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The Bauhaus Model

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As globalism redefines our understanding of place, it simultaneously affects the pedagogical role of the institution for the public artist. Can the idealistic notions of an academic public art program absorb expanding contexts from beyond the ivory tower? Art programs worldwide share the goal of teaching students to be socially responsible, yet the art school is also the setting for students' socialization and the distillation of their personal interests. How does European education begin to frame the variety of ways and means available for the student of public art? The goal of most M.F.A. programs in the United States is not focused on the audience for art nor does it question how the work intersects culture and society. This creates a disconnect between the students' vision of artwork as a cultural practice versus a studio practice.

As nationalities and countries continually reinvent cultural identity, artists are more than ever becoming citizens of the world and students of a grand conglomerate culture. The often talked about, and often missing, "sense of place" is one of the artist's challenges in creating meaningful work in the public realm. Yet to begin the move from modernist plaza plops toward intuitive site responses, the artist needs encouragement to expand the horizons of the academic insti-

tution. Several academic art centers in North America offer inventive strategies for artists interested in art in public space, yet they often emulate European models of higher education. Educator and executive director of Chicago-based architecture-treasures, Joyce Fernandes asserts that "there is a disconnect between the reality of public art in community settings and the idealistic notions of cultural production reproduced within many M.F.A. programs in the United States."

Several public art academic programs are offered in Europe: Pompeu Fabra—Barcelona, Spain; Oxford-Brookes—Oxford, England; Bauhaus School—Weimar, Germany; Piet Zwart Institute—Holland. All have particular philosophies of interacting with public space; however, the Bauhaus School has an especially interesting method for helping students understand the practice of public art by understanding their role as always evolving and multidisciplinary.

Since 1919 the Bauhaus School has addressed the politics of social space by combining avant-garde notions of design and art. The institution currently offers an M.F.A. program, led by Professor Liz Bachhuber and Assistant Professor Susanne Bosch, entitled Public Art and New Artistic Strategies. This international program, taught in English and German, educates

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FAR LEFT: Photo courtesy the artist. All other photos by Marcel Koelliker; courtesy www.artanna.net.



the artist as an evolving cultural producer. Current students represent sixteen nationalities and languages, and offer a truly global perspective on art in public space. Greek citizen Anna Lagiou-Tsoulofi, a 2005 graduate of the program, explains, "Public art doesn't only expose work in a typical public setting but begins to create a dialogue and questions a concept that is exposed to the public in a new way, by reinventing public space."

The Bauhaus program includes four major fields of specialization: (a) temporary interventions in public space; (b) new media; (c) integrated art within architecture; and (d) memory, the function of memorials, and the role of the historical. The program explores artist interactions, planning and creating political debates, and the interplay between multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary art practices. It also examines the process of bringing art to an audience in unconventional ways and inspiring communities to adopt an artist's vision. Artists are not only encouraged to explore public space but also to redevelop current trends in the art world, enabling them to invent new approaches to public art.

2004 Bauhaus graduate Peer Olivier Nau focused on bridging design and public space; this has led him to create unconventional performative works outside the gallery. He says, "Design and art in public space creates exchanges with people and their experiences; the viewer is confronted with your concept in unexpected ways. In design the aim is to find a perfect form for a specific problem. In combining both genres you connect with the daily lives of people and the hope for a connection that can begin to transcend."

The emerging Bauhaus philosophy of new artistic strategies is an evolving support mechanism for artists who incorporate philosophical, multidisciplinary, and experimental art practices into a public space. Lagiou-Tsoulofi's thesis project was an investigative performance that involved volunteering skills and services to public and private agencies over a two-day period. She says, "The places I chose to work were places where an intense interaction between the local society and

the foreign immigrant element takes place on a daily basis." The outcome of the inquiry was formed into a theoretical text and public posters with the logo "Whose city is this?" (Wessen Stadt ist das?), as well as a website that was publicized through a handbill campaign. By targeting specific locales, Lagiou-Tsoulofi was able to converse, educate, and learn through first-hand dialogue, as well as formulate a personal vision in a variety of public spaces outside the conventional public art arena.

As Lucy Lippard writes in *Moving Targets/Moving Out*, "The great and still elusive questions surrounding public art are: Which public? And is there an exchange between art and audience?" These questions lead to an expanding vision of public art whose pedagogy in the academic realm shapes artists and fosters meaningful work in this arena. Presenting and inventing new strategies of work is crucial as the artist's role evolves and changes conceptions of art in the public domain. How can American academia include such explorations of space and public interests? Is a successful artist one who honors concepts and connections to others in public space or one steeped in idealism and convention? The evolution of art in public space is one ripe for invention, as artists take a leading role with meaningful and socially conscious work.

STUART KEELER is an artist dedicated to exploring the context of art in public spaces.



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