

EDITORIAL

Creative Practices in the Public Realm

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Abstract

This ‘Art and Activism in Public Space’ special issue of The Journal of Public Space presents a spectrum of practices and theoretical reflections on creative practices in public space, across a diverse range of environments including in the Sudan, China, Australia, United Kingdom, Mexico, Cuba, Italy and Colombia.

Articles and portfolios included in the issue are not asked to respond to a specific theme. The intention is to reflect on what emerges at the intersection of art-based research, creative practice, theoretical frameworks around contemporary public practice, and the changing nature of public space. Through articles and portfolios, the reader is drawn into both familiar and unfamiliar scenarios.

Keywords: creative practices, public realm, art-based research, theoretical frameworks

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The 'Art and Activism in Public Space' is a special series of The Journal of Public Space. Issues of the series focus on the specific interconnection between art practice and public space, and are co-edited by Luisa Bravo, Maggie McCormick and Fiona Hillary as a result of the collaboration between The Journal of Public Space (developed by City Space Architecture in partnership with UN-Habitat) and RMIT University (MAPS Master of Arts-Art in Public Space, School of Art and CAST Contemporary Art and Social Transformation research group).

As in earlier issues, Vol. 7 no. 3 2022, the fourth of the series (previous issues have been published in 2018, 2019, 2020), presents a spectrum of practices and theoretical reflections on creative practices in public space, across a diverse range of public environments including in the Sudan, China, Australia, United Kingdom, Mexico, Cuba, Italy and Colombia.

Articles and portfolios included in the issue are not asked to respond to a specific theme. The intention is to reflect on what emerges at the intersection of art-based research, creative practice, theoretical frameworks around contemporary public practice, and the changing nature of public space. Through articles and portfolios, the reader is drawn into both familiar and unfamiliar scenarios.

Both peer reviewed articles and portfolios reveal, through different dimensions and explorations, a series of emergent and ongoing issues around placelessness, practice in a COVID-affected environment, civil activism and the struggle for authority in public space and emerging art practices in the public realm. Questions addressed across these practices include in the portfolio section concerns for human and non-human entanglements emerging from climate crisis; explorations of a Mexican feminist perspective on women in art; art as a form of cultural regeneration and democratising colonised public space.

Emergent and established practitioners are invited from alumni of the Master of Arts – Art in Public Space (MAPS) program at RMIT University (Australia) to contribute to the issue. The MAPS degree encourages active collaboration between interdisciplinary practitioners and theoreticians, industry, and communities to address critical issues in global public space. As one of the few post-graduate programs to focus specifically on art practice in public space as a skill-set in its own right MAPS is a worldwide leader in the field.

Celebration of the tenth anniversary of City Space Architecture

This issue of the special series Art and Activism in Public Space and its launch, scheduled in the Spring 2023, are expected to anticipate the celebration of the tenth anniversary of City Space Architecture, the publisher of The Journal of Public Space, on 13 May 2023. In the span of just a decade City Space Architecture has established a series of successful initiatives that are aimed at expanding knowledge and awareness on the importance of public space culture. In addition to The Journal of Public Space the most relevant are:

- MaPS. Mastering Public Space, a web-magazine hosting a collection of public space news in open access format from influential and reliable sources, curated by a cross-disciplinary team of researchers and practitioners - <https://www.masteringpublicspace.org/>. The web-magazine includes a dedicated section on creative practices;

- Museo Spazio Pubblico / Public Space Museum, a transdisciplinary, inclusive and plural practice that experiments methodologies at the intersection of art, architecture and technology with the aim to investigate the complexity of public space culture - <https://www.museospaziopubblico.it/>. The Museum is the artistic headquarters of City Space Architecture in Bologna, Italy;
- Public Space Academy, the first, free, interdisciplinary educational program aimed at establishing a new approach to urban complexity built around public space, developed in partnership with the Ove Arup Foundation - <https://www.publicspaceacademy.org/>

The Public Space Academy was launched at the 11th World Urban Forum in Katowice, in June 2022, during a training event promoted by City Space Architecture¹. It will start in 2023 as an online and open initiative and will provide introductory and advanced training on public space, engaging the best and most influential scholars, professionals, and urban innovators, from different backgrounds and expertise. Online contents, available for free on a customized OpenEdX platform, will be complemented with several face-to-face activities, such as talks, public dialogues, meetings, workshops, and exhibitions, in different cities worldwide, engaging Universities, cultural institutions and NGOs affiliated to City Space Architecture's global network. The Public Space Academy is aimed at inspiring and empowering a new generation of urban thinkers and doers who are willing to become agents of change in their own cities and communities, providing:

- theoretical introduction to public space complexity through advanced analytical skills both for academic research and for effective design;
- tools for the definition of a comprehensive urban strategy for effective local implementation, that is built around humans and their life in the public domain, putting public space as a priority in the regional and local urban agenda.



Figure 1. Launch of the Public Space Academy at the 11th World Urban Forum in Katowice during a training event coordinated by Luisa Bravo (on the right) with (from left to right) Hendrik Tieben (Chinese University of Hong Kong), Jose Chong (UN-Habitat) and Setha Low (City University of New York, the Graduate Center).

¹ Read the report: <https://www.cityspacearchitecture.org/?e=70>



Figure 2. Launch of the Public Space Academy at the 11th World Urban Forum in Katowice. The training event was attended by more than 50 participants.

The Academy will address major contemporary challenges, such as global commitments included in the Agenda 2030 with the Sustainable Development Goals and in the New Urban Agenda adopted at Habitat III, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Development that took place in Quito in 2016.

It is expected to attract significant interest in the mid-term and later, in the long-term, to bring attention on public space through a more rounded perspective, at the political, social and economic level, tackling issues of democratic engagement, social equity, inclusion and civil rights.

Learners attending the Academy will develop skills on how to deal with urban and social issues and to define priorities for public space design and will acquire expertise to present and discuss reasons and objectives of a public space strategy integrated in local, regional and national policies.

The Academy will include contents on creative practices in the public realm and will provide training opportunities on art-based research, exploring as well the performative dimension of public space, through seminars, keynote lectures and workshops, both online and in presence.

Acknowledgment

As ever, the 'Art and Activism in Public Space' editors would like to thank the writers and practitioners who have contributed to this issue and to the team of peer reviewers for their time and expertise.