



Public Art Roles in Malaysian Urban Landscape

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Abstract

Public art involves a collaboration of stakeholders, promotes a sense of community and contributes to a substantial public realm. Therefore, to investigate the aesthetic and functional values of public art in the local context, this paper reviews several public art projects in Malaysia, as reference studies. It examines the various dimensions of public art typology and significance roles of the public art installation. The outcome of this paper is hoped to provide a better understanding and appreciation of public art among stakeholders that lead to more successful implementation for a better quality of the public realm in the urban spaces.

Keywords: Public art; roles of public art; urban landscape; urban quality of life

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1.0 Introduction

According to Chang (2008), public art is an artistic expression of artist and community that can found in a variety of forms, materials and processes, either permanently or temporarily installed in public space. It included freestanding sculptures, monuments, archway and artist-designed street furniture and artwork integrated with building such as murals, architectural details, and digital display. In general, the practice of public art involves a collaboration of stakeholders, including ruling authority, policy maker, built environment professionals and visual art experts, and promotes a sense of community. It contributes to an enhancement of the public realm, successful place making and the development of cultural and social capital (Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture, 2010). Most public art in western countries celebrates the local culture and reinstate the sense of history and remarkable event, while public arts in China, Japan, and Korea, are often influenced by their belief and religion, and at the same time, preserving the city's identity.






Meanwhile, in Malaysia, there is an unprecedented interest and awareness of public art and its installation is being mostly found in the main cities including Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Perak, Selangor, and Johor. Notwithstanding the interest, however, the installation, locality and placement of public art are often misguided and widely debatable. This scenario is contrary to the guidelines provided by Cardiff County Council (2005) that public art should be placed in a publicly accessible area, which is open to the appreciation of everyone. The rationale for public art incorporated as part of the urban landscape and to what extent does it contribute towards improving the urban quality of life and the city itself is often questionable. The incorporation of public art should respond to the particular setting of a public place, such as its use, significance or history (Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2008). Therefore, the objectives of this study are (a) to examine the typologies of public art installation and (b) to investigate the aesthetic and functional values of public art in the local context. Thus, this paper reviews several public art projects in Malaysia as reference studies.

2.0 Literature Review

Public art: An overview

The term 'public art' is widely open to diverse interpretation and has been referred to artwork that located externally; from national statue or monument to a mural or graffiti painted on the wall by the public. Frequently, public art being used as an umbrella term covering any artwork that not displayed in the formal museums or art galleries (Hunting, 2005). Hence, the term 'public art' in this paper refers to the artwork with the participation of community members and selected artist that located in free accessed spaces. This paper differentiates the types of public art based on the justification by the Portland Public Art Committee (2009), Tyler (2013) and Nurul Izzah et al. (2014) summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Typology of public art

Type / Descriptions	Supporting image
<p>a. Artworks of Remembrance</p> <p>Artworks of remembrance are used to commemorate an important historical figure or event of public significance. It can be in a form of figurative or abstract statues, monuments, memorials, and historical markers.</p> <p>Public art as figurative statues (The Maine Lobsterman, Portland)</p>	
<p>b. Expressive Artworks</p> <p>Expressive artworks integrate objects into public spaces with the primary intention of introducing a sense of an artistic liveliness, playfulness, delight, fantasy, spirit, and joy into the daily lives of the citizens.</p> <p>Public art as free standing sculpture (Kolonihavehus, New York)</p>	
<p>c. Efficient Artworks</p> <p>Efficient artworks enliven the quality of the public realm while providing comfort and amenity, creating collaborations between visual arts experts and build environment professionals to insert functional elements into the area. It can include street furniture like benches, fountains, bus shelters, vertical green like a green wall, information kiosks, and signage.</p> <p>Public art as bridge (The Webb Bridge in Melbourne, Australia)</p>	
<p>d. Community Artworks</p> <p>Community artworks engage the diverse communities by generating collaborations between professionals of visual arts and community members to attain works of artistic excellence. It imaginatively conveys the memory, traditions, customs, values, and aspirations of community members.</p> <p>Public art as a mural (Man & Woman Facing Each Other, Tennessee)</p>	
<p>e. Technology-related artwork</p> <p>Categories of public art had expanded with the evolution of technology. Technology-related artwork is an electronic invention, which including webcam (with community approval), large video screen that showcases local artists artwork and expression using digital displays.</p> <p>Public art as a digital display (The Crown Fountain, Chicago)</p>	

(Source: Adapted from Portland Public Art Committee (2009), Tyler (2013) and Nurul Izzah et al. (2014))

The Malaysian Urban Landscape: An overview

Mohd Fabian (2010) stated that the increasing urban population in Malaysia urged this country to have a better urban retreat place in order to provide its community with a better quality environment. Additionally, urban landscape is claimed to act as a refinement of health, social and environment issues. Nevertheless, without any interesting element, those urban spaces are rather dull or will not serve their purposes as they should be (Tahir, 2005). In the year 2010, the former Minister of Tourism Malaysia, YB Dato' Seri Dr. Ng Yen Yen, had announced the establishment of the 1Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism 2010 or MCAT 2010. It would lay the foundation for public art to incorporate into the urban landscape industry, and it is aimed at engaging public participations and generating liveliness in the urban environment (Corporate, 2010). Thus, it is observed that public art has high potential

and play significant roles in portraying the image of the city with an improved quality of living environment.

Roles of public art in the urban landscape

Public art has its purpose in the urban community and its surrounding. Every implementation and installation of public art has its rationale towards improving the quality of the living environment. It has been established that public art plays important roles in the following manner (Hamilton City Council, 2010), namely:

- Reflecting and expressing city's identity
- Celebrating of significant people and places
- Telling the stories and histories of a place
- Contributing to a sense of pride and belonging to the community
- Improving the attractiveness of an area

A similar list of perceived roles of public art presented by Mohd Fabian (2010), are as follows:

- Celebrating the local event and history
- Addressing community needs
- Increasing aesthetical value
- Promoting a sense of community
- Giving educational value to the community

As the arrays mentioned above of the public art's roles, it can be summarized that public art not only benefits the urban environment, but the social and cultural benefits as well. Implementation of various forms of public art added significant value (historically, aesthetically and functionally) into the city and its community.

Aesthetic and functional values of public art

Ozsoy & Bayram (2007) highlighted three values derived from public art; historical, aesthetic and functional. The historic public arts encourage the connection between the societies with their history and generate a collective memory; usually historical artworks are related to the famous figure or historical events. The aesthetic public arts are primarily responding to the aesthetic requirements or the beautification of a place as well to improve the visual quality. Mohd Fabian (2010) agreed that public art carries the fundamental impression of art that is to beautify spaces. Besides, there are also public arts that perform as functional objects (sometimes referred as applied art) which providing comfort and amenity in urban areas (Ozsoy & Bayram, 2007). For instance, street furniture, bus stops, kiosks, vertical greenery, information boards, and signage. In spite of the three values, this paper focuses on aesthetic and functional value of public art in three-dimensional (3-D) visual art and two-dimensional (2-D) visual art form (Table 2) as it could improve the quality of life in the urban environment.

Although Table 2 provides clear distinction between different forms of public art, it frequently happens that selected visual art professional and community used the combination of forms and/or combination of different purposes (multipurpose) into their design and installation purpose.

Table 2: Purpose and form of public art

Public art by purpose	3-D visual art	2-D visual art
Aesthetic	Artistic sculptures, installation arts, digital display (permanent or temporary)	Murals, graffiti art, colored or ornamental pavement
Functional	Street furniture, signage, kiosks, bus stops, street light	Poster, tourist map, signage, public announcement

(Source: Researcher's construct)

3.0 Methodology

This paper studies and reviews five public art projects located in main cities in Malaysia; Penang, Ipoh, Kuala Lumpur, Shah Alam and Johor Bahru. The selected projects reviewed are based on Chang (2008) and Hunting (2005) studies that emphasized the importance of locality as a criteria for successful public art implementation. The criteria included (a) highly visible spaces and (b) free accessed by the public. The review of the public art projects is carried out as follows: Firstly, an extensive review of the literature for all five projects was conducted to gain information for the purpose of selecting public art, and the stakeholders involved. The literature is from multiple sources including websites, brochures and trade magazines. However, site observation was conducted on Laman Seni 7, Shah Alam and Johor Bahru City Centre. These findings show that various stakeholders were involved to incorporate public art in the Malaysian urban landscape.

All projects are being reviewed in four dimensions. The first dimension is the name of parties and communities involved in the projects. This aspect is important in order to identify the various stakeholders. The second dimension is the types of public art installation. The identification based on the information obtained from reviews of the literature shown in Table 1; artworks of remembrance, expressive artworks, efficient artworks, community artworks, or technology-related artworks. Next, the form and the purpose of the public art implementation also identified. These two aspects are important to define the objective of public art; either aesthetic, functional or combined values (multipurpose). The data obtained were presented in Table 3 according to the above dimensions for easy referencing and discussion.

4.0 Findings and Discussions

Table 3 summarizes the findings of selected public art in the five main cities, derived from the data collected. As mentioned earlier, all public art projects are located in the visible space and freely accessed by the public, where people can directly interact and use it. For instance, street furniture at Laman Seni 7, Shah Alam (Figure 4) and welded iron wall caricature (tourist information signage) at George Town, Penang (Figure 1). Thus, this finding shows that public arts have functional value in order to cater the community while added the aesthetic value to the city itself.

From all of the public art projects reviewed, three projects implemented at least two types of public art while the other two projects implemented only one type of public art. For example,

there are four types of public art recognized in George Town, Penang, including mural on the wall, welded iron wall caricature, street furniture and sculpture. On the other hand, two projects applied both 3-D and 2-D visual art form and other two projects used 2-D visual art which is murals (Figure 2) and graffiti on the river bank wall (Figure 3). Only one project installed 3-D visual art form in the particular area that located in Johor Bahru City Centre (Figure 5). In relation to this, it can conclude that various public art types and forms incorporated in the Malaysian urban landscape as to diversify its roles as urban design element. Consequently, this situation provides a better opportunity for the community to appreciate the art.

Table 3: Purpose and form of public art

Public Art Project	Dimensions			
	Partv Involved	Types	Form	Purpose
Georgetown, Penang	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Penang State Tourism Development and Culture, • Penang Global Tourism, • Appointed artist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Artworks of remembrance, • Expressive artworks, • Efficient artworks, • Community artworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-D visual art • 2-D visual art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic • Functional
Ipoh, Perak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Old Town White Coffee, • Appointed artist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community artworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-D visual art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic
Klang River, Kuala Lumpur	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL), • Graffiti artist, • Public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community artworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-D visual art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic
Laman Seni 7, Shah Alam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Khazanah Studio Uitm Shah Alam, • Majlis Bandaraya Shah Alam (MBSA), • Public 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efficient artworks, • Community artworks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-D visual art • 2-D visual art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic • Functional
Johor Bahru City Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majlis Bandaraya Johor Bahru (MBJB), • Appointed sculpture maker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expressive artworks, • Technology-related artwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-D visual art 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetic

(Source: Researcher's construct)

Referring to the purpose dimension, three projects recognized the need to use public art for its aesthetic value only (Figure 2, Figure 3 and Figure 5) while another two projects were multipurpose (Figure 1 and Figure 4). For evidence, KUL Sign Festival in 2013 changed the perception of graffiti art, which aesthetically benefits to enhance the grey and dull walls along the Klang River into vibrant community artwork. This scenario demonstrates that public art

can improve the image of the city and simultaneously encourage public participation to showcase their skills and aspirations. In contrast, public art in Johor Bahru City Centre showcases the aesthetic value in a different way. The collaboration of professional artists and technology expert produced the unique Khat calligraphy sculpture of 'Johor' spelling in Arabic language and digital display called 'Skrin Angkasa' (Figure 5). Hence, most of the artworks in the study areas are mainly for aesthetic value as compared to functional value.

The analysis of the findings of public art roles indicated that all projects have its own purpose through a variety of public art implementation. Thus, it can be concluded that public art contributes to giving additional value; functionally and aesthetically towards improving the quality of life in urban areas.



Figure 1: Public art in George Town, Penang
(Source: Researcher's archive, 2015)

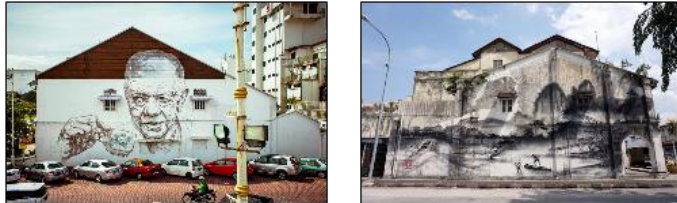


Figure 2: Public art in Ipoh, Perak
(Source: Researcher's archive, 2015)



Figure 3: Public art at Klang River Wall, Kuala Lumpur
(Source: Researcher's archive, 2015)



Figure 4: Public art in Laman Seni 7, Shah Alam
(Source: Researcher's archive, 2015)

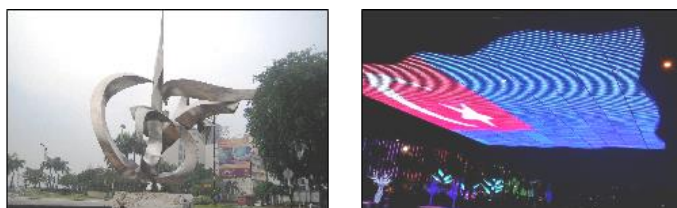


Figure 5: Public art in Johor Bahru City Centre
(Source: Researcher's archive, 2015)

Based on the literature review, it is found that public art implementation contribute towards generating a better quality of life for the urban community. Besides improving the attractiveness of an area, public art also reflects the city's identity, commemorate the history and showcase the uniqueness of the local culture. For instance, Old Town White Coffee, a manufacturer of white coffee in Malaysia has successfully implemented public art that celebrates the history of Ipoh by engaging a Lithuanian-born artist, Ernest Zacharveic. The mural collection inspired by the history of Ipoh as a mining area and pioneer for white coffee production (Figure 2).

In addition, public art implementation gave additional knowledge among the urban community and encourage their participation in the public art making. However, from the data summarized in Table 3, only two out of five projects that involved public participation; public art at Klang River, Kuala Lumpur and Laman Seni 7, Shah Alam. For example, Khazanah Studio, an architecture student committee from Uitm Shah Alam with collaboration from the local authority, Majlis Bandaraya Shah Alam (MBSA) offered an opportunity for the public to voice out their aspiration through community artworks and efficient artworks (Figure 4). This event obtained a good response from the public and successfully implemented by converting back lane of the commercial area into the public realm. For this reason, the future public art project should engage more participation from the community member as it could raise their awareness about public art roles and contribute to their perception of the spaces and places they dwell in.

All in all, to have a successful implementation of public art, various stakeholders should have a significant collaboration in order to plan, manage and maintain the artworks. It is

important to ensure the roles of public art are effectively benefiting not only the city's development but also its community. The local authority should take an action to ensure all the artworks are in a good condition and avoid any vandalism. Thus, further study should cover in-depth about the impact and sustainability of public art that leads to produce a framework for public art guidelines and public art master plan in urban Malaysia context. It needs to consider the diversity of people reside in Malaysia, which respect the local heritage by promoting harmony and a sharing of understanding the communities and cultures through the arts.

5.0 Conclusion

In summary, the purpose of incorporating various types of public art in the Malaysian urban landscape is to contribute towards a better quality of life; as aesthetically and functionally. The locality and placement of public art in a free accessed public area ensure that those artworks benefit its surrounding and the community itself. From the findings, it can be concluded that most of public art in Malaysia is for aesthetic value rather than functional value. Thus, for the future implementation should consider having both values as it could improve the quality of life by providing facilities, amenities, and additional knowledge of the community through art forms and simultaneously enhances the city's image. Moreover, this study found that the role of public art involves so much more than physical aspects; it celebrates the unique culture, reflects the history of the places and provides better facilities for the community.

This paper also proved that different public art will appeal towards its setting and fulfil the community's needs. Besides, stakeholder's participation in public art installation can lift up the awareness about the public art positive impacts and generate a sense of belonging and togetherness. In addition, the parties that involved in the built environment, the ruling authorities, the corporate body and the private sector need to work mutually with the professional artist and visual art expert, in order to encourage an inspired community and greater living environment through public art. Hence, more attention should be given to growing creativity and innovative mind that eventually support further research on sustainable public art that in line with technological advances. The outcome of this paper is hoped to provide a better understanding and appreciation of public art among the stakeholders that leads to the more successful implementation of public art and expands its roles for a better quality of the public realm in the urban area.

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