PUBLIC GLASS ART: EXPLORING THE IMPACTS OF GLASS ART IN PUBLIC SPACES

Parinaz Faghihi[1], Teresa Almeida[2], Fernando Quintas[3]

Abstract *— Public art has influenced human well-being during the past decades, as well as has contributed substantially to urban regeneration. Glass art has been explored in public art because of its great undiscovered potential in terms of production of innovative artworks and heritage enjoyment by the general public. This paper defines the term of public glass art as a multifaceted means of expression in the public realm which employs glass as a versatile material to express artists' motives and emotions, societies' culture, religion and civilization. The emphasis is on the potential of glass art to represent the world, the identity of a culture and of a civilization. As case studies, a number of successful European countries in public glass art are investigated in this paper. Moreover, an overview of the main concerns for the development of public glass art are presented.*

Index Terms —Public art, Glass art, Europe context.

INTRODUCTION

Today, the vitality is of critical importance to the prestigious urban environment. Public art is a tangible reflection of quality of life and is expected to improve urban residential environment [1]. Public art contributes, not only to the visual attractiveness and aesthetic terms of urban spaces, but rather towards urban regeneration [2], [3]. This contribution involves economic, social, environmental and psychological issues. Providing a definition of public art is rather difficult since the "Art" continually challenges and rewrites its own definition through its materials, and methods and the value it places on innovation and change. Nonetheless on one side public art is an art for everybody which is accessible in public spaces. On the other side it takes the definition even further and does not restrict to public places as long as it is visible to general public, therefore public art can be on private property such as museums and art galleries.

A traditional definition of public art is the "art placed in public places and spaces" [4]. Public art is a part of the societies' public history and part of the evolving culture. It reflects and reveals the societies and adds meaning to the cities.

As far as public art is important, materials and techniques used to present artworks in public spaces hold its value. This field of expression is open-endedness as public art encompasses place-making, environmental activism, cause-related art, sound installations, interdisciplinary performance events, community-based initiatives, and much more [5]. Just as Ricke Helmut says in "new glass in Europe": "A profusion of adequate technical design-possibilities had to be developed for the abundance of new conceptual beginnings" [6].

Regarding to the importance of different techniques, artists in Europe has recently employed glass to enhance and enrich public art. Transparency, translucence and brightness have presented glass as a versatile material that can be shaped in cold, warm and molten states through different techniques [7], [8].

With the invention of the small studio furnace some 50 years ago, making objects in glass was no longer subject to an industrial environment. Technical innovations made the glass furnace mobile and artist took the freedom of experimenting with this material in their own ateliers. In these early days whatever came out of these studios was automatically considered fantastic. Glass galleries opened one after another inducing a self-containing circuit with its very own group of collectors. In Netherlands glass is being used as an emancipated material in art, however this is not always the case in several other European countries.

This paper illustrate some case studies in Europe that presented public glass art.

PUBLIC GLASS ART

Safety and immortality of the materials are two important factors which have leaded artists to employ stone, wood and metal to present their artworks in public spaces for many years. Nonetheless these materials have their own defect. For instance, stone and metal are heavy and wood is easy to burn. The relationship between glass and public art is being developed since the medieval times, with the integration of the stained glass on the churches. Nevertheless public glass art is more than stained glass windows. Glass was hired in public art since the lamination techniques helped the artists to safeguard the glass in public spaces despite the fact that

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glass seemed a fragile material for many years. Glass is a great asset to artists for presenting transparency, translucence and brightness while other materials do not provide these qualities [9]. Glass art in public spaces plays, appropriately enough, an important role to demonstrate images conversion continuously, depending weather and the position of the sun that is changing over the day.
Glass is a unique material for sculpture, and it is a contemporary material. It is unique because no other medium has the ability to change colour, texture, and, seemingly, mass [10].

Many countries in the world have employed glass art in public spaces, especially European countries and the United States. This paper focuses on the development of public glass art in Europe in spite of the fact that there are good examples in United States to illustrate development of public glass art.

CASE STUDIES

Material in public art installations is of vital importance in expressing artists' thoughts, motives and emotions. In this context, glass has furnished an appropriate space for artists to employ sunlight and color to create distinctive artworks. Joost van Santen[4] is a Dutch artist whose glass artworks have been installed in public spaces. In his sculptures dynamic images appear when sunlight projects the colors of the glass onto the ground. "Ellipse of Light", a coloured glass installed in the south facade of the railway station in Hilversum the Netherlands (Figure 1), and "Light Man Number 1" installed in Wenceslas Square Prague Czech Republic (Figure 2) are two successfully executed of his works. To reflect the essence of his artworks, "Becoming aware of light as part of the universe", Joost van Santen says.

"Glass towers & fountains" at Bute Square in Cardiff-Wales (2000) by David Pearl (Figure 3), are tow colored cylindres, each of which is 35 feet tall and has been made of curved laminated and toughened glass on stainlees-steel. This work is a collaboration between David Pearl and Amber Hiscott who wanted to make a work of public art which retains an industrial and constructive quality by restraining decorativeness of colored glass [9].

"Light Transformer" at National Glass Centre in Sunderland-UK (1998) by Zora Palova [11] (Figure 4), and "Bridlington Spa" at Bridlington-Uk (2010) by Andrew Moor (Figure 5) are other glass artworks in public spaces which have been successfully executed in Europe. Zora's objects are moods and thoughts captured in glass and reflecting feelings of absurdity, inner conflict or –by contrast- liberty and audacity [12].

FIGURE 1. ELLIPSE OF LIGHT- JOOST VAN SANTEN- AMERSFOORT, NETHERLANDS- 2001.

FIGURE 2. LIGHT MAN NUMBER 1- JOOST VAN SANTEN- WENCESLAS SQUARE PRAGUE CZECH REPUBLIC- 2004.

Edvin Öhrström[5] is a Swedish glass artist who devoted most of his life in educating art and glass art and teaching in fine arts universities. He developed his sculptures to prisms of gemstone colors that played with light reflections and refractions in the glass. "Crystal, vertical accent in glass and steel" by Öhrström, is a glass obelisk installed in Sergel Square in Stockholm with 37 meter tall. It has been made from steel and covered with glass which has four lamps inside the obelisk as a light source (Figure 6). Öhrström has the idea of building extra parts of his glasses to substitute if other parts broke.

Arne Törnqvist, art critic for the daily newspaper "Stockholms Tidningen," wrote[6]: "Perhaps the best and most original quality in this work is its ability to harmonize with the expressive values of a modern mercantile milieu while still retaining a rough, virile force which can act as a link between the glass and sheet-metal of the buildings and the image of a piece of veined ore. In the unhesitating and

[4] http://home.wxs.nl/~jvansant/

[5] http://www.edvinohrstrom.com/

[6] http://www.edvinohrstrom.com/?cat=public_works&id=3

triumphant vigor it lacks any trace of wordly polish and technological sexlessness."

FIGURE 3. GLASS TOWERS AND FOUNTAINS- DAVID PEARL AND AMBER HISCOTT (COLLABORATION)- BUTE SQUERE, GARDIFF- 2000.

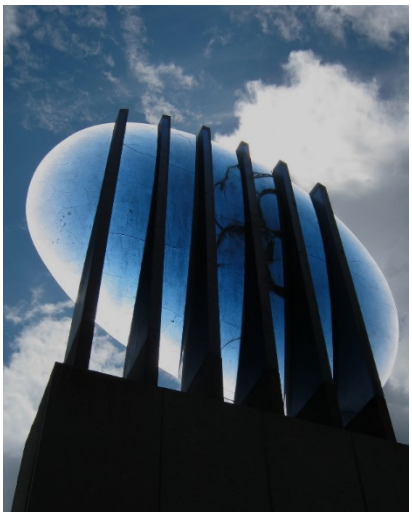

FIGURE 4. LIGHT TRANSFORMER - ZORA PALOVA - AT NATIONAL GLASS CENTRE IN SUNDERLAND-UK -1998.

By observing the curriculum of the artists that produced aforementioned artworks, we understand they have been specifically educated in glass art at art schools or art universities. It discloses the importance of glass education to develop the artist's skills and creativities.

It is necessary for the artists and designers to understand the potential that glass offers and use it according to its modus operandi. Artists and designers traditionally provided the projects and drawings and skillful glassblowers execute them afterwards, potentiating a harmonious relationship between artists, designers and craftsmen. "Craft education and practice is centered on a dialogue between creativity, materials, skills, and the artist developing ideas by combining conceptual vision with manipulation of the object" [13].

FIGURE 5. BRIDLINGTON SPA- ANDREW MOOR- BRIDLINGTON-UK- 2010.

FIGURE 6. CRYSTAL - VERTICAL ACCENT IN GLASS AND STEEL- EDVIN ÖHRSTRÖM- STOCKHOLM- 1979.

CONCLUSION

The term of public glass art was studied in this paper. Successfully executed glass arts in public spaces have been studied. This paper in particular explored case studies in the public glass art in Europe. It was observed that contemporary public glass art has an important role as a subject matter or as a medium on the urban regeneration. Larger number of people can experience glass in other ways than its material quality. In addition, the potential of glass regarding to production of innovative artworks is remarkable.

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