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Public Art: Building and Affirming Community Identity

Katrina A. Furlonge-Kelly

PUBLIC ART:
BUILDING AND AFFIRMING COMMUNITY IDENTITY

KATRINA A. FURLONGE-KELLY

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Barry University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the completion of the Honors Program

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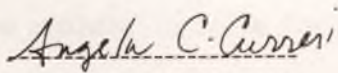
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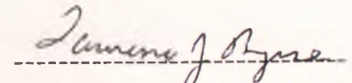
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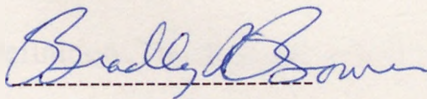
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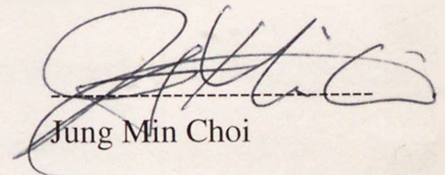
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The presence of art in public places is not a new phenomenon. Through the centuries, the public art movement has demonstrated its dynamic nature by the utilization of different styles of art and the changing functions of this art form. Public art distinguishes itself from other forms of art by its greater accessibility to the community. It is not simply a form of self-expression by the public artist, but rather, a response to the needs or desires of the members of a community. Consequently, public art should be defined not simply as art located in public places, but moreover, art that builds and affirms community identity while creating more distinct and engaging environments.

In the consumeristic society of the modern world, many people feel isolated, disconnected, and uncertain of their place in this world. Public art can serve not only an aesthetic function, but moreover, promote a humanistic ethic centered on human interests and values. Recent public art projects in Los Angeles and Miami demonstrate this new movement in the field of public art and support this new definition. The dialogue which takes place between the public artist and the members of a community ensures that the artwork reflects the genuine feelings, authentic experiences, and highest ideals of the community. The challenge is to increase the

awareness and appreciation of public art and to educate the public of the significance of its role in improving quality of life.

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“There is connectedness between what we see in the world and who we are,
between who we are and what we do.” – Estella Conwill Majozo

Introduction

The words “public art” conjure up a range of ideas and beliefs among different people. A discussion on public art can range from the incitement of a fiery discussion over the controversy surrounding an infamous art piece in a public space to a thoughtful reflection on how public art has ameliorated and beautified a previously deteriorating city center. In fact, one of the unique qualities of public art is its greater accessibility to the public than other forms of art and its greater likelihood to significantly impact the members of a community. Unlike fine art, public art is not simply used as a means of self-expression, but is distinctive in its emphasis on being user-centered (Lacy, 1995). In fact, many public artworks are either created through dialogue between the public artist and members of a community or the public artwork itself can create the physical or social space for dialogue to take place within a community (Senie & Webster, 1992).

There has been a recent movement in the field of public art towards a humanistic ethic that strives for compassion and social justice for all people (Senie et al., 1992). Additionally, recent public artwork has been created to be socially responsive and give voice to members of a community (Lacy, 1995). In this paper public art will be defined, within this humanistic context, as aesthetically pleasing and engaging artworks located in public spaces which serve not only to enliven the site but primarily build and affirm community identity. This issue is of great social concern especially in communities with ethnically and culturally diverse populations,

such as Los Angeles and Miami. These multicultural cities have large immigrant populations. The public artwork in these cities can invoke a sense of belonging and celebrate the unique presence and contribution of the diverse members of the community without sacrificing the aesthetic element.

Consequently, there has been growing academic interest in the relationship between place and identity (Neill, 1999). Undoubtedly, public art can play a vital role in developing local distinctiveness and creating a sense of place for the members of a community. A sense of place can be achieved by representing the unique history and characteristics of a community through public artworks. For example, in Los Angeles and Miami, the many ethnically diverse communities are located in different areas of the city. There may be an erroneous belief that it would be impossible to create a sense of place in these cities, and furthermore, to build and affirm community identity. However, this paper will present examples of public art projects in these cities that in fact successfully achieve this aim of the new socially conscious public art movement. In addition, this paper will discuss what makes these public artworks distinguishable from other public art projects that have been unsuccessful in meeting this objective.

The importance of the role of public art in building and affirming community identity cannot be understated. More specifically, a collective identity may arise from public artworks in diverse communities where similarities may be covert and differences striking. Community unity and civic pride may be encouraged through the creation of public artworks with which various members of a culturally diverse community can identify. "The Great Wall of Los Angeles" is an outstanding example

of public art in a multicultural community that incorporates the historical experiences and cultural elements of the different ethnic groups present in Los Angeles to produce a collective identity (see Appendix). This public art piece is a representation of the distinct culture of Los Angeles and manifests the essential qualities of the community.

Public art has the power to affirm the different identities of the various ethnic groups in a community and engender their sense of belonging. But furthermore, public art can bring forth group identification and a collective identity among different community members. Group identification arises from the common origins, shared characteristics or ideals of a group, and the resulting allegiance and solidarity of its members (Neill, 1999). Therefore, it is crucial that the symbolic representations and public art created to build and affirm community identity utilize the shared experiences of the community (Neill, 1999) and bridge the gap between European and other ethnic cultures (Lacy, 1995). Consequently, a new paradigm of what constitutes aesthetics has to be developed by the public to appreciate the different aesthetics of various cultures and embrace this new form of public art that threatens an elitist and limiting view of what constitutes high quality art (Lacy, 1995).

Building and affirming community identity through public art is necessary especially in today's world where many new urban developments are rapidly emerging without distinctive identities. People living in these communities may feel isolated and displaced. However, dialogue and understanding among the various people making up a community are encouraged when public artworks raise the awareness of the community to the historical and cultural narratives of its members. In addition, the hopes and dreams of a community may be conveyed through works of

public art to form a new collective identity. Therefore, the future of public art must ensure that community consciousness and awareness are raised through community interaction with the public art pieces. Public artists must continue to involve community members in their projects and educational outreach programs must remain fundamental parts of public art projects. Notwithstanding the large size of an art piece in a public space, it is not public art if it does not build or affirm community identity, either by empowering and including members of the community in its creation or by portraying the heritage or aspirations of the community.

Historical Perspective of Public Art

Even though public art is not a new phenomenon in the United States, there is still no consensus on a definition of public art among artists, the media, or other interest groups (Paleologos-Harris, 1984). However, it can be agreed upon that public art is more than bronze statues placed in parks and large metal sculptures placed in the empty plazas of large city buildings, cynically referred to as “plop art” (Cruikshank & Korza, 1988). Public art necessitates a balanced relationship between site, form, function, content, and audience (Paleologos-Harris). Once this balance is achieved the public art placed in the respective community will be site-specific and should successfully facilitate the development or strengthening of a community identity.

Many cities in the United States have memorials and statues which symbolize the historical experiences of the people who live there. As early as the late eighteenth century, funding has come from the U.S. Congress to install free standing memorials and architectural decoration (Senie et al., 1992). These early examples of public art

were intended to portray the proud heritage of these cities and instill in its citizens a sense of civic pride and identity. However, these early forms of public art were often installed without community involvement. These early public artworks did not give voice to members of the community. The bronze statues and memorials were created to express the beliefs and value systems of the dominant culture which were supposed to be adopted by the members of the community (Cruickshank et al., 1988). There was an emphasis on heroism and war and these values were upheld by the citizens. However, at the end of World War I, old values and styles of art began to be questioned. People reexamined their attitudes to war and the artwork that commemorated such events.

After World War II, more artists were moving away from creating commemorative statues and more focus was placed on incorporating modern sculpture into architectural design and integrating other traditional forms of art in buildings. In the 1960's, the trend moved toward large modern sculptures being placed in public spaces where they were visible by members of the community (Senie et al., 1992). These public spaces were intended to give communities a sense of place and make art more accessible to the public. However, unless the artwork fulfills some shared need or vision of a community, the public will not accept the piece and only have a negative or neutral response. This reaction is the opposite response which is desired from a public art piece which is intended to challenge and enhance public-well-being (Cruickshank et al., 1988).

In 1965, the U.S. Congress established the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), an independent federal agency which assists and encourages the cultural

resources of the country (Paleologos-Harris, 1984). Since its beginning, the NEA began supporting public art through its Visual Arts Program (Senie et al., 1992). The two main goals of the program are to support exceptionally talented artists and to provide the public with opportunities to experience American contemporary art. As a result, the Art-In-Public Places program and the Art-In-Architecture program have developed as part of the NEA and provided many public artists to create their works in public spaces, such as in the plazas of federal buildings or along public transport systems throughout the country. Although all the artwork commissioned by the NEA is described as public art by this agency, according to the definition of public art in this paper, they should not all be described as public art. Some of these projects have failed to build or affirm community identity and are simply artworks installed in public places without the involvement or consultation of community members.

The first Art-In-Public places grant of the NEA was given to Alexander Calder for his creation of “La Grande Vitesse” in Grand Rapids, Michigan in 1968 (Paleologos-Harris, 1984) (see Appendix). The large scale sculpture was initially not apparently related to its site and the artist was primarily commissioned because of his fame (Senie et al., 1992). Consequently, the public scorned the large, red, steel sculpture and there was public protest against the public artwork. Nevertheless, the public slowly changed its attitude to the piece as their understanding of the art work increased. Now the sculpture helps form the collective identity of the community and has become the official logo of the city and a source of pride for the community (Cruikshank et al., 1988).

In contrast, the “Tilted Arc”, designed by Richard Serra for the Federal Plaza in New York City in 1981, never gained the understanding of its public (see Appendix). The sculpture in the downtown plaza was supposed to reflect the “cold and divisive” design of the architecture of the building (Cruikshank et al., 1988, p. 249). The office workers did not comprehend the message and were enraged by the large and obtrusive structure. In 1989, the sculpture was removed (Senie et al., 1992) corroborating that this artwork neither built nor affirmed its community’s identity. Although one of the goals of the Art-In-Architecture program was to be responsive to the environment and its symbolic context (Thalacker, 1980), in the nineties, the public art produced by this agency was much less challenging to evade controversy, less ostentatious and more decorative (Grant, 1999).

A New Movement in Public Art

The controversies of the past have guided public artists and commissions towards a new movement in public art. The shift of public art advocates a humanistic ethic that values human interests and strives to improve the quality of life of the members of the community in which the public art is placed. Furthermore, the new public art movement performs a vital role in affirming the identity of a community and building a collective identity among diverse members of communities and increasing the sense of belonging of all the people living there. The creation of public art should also lead to increased communication between the people in a community, which is the basis of humanness (Lacy, 1995).

Modern society is consumer driven, highly competitive, and undergoing rapid technological advances. The notion of success in this society is represented by

maximized profits, increased production, and unrestrained consumption (Lacy, 1995). This contention confirms the belief of Karl Marx that members of the modern society only know how to relate to life by consuming or using it which therefore places a high value on material gain (Fromm, 1941; 1961). Art for many people has become yet another item on a list of consumption and symbols of material success. Public art has not been excluded from this phenomenon. Instead of the primary motive for its creation being an affirmation of community identity, the public art pieces installed may be unrelated to the site and serve to further alienate the members of the community. According to Viktor Frankl (1978), man is always searching for meaning in life especially in the detached nature of an industrial society. Public art can facilitate members in a society to feel connected to an ideal or a phenomenon larger than themselves. By building a sense of community identity, public art can increase the sense of belonging of an individual.

However, the community members in which public art is placed must be able to identify with the public artwork. The artwork will appear meaningless and displeasing if the needs and desires of the public are not satisfied (Hulme, 1924). In modern society where material success is highly regarded and a fast paced lifestyle is the norm, public art can be used to inspire a new community identity that esteems human values and philosophical ideals of strong relational bonds with other people and time for reflection on the meaning of life. The humanistic ethic reflected in art attempts to create a “cohesive vision” and encourage people to live with each other in community (Schwartz, 1974, p. 29). This ethic contrasts with the dehumanized sentiments and alienation experienced by members of modern society (Lacy, 1995).

Superior public art pieces, as defined by this paper, will build and assert community identity. Furthermore, the venerable artwork will represent the life of the people, challenge them to contemplate their existing values, and express their dreams (Zimenko, 1976).

In many of these recent public art projects, the artist serves a vital role as a vehicle for community expression (Close, 2001). Each community is unique and possesses its own distinctive energies, dynamics, and characteristics. These characteristics can be portrayed through site-specific public art to help encourage the building and affirming of community identity. Site-specific art is public art that is commissioned for a particular location and considers the physical and visual qualities of the space (Lacy, 1995). As mentioned before, when community members are recent immigrants with a distinctive cultural heritage, public art reflecting elements from that culture may help to improve the sense of well being and belonging of its members.

For example, successful public artworks expressing this humanistic ethic are incorporated in the “Mac Arthur Park Project” in Los Angeles (Senie et al., 1992). In 1989, it was estimated that more than seventy-five percent of this disadvantaged community’s residents were immigrants from Central America. Consequently, public art, such as the public art piece by Luis Jimenez, a Mexican-American artist, was installed depicting a scene of illegal immigrants entering the United States (see Appendix). This piece, entitled “Cruzando El Rio Bravo”, was created from the perspective of the people living in this community and reflected those individuals as

heroes of the American dream. The community identified with this piece of public art as it told their story of struggle and perseverance to relocate to this land.

Many Mexican American artists in Los Angeles have also used murals to affirm their cultural identity and develop a distinct identity as part of a new community. The tradition of producing murals as a form of community expression is integral to the Mexican culture (Cheng, 2001). In fact, according to Cheng (2001), the greatest muralists of the twentieth century were all Mexican: Jose Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siquieros (see Appendix). However, other members of the Los Angeles community can also benefit from these murals by this public art form fostering within them a greater understanding and appreciation of other members of the community. A collective identity arises from public art ventures such as these and a sense of place is created from the distinguishable public artwork.

As mentioned before, public art emerges from a specific time and place (Cruikshank et al., 1988). Therefore, a public art work that may be easily understood and embraced at one time and help to build and affirm the identity of a community, may be rejected at another time. The same community may feel alienated by a piece bearing no relevance to them and having no connection to their stories, such as some historic war memorials (Cambor, 1999). This again reemphasizes the importance of community outreach in public art projects. Community identity originates not only from the present but also from the past. Through educating the public, public art works will be understood from the appropriate context and allow the public to more clearly see where they have come from and how they have come to where they are now (Cambor, 1999). Instead of removing controversial monuments, the presence of

these monuments will help to build a new collective community identity (Cambor, 1999). The fascinating power of art to arouse a unique and distinct communication between people (Hulme, 1924) is what facilitates the development of a novel sense of self within a community.

Public art works have moved from simply being large unrelated steel structures placed in plazas to essential elements that are incorporated into already existing structures such as sidewalks and walls to build and affirm community identity through giving voice to a place (Close, 2001). Integrated art forms and materials are utilized in many public art projects, such as engravings, ceramics, and stone, to create pieces which can become for a community a more accurate reflection of who they are (Close, 2001) (see Appendix). For this goal to be attained and the humanistic ethic expressed, the community members must be involved in the planning process, before the artwork is placed, and through educational programs to optimize public understanding of the piece and its portrayal (Grant, 1999).

This humanistic ethic, centered on human interests and values, has modified the role of the public artist and changed the public artworks created. In fact, this new movement in public art is quite distinct from the public art of the last few centuries. Instead of creating public artworks in communities that instill values into a community, the new public art attempts to portray or reflect the already existing values of a community to build or affirm the identity of the respective community. The role of public artists is distinctly special in that “the artist picks out of reality something which we, owing to a certain hardening of our perceptions, have been unable to see ourselves” (Hulme, 1924, p.156). A new understanding of the different

community members is produced when public art closely reflects the various cultures and ideals present within a community (Neill, 1999). The representations of culture reflect the different identities present within a community and bring out the uniqueness of the community by affirming the presence of all its members (Close, 2001). In this way, public art will fulfill its mission of building and affirming community identity.

Building and Affirming Community Identity through Public Art:

Los Angeles and Miami

The City of Los Angeles

The community of Los Angeles, California is a diverse group of people with cultural ties from various parts of the world. It can be a daunting task attempting to meet the various cultural needs of its community members through public art. The goal of public art is not only to beautify an area but also to provide a voice for the various peoples present within a community (Lacy, 1995). In Los Angeles, a voice has to be provided for not only a multicultural community but for a multilingual community with Chinese, African, Korean, Thai, European, Chicano, and Central American backgrounds. Each of these groups will not only have differing experiences of living in this city, but have divergent perspectives of what public art means, where public artworks should be placed, and what form of public art is preferred.

Some groups in the community, such as “ethnic teenagers” (Lacy, 1995, p.136), may prefer, for example, graffiti, or uncommissioned art on public walls to ensure their voice is heard and their presence not forgotten. However, fifty-two million dollars annually is used to remove these unwanted public expressions of

community experiences (Lacy, 1995). Murals such as "America Tropical", the 1933 mural on Olvera Street by Mexican artist David Alfaro Siqueiros, are preserved in the present day to reflect the Mexican culture. However, this mural may have been censored if it was created in recent decades as it portrays the struggle of the Chicano, or Mexican American, community in Los Angeles by depicting a crucified Chicano and a mestizo shooting at the American eagle (see Appendix).

As an appeasement to local ethnic groups, some public art works commissioned make an attempt to reflect the cultural diversity of the community but these works often result in diluted attempts at building or affirming community identity. More emphasis is placed on the aesthetic appeal rather than the voice or true representation of the community's beliefs or experiences. Additionally, these art works may be placed at sites that may not be seen or experienced by many of the community members. For example, the lobby of the First Interstate Bank in Los Angeles depicts a multicultural version, by two New York-based artists, of the angels from the Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli in Assisi, Italy. In this depiction, the European angels are wearing ethnic symbols, such as a crowned mahogany headpiece from Nigerian masks or the pre-Colombian feathered serpent Quetzacoatl from the Aztecs, to represent the blending of the community cultures (Lacy, 1995). At the dedication, young African American and Hispanic children were used to cut the ribbons to this artwork that was supposed to represent the great melting pot of this community. However, this attempt at an artistic public representation of cultural unity failed. The artwork simply reinforced the existing dominant values of European culture in a multicultural society with the inclusion of token ethnic symbols.

However, all attempts at inviting the multicultural experience and representation of the city have not failed. Two great examples of involving the community to express their emotions and reflections are the “Mac Arthur Park Project” located in the West Lake district in downtown Los Angeles and “The Great Wall of Los Angeles” located in the San Fernando Valley. These two projects are examples of the emerging humanistic ethic on public art (Senie & Webster, 1992). The humanistic ethic accentuates the ability of public art to be used as a tool for social change, while at the same time not compromising aesthetics.

The Mac Arthur Park Project.

In 1983, the Otis/ Parson Institute of the Parsons School of Design created a public art program as part of a design team effort (Senie et al., 1992). The first site used was the 104 year old Mac Arthur Park that had been deteriorating and gaining a negative reputation as an unsafe location. Working-class Central American immigrants were the largest group to use the park. When the planning process began in 1984, the whole community was invited into the effort. The community activities, such as community art programs, put on by the Art Program reminded the community members that they were cared about and that other residents of Los Angeles had not neglected them. These programs also created an interest and thirst for knowledge about the art program and the plan for the park. One of the first programs involved the community in the general cleaning up of the park and repainting.

For about three months, information was gathered by the park planners from the artists and also members of the community, such as community leaders. A list of needs was generated, such as improved lighting and security in the park, preservation

of the park's rich heritage, and children's play spaces. In 1985, the need for improved lighting and security was met as the first artwork was installed. The installation of this artwork demonstrates that not only is public art used for aesthetics but also for function. Several artists were involved in this project and many met the need of celebrating the park's unique history and culture, such as the military associations of the park. The first installation was the entry gates designed by sculptor R.M. Fischer (see Appendix). Steel columns were used to create arches. These arches consisted of large fiberglass balls and eagles mounted on metal disks to symbolize the military past of the park. At the time of installation, the lighting fixtures in the arches at the gate were the only light source in the park due to deteriorated lighting systems within the park.

Additionally, other pieces were installed. For example, quotations from literature were used by artist Alexis Smith in the terrazzo of the sidewalk, or on a bronze suitcase at the side of a park bench (see Appendix). In earlier days, the park was used as the city's central forum for political and religious demonstrations. William Herron brought this experience back to life in his large chain-link mural sculpture entitled "Silent Voices" portraying a political rally in progress (Senie et al., 1992). In keeping with the public art movement towards creating public spaces for dialogue, Doug Hollis and Richard Turner collaborated on creating a poetry garden, entitled "Garden of Voices", in the north side of the park (see Appendix). Three cast-concrete benches provide seating and outdoor speakers play electronic poetry readings in the common languages of the neighborhood, including Spanish, English, Tagalog, and Korean.

The needs of the children of the community were not neglected. Judy Simonian and Latino ceramicist German Rugerio constructed children's play sculpture including a pair of child-sized ceramic tile-covered pyramids, four to five feet in height, connected by an underground speaking tube. The installation of the sculpture "Big Candy" designed by Franco Assetto represents the commitment of the Program to the wonder and fun-filled spirit of children.

Undoubtedly, the most dramatic and poignant public artwork piece in the park was the sculpture entitled "Cruzando El Rio Bravo" by Luis Jimenez (see Appendix). This Mexican-American artist designed this sculpture to represent the struggle and search for freedom and prosperity by thousands of illegal aliens. Many of the Central American immigrants, mostly from Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, who reside in the park's community and who utilize the park can very much identify with this image. The significance of the sculpture being designed by Luis Jimenez is the fact that an authenticity and certain honesty are given to the sculpture. The artist depicts the illegal aliens attempting to cross the Rio Bravo as heroes of the American dream. This positive depiction contrasts to the negative perception and image that is often portrayed of illegal immigrants. This representation will therefore increase the feelings of belongingness of the members of the community, which is seventy-seven percent Latino.

The Mac Arthur Park Community Council was also formed in the process of redefining the park. The Council is made up of community representatives from the park's constituencies, such as the YMCA, senior citizens, neighborhood residents, Police and Recreation departments, and the owners of surrounding businesses. This

council encouraged the dialogue between artists and members of the community. However, as time has passed, the effectiveness of the council has declined and some of the artwork has been vandalized. For example, “Silent Voices” had to be removed as it was vandalized beyond repair. Despite these challenges, the Mac Arthur Park Project serves as an outstanding example of the ability of public art to build and affirm the identity of a community. For decades, the people in this community had felt neglected until this project breathed new life into this community, re-instilling civic pride.

The Great Wall of Los Angeles.

A mural is one of the most prized and highly regarded forms of public artistic expression in Mexico (Cheng, 2001). Los Angeles, with a Hispanic population that is eighty percent Mexican, has continued the trend of producing murals to capture the essence of its multicultural community (Cheng, 2001). Most of the over 2, 000 murals produced by community members or by lesser known artists in Los Angeles are usually community projects depicting community stories (Holliday, 2000).

“The Great Wall of Los Angeles” is one of the most famous murals in this large city (see Appendix). In addition, it is another public artwork that serves as an example of the humanistic ethic of public art. This public artwork builds and affirms its community identity and invokes civic pride in the members of the Los Angeles community. Located in the Tujunga Flood Control Channel of the San Fernando Valley, this magnificent public artwork was conceived by Judith Baca and began in 1974. This project was one of the first public art pieces of the non-profit, independent organization co-founded by Baca. To this day this project is still considered by Baca

to be one of the true signature pieces of the organization. The Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC) worked on this project with over 400 multicultural youth and artists (Senie et al., 1992). The community members involved participated in workshops to discuss the diverse cultural backgrounds and stories.

In the end, the "Great Wall of Los Angeles" was 13 ½ feet high and a ½ mile long. The landmark, which took over six summers to complete, is a pictorial representation of the history of the different ethnic peoples of California from prehistoric times to the 1950's. The youngsters working on the mural were from diverse cultural, social, and economic backgrounds. The youth worked along with artists, historians, ethnologists, scholars, and other community members. This project opened up the community to a dialogue that continues to this day through the hundreds of visitors who visit the wall annually. Through this dialogue, members of the community may realize that although their stories are different, they share this common history and identity as members of the Los Angeles community.

Recently, SPARC received money from the Ford Foundation to update the "Great Wall" from the 1950's to the 1990's. The money raised will be used to achieve this goal set by SPARC. The City Council has also promised a grant of \$100,000 and other fundraising continues to fulfill the goal of half a million dollars (Holliday, 2000). Work will also be done to restore the Great Wall that is over twenty-five years old. Pollution, weather, and general neglect have contributed to the disrepair of the public artwork.

SPARC has been successful in fundraising in the past as it encourages dialogue among community members. Also, the various artistic endeavors of the

group encourage and stimulate creativity within the community and build a sense of community identity and pride. Since 1988, eighty-three murals have been produced and many youth within various communities, including less privileged communities, have been educated about and involved actively with public art projects. However, if the public artworks are not actively preserved, the projects can become dilapidated. If public art is an integral part of building and affirming community identity, when the art works fall into disrepair it could have a negative impact on the identity of the community. Ironically, the very artwork that was the source of community pride may become the source of frustration and shame. Consequently, Judith Baca and SPARC are actively involved in raising funds to restore the Great Wall that has damage from aging over 30 percent of its structure (Berbeo, 2000).

The City of Miami

Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places Program.

In 1982, Ordinance 82-112 of the Board of County Commissioners of Miami-Dade County, Florida established the Art in Public Places Trust (Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places, 1993). The ordinance put into effect the 1½ percent rule that ensures that 1½ percent of the construction costs of new county buildings provide funding for works of art in public places (Cruikshank et al., 1988). These artwork funds are deposited into the Art in Public Places Trust Fund. The Art in Public Places Trust is empowered to ensure that the Trust acts in the public interest and supports the goals of the program. The Master Plan of this program ensures that the artwork is of an “exceptional quality executed on an appropriate scale and for general public access in public places other than the museums, which enrich and give dimension to the

public environment.” The main focus of the Art in Public Places program is contemporary art.

The main goals of the Art in Public Places Program (AIPP) include the enhancement and preservation of the artistic heritage of Miami-Dade County, the enrichment of the public environment for both residents and visitors to the area, to increase public access to works of art, the enhancement of the climate for artistic creativity in Miami-Dade County, and the contribution to the civic pride of the community (Miami-Dade County Art In Public Places, 1993). In addition, there are two criteria that have to be met by the artists. The first criterion is that the acquisitions for Art in Public Places be recognized by art experts to be of an exceptional quality and enduring value. The second criterion is the appropriateness of the artwork to the site. The physical dimensions, social dynamics, local character, and the existing or planned surrounding urban context of the site must be considered in relation to the proposed artwork.

Miami-Dade county has a special uniqueness found within the treasure of its diversity. As a consequence of this diversity, the Miami-Dade Art in Public Places Program has to ensure that proposed art works must acknowledge the diversity of the community. The recognition of the multi-lingual and multicultural nature of the population of Miami-Dade county is of great importance and thus a wide range of expression is encouraged.

The policies of the Trust emphasize a responsibility to the community (Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places, 1993). These policies relate to the main focus of this paper. Public works of art must alter the public spaces in which they are located.

Some changes would be more dramatic than others; however, it must be acknowledged that the new artwork will be a new presence in the community. The public artwork chosen should therefore be aligned to the identity of the community and represent their stories. This task is a difficult one, especially since the art chosen by the Miami-Dade Art in Public Places program is contemporary art, and is created to reflect the rich ethnic diversity of the city. Contemporary art rapidly changes and evolves and often times many members of the community cannot identify with the pieces chosen. To overcome this challenge, the Miami-Dade AIPP is committed to the education of the community through high school programs, tours, and various lecture series. This action not only broadens community awareness of the various public art works in Miami-Dade county, but also increases the community's knowledge of contemporary art.

Every public artwork emerges from a specific time (Cruikshank et al., 1988). The public art incorporated in the Miami-Dade AIPP is contemporary art. This art form may not be easily understood or accepted by the community members. This dilemma is the reason why the education programs and community outreach programs are so crucial to the success of this organization in achieving its aim of positively engaging its public through the public artworks commissioned. People living in the community where a contemporary artwork is installed without initial consultation often will focus on the negative aspects of the artwork due to their inability to put the public artwork in context (Cruikshank et al., 1988). Public art, especially contemporary art, may facilitate a community's understanding of the

dynamics of society today and the rapid changes being experienced by its members (Cruikshank et al., 1988).

The Art in Public Places Trust implements individual artwork projects in accordance with the Master Plan. Art funds are deposited into Art Trust Fund and staff researchers identify and plan construction projects and potential work sites. The Professional Advisory Committee (PAC) is made up of eleven members and is appointed to two-year terms. The PAC members are well-recognized professionals in their respective fields of art, art history, architecture, and architectural history. They also have a lot of knowledge in contemporary and modern art. At anytime, consultants may be included to provide additional expert advice when necessary in decision-making. The Miami-Dade AIPP also involves the public in the process by informing them of the plans and progress of the various projects. This process can help eliminate the perception of art as an “elitist movement” (Cruikshank et al., 1988, p. 249). By involving the public, either in the conceptual phase or the installation phase, a sense of ownership evolves, a new civic pride arises, and the identity of the community is affirmed (Gould, 2001).

However, the words “controversy” and “public art” often seem inextricably connected. At the beginning of the year 2001, another controversy involving a new bandshell to be erected opposite the American Airlines Arena in downtown Miami was featured in the media. “Bandshell” designed by Frank Stella, a well-known minimalist sculptor, was commissioned by the Metro-Dade AIPP in 1998 for a cost of 1.45 million dollars from start to finish. However, Stella went over budget with the 35-foot tall steel structure, almost twice the amount initially agreed upon, and the

AIPP decided to terminate the contract. The design by Stella was “flowing and organic” (Korten, 2001, p.15) and gained worldwide accolades (see Appendix). The installation of this public artwork was to increase the beauty of downtown Miami and add a new aesthetic element to the area. In terminating the contract, Miami Dade lost a signature piece of public art that would have been key in creating a sense of place and strengthening the identity of the Miami community. It would have been a piece which would have instilled a new pride in a community and affirmed its identity. However, the AIPP stated that they wanted to set a precedent by not paying the new cost because they had already agreed upon a previous figure in the contract. To this date, the issue is yet to be resolved.

Art in Public Places: Metrorail and Metromover Stations.

One of the policies of the Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places program is to recognize “the multi-lingual and multi-cultural nature of Miami-Dade County’s population” (Miami-Dade County Art in Public Places, 1993, p. 3). The population of Miami is culturally diverse and many communities have developed which are rich in the cultural heritage of the immigrants who inhabit the communities. The Art in Public Places program has attempted to reflect the cultural heritage of the various communities at Metrorail and Metromover stations of the Miami-Dade Transit Agency. Local artists have been commissioned to create public artworks at the various stations. Three examples will be presented here to demonstrate how the artwork has been site-specific and has involved the respective communities either directly or indirectly. The projects include the Eighth Street Station and the School

Board Station of the Metromover and the Ninth Street Pedestrian Mall of the Metrorail.

The Eighth Street station depicts the work of a local Miami artist known worldwide for his work with ceramic tile. Carlos Alves, or the “Mosaic Man” (Ocean Drive Magazine, 1997), completed his project in 1994 that included installations entitled “La Palma”, “Ventana Solar”, and “Porton de Sentimientos” (Art in Public Places, 1994). The artist used recycled ceramics, items embedded in clay, and items collected from merchants from Calle Ocho, or Eighth Street, a predominantly Cuban area in Miami.

On the south side of the station, the artist created a ceramic royal palm tree, “La Palma” that rises from the ground level to the top of the station. This royal palm holds special significance for the people of this community as a famous Cuban poet, Jose Marti, uses the royal palm to symbolize freedom. Incorporating this element encourages the civic pride of the community by including images that hold cultural meaning. On the north side of the station, the artist installed “Porton de Sentimientos” or the gate of feelings, which represents the gateway to Calle Ocho. The handles of the gate are hearts made from red tile. His final installation is the “Ventana Solar” or solar window, which represents a Cuban colonial window to the area (see Appendix). This window is a reflection of the familiar and a manifestation of Cuban architecture that increases the sense of belonging possessed by the Cuban members of this community.

In contrast, another community along the Miami Dade Transit route is the historical African American community of Overtown. The artist commissioned to do

the public artwork at this site was a well-known African American artist, Gary Moore. This project was a collaborative effort with Gary Moore and landscape architects Gerald Marston and Wallace Roberts & Todd, Incorporated. The project along the Ninth Street Pedestrian Mall was completed in 1995 and used rustic terrazzo, dyed concrete unit pavers, and bronze inserts. The final effect was a pathway that imitated the textile weavings of an African Kente cloth. This pathway used bright colors such as oranges, greens, reds, and blues that added lots of vibrancy to the space (see Appendix). The benches, garbage bins, and lighting all use bright colors and also add an aesthetic presence to the location. The public artwork at this location celebrates the unique culture of this community and engenders civic pride among its members.

The third example of public art that builds and affirms community identity commissioned by the Art in Public Places program is “Vision of Peace” that was a collaborative effort by artist Noreen Morelli and students from the Design and Architecture Senior High School in Miami (see Appendix). As the artwork commissioned by the Art in Public Places program is contemporary art, the ceramic mural created by this collaboration abstractly portrays the tropical landscape and architecture of Miami. This artwork is in essence an inclusive piece that represents the larger community of Miami and not simply one of the smaller communities that make up the city of Miami. The sun is used to represent a peace symbol and is the central image of this artwork. Images of ladders are used to represent the students striving for the future and the positive ideals of the community.

The Holocaust Memorial: The Sculpture of Love and Anguish.

The Holocaust Memorial located in Miami Beach was funded by the Holocaust Memorial Committee, a private, nonprofit organization primarily as a tribute to the Jewish population in Miami. Kenneth Treister, an architect and sculptor, was commissioned in 1985 to design the memorial of the Jewish culture and people lost in the holocaust. In 1990, the project was completed. One of the most outstanding and striking pieces is the “Sculpture of Love and Anguish”, a forty-two-foot high bronze sculpture of a human hand reaching upwards (see Appendix). The giant outstretched hand has a number tattooed from a concentration camp in Auschwitz and represents the last reach of a dying person.

The uniqueness of this piece of public artwork is the intention behind it. This art work not only builds and affirms Jewish identity, but additionally, it helps the various immigrant groups who came to Miami in search of refuge to achieve a sense of belonging by sharing their unique story and by helping them identify with the suffering of other groups in the community. This artwork helps build and affirm the identity of the various members of the greater Miami community as tolerant and accepting individuals.

The Future of Public Art:

Where do we go from here?

Public art surrounds us. Through public art the stories of a community are expressed and their dreams and aspirations are portrayed. Members of a community should be able to enjoy the presence of the artwork in their public spaces, and furthermore, gain some sense of pride and identity from them. In the future, it is

hoped that the public becomes increasingly aware of the presence of public art and more knowledgeable as more projects are implemented. In addition, it is hoped that communities are impacted in a profound and positive way by the public artworks, and that the trend towards more socially conscious public art continues.

According to the humanistic ethic, public artwork is used to inspire the members of the community to have a “greater intensity of being” and possess a “greater awareness”, qualities which are attained by striving for human potential described by Erich Fromm (Illich, 1969, p.8). Through a greater awareness of self and others, members of a community develop a collective identity that promotes a sense of belonging. It is therefore important that public art avoids highlighting the values of the consumeristic culture which promotes isolation, and rather, accentuates the humanistic ethic which encourages community awareness (Lacy, 1995).

The mistakes of the past have endowed public artists with greater knowledge and experience. Public artists should take advantage of these experiences and empower themselves to create public art pieces which not only improve the well-being of the community members but also demonstrate an appreciation of their presence. Educational outreach programs ensure that community members can identify with the art pieces and understand the true objectives of public art commissions (Grant, 1999). It is therefore crucial that the public is educated about the public artworks present in their respective communities through various education programs and increased press coverage.

Following the humanistic perspective, in the future, public art will be used to accentuate positive human values and promote community cohesiveness. As

discussed earlier, it is essential that public art not only transforms the public spaces of communities into more visually engaging sites, but moreover, helps communities discover their unique identity and encourage the development of a sense of belonging among their members. A sense of place emerges from public art that reflects and represents the distinct characteristics of communities. Through these representations, the community identity is affirmed.

The public art of the future demands that the rigidity and elitism often associated with art be called into question. Greater flexibility and more openness to accept new forms of public art are required not only of the public but also of the public artists themselves. These challenges question the old definition of aesthetics and change what is considered high quality art. Public art will help to redefine these old taboos and easily accepted beliefs of the past. By inviting the community to become involved in the creation of public art pieces, either in the conceptual phase or the installation phase, its members feel more closely connected to the piece and this facilitates their identification with the artwork. As a result, the community identity is affirmed and strengthened through the artwork that is conceived from their past, their present, and their future.

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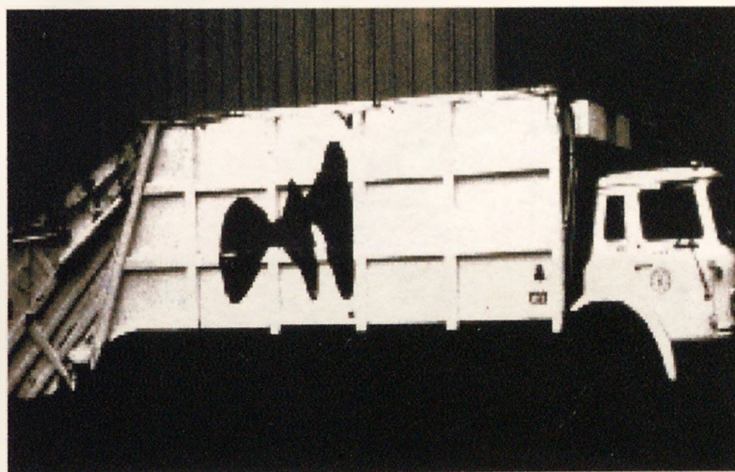
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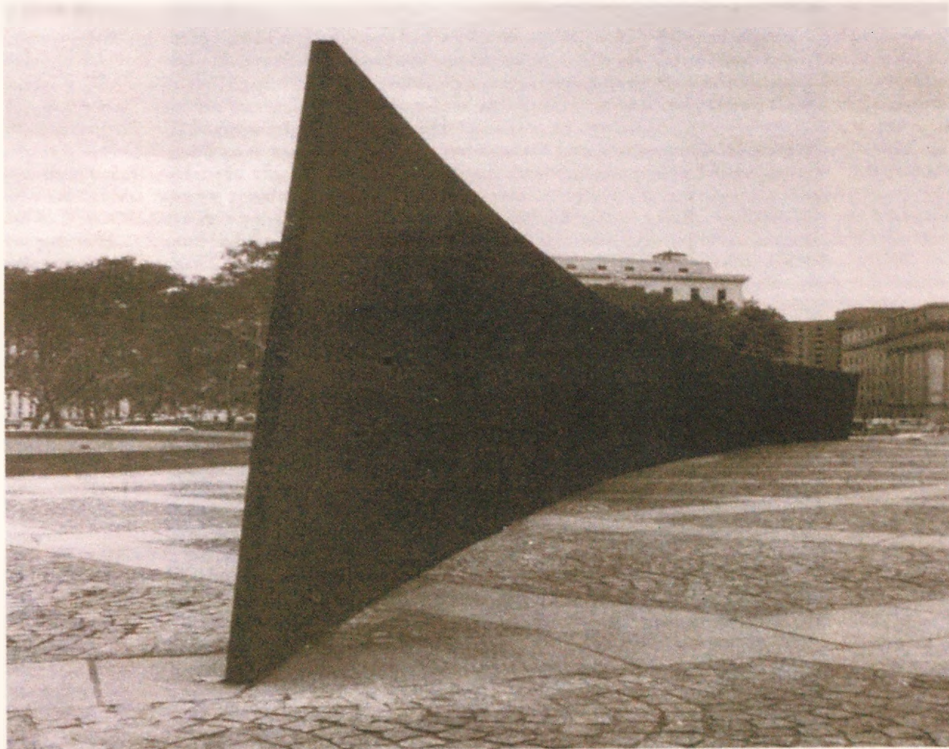
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“La Grande Vitesse” (1968) Alexander Calder



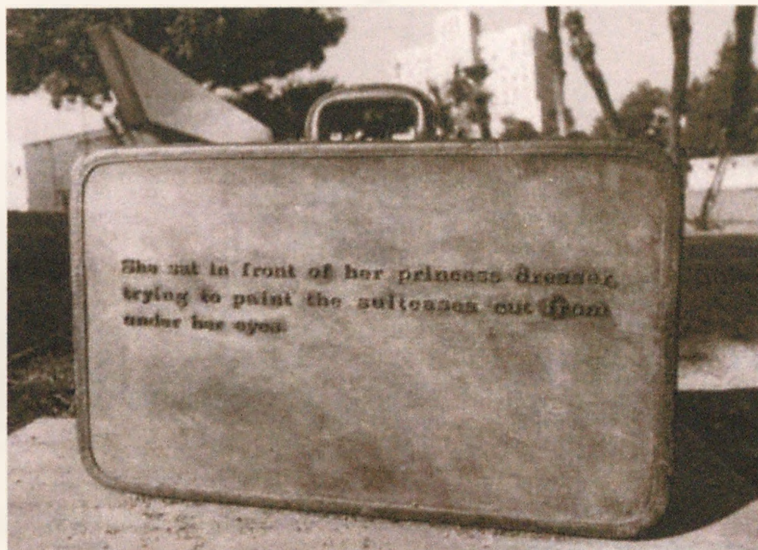
The image of “La Grande Vitesse” used as official city logo on sanitation truck
(Grand Rapids, Michigan)



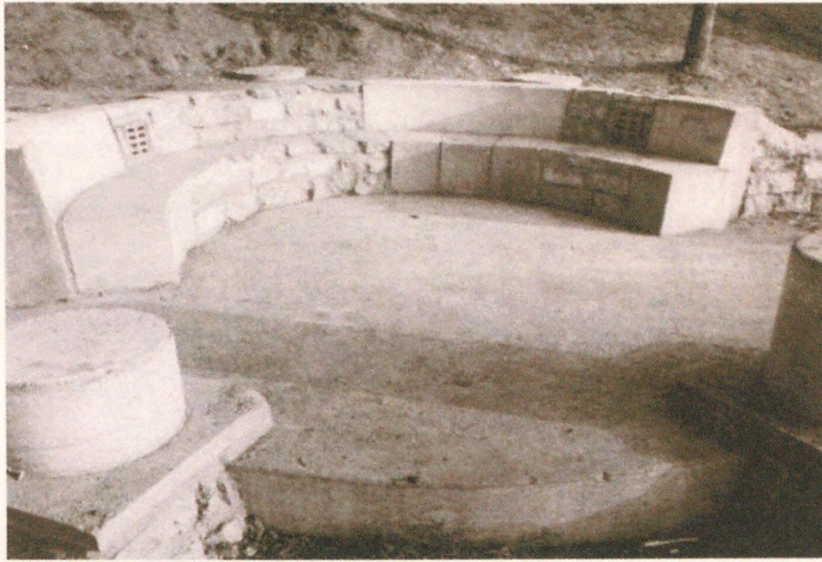
"Tilted Arc" (1981) Richard Serra



Entry Gate to Mac Arthur Park (1986) R.M. Fischer



"Bronze Suitcase" (1986) Alexis Smith

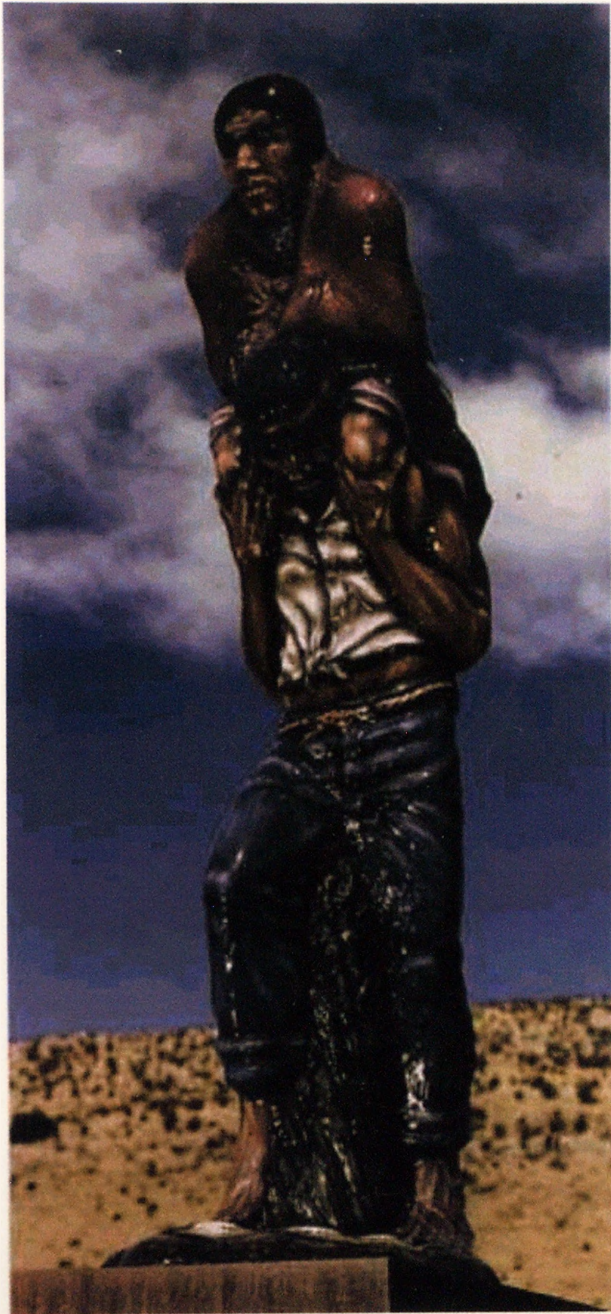


“Garden of Voices” (1986) Doug Hollis/ Richard Turner
Mac Arthur Park Project



Installing ceramic tile covered pyramids in presence of community onlookers.

Play structures for Mac Arthur Park community children
Judy Simonian/ German Rugerio (1986)



“Cruzando El Rio Bravo” / “Border Crossing” (1989) Luis Jimenez
Mac Arthur Park Project



“Man in Flames” (1938-1939) Jose Clemente Orozco



“Pan American Unity” (1940) Diego Rivera



“America Tropical” (1933) David Alfaro Siqueiros



“The Great Wall of Los Angeles” Judith Baca (1976-1983)



Judith Baca with some of the Great Wall Kids



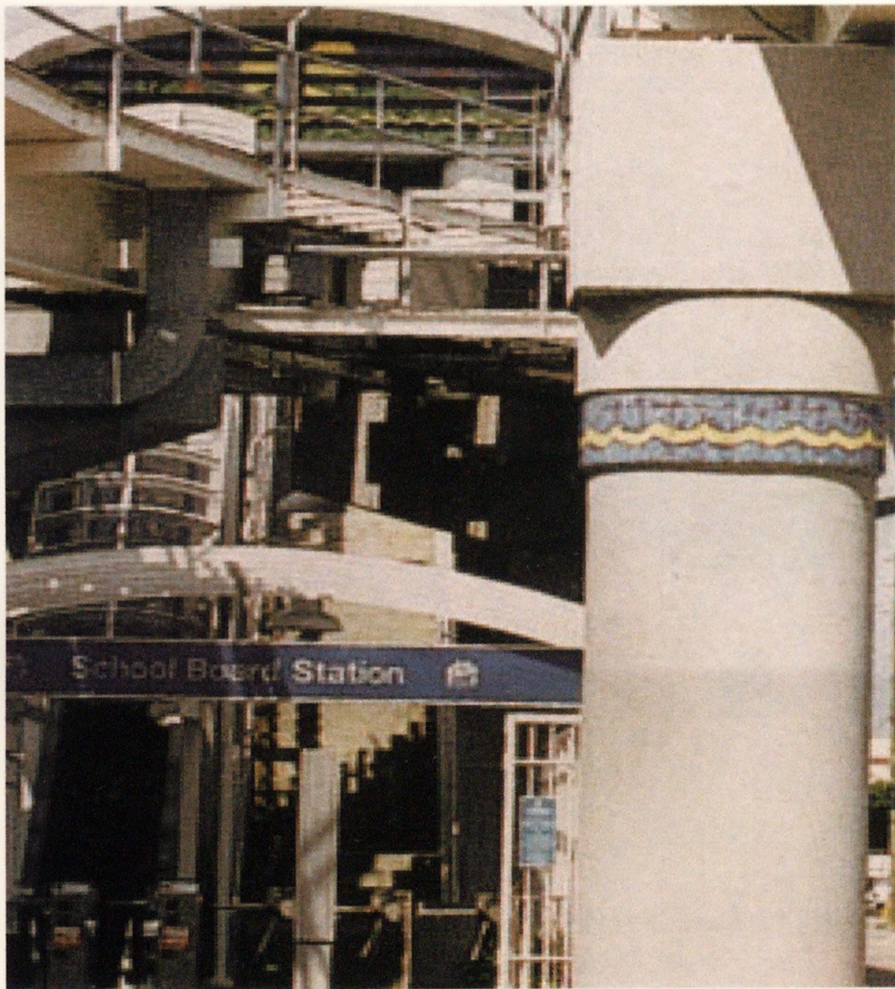
“Bandshell” (Model) (1999) Frank Stella
Designed for Downtown Miami



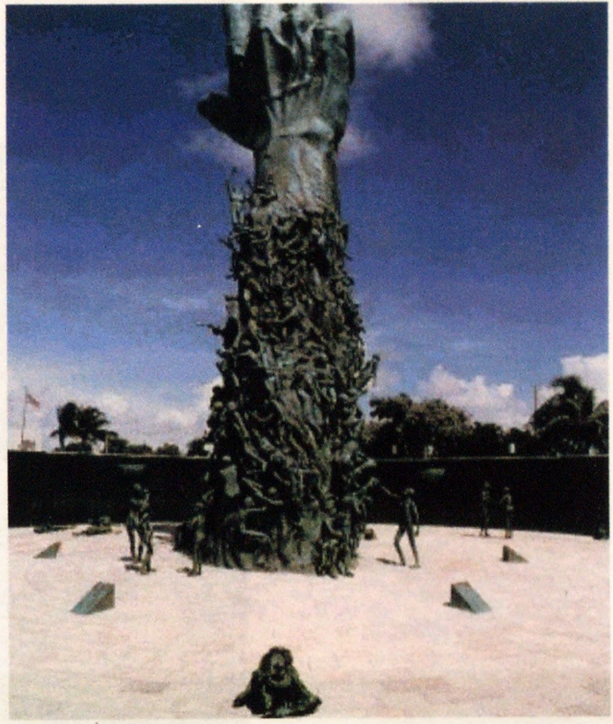
“Ventana Solar” (1994) Carlos Alves



“Ninth Street Pedestrian Mall” (1995) Gary Moore



“Vision of Peace” (1994) Noreen Morelli/ D.A.S.H. students



“The Sculpture of Love and Anguish” (1990) Kenneth Treister
The Holocaust Memorial on Miami Beach



“The Sculpture of Love and Anguish” (1990) Kenneth Treister
(Detailed Image)