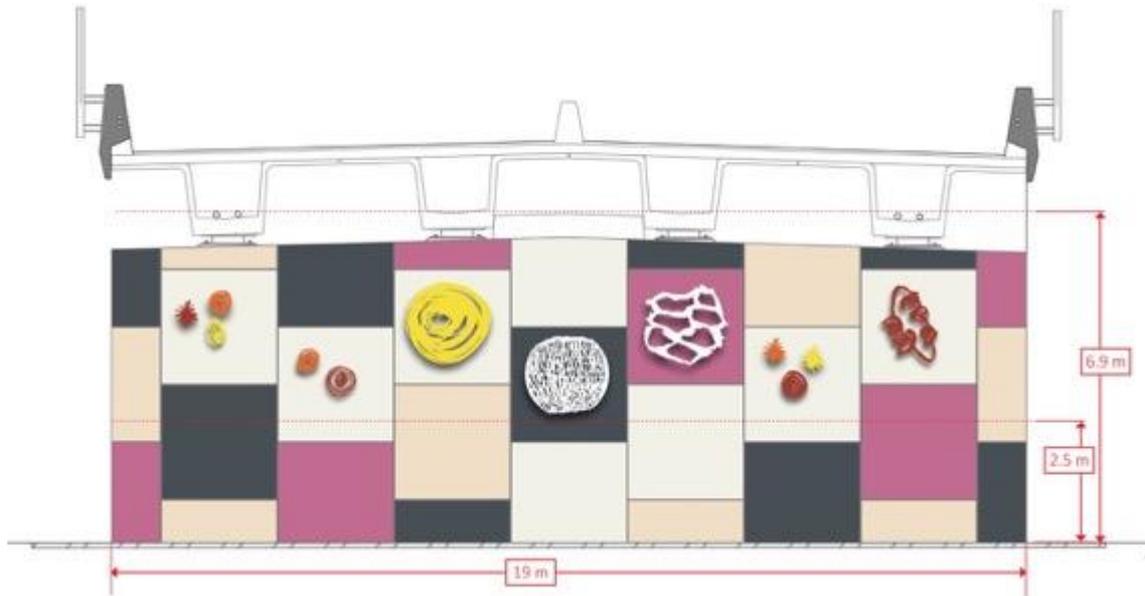


Figure 12: Public art, final design mock-up





Figure 13: Mock-up of possible lighting configurations.



Figure 14: Artists' impression

Both projects had similar requirements:

- No sharp points, incorporate materials that can trap limbs or (create tripping hazards).
- Materials that are suitable for external use in public thoroughfares.
- UV resistance, colour fade and wear and tear and impact loading to achieve the design life of 20 years.
- Low maintenance
- Meet the appropriate design specifications and standards
- Slip resistant if tiles were selected (which inevitably narrowed the colour selection to greys, brown and creams)
- Art coordinator must present their work at CRG meetings

Artists were responsible for:

- Outline of artwork concept
- Consultation and collaboration

- Timeline for designing the work
- Requirements of the design development and documentation including provision of digital files and/or engineering specifications.
- Fabrication and installation of artwork
- Timeline for installing the artwork
- A budget breakdown to ensure the artwork concepts could be developed and produced within the allowed budget.

Site Specificity

These public artworks are site specific: designed specifically for, and responsive to the particular site through scale, material, form, concept and community consultation (2004, NAVA, 2019c). The projects are discussed in terms of engagement between the academy, industry, and community—all voices that ceaselessly contest meaning. Both public artworks were situated in places that are driven/ridden/walked through rather than destinations, hence adding a more complex set of measurements to elicit meaningful impact analysis beyond simple numbers of passers-by. Engagement on the other hand is on first pass an obvious criterion.

This paper focuses in part, on the research end-user's evaluation and expectations of both projects. Additionally while the recent Australian Research Council's, Engagement and Impact Assessment 2018–2019 National Report (2019b) measures 'units of assessment' by effective interactions between researchers and research end-users outside of academia for the mutually beneficial transfer of knowledge, technologies, methods and resources, the bureaucratic foibles inherent inside the academy can add another level of administrative headache to the artist/researcher's workload. As an example, negotiating the contracts between Main Roads WA, CPB Contractors and ECU's Research Services took 10 months to agree on. After much toing and froing both parties have a workable research contract template for future projects.

Public art is a term used to describe community, state and government programmes that are 'in a place freely accessible or visible to the public...concerned with, or affecting the community or individuals... maintained for or used by the community or individuals...paid for by the public' (Cartiere and Zebracki, 2016) all of which hold true for both projects. Urban environments are never static, they change 'according to zoning ordinances, development, urban renewal, and any number of factors;

landscapes are in flux on a seasonal basis as well as over longer periods of time' (Knight and Senie, 2016), the site however defines the audience—those who pass by and those 'involved with its commission, design, execution, and installation' (Knight and Senie, 2016). While this paper does not directly focus on the ways we as artists use public art and public space to articulate our own interests and identities 'the conviction that art can not only challenge, question, displace, destabilize, and overturn the status quo in a society' (Schuermans et al., 2012) holds true. It must be asked however, what are the 'implications of the language that so often frames core elements of these projects, such as "audience engagement", "participation" and "public"...that invariably inform the way such work is sanctioned, supported and shared (Cartiere and Zebracki, 2016). It is issues around 'economic, social, cultural, and political claims about the impacts of art in public spaces [which] are often criticized for being overblown and unrealistic' (Schuermans et al., 2012) and the way that artists interact with stakeholders that is of interest here. It is 'what happens when art is "out there" in public space' (Schuermans et al., 2012), 'what these forms of art "do", or are claimed to "do", in terms of building communities and places' (Hawkins (2012) as cited in Schuermans et al., 2012). The role of the artist instead of expressing a particular opinion, engages with stakeholders and sites of the artwork in cooperative, intricate and complex ways, hence projecting an alternative view on the processes of place-making or sense of place (Schuermans et al., 2012, Lossau and Stevens, 2015). Along with other "place-making" activities, such as urban design, art became widely regarded as low-cost way to help create an identity for redevelopment schemes and to engage local people in regeneration processes' (Cartiere and Zebracki, 2016).

Cartiere and Zebracki (2016) in this context challenge 'public art commissioners, curators and artists...to develop new approaches to producing and articulating the value of art within the post-regenerate city....notion of "place listening"...how public art continues to help shape our cities'. It is against this backdrop that these projects offer an artist led perspective that unfolds the political capacity of public art not necessarily to make tangible social change but to harness a political imagination towards demonstrating and actualising different ways to be in the world together, an urban renewal that listens to place, its community and other stakeholders.

Stakeholders

The stakeholders in both projects included: Main Roads WA, CPB Construction and their contractors (lighting experts etc.), St Stephens School/Kinross College, the public arts team at Edith Cowan University and their contractors (fabricators and

installation team), and the Community Reference Group who were consulted throughout the project. Each stakeholder had a different remit which required cooperative, intricate and at times complex communication strategies to ensure that all were included, informed and consulted. Industry partners are not free of frustrations either given communities and community organisations use of social media as a democratising voice.

CPB Contractors and Community

Public art can express collective community values; reflecting how we see the world, enhance the built environment, transform the landscape, or question our assumptions (Cartiere, 2014). Not all of the community have been supportive of the second project. Once complete, the Wanneroo Road and Joondalup Drive Interchange upgrade will improve traffic flow in the area and support the projected levels of traffic resulting from planned development for the corridor North of Perth. At the end of the project, life in the community will return to normal; the changes will be accepted as the flow of traffic in the area will have improved. The impacts during construction have led to frustrations and annoyance for some of the community living or working in the area. According to Senior Stakeholder and Community Relations Advisor on the project, Fiona Bell:

there has been a lot of development and construction in the area recently, many community members are exhausted by the road works. There has been a lot of community interest in the project from the start. Many community members have wanted to be involved and have had input into how the upgrade will look and function. They are interested in what is happening; how it will happen, when, why etc. Keeping them informed is critical. It was important not to make the mistake of thinking the community can be managed. From the start of the project, time was invested into building relationships with business owners, local schools, residents and key stakeholders. Good relationships with the community have been essential; understanding them and their issues, as well as working with them, and constantly keeping them informed. However, during major parts of the construction phase the community have become vocal in opposing the works. Social media has proven to be a popular avenue for the community to share their thoughts and feelings. At the start of the project, there were regular posts opposing or questioning the project on the community Facebook pages. Some of these posts by persons opposed to the project

were considered intentional...the power of social media cannot be underestimated. There is always the potential for issues to escalate extremely quickly. No longer does the community need to hold a 'Town Hall' to gain support from other community members...Unlike in a meeting however, everyone gets to voice their opinion on Facebook. Monitoring community Facebook pages has been essential in understanding and working with the community...Not surprisingly, Facebook has been the most used medium for the community to communicate feedback on the project. People who have used Facebook have generally wanted to share their frustrations, rather than seeking a response to their concerns.

Academy

Projects such as these require liaising with industry stakeholders to meet the academy's expectations (2019c) also. Public arts do not easily fit inside this traditional model of government funding. Various paper trails from all stakeholders are required with little similarity across the different domains—resulting in lengthy and time-consuming contract negotiation for all parties. Additionally, industry has in most cases already set up much of the community engagement negotiations—around which, playing catch may not occur until the first Community Reference Group meeting.

The project

On the second project (much like the first) Adams and See developed a program that worked with the project brief and the year 11 ATAR school curriculum for St Stephen's School, Caramar, WA. The Principal acknowledged the importance of promotional opportunities for the school, while the Head of Learning Area, in the Arts commented on the opportunity for the students to be involved in and exposed to such a process.

See facilitated two drawing sessions, followed by a developed design presentation. The initial drawing session began with contextualising the project—what the student's role would be, as well as sharing details of the previous, public arts project. The students had the intended themes explained—micro/macro patterns in the built and natural environment—followed by a materials and methods demonstration. Other stakeholder (Fiona Bell, and Steven Cole, Project Manager, Main Roads WA) also attended this session. The second drawings session was conducted in the school

grounds with the intent that the students would apply what they had learnt in the previous session in the field. The drawings from these sessions formed the basis on which the developed artwork was based (Figure 15).



Figure15: a selection of drawing from year 11 students, St Stephen's School, Caramar, Western Australia.

A follow up presentation some months into the project described to the students the processes applied to their original drawings—detailing how shapes, colours and patterns had been taken directly from their sketches and translated into developed designs (Figure 16) inclusive of an impression of how lighting would transform the art wall at night (Figure 13). The art teacher in particular was excited by the result. A school excursion to the artwork site is scheduled for 2020 on completion of the project.

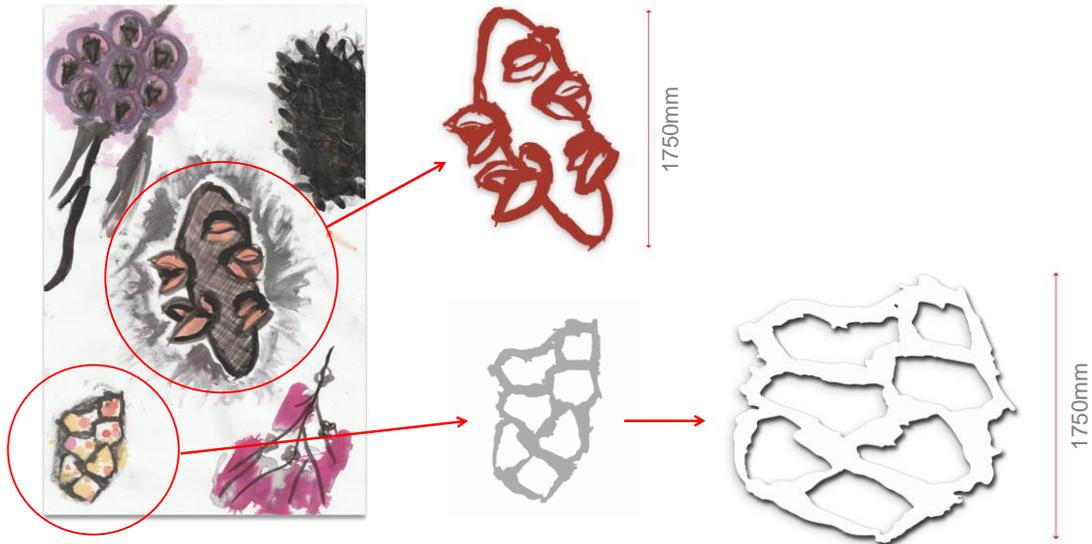


Figure 16: Sketches translated into developed designs

Community Reference Group (CRG)

The community reference groups on both projects were made up of an independent chair, industry partners, local government, and community members. The ECU arts team presented both projects on several occasions through the period leading up to installation. These were several months apart with 10 to 15 minutes of the meeting given over to the public artwork presentation. Questions, comments and suggestions came predominantly from community members. As generous as their suggestions were, consultation, negotiation and in most cases 'sign off' had already occurred with industry partners. Public arts projects are unequivocally collaborative 'all public art professionals—artists, architects, urban planners, curators, critics, historians, administrators—are practicing *in* [emphasis in original] public: the publicness of our efforts is inherent' (Knight and Senie, 2016). Time frames and financial constraints notwithstanding 'since the late 20th century, art in the public space is no longer justified simply by arguments about the meaning of works, but rather its externalities and potential effects on the urban fabric' (Maeder et al., 2017) and both projects are a consequence of this process. That is to say 'public art's high exposure to the critical judgment of the media and the public—not to mention fear of being a source of controversy for those involved in public commissions—tend to orient production towards more consensual forms' (Maeder et al., 2017). Artists in this context are 'not community problem solvers or educators but, ...facilitators who help shape a process of inquiry within a community' (Knight and Senie, 2016). While this kind of minimal risk approach is hardly optimal for artists it does provide much needed public

programs being delivered into public hands albeit devoid of and critical base (Maeder et al., 2017). Main Roads WA have requested a commercial contract agreement with the ECU art team for artists impressions on future projects as a consequence of the work undertaken on the second project in this study. As trust in the arts team at ECU grows it is possible that a more socially engaged and community inclusive approach could be negotiated on future public arts research projects. This kind of outlook would allow for an examination of future sites in terms of 'the way they interact with urban space, and their processes of implementation' (Guazon, 2013) and hence developing public art works that are anchored to the publics they are created for (Guazon, 2013, Schuermans et al., 2012, Lossau and Stevens, 2015, Maeder et al., 2017, Hawkins, 2017, Knight and Senie, 2016).

Assessment

Future projects might also benefit by developing tools for assessment of public art. While much has been said about audiences of public art making concessions rather than the artists that make them (Miles, 1997) 'the question of which "public" public art is developed for is therefore deeply politicized and contested, but is still seldom analysed from a perspective other than that of prevailing modes of art criticism' (Cartiere, 2014). The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) advocates: 'Decide whether to involve the community and to what extent. If so, establish the mode of community participation in the project at the outset and ensure that expectations are clearly articulated in the project brief' (NAVA, 2019b). Tools for assessment while available are rarely employed 'so the only gauge of a work's success or failure in reaching its audience is when debate erupts into protest' (Cartiere, 2014). The *chART: Public Art Marpole* (2019a) did attempt to use an amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative research methods to advance a multi-dimensional assessment of specific public art projects within the community relate to a wider spectrum of effects.

They recommended a balance of process and outcome, and

- 'Quality of local as well as national consultation in planning process
- Degree of fit between original plans and achieved artwork
- Relationship between art programme and overall regeneration initiatives relating to public space' (Cartiere and Guindon, 2018).

Other criteria to considered in this project were:

- Aesthetic impact: 'Quality' of artwork, assessed in relation to different criteria (for example, artist versus lay understandings of technical innovation involved), and the degree to which the work harmonizes or clashes...with the character of the location.
- Social impact: the degree to which the artwork energizes the site or broader locality in measurable ways.
- Sustainability: Whether the artwork provides 'value for money' and whether the artwork provides a safe, accessible site, appropriate in the short and anticipated long term to the public uses of its wider urban environment. (Cartiere and Guindon, 2018)

Ultimately many agreed that the lack of qualitative and quantitative analysis (Cartiere, 2014, Zebracki, 2012a, Zebracki et al., 2010) requires promoting, with Zebracki recommending:

more refined public practices that genuinely engage with and practically incorporate the varying perspectives of all actors involved—that is, artists, policymakers, planners and publics within geographical layers of the regional, the local and individual embodiment—from public-planning phase throughout its implementation and 'afterworld'. (Zebracki, 2012b)

Conclusion

Ultimately in both public arts projects examined in this case study, the practitioners 'engaged to develop a concept in response to a brief [who]...subcontract[ed] others to help fabricate and install the work...Where consultation with relevant community members informs and influences the project' (NAVA, 2019b). All aspects of the project adhered to NAVA's Code of Practice (2019a). This included the contract—while the process took a lot more time and energy from both industry and the academy (lawyers, research services and the art coordinator) than seems reasonable, the outcome inevitably led to a contract that adheres to the code and is an excellent template for future engagement projects such as these. The communities the public artworks were intended for are ultimately reconciled to the projects.

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