Notes from Workshop #33:

Art in the Public Realm: Forging, Reflecting, and Informing Urban Identities

January 20, 2018

Pedro Alonzo, as a curator for arts in public places, will discuss his experience and lessons learned about site and artist selection, and about the challenges in developing mural projects that, among other features, provide opportunities for all—adults, kids—to participate.

With Pedro’s work as background, participants will have the opportunity to develop a site-specific project and how that project can incorporate/reflect these critical components:

• location
• determination of a relevant issue
• approaching a community
• creation of a platform for engagement and interaction

For Pedro’s presentation, click here.

Review of Philadelphia Mural Arts’ 2015 “Open Source” initiative

• Framework: informed by civic engagement, reveal Philadelphia’s unique urban environment
• Emphasis on arts education, involving 2000 students/year, all of whom were paid
• Resulting murals seen as a by-product of civic engagement/strong links to the various communities that participated, and to the issues within those communities: e.g...
  • Restorative Justice Program: employing inmates to paint murals on parachute cloth
  • Porch Light program: collaboration between Mural Arts and City Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual disability Services
• Artists/works included:
  • Sam Durant: “Labyrinth”: chain-link fence next to City Hall; initially transparent onto which people could post statements/hang personal items. Metaphor for labyrinth of mass incarceration.
  • SWOON: focus on those struggling with substance abuse. Worked with population at women’s correctional facility to get their story out, generating portraits that became the mural’s content.
  • Michelle Ortiz: immigration-focused work to protest deportation: closed down a city block, in middle of the night, to stencil “we are human beings fighting for our family and survival.” People being processed for deportation would look out the window and see that.
- Jonathan Monk: emphasis on sculpture that is “touchable” and works with the community; became skateboarding site
- Others artists included: MOMO, Shinique Smith

### Trustees of Reservations’ “Art and the Landscape” initiative
- Navigating the Trustees’ properties with family
  - World’s End with kids; Old Manse with stepfather and kids
  - What makes each of these places unique? It’s the history.
- Brought Sam Durant to the Old Manse in Concord, MA, to see what he might reveal about the place, and how to make that happen
  - Created “The Meeting House” installation as connection/meeting point in which to confront legacy of slavery; referenced “Black Walden” (2009) and legacy of slavery
  - Break through suburban isolation
  - Commissioned four African-American poets to respond to the site
- Jeppe Hein, World’s End (Hingham, MA) “Mirror Labyrinth”
  - About presence, wellness, wellbeing
  - Had to walk a mile, decompress, before getting to the piece

### JR in Tecate, Mexico
- Pedro’s question: what can I do as a curator to humanize the issue/reframe relationship between Mexico and the US?
- Giving voice to the forgotten
- JR mural: little boy looking over the border fence in Mexico.
- Found the boy, found the boy’s family, got mother’s approval
- Hired local workers, with border patrol continuing to ask what was going on
- Work around permitting requirements: “just do it.”

### Open Discussion:
- Arts funding being cut: so those that are allowed to play usually do have still some sort of privilege, be it racial or economic.
  - Response: street art can be “low tech”: examples for how you can make a statement.
  - Shepard Fairey has kits to teach you how to make your stencil, to encourage others to put thing in public space.
  - From Pedro: acknowledges that his role is exclusive and has to use his opinions to formulate what is “worthy.” Thinks a healthy environment is in co-existing.
- What makes an artist good at facilitating?
  - Basic human need to reach out
  - Some artists are very uncompromising on what they do/ their vision: doesn’t end up well for the artist or the community
  - Flexibility, determination, desire to want to make this happen
  - Skills to pull it off
- What do you need from the organization to make it work?
  - Organization willing/affirming they are with Pedro to not make everyone happy
  - Clarity re objectives?
- Pedro’s goals: (1) connect an artist with the greater public; (2) get street art to be taken seriously; (3) don’t dilute art when it’s put through a host institution.
- Important to have diversity
  - What happens to the authorship in that space?
    - Is it enhanced by the social environment in which it is happening?
    - When it’s more about the community and not about the artist, the artist can believe that authorship is compromised
    - Ben Bruce: happy to give away his authorship at times. No matter what, you have to look at the parameters you have and work to get it done.
    - Be critical of social practice: whose art is considered to represent that? Arts Education and Community Art often focus on marginalized people. Has that always been what it means? “We all have the right to choose our own beauty.”
    - Really had to justify who does and doesn’t enter into the artistic space