

Scaffold on Trial: The Rhetorical Controversy of a Public Artifact in Minneapolis

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Abstract : Though traditional art has been strong on showcasing aesthetics to imbue pleasantries, modern public art has been breaking trends to push citizens beyond the pleasure of seeing beauty. Contemporary public sculpture, in particular, has been the impetus of provoking questions about community standards, identity, and race relations. A phenomenon involving Scaffold, a sculpture by artist Sam Durant, became the focal point of contention within Minneapolis, Minnesota, recently. With intentions to better understand the power public sculpture has to disrupt community identity, in this book, It will use primarily rhetorical theory to explain how all parties involved—The Walker Art Museum, the Dakota Nation, Durant, and local citizens—participated in a controversy touching on racial politics, identity, culture, history and public art. This mixed-methods case study examines the public artifact contextually through historical and cultural frameworks. Findings in this project will reveal Scaffold to be represented as a tool of empowered Caucasians to the exclusion of marginalized people. This project also informs the fields of public rhetoric and political identity, marginalized voices, and community and social justice initiatives to include the difficult topic of race and identity.

Keywords : public art controversy, technical communication, community narrative, ambient rhetoric

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