Evanescent: Animating Space

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by
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I would like to thank all the faculty that I have had the honor to receive instruction from while attending Cal Poly. Without their help, I would not be who I am today.
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“It seems to exist not so much in space as to be of space - its form so transparent and ephemeral, that the interior and the garden merge imperceptibly to create that ideal sensation of one continuum.”
Norman F Carver

Art

Art is how we digest the world around us. Our reaction to the impressions made by our surroundings. A photograph of the invisible inner movement of our minds. At its basis, art is the language that every human is fluent in, regardless of age, color, gender, or any aspect of one’s identity. Regardless of its content, the form’s expression is so immediate it almost precedes reaction, where the viewer indisputably feels. Even if you do not agree with the subject, everyone perceives color and space.

Public Art

Public art is the expression a community’s values. It is their grocery shopping list, their childhood home address, the color of one’s hair. It is the manifestation of the indiscernible elements that make an identity.

Intersection of Public Art and Planning

Public art can be seen as the community’s reaction to their perception of the world. It is their social statement on existing conditions. Being perceptive about the community’s attitude for the way they view their world is insight into the heart of a community. Artists have a way to spark empathy and desire in their community for a reimagined world. They are the link between a community’s frustrations, appreciations, love, and pain.
Sitting in Little Tokyo, a formerly abandoned police car warehouse was repurposed by architect Frank Gehry into The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA, opened in 1983. The space features 40,000 square feet of exhibition space. The gallery presents, collects and interprets contemporary works of art. Founded by artists, their mission is to:

- Make art accessible
- Embrace the inevitability of change
- Support the multiplicity of perspectives
- Embrace the inevitability of change
- Make art accessible

While the Grand Avenue facility was being planned and constructed, the MOCA opened an interim exhibition space outside the warehouse called the “Temporary Contemporary” in the fall of 1983. At the time, the warehouse district was a flourishing arts district, with many studios being situated in the area.
Figure 1.2: The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA
Figure 1.3: Project Location
Site Visit and Analysis

The interim space consists of an 15789 square feet informal plaza, with a built canopy of chain-link fencing and steel trusses over a closed-off street. The structural network of steel beams and supports’ skeleton is perfect for a re-exploration of the former “Temporary Contemporary” interim use.

Urban Furniture

The space features an avenue of movable planters and benches made of cinder block. These existing planters allow for a fluid space with opportunity to create dynamic shapes of space. They can create different circulation networks for pedestrians, and encourage users to play with the space’s orientations and viewpoints. The west end of the site is enclosed by a line of planters filled with trees.

South facing view

Figure 1.4: South View of MOCA

Cinder block planters

Figure 1.5: Cinder Planters
Reminiscent of the Temporary Contemporary, Evanescent will bring life to the spaces between the steel supports with modular canvases. The “pieces” will be impermanent movable fixtures sliding vertically. Evanescent will be an open-space studio space where informal and formal artists alike may work. The project will be an infill redesign of the space with minimal new construction. The design aspires to break down the public’s perception of art and public space. It is an invitation for the public to let their creative impulses loose, with no formal narrative, pushing a contemporary envelope. With a natural and freeflow creative space, the artist-planner relationship is released, where citizens themselves are empowered and respectfully considered. The barrier between professionals and the community evaporates, creating a reciprocal and positive relationship.

Evanescent will be an open-space studio space where the everyday citizen and formally trained artists alike may work. The project will be an infill redesign of the space with minimal new construction. The medium of art is the perfect form for expressing the public’s spirit. Regardless of one’s ability, allowing anyone a space for their creative capacities demonstrates concretely the power of self-expression. A public art space supported by a contemporary gallery is the perfect opportunity to reevaluate perceptions of art. Rather than the artwork being separate, the viewer is the working subject to be valued.

The goal of the space is to bring life to the currently underused space. Currently, the space is used for outdoor seating and recreation. However, there is not a clear intention for the space. A more direct narrative should be emphasized, with opportunity to liven the space. Event planning and gallery sponsorship with a specific direction should be instated. The potential for a large open space to be filled with amenities like a formal gathering space can be established.
Figure 1.6: Northern end of The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA
Figure 1.7: Evanescent: Animating Space
Project Goals

Kevin Lynch examined the way a citizen can successfully function in their environment. A legible city image with a characterization of visual quality and clear space, creates an image and identity. The way for an individual to properly tap into the potential of space is a defined narrative. The goal of the project is to create a sense of identity in the present unclarity. The formation of mental image is integral to cognitive psychology. A strong response and perception attracts people to pleasant places. Image consists of the set of beliefs, ideas, and impressions a person holds on their environment. Understanding mental pictures that can be enhanced by urban design is conducive to people’s attitude and action within a space. The space effectively harnesses people’s perceptions of the world by encouraging users of the space to create art, regardless of their qualifications or background. The modular canvases act as anchors for people’s mental perceptions and impressions of the world. It is important to gratify all forms of expression without gatekeeping, as the emotional anarchy of art creates diverse and unique ideas with intrinsic value, less focused on tangible rewards and productivity. To encourage a nonlinear motive of learning for users is a mindset to be valued for its spirit rather than anything quantifiable or of profit. In the authors opinion, contemporary society stresses individuals for a high level of productivity and objective results, while in reality the beauty of struggle and one’s identity is limitless. The project is a critical examination of our societal attitudes to shift our focus away from results and to lead our attention to the pursuit of living and growth.

The project encourages replication of the intersection between public programming and art. While public art is commissioned in forms like murals and sculptures, facilitating a space through sponsored free curation is an exciting mode with great potential. Creating a program where citizens furnish their city with their expressions vests power and value that can be used in other cities. Planners should animate their city by defining a freeflowing space for performance, dance, theatre, poetry, graffiti, posters, sculpture, murals and installations.
Case Study: La Tierra de la Culebra Park

Figure 1.8: La Tierra de la Culebra
La Tierra de la Culebra is an art park in Highland Park, Los Angeles. After the 1992 civil uprisings in L.A., artist Tricia Ward had the opportunity to start a community arts workshop in Highland Park. Tricia Ward placed local youth and the community at the center of the project. Their main frustration was rooted in the lack of investment in youth and community services. Volunteers, community partners, and Ward, imagined a space where young people could explore their creative worlds.

Initially, the space was an abandoned and neglected parcel of land in the Highland Park neighborhood. She began the project without permission and eventually obtained a use agreement from the Los Angeles Cultural Affairs Department and eventually the Los Angeles Conservation Corps. From this work, she founded Arts. Community. Land. Activism!, a public art and land collective dedicated to synergistically working with residents of underserved neighborhoods to transform urban land into living ArtParks. The ArtParks are landmarks of art, education, creation, and transformation centers for youth and families to celebrate culture and civic engagement.
La Tierra de la Culebra Park features a range of public art installations strategically placed within the park’s design. These installations contribute to the aesthetic appeal, cultural identity, and storytelling aspect of the park. They often address social and environmental themes, reflecting the experiences and aspirations of the local community.

The process of developing La Tierra de la Culebra Park involved extensive community engagement, ensuring that the park’s design and art installations were reflective of the neighborhood’s cultural diversity and needs. This inclusive approach fostered a sense of ownership among residents, promoting social integration and a shared identity with the park.
Ten Policies for Future Animated Spaces

Rotating Art Program:
Implement a rotating art program that periodically removes existing artworks to make room for new creations.
Define the frequency of rotations based on available resources, community interest, and the desired level of dynamism in the public space.

Open Invitation for Creative Expression:
Invite citizens of all backgrounds and ages to creatively contribute to the public space during each rotation period.
Encourage individuals to freely express their artistic ideas and participate in the temporary art.

Call for Proposals:
Announce a call for proposals before each rotation period to invite citizens to submit their ideas for the temporary art installations.
Encourage diverse artistic concepts and ensure an inclusive selection process.

Selection and Evaluation:
Convene a selection committee consisting of community representatives, artists, and city officials to review the submitted proposals.
Evaluate the artistic merit, feasibility, safety considerations, and appropriateness for the public.

Installation and Display:
Collaborate with selected artists and citizen participants to facilitate the installation and display of the temporary artworks.
Provide support and resources as needed, such as assistance with logistics, site preparation, and installation techniques.
Periodic Rotation:
Establish a predetermined timeline for the rotation of the temporary artworks. Coordinate the removal of existing installations and ensure a smooth transition for new artworks to be installed.

Documentation and Public Engagement:
Document each rotation period by capturing photographs, videos, or written accounts of the temporary artworks. Organize public engagement activities, such as guided tours, artist talks, or community events, to encourage interaction and dialogue around the art installations.

Maintenance and Storage:
Develop a maintenance plan to ensure the upkeep of the temporary artworks during their display period. Safely store and preserve the removed artworks to potentially exhibit them in future exhibitions or archive them for documentation purposes.

Community Feedback and Evaluation:
Collect feedback from the community on the temporary artworks through surveys, public forums, or online platforms. Regularly evaluate the success of the program by considering community engagement, artistic quality, and the program’s impact on the public space.

Support and Recognition:
Provide support and resources to participating artists and citizen contributors, such as artist stipends, recognition plaques, or certificates of participation. Celebrate the artistic contributions of citizens and recognize their role in enhancing the public space.
References
