

Public Art and Public Space in an Emerging Knowledge Economy: The Case of Doha

Anna Grichting, Sara Al Sada, Angelica Caccam, Urshi Khan

II. METHODOLOGY

Abstract—Qatar, a Gulf country highly dependent on its oil and gas revenues – is looking to innovate, diversify, and ultimately reach its aim of creating a knowledge economy to prepare for its post-oil era. One area that the country is investing in is Contemporary Art, and world renowned artists such as Damien Hirst and Richard Serra – have been commissioned to design site-specific art for the public spaces of the city of Doha as well as in more remote desert locations. This research discusses the changing presence, role and context of public art in Doha, both from a historical and cultural overview, and the different forms and media as well as the typologies of urban and public spaces in which the art is installed. It examines the process of implementing site-specific artworks, looking at questions of scale, history, social meaning and formal aesthetics. The methodologies combine theoretical research on the understanding of public art and its role and placement in public space, as well as empirical research on contemporary public art projects in Doha, based on documentation and interviews and as well as site and context analysis of the urban or architectural spaces within which the art is situated. Surveys and interviews – using social media - in different segments of the contemporary Qatari society, including all nationalities and social groups, are used to measure and qualify the impacts and effects on the population.

Keywords—Contemporary Public Art, Knowledge Economy, Public Realm, Site Specific Art Works.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE Qatar Museums Authority recently announced a series of public art initiatives in Doha with the purpose of “bringing art out of the walls of the museum” to make it accessible to the public on a daily basis and to encourage discussion and debate [1]. While the installation of sculptures in public spaces is not new in Doha, and many roundabouts in the city are identified and named by the works of art that are placed in their centers, the practice of integrating art in public spaces and architectural projects is reaching a new dimension as internationally renowned artists are being commissioned to install their works in the public spaces and buildings of the city of Doha. One important aspect of acity’s identity is articulated in its public spaces, and this points to the important relationship between Public Art and Public Space [2]. “*Public art by its nature concerns not only aesthetics, but situated in public space it is contextualized by social, cultural and political issues*”

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A. Literature Review

The field of Public Art in general, and the history and contemporary practices of Public Art in Doha were researched to lay the foundations to develop the survey strategy and objectives which identified and studied examples of Public Art in Doha. The literature included theoretical approaches through the existing literature on Public Art (practices, definitions, and research), documents of policies of cultural development according to Qatar National Vision 2030, and publications and media on historical and contemporary Public Art practices and projects in Qatar according to the following outline:

- i. Literature review on Public Art (definitions, practices, current research)
- ii. Literature review on Public Art in Qatar (history of Public Art in Qatar, practices, policies)
- iii. Literature review on Contemporary Public Art projects in Doha.

B. Case Studies

A series of case studies in Doha and Qatar were selected for the research. A documentation of sites and artworks were carried out according to the following criteria:

- i. The Artist: his biography and overview of his position on public art
- ii. Location and Spatial Context: Scale, landscape, public or semi-public, open-closed etc.
- iii. Typology of the artwork: Sculpture – (abstract, figurative), Scale, Interactivity, Materials, etc.
- iv. Policies and Planning: Processes of commissioning and installing the artwork. (If available)
- v. Cost of installing the artwork. Cost of artwork, installation, modification of public space, maintenance, etc. (If available)

C. Data Collection

Aside from the public reaction and appreciation of Art Work’s studies through the literature review and press, an important aspect of this research was to try to understand what role the art work plays in people’s lives, and how it affects their view and reaction to public space. To collect this type of data, a Web Blog and Facebook page were created to disseminate the art works and their sites and to generate discussions and questionnaires. This also included handing out surveys to people and collecting feedback in a more informal way (students, families, and other people living in Qatar.)

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

One aspect of the literature review was to define public art and to understand the terminology and how to categorize the art works. Also, it helped in analysing the perception of the residents of Qatar towards the public art seen around the city.

To define what public art is and what are the types of public art, books that concentrate on art and spaces were reviewed. Based on Cartiere and Willis, public art is an obscure and complex field whose diversity can become a struggle for analytical acknowledgement. In addition to this, public art is often seen as a political involvement, which includes spatial, social and contextual practices. From these perceptions of public art a certain type of public art was established. According to Cartiere and Willis, the type of public art that was conceived during its early stages was the site – specific art. This type of public art refers to the works that integrate and respond to the topography of its site [3].

Another book that was referred to so that the definition of public art is explored more. According to Miles, public art is described to have two roles which characterizes the public realm as a multifaceted field of public interest instead of just an area for the public. In addition to this, it refers to public art as a creator of controversy, narrator of its surroundings and the people, unifier of decoration and functionality and a provider of expression for the people who do not have a way to voice it out in mainstream media or broadcast it on television. As a result of what public art signifies, a list of its types were generated. The types of public art that were mentioned in *Art, Space and the City* were established through what they represent and where they are located. These categories are namely sculpture outdoors, community murals, land art, site-general, design of paving and street furniture and performance art. Similar to Cartiere and Willis, Malcolm also mentioned the category site – specific art [4].

As mentioned by Cartiere and Willis and Miles, public art attracts public interest. However, this could be either positive or negative. After defining public art, the reaction of the people, specifically in Qatar, on these art works were read through articles that were published within the country. As a result, it was found that there were some public art works that created controversy and debate between the country's residents. One is Adel Abdessemed's *Coup de Tete*, also known as the *Headbutt* which was removed from its location after creating different reactions from the public. According to an article on the art piece, a number of locals saw the piece was a promotion of violence and a portrayal of the only negative instance within Zidane's career [5].

Another art piece that was presented to the residents of Qatar that created some discussion was *The Miraculous Journey* by Damien Hirst. As mentioned by Carol Vogel in her article in the International Herald Tribune, the unveiling of the art work provoked the minds of some people in Qatar [6]. However, HH Sheika Al-Mayassa defended the piece by addressing that it is less daring than having a lot of nudity. In addition to this, Her Highness Sheika Al-Mayassa believes that behind these controversies, it is important for people to discuss these topics whether they approve or not.

Although some public art pieces have created disapproving reactions from the public in Qatar, Richard Serra, in an article on Gulf Times, stated that if people follow the sculpture's nature of history every passing year, they will understand that the sculptures are moving from a base to the same behavioural areas as the people. Therefore, these sculptures have the potential to create spaces that encourages interaction between the people and itself [7].

IV. CASE STUDIES

The public artwork that has been recently introduced in Doha has played a major role in the interaction between people and art, as can be concluded from the review of press articles and the data collected through the Social Media Surveys and informal surveys. The installation of these outstanding art pieces might be considered as the first effective method that succeeded in attracting people's attention toward contemporary art. However, the installation of these marvellous artworks in public spaces has not only created the clearly noticed positive responses from people in drawing their attention towards the field of arts, but it has also generated several new effects. An example of these new impacts is the rise of public spaces created around these artworks. This in turn has resulted in a new philosophy in planning public spaces in Doha that is taking into consideration, in addition to building design, the insertion of such masterpieces in the planned areas.

In order to analyze the varied effects of public artwork on Architecture and urban planning in Doha, five case studies have been selected to explore the results of these proactive actions that have been taken to encourage people to be involved and interact with different art fields. The selected case studies, which are different in various aspects, provide a detailed overview about the types of chosen artworks and highlight the successes achieved as well as some difficulties encountered.

A. Calligraphy

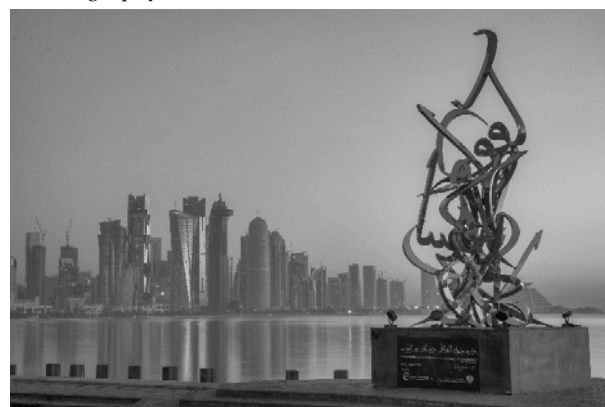


Fig. 1 Calligraphy Sculpture by: Sabah Arbili

Artist: Sabah Arbili

Date of installation: January 7, 2014

Location and spatial context: The stainless steel small-scale artwork has been placed in a very popular and huge public space in the Doha Corniche. After the unveiling of the

artwork, it received outstanding reactions from the audience. This provides clear and convincing evidence about the strong relationship between culture, arts and urbanism and how they can affect people's behaviours.



Fig. 2 Site Plan Calligraphy

Typology: Outdoors sculpture.

This artwork has a very interesting and intricate design composed of calligraphy. The letters are based on a poem by H. E. Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Al Thani. The meaning of the poem is "And amongst the sultans I stood out; as a freeman floating over mountain peaks." This sculpture captured a lot of attention among the visitors of Corniche. The breathtaking artwork is made of stainless steel and is 7.5m high including its base. It has added beauty and a topic of discussion in a popular public place like the Corniche. Sabah Arbilli, the artist, said, "This piece celebrates culture, history, captivates and draws the viewers to its presence" [8]

B. The Miraculous Journey



Fig. 3 The Miraculous Journey by: Damien Hirst

Artist: Damien Hirst

Date of installation: October 7, 2013

Location and spatial context: The fourteen sculptures are placed in front of Sidra Medical & Research Center, which is dedicated to women and children. It is truly noticeable that this prestigious artwork is in harmony with the spirit of the building and its function.

Typology: Site-specific artwork.

The series of fourteen monumental bronze sculptures that ends with a statue of a 46-foot-tall anatomically correct baby boy is considered as one of the largest artworks in the world. This artwork traces the development of a foetus from gestation to birth. Damien Hirst's "The Miraculous Journey" cost around 20 million dollars. It has received a lot of controversial comments from the conservative Muslim communities. "I want to make art that will have meaning forever", said the British artist about his fabulous art piece. [9]

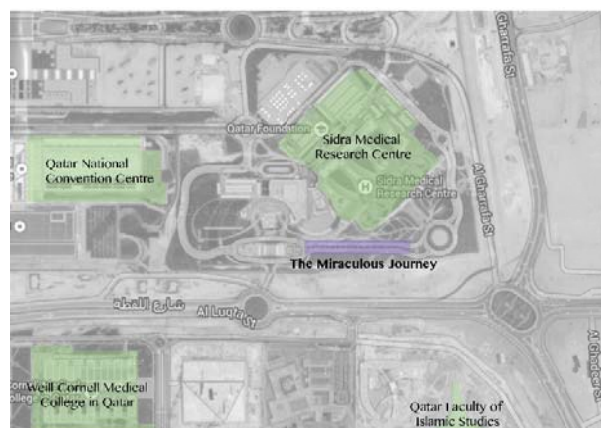


Fig. 4 Site Plan The Miraculous Journey

C. Head Butt



Fig. 5 Head Butt by: Abel Abdessemed

Artist: Adel Abdessemed

Date of installation: October 4, 2013. (The Sculpture was removed shortly after, therefore we have no site plan)

Location and spatial context: It is a huge artwork placed in Doha Corniche, which is considered the biggest public space in the city. The Corniche holds a number of water sports events and this art piece celebrates a famous moment in the 2006 world cup which is one justification for the placement of the statue.

Typology: Site-general artwork.

This impressive 5-meters high bronze sculpture depicts the French footballer Zinedine Zidane's infamous head-butt on Italy's Marco Materazzi during the 2006 World Cup final match. But this spectacular piece unfortunately received a lot of criticism and controversial discussions, which led to its

removal. According to some residents of Qatar, especially the Qatari population, it was viewed as a symbol of violence and captures a very negative moment of the famous footballer Zidane's career.

For the artist Adel Abdessemed "The statue goes against the tradition of making statues in honors of certain victories. It is an ode to defeat."

D. Seven '7'



Fig. 6 '7' sculpture by: Richard Serra

Artist: Richard Serra

Date of installation: December 2011

Location and spatial context: The 24.6-meters high sculpture stands at the end of the Museum of Islamic Art (MIA) Park and creates a spectacular view with the background of Doha's famous skyline and the Museum of Islamic Art. The artist discussed the design of his tallest art piece with the architect of the Museum – I.M. Pei - in order to integrate the artwork with the building and the public space around it. It is the first time that a sculptor has designed the physical location of his site-specific sculpture, as the site was formerly part of the water and created by landfill from the museum excavations. One can feel the huge scale of '7' when arriving to the small plaza at the end of the park. This shows clearly how the artist takes into his consideration the architectural and urban context of the surrounding spaces.



Fig. 7 Site Plan. Seven

Typology: Site-specific artwork.

'7' sculpture is the tallest public art piece the artist has design, and also the tallest in Qatar (aside from Serra's East-West). It is also his first artwork to be displayed in the Middle East. The sculpture was located in its current small plaza based on a personal recommendation from the architect of the Museum. The initial concept was based on an eight-sided model. After a series of discussions between Richard Serra and Sheikha Al-Mayassabint Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani - who was not convinced with his proposed model - the sculpture was converted into a seven-sided model. These seven sides are constructed of huge corten steel plates which are assembled in a heptagonal shape which stand 24.6 meters in the air. The concept was influenced by the design of minaret, a distinctive architectural element of mosques. It was the minaret of Ghazni in Afghanistan that was specifically the essential inspiration for Serra. Moreover, this spectacular artwork celebrates the spiritual and scientific importance of the number 7 in Islamic culture. [10]

According to Serra, this public art piece was designed to complement the surroundings. "It is my hope that the sculpture will provide both a public place and a private space for people to gather and experience the narrow, vertical, open column in relation to themselves, the Museum of Islamic Art, the city of Doha, the surrounding sea, and then sky as seen through the opening at the top of the sculpture." [11]

E. East-West/ West-East



Fig. 8 East-West/ West-East by: Richard Serra

Artist: Richard Serra

Date of installation: April 2014

Location and spatial context: The art piece has been installed in Zikreet in the Brouq Nature Reserve in Qatar. It is a vast sculpture both in terms of its size and span. It gives a new meaning to its landscape context and defines the edges of the space. The specific location creates a new landmark outside the urban context of the city. According to Serra, the artwork gives the landscape a demarcation between the east and west and gives humans a scale to measure their own relationship to the land. This allows people to observe the land through the placement of these pieces in way that would not have been possible before. The special location that has been

chosen by Serra definitely encourages people to investigate this nature reserve and see it from another perspective.

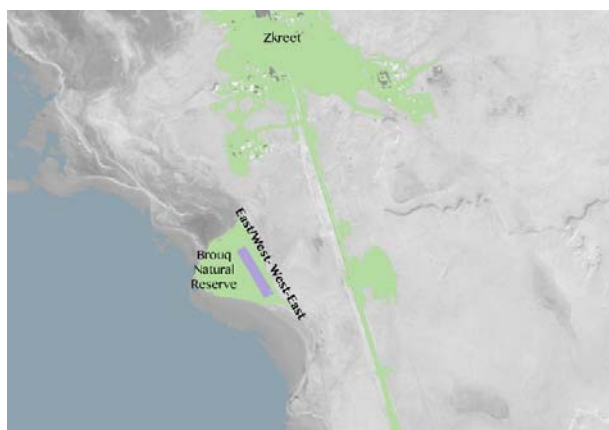


Fig. 9 Site Plan. Site Plan East West

Typology: An abstracted large-scale sculpture. Land Art.

The East-West/ West-East artwork is a collection of 4 steel plates that span over one kilometer, and can be explored from either end. The topography of the land allows the centre two plates to be placed higher than the end plates. Despite the great distance between the plates, all the four plates can be seen from either end. This art work gives a whole new identity to its location as it is far away from the main city. Richard Serra has created a “place within a place”. It gives a demarcation to the landscape between east and west. Before the installation of this collection, the land was undifferentiated as most of the landscape is out there.

F. Searching for the Light IV



Fig. 10 Searching For the Light IV

Artist: Eduardo Chillida

Date of installation: The steel artwork was executed in 2001. It was first placed in West Bretton, Yorkshire Sculpture Park from 2002 to 2004. In 2006, this art piece was moved to Bilbao to be exhibited in the Guggenheim Museum of Bilbao. It was located in Plaza de Isozaki Atea in Bilbao shortly afterward and stayed there until 2013. The artwork was bought by Qatar University at the end of 2013 and was installed in front of the food court in September 2014. This area is one of the most attractive spaces in the female campus.

Location and spatial context: The artwork was installed in front of the food court of Qatar University’s female campus. Therefore, this art piece is not classified as an open public art because people are not able to reach it from all over the city. However, it has a strong relationship with the spatial context of the space as it explains the idea of searching or exploring in an abstracted way, which encouraged the students to discuss this artwork in more detail and find the story behind it.

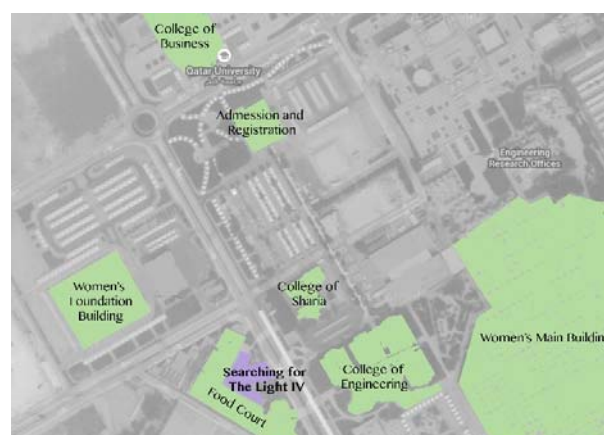


Fig. 11 Site Plan. Searching for the Light

Typology: Considered as an abstracted artwork.

The shape of this 8-meters-high piece, which consists of the curved blades that leads to an opening at the top of the vertical sculpture, demonstrates the main concept of the artwork *searching about light*. The opening in the top of the sculpture reflects the idea of searching about light and it somehow reminds us of the characteristic pose of the Virgin Mary with her arms open. The combination between the idea of abstraction and figurative made the work more accessible, and seemingly stimulated the audience to think and reflect on the sculpture and generated many positive reactions from the public and students. Nevertheless, as we will see in the data collection through interviews and social media, it is the piece that received the maximum of negative comments.

V. DATA COLLECTION

For the collection of data, feedback from general public in Doha was collected by campaigning on the Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/PublicArtInQatar>) and a website blog (<http://blogs.qu.edu.qa/publicarturesearch/>). We also handed out surveys to be filled for each case study of the

different public artworks in Qatar. The surveys the following questions:

- Do you think this art piece is appropriate to Qatari Culture?
- Do you think this art piece is relevant and well integrated into the site?
- Does this art work make you want to visit the place?
- Does this piece of art make you see the space differently?
- What feelings, emotions and thoughts does this art work evoke in you?

The art piece called “The Miraculous Journey” has received positive comments as it portrays how great and special mothers are. However 50% of the people thought that the sculptures are not appropriate to the Qatari culture. Most people felt that it is well integrated to the site and it makes them see the space differently. However, this art piece does not make people want to visit the place. There are a number of both positive and negative comments on the art piece called “Head-butt” calling it strange and showing defeat. Many people thought it is inappropriate to the Qatari Culture. However, they think that it is relevant to the site and makes one see the space differently.

The other art pieces like “Seven”, “East west” and “calligraphy Sculpture” have received very positive feedbacks. People appreciate the “sense of unity” and the simplicity of the ‘Seven’ sculpture; the “sense of direction and path” that the sculpture ‘East-West’ creates has awed the people; the “complexity”, and “the emotion of triumph” is instilled in the people’s minds when they see the calligraphy sculpture by Sabah Arbilli. Some say “the art work by the cornice shows a sense of hierarchy between the Arabic letters which are conveyed in the description on the base of the sculpture. They find the articulation of the letters very clever as it gives an image of a ‘mountain peak’” and “evokes the belonging to the Arab region”. Others mention that “it makes me feel guilty, how nice and strong our Arabic letters and language are, while we use other letters and languages in our communication.”

The artwork called ‘Searching for Light IV’ received the most negative response as people feel “confused” and “do not understand the art piece”. However, the artwork placed in Qatar University also received comments like “I see the sculpture as the students and also, in a way, Qatar University. I say this because the sculpture gives an image of reaching for something great.” Similar comments include “the students and the university is aiming to achieve their greatest potential” and “it creates a different atmosphere in the university campus.”

VI. CONCLUSION

This research on Contemporary Public Art in Doha and Qatar is a preliminary study of a new and emerging trend in the country. Nevertheless, there has been a past practice of installing sculptures in public spaces, especially roundabouts, in Doha, when the modern city was being built from the early 1980s. This art had a more decorative aspect and meaning than today’s contemporary pieces by well-known artists. Nevertheless, this research could benefit from further knowledge on this early phase of public art in Qatar, and on

the public reactions to these installations when they were first perceived. While there is no literature on this subject, a research on press articles, as well as interviews with the Public Works authority may yield some interesting comparisons with today, and would give this research a more solid historical base.

The research and the data collection through the local press, questionnaires and social media has confirmed that these works of art in public space in Doha generate strong feelings and reactions from the public, at times resulting with the removal of the works, such as was the case for the Head Butt sculpture by Abdessemed. It is possible that with time, and with new generations, certain aspects, including form and meaning of public art, will become more accepted by the local populations. But it is not important that everyone agrees or likes the art, as we the definition and role of public art is not necessarily to adorn or beautify, but to provoke thought. It could be argued that it is more successful when it provokes debate than if there is a consensus on its aesthetics or meaning.

With regard to the process of installation, the choice and the design, it was difficult to obtain information regarding this aspect of the research, relating to the design process of the public space. Although many attempts were made, it was not possible to discuss the projects with the Qatar Museums Authority, who have commissioned and installed the pieces, and therefore this aspect of the initial research methodology is missing. The Qatar Museums (QM) Public Art Department is responsible for overseeing the installation of artwork by renowned artists in the public realm in Qatar.

This could be a further phase of this research, as could the research on the historical and past practices of public art in Doha and Qatar. There is also more analysis to be carried out on the public realm in which the pieces are placed, and it would be interesting, over time, to see the use and transformation of the public space. As of now, all of these works are too new to have any significant user’s data on the transformation of the space. Other types of Public Art by renowned artists, in semi-public spaces, such as the New Doha International Airport and Qatar Convention Center, could also be included in a second phase of this research.

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