

Fall 2006

Sydney's Public Sculpture

Gabriel Strader-Brown
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Sydney's Public Sculpture

Gabriel Strader-Brown

Academic Director: Bill McKernan

Academic Advisor: Caroline Jordan

S.I.T. Australia, Melbourne: The Multicultural Society

Fall 2006

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David Handley Interview:

Art Interview: So is Sculpture by the Sea going to continue to be free to the public? It can't be any other way can it?

David: The whole raison d'être of Sculpture by the Sea is to create a major free to the public event. Its starting point in my head 10 years ago was that it would be free to the public, so there won't be any change there. Hopefully we will get more private donations, they are going very very well, hopefully government grants, which are going very very badly, to help us keep it free.

The location is quite stunning; it is quite perfect, you can see it staying there well into the future, and Waverly Council is still very much behind it?

All of those big stakeholder issues are great. For me, Sculpture by the Sea is going through a different stage in its life. The exponential growth that we've had in terms of public interest, media interest, artists' interest is levelling off, which is quite fantastic from our point of view, because I was worried if the public interest kept going, in two or three years time we would be bursting at the seams.

What you're saying is it has plateaued somewhat.

There was quite a noticeable change in the appreciation from the visitors this year. In 2004 35% of our visitors came for the first time, I'm guessing that this year that will be more like 10%. So there wasn't that sense of awe and wonder, that sense of, wow this is happening in our city, which we have felt amongst the crowd up to now.

So the buzz has sort of gone...

No, not that the buzz has gone, it has changed. When people come to Sculpture by the Sea now, they know what the exhibition is about, they know what to expect in a very broad-brush sense.

So they are not just doing the Sydney thing, having a day out, looking to be entertained, they are actually concentrating?

They are actually coming to see the sculptures and what we are hearing from our staff, is that visitors are starting to compare one exhibition from the next, and from my point of view that is quite a critical position for Sculpture by the Sea. With an event, what you are always worried about, is it hitting a peak one year, and dropping off quite rapidly afterwards, but that didn't happen this year, so that shows the exhibition has a very long life.

So it is entering more of a mature phase. It is coming up to the 10th year now, it obviously has had a rapid growth, it has probably seemed like a charging horse sometimes, getting out of control.

My first six years were like hell, it was a sprint, it was terrifying. Where was the money going to come from, how were we going to cope, we didn't have the staff. Two years ago we had only two full time staff, now we have seven.

But this is not the only production; you're doing other events as well. You've got an exhibition happening at Cottesloe beach in Perth and you've got something happening in Tasmania as well.

Tasmania is a lovely little project, Cottesloe is quite big. Where you are right in saying that, is that without Cottesloe the seven staff would be busy eight, nine months a year and where Cottesloe has been great, it is probably making us busy for thirteen months a year. It's not the sort of industry where you can hire an exhibition co-ordinator for just six months, because there aren't those sorts of people out there. It's not like the film industry where you are hiring people for three months here or four months there.

You have been hiring sales staff, how is this area going to develop?

This is one of the interesting aspects of Sculpture by the Sea. The sales from the exhibition are going to be brought within the not-for-profit entity. What is happening, the organization is going through an evolutionary change from being run by me as a sole trader, in 1997, to my company, which ran it from

1998 until the first couple of months in 2003, and in 2003 we set up Sculpture by the Sea Incorporated, a not-for-profit entity. We had a very small board for the first couple of years, we then expanded that board, so what is happening now is my modest personal capital underwrites the not-for-profit entity, so the plan is to remove me as the underwriter, with Sculpture by the Sea developing its own resources, so that it is independent, and in a few more years time it can stand on its own two feet.

So this was some of the logic in turning it into a not-for-profit organization. I'm wondering if you're thinking about establishing a permanent site for sculpture to make sales?

What people now see through Sculpture by the Sea is that the Sydney public now have a relationship with sculpture, which they didn't have ten years ago. Whereas ten years ago sculpture basically meant statues, the public's taste is maturing in relation to sculpture, and the next stage, to build on that relationship, is to develop a Sculpture Park.

Would that be part of Sculpture by the Sea?

It would be run through the not-for-profit entity, it is the next stage of our growth for the entity, and to take it a step further it is the next stage in the relationship between Australia, sculpture and our international visitors.

It seems to be a worldwide phenomenon; they are being established on a very professional basis. Maybe Sydney is ready, maybe in a way Sculpture by the Sea is a test that people will come and look at sculpture, it's breaking down the barriers between public and private space. The distinction is being blurred and people are starting to think, wow I can have one of these at home. Before it was only public sculpture that was out there.

I don't know how many sculptures there are now that are viewable in the major residences around Sydney. There are at least half a dozen sculptures in private hands that you see from the harbour.

There are not many galleries showing sculpture or can't show sculpture on a large scale.

That's where Sculpture by the Sea really has its main appeal for sculptors. There is nothing in New South Wales on that scale. I don't mind confessing what a big surprise it was to me just how immature the sculpture scene and the sculpture market was when we started Sculpture by the Sea, you couldn't call it a sculpture market.

The nature of sculpture is that it does take a long time to make and to put an exhibition together; Sculpture by the Sea gives some people the opportunity to make something that they haven't attempted before. It's grown in that way and it's given people much more confidence knowing they have somewhere to put it, and it is going to be seen by a lot of people.

That is the other thing, since Sculpture by the Sea there are a lot more galleries representing sculptors.

So in a way Sculpture by the Sea is giving artists a leg up, giving them that initial recognition. I think galleries have been quite reticent to show sculpture and quite frankly I don't think they know how to sell it.

This was one of the interesting things when we started Sculpture Inside. What I was hearing was that the public thought sculpture was some big thing on a hill, or something that went outdoors. So I thought, let's have an indoor show showing all those fantastic small sculptures that I kept seeing in artists' homes and in their studios. Then you had the other advantage that we would be more likely to sell a small piece by an artist than a big one, and if an artist sells their indoor piece for \$1,500 to \$5,000 then that's going to be giving them money which helps them recover their costs in making the big work. This year from the indoor shows alone we generated over \$130,000 worth of sales in three weeks.

Just getting back to the funding, you said you weren't going to be underwriting it anymore.

Well I will be for the next couple of years.

Are you applying for government grants, do you see a government body moving in and getting involved, and at what level? Can you see The Festival of Sydney running Sculpture by the Sea?

No nothing like that. Sculpture by the Sea is big enough to stand on its own two feet. Where we've had a break through in the last two years, once we got the tax deductible, gift recipient status, private donations have gone up by a multiplier of just under five. Where that's working is that 20% of donations are passed on to artists, to assist them with their costs. That said, that touches just the tip of the iceberg in terms of artists' costs. For five overseas artists we pay their air fares, and air fares for five interstate artists as well. The other big plus is that the more it keeps growing, the more it keeps maturing, the more and more attractive it is to sponsors, and we've had quite an increase in sponsorship this year. The difficulty was that most of those sponsors signed just eight weeks before the exhibition, so without the sales from Cottesloe and our private donors we would have gone under by about May. So that's where government grants become very important to us, but we got diddly squat this year.

Who would fund it, The Australia Council and The NSW Ministry for the Arts?

Yes. Why we are not getting a few hundred thousand dollars from those bodies is incomprehensible. The reasons why it is incomprehensible is I can't see how those bodies can't see one, the merit of Sculpture by the Sea and two, the effort the artists are going to. One of the criticisms they give us is the variable standard of work. Every single art show in history in the world has had work of variable standard. From my point of view, what I have been trying to push for in the last few years is the need for artists' fees, and we're not having much luck there. The Ministry has told us not to even apply for them. The other thing, which Sculpture by the Sea represents, it is one of the few areas in the visual arts in Australia that can reach internationally. In the media we had photos in the Times, the New York Post, all around the world, and if we were able to have funds to expand the artist program and get more support for the artists, that's just going to be a further benefit to the perception of Australia internationally and to the visual arts scene in Australia.

Well let's talk a bit more specifically about the exhibition. I like the way the artists are getting more ambitious, like Jarrod Taylor's Structural Wave. Is that what you are encouraging, for people to take a few more risks, to do larger projects?

We're not actively encouraging that, I think the popular media and sales is encouraging artists to do that. It is actually producing a structural flaw, which is, the more that artists want to do these pieces, there's a tendency for the show to be focused on Marks Park and Tamarama Beach.

Also megalomania takes over because the perception is that you can only get into Sculpture by the Sea by making big sculptures, so it might become self-perpetuating.

It's actually the opposite of that, because we are actually looking for really good small sculpture that can be nestled among the rocks.

How do you control that, I know you have judges, you change the judges every year, but how do you control that, how can you determine what actually goes into the show? With whom does the final arbitration lie, with the judges, with you, with the panel?

The final decision is with the curatorial panel. Axel (Arnett) as site curator has been advising them for the last three years, as to what we need in terms of works for the site.

So he actually sits down with the judges beforehand?

During the process.

He says, for Tamarama beach we need these sorts of things, for the rocks, we need...

Not so much that. As the sculptures are being selected he says ok we need a few more for Tamarama, or we need a few more for the rocks, or by the way, have you guys noticed that you've chosen two site specific sculptures for exactly the same site. We're currently looking at how we can tweak the model, and we haven't made final decision on that, but you will notice some changes come next year.

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to observe the involvement that the city of Sydney has with the public arts attraction. Furthermore, the study will hopefully shed light on the importance of public art in Sydney and how it is an important aspect of cultural heritage. In addition to this, the analysis will cover the methods in which its venue is made accessible to the public through financial means and through aesthetic appeal. In order to uncover these objectives, the function and history of Sculpture by the Sea will be studied as well as the policies and or stance that the Sydney council has directed towards public arts.

The study will be conducted by means of extensive research on the event itself, research on the analysis of cultural heritage promotion through the uses of public art, and research of corporate sponsorship of public sculpture in Australia. Intern volunteer fieldwork at the Sculpture by the Sea Festival will be conducted, which will provide interviews with organizers of the event as well as artists exhibiting pieces. Survey methodology will be conducted through the festival's people's choice ballots in order to observe the public's reaction to the event and its interest in the artwork.

Introduction

A sculpture is iconic in its presentation. By creating three-dimensional art, the viewer feels that he or she is on the same plane as the artwork itself. It lets the person feel that he or she can actually touch it and in some cases that is the objective. Ruth Butler once stated about sculpture, “It was not like something; it was something.”¹ By making art three dimensional, scale, depth and reality are all altered by something that represents a plausible fantastic shape or action both familiar and unfamiliar to the viewer at the same time. Part of the admiration for art is that everyone can have it. People from all over the world are attracted to sculpture or other forms of art. It is part of cultural enrichment. Art, especially sculpture represents social and political influences. It expresses culturally distinctive cognitive styles. It utilizes technique and culturally visual preferences. In Australia, art is just as much of a significant factor in the country’s history as any other, but its contemporary art scene is not as reputable or progressive as other countries such as the United States or various countries in Europe. Compared with these other nations, Australia has a rather youthful age. This makes it hard for the country to develop an experienced art market. This doesn’t mean that Australia doesn’t have a contemporary art market though.

In Sydney an annual event called Sculpture by the Sea is held on the path running from Bondi Beach to Tamarama Beach, in which national and international sculptors are called upon to contribute works of theirs to this public exhibition in the Bondi suburb. It is Australia’s largest sculpture event and is held annually. The festival is a temporary venue, which is open to all with no admission charge and incorporates the general public with educational programs and a people’s selection process. This festival is a strong promoter of Sydney’s art centre. Sydney, easily

¹ Michael Brenson, *Acts of Engagement: Writings on Art, Criticism and Institutions* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2004) 202.

being Australia's most internationally popular city, holds many attractions and one would assume that it holds a strong artistic prestige. But it is Melbourne, Australia's second largest city that holds the stronger artistic reputation. Sydney and Melbourne have had a non-aggressive rivalry between each other for decades. Mixed in with this competitive nature are the arts and Melbourne holds its head high as a more esteemed artistic city. Whether this is because Sydney's art scene is more of a commodity than Melbourne's or whether Melbourne has a more academic presence and a more contemporary metropolitan culture than Sydney are all accusations that many Australians make.

With this in mind, the question arises; how can Sydney improve its artistic environment? David Handley's Sculpture by the Sea festival stands as a possible solution and reformation tool to this dilemma of prestige. Sculpture by the Sea is a public show and it is through art being made public that Sydney's artistic reputation can compete with Melbourne's. Although Melbourne offers heaps of public art venues, it is in Sydney that the largest sculpture festival, which is also public, is found. This task of putting on a free exhibition at this size is extremely tedious, especially now that the event has just celebrated its tenth year of production. The entire organization of such a spectacle is daunting enough, let alone making it a free public one. And yet this festival not only is able to sustain itself but also puts Sydney on the map artistically speaking and also exhibits upcoming studying and amateur artists, as the application process of entering a piece is open to anyone. Through this public art show and other smaller public or non-profit art venues, Sydney takes on the challenge of bringing back a smaller art marker back from the dead. Everything about the festival helps bring the art to the people annually through public access, which

enriches the Sydney community at the same time. Public art is vital for the image of Australia's largest city.

Public access is important for any form of community development. The sheer concept offers opportunities to many that would not in some cases be able to enjoy or take the time to enjoy. Art is no exception. Art or the fine arts used to have the tendency sometimes to fall under an exclusive stigma. Or in some cases the art management in some areas is too industrial. Aristocracy and commodity are associated with art venues or other aspects of artistic culture in the past and in today's society. What is obvious or at least should be is that art can be interpreted and admired by anyone and perhaps should be admired by everyone. It does not belong to a specific group within society therefore it should be accessible to the general public. As with most attractions for the public, admission prices say otherwise, unintentionally making the attraction non-public.

There is certainly a market to be made of art and in some cases admission fares are vital in sustaining the venue. But just as admission prices are important for the sustenance of the gallery or museum, making the art viewable to the public is equally important, especially to a public that might lose interest in such an event due to the sway of the dollar. The Sculpture by the Sea festival is able to draw a larger audience and probably make more of a profit off of novelty items by making its doors public than if it were an event that charged admission. Michael Brenson writes in

Acts of Engagement: Writings on Art, Criticism and Institutions,

The success of museum's responsiveness to the needs of the general public, which is apparent in the enormous increase in museum attendance, has had an extraordinary effect not only on the look and feel of so many museums but also on the morale of their administrations.²

² Brenson, 65-66.

But Sculpture by the Sea accomplishes making the art more accessible to the public in ways other than providing a free exhibition. Although its sculptural attractions have many conceptually focused works, the majority of the works ride on the more aesthetically pleasing wave.

Art will always have a concept behind it. Whether it portrays a political or social message or whether it just revolves around a common style or shape, art will always have a concept. A major divide that people are seeing between artwork now is a focus on conceptual work versus a focus on aesthetics. A shift towards aesthetic work is becoming quite popular in many artists' techniques as well as in the public's eye. Simple themes relating more to visual stimulation of the viewer are prominent in the contemporary sculptor community. This in a sense also makes the artwork more accessible to the public. If aesthetics are favourable with the public and more comprehensive than say elaborate conceptual work, which in many respects is just as good if not better in some cases, then a public exhibition of sculptural or three dimensional works would promote access ten folds. Sculpture by the Sea promotes this kind of financial access as well as sensory and conceptual access. This public exhibition is one of the strongest spectacles in Sydney to combat a dead art market.

The Sculpture by the Sea festival when observed in full detail provides an extensive analysis of public art at its best. Its production offers an opportunity of exotic sculptural work not only to Sydney's audience but to a national and international audience as well. Its emphasis on aesthetically pleasing work helps the public audience appreciate an artistic presence. It utilizes Sydney artists that are not very reputable as well as those who are. What this study is trying to accomplish is to observe the involvement that goes into public art venues, specifically the Sculpture by the Sea festival, to understand Sydney's reputation in the art market of Australia, to

observe how the festival itself promotes public access to the arts and to analyse the changing them shift in sculptural art, whether it is more conceptual or more purely aesthetic.

By first not only looking at the history of Sculpture by the Sea but Sydney's artistic heritage with public and non-public events in mind, the state of Sydney's contemporary art market will be more familiar and Sculpture by the Sea's contribution to the public art scene will be understood. By observing and critiquing the internal organization that goes into the festival itself, the process of the festival and other public art venues will be easier to analyse. In the final step of the focus, the concept of public access to the arts and how it supports urban community development will be discussed and analysed. The aesthetic shift of three-dimensional art is also an important factor of this accessibility. The festival's employees, volunteers, procedural activities, supporters, public viewers and artists all present important evidence for the success of this exhibition's public theme. Sculpture by the Sea reveals many methods of to support public arts, what artists must struggle through for credit and how three-dimensional artwork looks more to visual dynamics rather than conceptual complexity.

Methodology

The methodology used for this study on the Sculpture by the Sea festival consisted mostly of field based observations and interviews. In this case field based observations were extremely collaborative with volunteer work for the event. All one has to do to apply is make contact with the Sculpture by the Sea organization either by telephone, email, or just walking in and making an appearance, and simply apply for a specific volunteer service, usually one of necessity. The Sculpture by the Sea organization is easy to contact with information provided on its website or by

information provided by advertising or newspapers or by the colourful catalogues sold at the exhibition. An option for interning is available for any of the volunteers provided they have the academic credentials. Staff selection usually consists of either the director's search for a specialized marketing or curator position for permanent staff or an annual site crew. Many of the employees and volunteers are associated with an interest for the arts either being artists themselves or obtaining a degree related to a particular art field.

Interning at Sculpture by the Sea provides copious amounts of information about the background and history of the festival as well as an in depth look at the organization that goes into it and the contemporary views of the collaborators and artists of the festival. A volunteer/intern's tasks consist generally of the basic labour needed in the large event. The most prominent of these is recording people's choice award data. The people's choice award is a prize of two thousand dollars awarded to an artist or group of artists for the honour of creating the sculpture most liked by the people. This aspect of the festival is so vital for the connection to public arts and aesthetics. The ballots served as survey data for this study. Provided in every catalogue or available at multiple drop-in boxes, were the ballots with written questions.

The ballot asked for the number of the preferred sculpture, which can be identified by the numbered plaque in front of the sculpture. The ballot also asks for the name of the patron, an optional address and email address for purposes of recording statistics of where each person resides in and how far the event's reputation reaches. The ballot also requests information on the person's mode of transportation, age, how he or she heard of the festival and if the person had attended Sculpture by the Sea in previous years. The ballot also asks if the patron travelled to Sydney for

the sole purpose of attending the festival, as well as questions on whether he or she wants to receive further information on other Sculpture by the Sea events or if that person wants to be a supporter of the organization. In addition to this the ballot asks for any comments that the person wants to make about the year's festival in general. All of this information is stored not only for the people's choice award but also for ways of gaining more supporters, preparing for the following year's show in regards to advertising, securing ways of access and convenience and towards what age group is this festival appropriate for. This serves this study by displaying again the organization and also the insight of the public about the festival and it also shows the amount of people who benefit from the exhibition.

The people's choice award data entry is not the only task appointed to a Sculpture by the Sea volunteer. Selling catalogues and calendars is another important part of the internship. Catalogue and calendar sales are huge in sustaining the event. The exhibition being free needs plenty of funding from both federal and private organizations and seeing as how most of its funding is private, the Sculpture by the Sea company must try to make up for the cost of the show. Participating in catalogue sales serve as a method of researching the cost of an immense public arts exhibition and ways of supporting itself through optional merchandise sales.

Methodology of this intern study also consisted of research for Sculpture by the Sea's contact list of international sculptors. In the particular case of this tenth annual festival, the people at Sculpture by the Sea has been putting an emphasis on African artists as they see a lack of this culturally specific style in the festival. Volunteer work was conducted in the form of finding African galleries or studios and specific African sculptors over the Internet in order to collect contact information. This again served as important fieldwork observing the layered structure and process

of Sculpture by the Sea's preparation. Further intern work included an artists' night patrol, in which volunteers or site crew members and artists are paired together to patrol the exhibition's grounds and boundaries during the evening in order to prevent any vandalism that might occur. This provided one on one discussion with a couple of artists. Other volunteer work consisted of marking sculptures in the exhibition that were sold.

All of the Sculpture by the Sea intern work offered interactions and interviews with important staff members as well as other volunteers. In addition to the fieldwork, separate interviews were conducted with David Handley, the director of Sculpture by the Sea, Holly Fisher, the festival's exhibition manager, and Axel Arnott, the site curator of the festival. These were conducted at the Sculpture by the Sea headquarters in Surry Hills, Sydney. As part of a volunteer staff benefit, every Sunday of the two and a half week show, both artists and staff members involved were invited to the Ice Burg's bar on Bondi for a social gathering. Here fellow artists could chat and staff members were able to meet artists and celebrate. Casual interviews and interactions with the artists were conducted here.

Upon the finish of the festival, de-installation of the sculptures commenced and more fieldwork collaboration was conducted. This served as an opportunity to observe the whole packing up process and gain insight for next year's event. By aiding the site crew in the job of securing and removing the sculptures from the Bondi area, more insight and information was received from the workers, whether they were part time or if they had worked with Sculpture by the Sea in previous years. This also presented the opportunity of de-installing the artwork with the artists themselves.

Aside from the actual intern labour, Sculpture by the Sea made many references available covering not only this year's festival but previous ones as well.

Periodicals, which are mostly newspaper articles, serve as reflection of gratitude and excitement for the festival and criticism of the event's direction as well. Sculpture by the Sea offered these resources and also offered some time to talk with the company's media director. Further research continued outside of the Sculpture by the Sea festival with extensive research of public art, public sculpture, sculpture's expression and Sydney's historical art scene as well as its policies regarding the public arts. This was mostly conducted at Sydney's State Library and the University of Sydney's Fisher Library. Some research was conducted at the University of Melbourne's library.

The books *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, *Art, Space and the City: Public and Urban Futures* and *Acts of Engagement: Writings on Art, Criticism and Institutions* were analysed to support the discussion of the purpose of public arts and more specifically public sculpture. The book *Monumental Queensland: Signposts on a Cultural Landscape* was used to bring up the relevance of various forms of public sculpture in Australia. The article *Arts Managers and Managerialism: A Cross Sector Analysis of CEOs' Orientation Skills* was analysed to provide a model for the differing art markets for public and private venues. Various periodicals and policy proposals were used for details on the Sculpture by the Sea's success and the leading public arts efforts in Sydney.

What is Sculpture by the Sea?

The birth of the Sculpture by the Sea Festival began in 1997 when David Handley put on a show with a number of sculptural pieces in the Bondi walkway to Tamarama over the course of four days, but its vision had stretched before that. Handley, a native to Sydney has always loved social-cultural matters in

sophistication³ and he has always loved the city of Sydney. He laments on his youthful days when Australia was what he calls a simple place. But when the jet age emerged, many great Australian artists in their own right went overseas and expanded Australian culture. At the same time Handley holds a lot of anger towards marketing and commercialising at that time and still resents it today. He uses rock and roll as a prime example of how the market has ruined a truly great aspect of fine arts.

A student of law in his early twenties he quit the practice in 1994 and fled to Prague to recuperate. It was in an area of the Czech Republic called Klatovy that David was inspired by sculpture. In this small town was a contemporary sculpture garden set among thirteenth century ruins. It was a touching moment for him and he comments on how he wondered why Sydney didn't have something like this. He compares what he aspired to create to other domain free venues in Sydney like Jazz in the Park. Events like these brought strangers together to admire something beautiful. David would only say, "What a sense of community."⁴ He wanted to have something that added to the reputation of Australia in this way.

At this point David was working as a film producer and had an ideal job set up in New Zealand. Unfortunately the career fell through and David went back to Sydney to again reevaluate things. In December of 1996, David was walking on the path from Bondi Beach to Tamarama and it was then that he foresaw the location of the Sculpture by the Sea festival. Handley recalls thinking that it was the perfect location, as it was pleasant on its own and literally thousands of people would see it inevitably. It was at this stage that he immediately began preparation for production of the monumental event. Handley made a call to the Sydney Council and the

³ David Handley

⁴ Handley

Waverly Council in Bondi in February of 1997 and was granted the space for production but with only a five hundred dollar budget.

The only problem at this point was that he practically had no contacts. Through a combination of phoning artists at random and enlisting artists through friends they shared he had something going. One of his friends worked at a gallery called Christie's and through there he was able to gain a lot of access to the arts. Through luck and chance he recruited artists such as Ron Robertson Swan, a renowned Australian artist, and more as exhibitors and judges. One artist even turned out to be by coincidence a schoolmate of David's. David was also able to secure more funding through private sponsors. The first Sculpture by the Sea Festival had a total budget of eleven thousand dollars. The festival was an immediate success in 1997, attracting over twenty five thousand viewers. David immediately knew he wanted to keep the event going.

In 1998 Handley had a huge break when the director of the Olympic Arts Festival in Sydney commissioned his company. Sculpture by the Sea was funded with a good one hundred fifty thousand dollars over the course of an eighteen month production, which Handley now says he would never do again as that kind of funding hardly covers the cost of salary over that long of a work period. But at the time, this funding was extremely good considering the budget the company had had the previous year. In 1999 show, the festival became much more costly as the company expanded the festivals length to a nine day show as opposed to a four day show. This increased the cost exponentially and to add to that poor weather conditions detracted the audience and which only worsened the cost of the show. The best thing that came out of the 99 show was the induction of Axel Arnott to the staff of Sculpture by the Sea. Arnott who had had a good amount of experience in landscape training became

the new site curator and took to Sculpture by the Sea like a duck in water⁵ as David remembers.

It was at this point that the staff of Sculpture by the Sea had to be considered. The festival was working on a budget of one hundred sixty five thousand dollars and the staff was working next to nothing. David had to rely on more volunteers for the success of the show. It was in 2000 that David identifies with when the festival really became a real project, and through vigorous efforts Sculpture by the Sea was getting the sufficient funding it needed, but mostly through private and corporate sponsors. The festival was running parallel to the 2000 summer Olympics in Sydney. The public loved it and treated it as what Handley calls a post Olympic party. It has been from 2000 that the show really took off, and Sculpture by the Sea has been able to expand its staff and its budget, although Handley comments that the years 2002 and 2003 were scarring ones that he has only recently been able to heal from. During these years when the show was in such high demand its production length was extended, the process of securing funds was extremely difficult and too close to call. Fortunately it was during these years that sculpture sales boomed.

This year's tenth annual Sculpture by the Sea Festival has progressed dramatically from the first production. It has a budget of nine hundred thousand dollars as opposed to eleven thousand. Again this funding of show derives from a small percentage of federal organizations such as the Australian Council for the Arts or the NSW Ministry for the Arts, and a large percentage from major corporate funding partners like Kodak, NAB, Sydney Water, Transfield, Vertel and Lipton etc. These funding partners are able to provide free services for the audience such as free water and beverages or free photo development. Sculpture by the Sea now has eight

⁵ Handley

full time staff members and four part time staff members as well as an ample number of volunteers. The festival itself was able to showcase from the second to the nineteenth of November. It has been able to provide education programs for youth groups in which exhibiting artists go into detail about certain pieces in the exhibition and lead art crafted projects with the kids as well. The festival has displayed one hundred and eighty eight different sculptures by artists all over Australia as well as twenty four international artists and ten specially invited artists.

The company of Sculpture by the Sea doesn't just cease work after the end of the annual festival. In February, a call is put out artists all over the world. This is done through contact research and advertising. The application deadline for entering a piece is late April. Artists are notified by early May. During mid May site meetings are held. The artists have until October fourth to complete their sculptures. During this time, Sculpture by the Sea is looking for cash subsidies for the artists, securing sponsors for the festival, conducting publicity reports, handling council meetings and conducting artists' surveys in order to get honest feedback from the artists. Sculpture by the Sea also prepares for its counterpart festival in Perth in March, which is now reaching its third annual mark. Sculpture by the Sea also commissions for other events such as memorials or monuments. The company has also branched off into a new enterprise called Sculpture International, which handles commissioning and sculpture sales. And David Handley's most recent project is the creation of a permanent sculpture garden in the Middlehead area of Sydney for everyone to enjoy.

Sculpture by the Sea has come a long way since it was started from scratch with no contacts and very little funding. It is a public arts event that adds to the cultural attraction of Australia and one that is one of Sydney's most successful attractions. It does have a more commercial market than it did when it was created,

and this is a fact that Handley struggles with a little. He doesn't want the sales portion of the festival to become the driving force behind it but at the same time is proud that it is helping struggling artists. Handley is trying to keep the festival operating as closely to his original ideals as he can.

Sydney in the Shadows of Melbourne

Many Australians invested in the arts would ask why someone would want to analyse anything having to do with public arts in Sydney when Melbourne has such a prestigious reputation for its artistic culture. As far as Australian identity goes, Melbourne identifies itself as being the art hub of Australia. In many respects this is accurate. Melbourne has more of an involvement in its public art space. Federation Square is the quintessential example of art being utilized in the city's public space, in the heart of the city. Melbourne is home to artistically influenced suburbs such as Fitzroy, which is home to many contemporary artists leading the way in modern art. The city does hold more public art galleries and venues than Sydney does or so that is what many art academics would confer. Even the architecture of Melbourne seems more artistically influenced than that of Sydney's. Melbournites very often state that Sydney's art market is too commercial and lacking creativity. But is this true, or is it the result of an age-old rivalry between the two cities?

It is common to hear someone from Melbourne cast insults towards Sydney just as a person from Sydney might slander Melbourne. But is it true that Sydney's art market is much more inferior than Melbourne's or even almost invisible? Shouldn't the federal government be investing in the phenomenon of the public arts. According to Palmer the National-Liberal Party has staked a claim in the public arts as a priority. He writes,

The current Liberal-National Party government was elected in March 1996 on a platform that continued this approach. It has promised to review tax arrangements to encourage private and corporate donations to the arts, establish an Arts Benefactors Awards to publicly recognize

individual and corporate support to the arts, and ‘restructure the Australian Foundation for Culture and the Humanities so that its principal emphasis is on encouraging culture of private philanthropy and benefaction to the arts.’⁶

Sculpture by the Sea is a public art event that is extremely influential in Australia’s three dimensional art realms and it takes place in of all places, Sydney. If Melbourne’s art reputation is reigning, why is Australia’s largest sculpture event being held in a city with a potentially very poor art market? The answer is that Sydney does have an art presence but one that is kept quiet due to it’s giant sized neighbour, Melbourne. It is extremely difficult for artists to gain recognition while basing themselves in Sydney. Listed on the following page is an excerpt from the City Life & Culture proposal for Sydney’s development, which includes public arts programs. This is serving as a model that Sydney does have patrons who are making an effort to promote public arts, but whether or not the Sydney Council approves of projects is another thing.

François Limondin, a Sydney artist originating from France exhibiting one of his pieces in the Sculpture by the Sea festival expresses the difficulty that Sydney artists must face to be known. He expands on the idea that there is a lack of renowned artists in Sydney because many try to climb the ranks leave Sydney for not only the more prestigious Melbourne, but also other countries with a more reputable art presence as well. He states,

It’s very hard. Sydney has practically no art market. Everyone goes to study art in Melbourne, because there is more of a market there. Australia has very little of an art market. Europe or the United States has much more of an art market because it has more of a history and Australia is very young!⁷

But the problem is that this sentiment is promoting far too much corporate sponsorship rather than federal funding. Sydney really doesn’t have enough funding to produce an abundance of public art events on the scale of Sculpture by the Sea or

⁶ Palmer, 437-438.

⁷ François Limondin

Melbourne's many public arts productions. Limondin continued saying there aren't really any great artists in Sydney and that they all reside in Melbourne, although Mrs. Limondin, also present for the conversation at the Ice Burg's social strongly disagreed and pointed out that impressive artists can still be found in Sydney especially in the Surry Hills area.

The part of Sydney known as Surry Hills is an art centred district within the large metropolitan area. It is a community of many aspiring artists. Surry Hills is home to many smaller less commercial galleries. Sculpture by the Sea's office can be found in Surry Hills. The Australian Council for the Arts headquarters can also be found in Surry Hills. The council aside from supporting Sculpture by the Sea with sponsorship also helps to fund many of the surrounding venues in Surry Hills not to mention many others all around the country. Its mission statement is the following, "The Australia Council is the Australian government's arts funding and advisory body. It directly supports young, emerging, and established artists, as well as new and established organizations."⁸ The Surry Hills area of Sydney certainly contains some of the leading collaborators and patrons with Sydney's art scene.

Still the fact remains that Melbourne's presence is extremely intimidating and the fact that Sydney lacks federal support and as a result of that many artists are discouraged from remaining in Sydney and instead tend to endure an apprenticeship in Melbourne or as Limondin had commented on before, a more historically endowed international setting. Yet Sculpture by the Sea is still able to exhibit Sydney artists' works, which is a difficult task when so many are being dissuaded to stay in the city. Its private sponsors put money directly into the hands of the artists for production, which imitates artists less in creating wonderful pieces of art. Michael Brenson's *Acts*

⁸ "About us: Who and Why We Are." *About Us Pages*.
http://www.ozco.gov.au/the_council/about_us/who_and_why_we_are/ (3 Dec. 2006).

of Engagement analyses the roles that public art has with urban developments. In it he references a young artist named Beverly Semmes who stresses the importance of funding. He states,

Part of what she regrets about the diminishing number of grants to individual artists is that, in her view, many young artists believe they have no choice except to make smaller work because it has a better chance of succeeding in the gallery system.⁹

Perhaps this is true, and the deficiency of funding in Sydney prohibits the artists from really exhibiting wonderful things. Fortunately Sculpture by the Sea does this through private means. David Handley states, “One of the great achievements of Sculpture by the Sea has been making sculpture accessible again and providing an income for artists who would have otherwise struggled.”¹⁰

Greg Bachmayer is a Sydney artist also exhibiting a piece in the Sculpture by the Sea festival. He is studying for a degree in design. He used the following analogy to represent the appeal and relationship of both Sydney and Melbourne. He says,

It’s like Sydney and Melbourne are sisters. Sydney is the blonde bombshell, the real beautiful one, but not too bright. Melbourne is the sister that’s the real interesting one but a bit more bland looking. You know you should be into the interesting one but you keep getting pulled towards the hot one.¹¹

Bachmayer is expressing that Sydney has an easier life style than Melbourne does. There is definitely more of an art scene in Melbourne but Sydney’s attractions are very strong. Bachmayer was surprised when hearing about a student from Melbourne conducting a project in Sydney on the public arts. His sentiments are that Melbourne has much more overall in the arts, but again he recognizes the pleasant lifestyle of Sydney and notes that Sydney’s art scene has not disappeared, it’s just hard to compete with Melbourne.

David Handley accepts the fact that Sydney is in the shadow of Melbourne’s art industry. “Sydney’s public art is an international disgrace,” he states. “Our

⁹ Brenson, 273.

¹⁰ Handley

¹¹ Greg Bachmayer

political leaders are a big joke when considering public art.”¹² Handley praises Melbourne in fact for having a much larger federal investment in the public arts. Sydney government funding is sparse for the Sculpture by the Sea festival and yet the event still does wonderful things for the city’s morale. The media promotes the spectacle with very little mention that it is largely privately sponsored show with claims to fame of it being Sydney’s event. The Sydney magazine stated, “Ten years after it sputtered into existence, our most popular outdoor event shows no sign of slowing down.”¹³

Handley is trying to boost the public art scene in Sydney but the federal funding he receives is insufficient. It is through private and corporate sponsors that an event such as this can come into existence. Perhaps this is a good thing or at least a good way to start a rejuvenation in Sydney’s artistic side. There is a large debate over the objectives of federally funded versus privately funded public arts. With very little assistance from the federal sponsor, the Sculpture by the Sea is still forming a huge poster child for Sydney’s cultural industry and possibly with more control over the presentation of the art.

Sculpture’s Public Orientation

*The most fundamental change that has affected museums [in the last fifty years] is the now almost universal conviction that they exist in order to serve the public.*¹⁴

What is the goal of a public arts venue? Would there really be a lack of patrons if magnificent events like Sculpture by the Sea charged admission? These are questions that need answering when looking at the success of the public arts in Sydney. The goal of public art marketing is tied into making art accessible to the

¹² Handley

¹³ Mark Chipperfield, *The Sydney Magazine* Nov. 2006: 20.

¹⁴ Neil Harris, “The Divided House of the American Art Museum,” *Daedus* (1999) 38.

people but also has much to do with divided objectives. Ian Palmer of the University of Technology in Sydney, stresses this stating, “Arts organizations contain a range of multiple and often conflicting objectives such as social, aesthetic, and financial objectives.”¹⁵ It is true that public art exhibitions such as Sculpture by the Sea do make art more accessible for the public and there is a passionate investment in this, but public art, especially public art that is advertised annually, has partially a commoditized purpose. In Ian Palmer’s article *Art Managers and Managerialism: A Cross Sector Analysis of CEOs’ Orientation Skills*, he quotes Paul Keating’s *Creative Nation* address in 1994. Paul Keating was quoted saying, “In it, cultural industries were referred to as generating \$13 billion per annum, employing a third of a million Australians, and contributing to innovation, creativity, marketing, tourism, and Australia’s economic success.”¹⁶ Public art certainly has a connection to the economic success of the city. To elaborate, the intention is not to make it seem that all of Sydney’s public art is associated with a secret agenda to commercialize itself. There is no denying that most public art is a productive benefit for Sydney’s community. It enriches the lives of the people who view it and adds a cultural value to the city. But it also serves a commercial market. Palmer states, “Peterson argues that the use of the term cultural industry runs the danger of ‘being locked into economic rationalist argument about marketability’ of particular cultural industries.”¹⁷ Alternative objectives for such an event like the Sculpture by the Sea festival are real and must be explored.

Sculpture by the Sea is without a doubt one of Australia’s most successful art events. With such a reputation and so much demand for it, the city of Sydney benefits

¹⁵ Ian Palmer, *Art Managers and Managerialism: A Cross Sector Analysis of CEOs’ Orientation Skills* (Sydney, Public Productivity & Management Review, 1996) 434.

¹⁶ Palmer, 435.

¹⁷ Palmer, 435.

from this publicity. Sydney even commissioned the company for its 1998 Olympic Arts Festival. Sydney has had the opportunity to add Sculpture by the sea as another one of its attractions that it holds for not only residents of Sydney and other interstate Australians as well as tourists visiting from foreign countries. The evidence of this is in the people's choice award ballots. Although a majority of the people attending the festival are from Sydney there are still those that are travelling from other parts of New South Wales, or some travelling from Victoria, Queensland or Tasmania. And yes, there are a small percentage of international patrons travelling from such places as the United Kingdom, United States, Mexico, and various European countries.

Many of these out of staters declared that they did not travel to Sydney for the sole purpose of attending the Sculpture by the Sea festival and many attended for reasons of hearing through word of mouth or the media which means that Sydney is definitely advertising this event with flashing colours, which promotes the reputation of the city. Some might disagree with this statement, as the only reason that people were attending the event was not of original intent and therefore it isn't really attracting people from afar. What this statement means is that those who did declare intentional attendance are more often already involved in the art patronage or are connected to the artist exhibiting in the festival and have very little interest in the city or the festival as a holiday experience. Still the fact remains that these specific patrons are benefiting Sydney by attending the newly acknowledged city attraction, whether they mean to or not. And there are those who specifically did attend the event out of sheer curiosity and a general enjoyment of viewing a random public arts event. But what is meant by this previous statement is that the tenth annual Sculpture by the Sea festival has received a fair amount of coverage by now and the city of Sydney can now identify it as one of its routine allures that it can sell to tourists.

This is the commoditized goal of the public art exhibition. But is this a bad thing? In Rosalyn Deutsche's *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, the image of New York City is analysed in her second chapter and how public art is a means to improve its image. She states, "But it is community, as both territory and social form, that redevelopment destroys, converting the city into a terrain organized to fulfil capital's need to exploit space for profit."¹⁸ It certainly promotes a cultural heritage to the city. An address made by the Department of the Arts, Sport, the Environment and Territories in 1992 quoted in Palmers article stated, "The cultural industry contributes significantly to Australia's social and economic well-being. The government seeks to foster conditions favourable to the development of a vigorous cultural industry."¹⁹ If a city like Sydney wants to have a strong flourishing art market, especially when art holds a huge profitable industry, it must make its art presence into a commodity that some critics, especially those in Melbourne, might see as 'tacky' or in other words too superficial or commercial. Deutche references the mayor of New York Ed Koch's address on the aesthetics of the city in 1988. She writes,

As further proof of the advantages of New York's 'ascendancy,' Koch's planned speech stressed his administration's interest in the aesthetics of the city –its revitalization of the municipal art commission, programs of flexible zoning regulations, planning controls, design review panels. And public art. 'Once again' the speech asserted, 'public art has become a priority.'²⁰

An aesthetic appeal of the city is important and promotes a well-managed city.

Sydney is not alone in promoting cultural heritage through means of public art. Lisanne Gibson and Joanna Besley's *Monumental Queensland: Signposts on a Cultural Landscape* addresses the type of public art that is dominant in the state. The book references the Burra Charter, a policy on promoting cultural heritage. It defines cultural heritage significance as "aesthetic, historic, scientific or social value for past,

¹⁸ Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996) 67.

¹⁹ Palmer, 435.

²⁰ Deutsche, 56

present or future generations.²¹” In Gibson and Besley’s book, most of the public art being discussed is corporate sculptures that are used to promote the community as well as its business. They write “Hedger describes corporate sculpture as ‘the most rapidly growing area of public sculpture’ in Australia. Certainly this long-held Australian tradition of commercial organizations commissioning public art to act as a ‘badge’ for the entrance to the company building has continued.²²” They also reference corporate sponsorships or donations for the cause of public arts. The company Transfield donated a piece of artwork titled *The Red Cube*, which commemorated the opening of the Gateway Bridge²³. It was through a corporate sponsor that city was able to exhibit a permanent sculpture that added to the cultural heritage of the city.

But Sculpture by the Sea isn’t just an urban beautification project in order to improve the image of a suburban community, it’s a major exhibition that brings Australian and international contemporary sculpture to the people of Sydney for free in effort to enrich. Or is it really that different? Transfield, which is one of Sculpture by the Sea’s biggest funding partners, just so happens to be the company that donated *The Red Cube* to Brisbane. As a result Sydney is able to boost its artistic identity and some would say economy through means of a corporate industry.

When David Handley was exposed to public sculpture gardens in the Czech Republic, his thought was partially invested in the improvement of Sydney’s appeal, and to make moving artwork accessible for his fellow Sydney neighbours. He stated in a publicized interview, “At the time, I had all the naïve idealism and confidence of a young man. So I decided to create a major, free-to-the public cultural event for

²¹ Lisanne Gibson and Joanna Besley, *Monumental Queensland: Signposts on a Cultural Landscape* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2004) 10.

²² Gibson, Besley 161.

²³ Gibson, Besley 158.

Sydney to showcase the city to the world,”²⁴ So the festival does improve the cultural industry of Sydney, which in a way has served as a commodity to the city. Is this condemnable? No, it’s a result of the good intentioned project. While Sculpture by the Sea makes three-dimensional art more accessible to the public with the aide of some federal funding and a lot of corporate funding, it puts Sydney in the spotlight in return in which many of Sydney’s renowned and upcoming artists alike will be recognized but also puts a corporate partner in the spotlight.

Another alternative method of public art venues is the success of attracting a large audience for their individual benefit and possible profit. A free exhibition with enough publicity will almost certainly attract more people than one that charge an admission fee. With the concern of cost gone, these venues with no admission costs make the art spectacle infinitely more attainable as our society is constantly budgeting the important things in life. With a mass audience reaping the benefits of a free event, it also becomes more susceptible to concessions or secondary material novelties that do cost money. A patron so happy with his or her non-costly experience may no longer question the validity of purchasing a souvenir because that person is guilt free of investing money into something that might not have proven worth while. Sculpture by the Sea has the expectation of attracting a larger audience with it public allure, otherwise it would not invest so much time and money into it.

To elaborate, the Sculpture by the Sea festival does not exactly receive full funding from for its exhibition. In fact it receives little federal funding in comparison with the private funding it receives. It is a very costly production ranging in the \$900,000 mark. So the Sculpture by the Sea Company itself must shell out some funding from its own pockets to produce such an event. In order to sustain itself, it

²⁴ Handley

reverts to catalogue and other novelty item sales. Although many of the exhibition pieces are for sale and the Sculpture by the Sea company gets forty percent of that profit made, this is still a profit by chance operation, meaning that not all of the sculptures will be sold and it will not cover the festival's expenses.

Catalogue sales are crucial for making up for some of the cost of the exhibition and various installations. Catalogues at the festival are themselves important part of the show. Although the exhibition is free, none of the sculptures are labelled by the title, artist or any additional information on the piece. Instead, each piece is numbered which correlates with the numbers in the catalogue, which reveals the details of the sculpture including its title, creator, materials used, the artist's statement, price, and a short biographical blurb about the artist. The catalogue, or programme, also includes a map of the exhibition's boundaries, specially selected page long reviews of specific exhibited works and plenty of contact information for purposes of sales and other Sculpture by the Sea related events. Although it isn't a mandatory purchase and not vital for the people's choice award, a patron would be missing out by remaining uninformed of the sculpture's origin and details.

A person attending Sculpture by the Sea is very likely to purchase a programme with the annoyance of a cover charge lifted, especially if the programme assists in the comprehension of the sculptural works. The programmes cost eight dollars and Sculpture by the Sea anticipated four hundred thousand sales for this year's tenth annual festival. Still it is surprising to discover that for some who are enjoying the free exhibit are revolted by the fact that the catalogues would cost money when it is so important for their knowledge of the art. Many patrons don't realize that it is a small price to pay for such an amazing exhibition. In addition to the catalogues,

calendars are sold for fifteen dollars and kids' guides are sold for five dollars. T-shirts are available to purchase online for twenty four dollars.

Sculpture by the Sea is not the only public art venue that operates this way. Sydney's public art gallery also does not charge admission, but does sell secondary items such as souvenirs. Again, the goal of attracting a strong audience through promoted easy access is the objective. It's valid to think that a public exhibition will attract a larger audience because people like free things. Because of this, souvenir items hold a large potential for profit. But the difference between a real profit and Sculpture by the Sea's sales is that Sculpture by the Sea and other public art venues aren't usually looking to make it rich. Instead it is trying to cover the costs of installation, exhibition space and part time staff employment. Without these types of sales, it would be difficult for the festival to exist. Now that the alternative goals of public venues have been discussed, the intention of generosity and access will be touched upon.

Sculpture by the Sea is a public arts event that fits a social framework of the art industry, thereby meaning that the objective of the show is to educate the public. Sculpture by the Sea most certainly holds education programs literally for the public youth with the artists providing activities, but the festival itself is holds the quality of education just displaying the diverse and magnificent sculptures. This concept of a social framework is one that is explained by Palmer. He addresses the managerial clockwork within the art industry and applies it directly to the Australian art scene. He points out that there are three different types of art managerial orientations.

The first is the aesthetic orientation, in which the primary goal of the venue is to produce an outstanding exhibition. The aesthetic revolves around the overall success or reputation of the show and the audience's reaction to it. The second

orientation is the managerialist orientation in which the objective of the venue is more about profit. The last one that Sculpture by the Sea largely embodies is the social orientation in which the objective of the venue is to educate and add cultural value to the society. He states, “PUB sector arts managers are significantly more likely to opt for a social frame compared to PFP arts managers who are more likely to opt for an aesthetic frame.”²⁵ A PUB being a public arts venue usually tend to make art accessible to the public for the cause of cultural enlightenment and a PFP being a private for profit venue tends embrace or some might even say exploit the art market.²⁶

Sculpture by the Sea is an event that educates and reaches out to the community, and yes it may use corporate sponsors but as Handley put it, “Sponsors are huge helps. They give out free items, and what’s great is that we’re not milking the public for commercial benefit.”²⁷ The sponsors aren’t selling products at the event, instead they donating resources. Handley has to turn to corporate sponsors due to the lack of federal funding. But in every sense of the word Sculpture by the Sea fits a social manager’s orientation.

Aesthetic Versus Conceptual

*What I’m referring to is that moment – the aha moment, epiphanic moment, the moment of recognition, whatever you want to call it-when a connection is made between viewer and work that is intimate and intense enough to convince the viewer that that work, and art in general, is vital to his or her life.*²⁸

Consider the reasons why people like sculpture. Sculptural art catches the eye, as do many forms of visual art. But sculpture plays with the viewers’ dimensions and is extremely visually stimulating. Now consider what a member of the general public

²⁵ Palmer, 446.

²⁶ Palmer, 446.

²⁷ Handley

²⁸ Brenson, 65-66.

would enjoy more at an exhibition, a fantastic eye popping three-dimensional sculpture or a complex yet meaningful, aesthetically lacking sculpture. Gibson and Besley stress the importance of the aesthetic quality in public arts in Queensland. They state, “In relation to public art, for instance, art and architectural theories have judged the aesthetic or design qualities of an object to the aspect of most importance.”²⁹ The public will most likely be drawn to an aesthetically pleasing piece of artwork rather than the concentrated conceptual dull artwork. Now to qualify this statement, conceptual art is also aesthetically pleasing and aesthetic and conceptual are not exactly divided. An eye-popping sculpture does have a concept. But the influences driving art may differ. There are definitely sculptures that emphasize on the aesthetic appeal more so than other sculptures that were created out of motivations to express an elaborate message. Now not to downplay the conceptual side of art, the fact of the matter is that the visually appealing factor will usually dominate in the public’s eye.

The types of sculptures exhibited in Sculpture by the Sea are fantastic, large and chalk full of curves, twists, colour, and a load of visual stimuli. Those that attend are almost always satisfied with the festival and are always in demand for the next year’s show. Given that the exhibition is free and the programmes that explain the artwork’s story are optional, many patrons are completely exuberated solely by the visual rush they’ve just experienced. On the people’s choice award ballots the ‘add your own comments’ lines are usually filled out with praises of excellence. But how many people did the inner meaning of the sculpture touch? Some of the exhibited pieces are easier to infer the conceptual meaning but many stand by themselves as visual fulfilment. These penetrating attractions represent the kind of art that is soluble

²⁹ Gibson, Besley, 9.

with the public, therefore promoting access to arts in general. Artwork that is more aesthetically enjoyable in a free exhibition is able to reach a wider audience.

Now think about the aesthetics of sculpture more deeply. A sculpture can be grasped by any number of people. But the type of art that most of the attendants of Sculpture by the Sea enjoyed most was the more exotic and monumental kind. Now a sculpture exhibition that puts a primary focus on a theme of conceptual detail may draw a crowd. In fact, a few critics have commented on the fact that the festival lacks direction, has no theme and that that is a problem. Very few voiced this opinion in the people's choice award ballots. It is true that the festival itself had a very broad and wide range of artwork, but this is something that the audience enjoys. In Malcolm Miles' *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures*, he addresses the characteristics of public arts and what is most important within the public realm.

He states,

Central to the development of new, more theorised practises of public art is the recognition that there is no 'general public' (only a diversity of specific publics), and the redefinition of its location as the public realm, rather than a physical site assumed to grant access to an undefined public.³⁰

There is no specific audience in the Sculpture by the Sea Festival, and a broader themed exhibition will appeal to what the public really is, not one identity, but a range of identities. The diversity and playfulness of the artwork is more of a promotion of the arts rather than a negative quality. In addition to this, a sculpture exhibition focused primarily on conceptually connected works would not draw as wide of an audience and could possibly attract one of elitist patrons.

The site location would probably not be as favourable with a conceptual or themed show as artists could potentially install in a setting that is involved with the

³⁰ Malcolm Miles, *Art, Space and the City: Public Art and Urban Futures* (London: Routledge, 1997) 84.

particular theme of the exhibition. The Sculpture by the Sea Festival gives artists the freedom to exhibit their own individual work with a less difficult selection process in a location much desired by the public. Bondi being a very visual location combines with the visual draw of the sculptures to attract. Deutsche states, “The lingering abstraction of the sculpture from its space emerges most clearly in the attitude of the work and its supporters toward urgent questions about the use of public space.”³¹ The exhibition is mostly about visual extravagance and the public favours this kind of presentation. The popularity of individual sculptures over others in the exhibition supports this. Examining the people’s choice award shows that more of the attendees enjoyed these sculptures of visual extravagance.

The sculpture selected for the people’s choice award was one titled *Hot with a Chance of a Late Storm*. This sculpture created by a team of artists known as the Glue Society crafted what looks to be a melting Mr. Whippy ice cream truck. It has all the details that a real ice cream truck would have, only distorted due to a fantastic idea of an overwhelming force of the sun. Now the piece certainly has a concept, one of an unquestionable Australian common theme of intensely warm weather and perhaps it comments on global warming as well. The artists’ statement is, “No one is safe from the Australian summer, not even Mr. Whippy.” Whatever the theme may be, the main appeal of this sculpture is one of altering perception. The piece resembles a familiar object in the viewer’s eye, but it is distorted and altered into a state of matter that is not practically conceived of. This sculpture took the people’s choice award and the kids’ choice award, revealing just how popular a work of visual fanaticism can be.

³¹ Deutsche, 62.

Other sculptures that had this overwhelming power of visual protrusion were also more popularly voted on. Sculptures like Jarrod Taylor's *Structural Wind*, which resembled a large whirlwind image made from steel scaffolding, or Richie Kuhaupt's *Layers and Then There's Layers*, which was a collection of small human forms crafted from resin and marble, were extremely popular. The idea that familiar shapes or objects are altered, or the presence of the shape being the strongest appeal, is the focus here. Before viewers conceptualise a piece of artwork, they must first see it. What some artists are trying to do is embrace this visual dominance. In *Acts of Engagement*, Brenson quotes Clement Greenberg who addresses the visual side of sculpture. He is quoted saying, "The human body is no longer postulated as the agent of space in either pictorial or sculptural art. Now it is the eyesight alone, and eyesight has more freedom of movement and invention within three dimensions than within two."³²

Compare these sharp and protruding sculptures to exhibited pieces in the show that held less of an aesthetic sensation and relied more on cryptic messages for its objective. The sculpture titled *Poles Apart* consists of two pillars set in Bondi's rocky cliffs. One pillar has the text 'God is Great' running down its vinyl surface while the other one has the text 'God is Love.' The artist Margot Seares' statement is "God is great and God is Love. Are they really poles apart?" Obviously this sculpture is expressing a religion related opinion. No criticism is being made on the worth of the sculpture, but the public audience did not appreciate this type of art as much as they did with the other more visually stimulating pieces. Again, the evidence is in the people's choice ballots. In addition to the lack of aesthetic appeal, this sculpture hardly fit with the location, but of course that has to do with aesthetic appeal as well.

³² Brenson, 203.

Bondi itself is a visual delight. Art that does not mesh with this rich environment will have difficulty competing with it.

This method of sculpting is an idea that is not new but at the same time not common. A growing inspiration for the artist is simply the aesthetic details of the art. A sculptor might create a piece made mostly of rectangles simply because he or she is moved by the shape. The rectangular sculpture does not need to have a cryptic message about social or political opinions; it can simply be about the visual creativity. Why are people immediately drawn to art? Because it's distorting and altering their visual boredom. The artist has the option of producing art that will deliver conceptual profundity or art that is just simply enjoyed because of its shape, size or surface. Neither form is better than the other. But in the public's eye, and as in the case of the Sculpture by the Sea festival, the aesthetic is much more important and more enjoyed and therefore more accessible.

Conclusion

Sculpture by the Sea is one of those rare public arts spectacles that promote the cultural economy of Sydney without selling itself for commercial benefit. From the very beginning of its creation, it had very little to stand on, but it still prevailed. Its organization and funding have grown immensely and is now seen as one of Sydney's most successful cultural events. But it is not through government means that Sculpture by the Sea is able to sustain itself. Of course it gets funding from the council, but not the amount that a ten year event that by now attracts more than 400,000 people should deserve.

Three issues have been uncovered in this analysis. First: Sydney is lacking an artistic public culture. Sydney's art market is much inferior to Melbourne's but it is not as if the city's artistic community is not trying. Sydney just does not have as

much involvement with its public art venues as Melbourne does. Sculpture by the Sea relies on corporate sponsors, something that is becoming more prominent not just in the Australian public art scene, but the public art scene in general. The festival although promoting the city's art reputation provides evidence of the lack of interest in Sydney's public arts.

Second: Sculpture by the Sea functions as a social oriented venue. Its primary goal is to educate the masses, not to exploit the art market. Although this is the true objective of the event, a commodity is made from the highly illustrious event. But one should not be sceptical of the festival. David Handley's intentions are true to his original ideals. Although the city does not assist in the production of this public art event and others that sculpts a liveable image of the city, it still takes credit for it.

Third: Sculpture by the Sea's aesthetic approach to delivering a quality product to the public is largely successful. The festival's whole system is to make art more accessible to the people, and in addition to its non-costly structure, the art is more enjoyable to the people due to its aesthetic emphasis. The controlled conceptual and amplified aesthetically sculptures are praised well and there is evidence that the more visually stimulating sculptures are the more preferred ones. Given that Sculpture by the Sea has a plentiful amount of visually illuminating works of art, the audience is more than satisfied.

Sculpture by the Sea serves as an example of how an individual can press through the difficulties of little support and produce a world wide appreciated phenomenon. David Handley's original method of doing this was acting more as an impresario with his charm and contacts and now he has turned into the manager, which is a position that cannot be ignored in any industry, especially the art industry. The hope for Sydney's artistic rejuvenation lies not in the city's sponsorship, or at

least not at the moment, but in corporate sponsorship, which may at first have a negative connotation, but Handley handles it with maturity. His corporate partners will not exploit the festival. By now he is exploiting the sponsors both federal and corporate to make the art as accessible as possible without the lure of capitalism. The money that does come from sales goes directly into the artists' hands and this does not need to be dwelled upon as a market driven organization.

To sum up what this study was trying to observe one should note the three findings that touched upon at the beginning of this conclusion. Does Sydney really lack an art market? Yes, considerably, but it is not invisible. It is just being quelled by the city government's obliviousness to the need for public art as a cultural promoter.

Is Sculpture by the Sea combating the death of Sydney's art market through means of public arts? Yes, but not by federal funding. It relies on private donations and corporate partnerships. Because the Sydney council refuses to support events like these with a substantial endowment, it is essential that these organizations like Sculpture by the Sea recruit as much sponsorship as it can, but without taking advantage of the public's wallets. Brenson states, "It is essential to fund projects that are process-based, that approach process as product, that are organic and open-ended and that can therefore evolve overtime, even year."³³ Sculpture by the Sea has certainly done that. Over the course of ten years it has multiplied its productivity ten folds. With more sponsorship it will be able to give back to the community so much and it is apparent that this company is already doing that with its production of a permanent sculpture garden in Middlehead. Whether further funding comes from the federal side or more from the private and corporate remains to be seen.

³³ Brenson, 274.

Lastly, Sculpture by the Sea's sense of visual sensation promotes the city's community development. The audience prefers a fantastic visual spectacle and that's what it gets year after year. Complete strangers are brought together along the Bondi pathway and rejoice together over the marvellous production of art that is being created on the city's home turf as well as all over the country and across the globe. Sculpture by the Sea has difficulty to stride past, but so far is making an excellent effort in providing accessible culture to the public.

Looking Back

Conducting this study has added fruitful experience to my fieldwork career.

When first approaching the project, I wanted to take on so much. My goal was to involve myself or make contact with multiple public arts venues and to observe how the city is involved with these productions. My eyes were bigger than my stomach, so to speak in this case. Conducting a project like that would have taken much longer than the given length of a month. This project has helped me think more rationally about the focus of analysis. Sometimes smaller is actually bigger and in this case that was true.

The Sculpture by the Sea Festival was such a large public arts event that embodied all of the aspects that I wanted to touch upon. Even though it was so successful, I was still able to receive insight about the lack of support it received from the city. Also by focusing primarily on this one venue of the study, I was able to obtain a meaningful and fruitful connection to the study, as it was an area that I was interested in and it helped formed good contacts for references.

As far as the fieldwork itself went, my interview skills vastly improved. I learned that sometimes a script is just obsolete and that you just have to go with a casual mindset. The artists being interviewed would go off on tangents that was relevant to my study but ones that I had not considered before. I also learned a bit about my productivity in a major study like this. I had much more confidence in just doing the work rather than questioning whether or not I could do it.

Something that I will take back from this experience aside from the prestigious references I now have is the mindset of not procrastinating as much as I have in the past. With a short amount of time to conduct a study like this, a month can still deceive someone of the time he or she actually has. I might have procrastinated in the

beginning of this study, but after the first week, it really started to hit me that I needed to manage my time better. Putting aside the research and writing portion of my project while I was interning made it difficult to catch up later. But luckily without even realizing it, I just jumped into it, which is not something I do often with big elaborate projects.

What I took back from this project was really organizational skills and more confidence to jump into the situation. An elaborate field study requires time and effort, which I was willing to give for this project. One of the best aspects of this effort was that it was still achievable even with the intimidation of being in a foreign country. I didn't exactly feel the most experienced at this event not only because I am a student but also because I had little experience with the Australian art scene. The experience has helped me gain insight on the preparation that goes into a large project such as this.

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