



The Public Art of Fort Wayne, Indiana

Angie Quinn

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From February 5th to June 2nd, 2013, the British Museum presented a major exhibition entitled: “Ice Age Art: Arrival of the Modern Mind.” The curators created a unique series of juxtaposition between known art works by Picasso, Matisse, Mondrian and others, with prehistoric sculpture, ceramic works, and drawings, in order to show the long history of modern humans and their “fundamental human desire to communicate and make art as a way of understanding ourselves and our place in the world.”¹

Place-making is a fundamental human activity and may provide the best way to differentiate the difference between “private” and “public” art.

Private art is easy to define and understand. It is the art we purchase for our homes (whether it matches the sofa or not), or experience in the privacy of a secret garden. It might even be a personal talisman, adorning our ears, or fingers, or hidden in a pocket. It includes the artwork we encounter at a gallery or museum, and even though many others might be present, our interaction with the art is usually just with ourselves, or perhaps our spouses or children. Such art is usually created by the artist without consideration for future audiences. If it’s good, someone might buy it. If it’s great, someone might hang it in a gallery or museum.

So, just what constitutes public art? How is it differentiated from “private” art? Public art is that which is to be experienced by a “public:” the community, open to all, supported by public funds, or specifically created to be experienced by the masses. Public art can have an aura of permanency, or might be ephemeral, such as a public street performance, a parade, or a Christo installation. It can include architecture and landscape architecture: both of which are

¹ http://www.britishmuseum.org/whats_on/past_exhibitions/2013/ice_age_art/about_the_exhibition.aspx, accessed March 23, 2014.

designed to be enjoyed outdoors. In general though, Public Art is a collaborative activity between artist and community, and artist and the intended site.

A 1977 sociological study of public monuments further defines the “public”: “‘public’ means ‘pertaining to the people of a country or locality’, further’ ‘done or made by or on behalf of the community as a whole’, and ‘open to general observation’... [The] word ‘public’ suggests a wide audience.”²

The “public” who views public art is idiosyncratic, according to Martin Zebracki, of the Urban and Regional Research Center, of Utrecht University, the Netherlands. He notes that the bulk of people who view public art are “undirected observers in an open urban field. This is in sharp contrast with the ‘directed’, namely specific, publics that voluntarily choose to visit and enjoy culture and arts venues.”³

Monuments and large-scale architecture have been the most common forms of public art for millennia. Pyramids, Gothic cathedrals, and such large scale works have always been meant to awe and inspire the public. Statues of honored heroes, gods, poets, and legendary figures have graced crossroads for a variety of purposes, but always with the intention that such pieces would be acknowledged by passersby.

Another form of public art might be found in the petroglyphs made by low-technology people of long ago. A few examples have been found in the Midwest, but few in Indiana. Likely locations—such as the top of the easily-climbable Hanging Rock National Natural Monument near Lagro—often have been obscured by a continuous marking by humans as they visit. It is not known if earlier hands left their marks here.

² Doezema, M., & Hargrove, J. *The Public Monument and Its Audience*. Kent: The Kent State University Press, 1977. Found in *GeoJournal: Spatially Integrated Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2011, and accessed online, March 23, 2014.

³³ Zebracki, Martin. “Beyond Public Artopia: Public Art as Perceived by its Publics.” In *GeoJournal: Spatially Integrated Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2011, and accessed online, March 23, 2014.

At the time of Fort Wayne's founding and early development public art in the Americas included the designed plat for the District of Columbia, the architectural design for the United States Capital, and the first of many monuments to our fallen heroes of the American Revolution and the War of 1812.

During the 1850s the earliest examples of what can be termed "public art" were constructed in Fort Wayne. Designed by architects the spires of the Cathedral and other Gothic Revival churches reached for the sky, while the landscape architecture of Lindenwood Cemetery was designed to be a public landscape for honoring the dead or having a picnic. Reflecting ponds, picturesque bridges and other design features were intended to create a harmonious design that elevated it above its graveyard cohort.

By the 1870s and 1880s architects were designing homes in the West Central neighborhood. And, while these Queen Anne style homes were designed for private use, the amount of jee-jaws and ornamentation were clearly designed to be viewed by the admiring public.

The desire for public art continued to expand so that by 1884 the cast-iron, double-intersecting through-truss designed Wells Street Bridge also featured decorative portals with center plaques, and other design elements that clearly set it apart from the average, ordinary iron bridge of the day. And, these public-pleasing features have helped to preserve the bridge in its original location, and led to its inclusion in the River Greenway system and listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1887 Maumee Valley Monumental Association formed to develop a plan for highlighting the historic battles of the region. Newspaper reports of the organization and its goals were frequent, providing sufficient information for historian Rex Potterf to write a short history of their activities. Potterf was able to describe the rationale, and goals of the organization, and these serve as a model for subsequent public art efforts in Fort Wayne:

"The stated purpose of the association was to obtain from Congress appropriations for the erection of memorial buildings or monuments at the old battle grounds and fort that formed a chain of defense along the Maumee River from Fort Wayne to Lake Erie. There was the hope that Congress would provide for the purchase of the sites of old Indian fortifications, Fort

Meigs, Defiance, Recovery, Miami and Wayne with the purpose of keeping alive for future generations the patriotism of the people...the association sought to extend its influence and increase its membership by holding its membership meeting at Fort Wayne on September 10, 1887...[and again in 1888]...Former President Rutherford B. Hayes headed a delegation...from Ohio...[planning soon began for the] Old Fort site at the northwest corner of East Main and Clay Street...Plans rapidly proliferated for a suitable commemoration of the origin of the old fort...included the erection of a liberty pole nearly seventy-five feet in length in the center of the iron-fenced enclosure...⁴

In 1897 the Allen County Courthouse design was completed by local architect Brentwood S. Tolan in the newly popular Beaux Arts style. After the groundbreaking and laying of the cornerstone was celebrated in November of 1897, the community watched as Tolan's design became reality. Historian Michael Hawfield captures both the rationale and the public reaction to the Courthouse in this passage from his recent history:

“Sculpted images and bold inscriptions encircle the building on its friezes and cornices as a sermon in stone proclaiming the high values of civilization, law, and historical accomplishment. These were stirring images and concepts for the people of Fort Wayne and Allen County just before the turn of the century....All of this was founded in and made possible by the ideals of democracy, freedom, liberty, and the sanctity of the law, the nation's great ideological pillars. These are precisely the icons masterfully portrayed in the design of the new courthouse. Meant not only to celebrate the ideals that lay at the foundation of success, they also were meant to be inspirational—and overawing—to the crowds of new immigrants who generally hailed from countries where such ideals, or a strong middle class, did not exist.”⁵

Satisfied with the completed Courthouse project, Fort Wayne soon entered into a several decade-long process of transformation into a modern and beautiful city. The City Beautiful Movement, as it was being called nationally, arrived in Fort Wayne in 1909 in the person of

⁴⁴ Potterf, Rex. “The Burgeoning Interest in Local History in Fort Wayne 1887-1894. In *Old Fort News*, vol. XXXI, No. 1, 1968.

⁵ Hawfield, Michael. *The Allen County Courthouse: A National Treasure Restored*. Zionsville, Indiana: Guild Press Emmis Publishing LP, 2002. Pp. 29-35.

Charles Mulford Robinson, a national proponent for civic beautification. Following a series of lectures and written recommendations Fort Wayne city leaders acted to create a more attractive city. The nationally prominent landscape architect George Kessler was hired in 1911 to design a system of interconnected parks and boulevards. This plan was followed to great extent, and many of the city's wide, tree-lined boulevards originated with the Kessler plan.

A preliminary report of Fort Wayne's Park and Boulevard System was completed for ARCH by Christopher Baas and Christine Jones, prior to the National Register designation. It described the effect of City Beautiful Movement on public art in Fort Wayne:

"Soon after the release of the [Charles Mulford] Robinson (1909) and [George E.] Kessler (1911) plans for the improvement of Fort Wayne, the form of the city's residential suburbs took on distinct City Beautiful features. Residential districts began to display esplanades and parks, parkways with trees, ornate entry markers and decorative lighting... Robinson's plan included a chapter on the condition of the city's residential streets in 1909. His recommendations focused mainly on the visual aesthetics of residential areas...Kessler's plan laid out the locations of the improvements of existing streets and the extension of boulevards into the rural lands beyond the city limits.⁶

As these new parks and redesigned spaces became available public memorials and sculptures were placed in several during the first quarter of the 20th Century. The earliest, perhaps, is the Perry Randall Memorial, completed in 1916, and located in Swinney Park, near the Swinney Homestead. The work was completed by Frederick Hibbard, a Chicago artist. He also completed the statues of David Foster—also in Swinney Park, and General Henry Lawton, in Lakeside Park. Hibbard also created a cast stone sculpture as a memorial for veterans of World War I. Located in Memorial Park, and funded by a donation of Mrs. Olen J. Pond, the piece was intended to remember Mr. Pond as well as serve as a memorial to the veterans. Entitled "Memory, the piece consisted of a "provocatively draped woman that was originally flanked by two

⁶ Civilizing of a Midwestern City: The Fort Wayne Park and Boulevard System, Multiple Property Document, pp. 75-84.

drinking fountains and backed by a semicircle of trees. Sadly, the head was removed by vandals in 1990, and the fountains are no longer present.

Completed in 1928 as the city's effort to remember the valiant work of area veterans in World War I, Memorial Park contains several additional public art works. Entitled the Allen County World War Memorial, a triple-arched structure faces Glasgow Avenue, and is flanked by bronze figures sculpted by Owen County artist Ernest Moore Viquesney. Viquesney made quite a success of "The Spirit of the American Doughboy" which was duplicated multiple times and is found nationally. A second figure of Viquesney's was not as popular, though, and Fort Wayne is one of the few to display his "The Spirit of the American Navy."

Memorial Park also is home to "the Spirit of Flight," dedicated to the memory of Art Smith, Fort Wayne's early aviator. Designed by New York sculptor James S. J. Novelli, it was completed just two years after Smith's tragic death during an early US airmail flight in Ohio.⁷

There is an honored Quest Club tradition of holding one's own opinions close to the vest while presenting a paper to the group, but I hereby announce that I have two, well at least two, favorite pieces of public art. The first was completed and placed in Fort Wayne's smallest city park in 1927. "Let's go Swimmin'" says the caption beneath the limestone pair of boys, with an arm around the shoulder of the other, wearing summer play clothes, and looking just a bit wet. The Old Aqueduct Club Memorial is perhaps the most whimsical public art ever conceived for our city, and exists for the sole purpose of reminding us all of how much fun can be had in the summertime, and how soon we cast away our youth as we take on the mantle of adulthood. The sculpture was designed by local architect Marshall S. Mahurin, one of over 100 local businessmen who spent a portion of their youth swimming in the old covered canal aqueduct which spanned the St. Marys River, near the west end of the West Central neighborhood. During my years with ARCH I often shared this statue with students touring the architecture of

⁷ Greiff, pp. 84-87.

the neighborhood, and asked them to consider what statue THEY might design in the future when looking back upon their own childhoods.

Thirty years after the Maumee Valley Monumental Association first began lobbying for public works to commemorate the sixty years of conflict as American Indians, the French, the British, and the United States sought to secure the land that is now Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan, the Anthony Wayne statue was completed and dedicated in its first location in Hayden Park, at the corner of Maumee Boulevard and Harmar Street. This spot was located along the newly created Lincoln Highway, where it crossed the street named for the first United States commander to attempt to secure the headwaters of the Maumee River. Designed by George E. Ganiere, the statue was dedicated on July 4, 1918. It remained as a roadside welcome to travelers on the Lincoln Highway for many years, even after the Lincoln's successor, US 30, was rerouted along Coliseum Boulevard, bypassing downtown.

To reintroduce the statue to the community, a more central location in downtown was chosen, and the statue of Anthony Wayne was installed at Freimann Square—the heart of the original military grounds established by General Wayne after his victories during the summer of 1794. With mature trees alongside the plaza devoted to the Wayne statue, it appears that the General is emerging from the forest.

During the summer of 2013 Mayor Henry proposed to relocate the Wayne statue, to the center of the Allen County Courthouse Green, where it might be more visible. Community opinion was divided over the plan, with the greatest concerns coming from the Allen County Courthouse Preservation Trust, whose mission includes maintaining the designed green space that frames the entrance to the courthouse. When the Trust offered to provide funds for repairs to the statue and existing landscape elements at Freimann Square, the Mayor withdrew his proposal.

Much of the publicly accessible sculpture in Fort Wayne installed during from the 1930s to the 1950s are religious in nature, and are found in cemeteries, churchyards, or as adornment of religious architecture. A few exceptions include the Lion statute installed in 1953 in Lion's Park, the series of friezes adorning the Midwestern United Life Insurance Company building, completed in 1963, and *Animals in Motion*. *Animals in Motion* is a sculpture first donated to the Fort Wayne Art School in 1960, in memory of Mr. and Mrs. William Freuchtenicht. It was placed in storage shortly thereafter, until discovered during the move of the Fort Wayne Museum of Art to its current location on West Main Street. Today, *Animals in Motion* is one of the featured outdoor sculptures on display on the museum grounds.

A public designed interior space constructed during this time is the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum. Although the architectural firm of Saarinen, Swanson and Saarinen was the choice of the planning committee, the county commissioners signed a contract with local architect A. M. Strauss. This monumental structure was planned to be a memorial to military servicemen, and was conceived during World War II. The Memorial Hall was reserved as a public place to remember and honor those who served. The dedication program describes the hall as follows:

“Evidence of the special attention was shown as the Memorial Hall was completed. The Hall is finished in four kinds of marble, Renfrew from England, Notre Dame from France, Red Levoto from Italy, and Bois Jourdan from Spain, plus columns of Indiana limestone. Five cast aluminum heads were placed on the exterior of the building above the windows of Memorial Hall. The heads symbolize the Marines, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard. With the aid of the Allen County Council of Veterans Organizations, the War Department, and relatives of the deceased, a list of names of Allen County casualties of World Wars I and II was compiled and printed in the Fort Wayne newspapers for additions and corrections. Bronze memorial plaques were placed on the east and west walls of Memorial Hall.”⁸

⁸ *Allen County War Memorial Coliseum 1944-1952: A Project of the Fort Wayne Junior Chamber of Commerce*. N.d. accessed at <http://www.memorialcoliseum.com/about-us/history>, March 24, 2014.

The United States Bicentennial celebration in 1976 heralded the beginning of the modern era of public art in Fort Wayne, and across the country. Two major pieces were completed by local artist Hector Garcia as part of the city's commemoration. The Jesuit, in bronze, is located at the confluence of the rivers, on the grounds of the Water Filtration Facility. The piece was funded from the estate of Joseph Parrot, a lover of local history who wondered about the unknown Jesuit who may have first looked upon the headwaters of the Maumee River, and gave European names to the rivers St. Mary and St. Joseph.⁹

During the same year, Garcia completed his statue of Little Turtle, also bronze, which was installed at the entrance of the Old Fort Wayne. This piece was funded by members of the Fort Wayne Bicentennial Commission, Walter B. Helmke and others. After the daily operations of the fort were discontinued, Little Turtle was moved to its current location across the river in Headwaters Park.

In 1978, Lincoln National Life Insurance Company expanded its art collection with the dedication of a sculpture garden on Clinton Street. This addition of contemporary sculpture joins the c. 1932 Hoosier Youth statue installed by the corporation at its Harrison Street entrance. Works in the garden include:

George Rickey: Two Open Rectangles Eccentric Variation IV

Richard Stankiewicz: Untitled

George Sugarman: Black Prow

William King: Dance in Fountain

Additionally, Lincoln has installed a cast of J. Seward Johnson's Crack the Whip in a small park area on Harrison Street. J. Seward Johnson is a prolific creator of life-like sculpture created

⁹ *Who Put that There, "Jesuit Priest."*

using digital fabrication and a large crew of assistants. Crack the Whip is a popular piece, and has been installed in many locations in Indiana and the Midwest.

While Lincoln created a specific location for its sculpture, a more organic collection of public art might be found along Main Street, from Calhoun to Clay. From the sidewalk, or even by car, the public can encounter the Allen County Courthouse, Anthony Wayne, the Helmholtz, Crossings, Giant Party Toothpicks, Helitec I, Quake, Animals in Motion, and Station.

The Helmholtz, Crossings, Helitec I, Quake, Animals in Motion, and Station are owned by the Fort Wayne Museum of Art. With the exception of Animals in Motion, these are contemporary works, and are sometimes greatly loved or reviled by the public that views them.

Glory June Greiff writes: “Artists and arts writers differ on whether public art should ever be controversial, and some even wonder whether contemporary art should be placed in a public setting at all...Sculptor Don Robertson thinks contemporary art is suitable for the street but believes public art should complement the architectural environment...Mark di Suvero, on the other hand, makes bold artistic statements that often clash with their surroundings. His *Keepers of the Fire*, despite its name, does not evoke thoughts of the Potawatomi Indians. At the same time, the piece is adjacent to a very contemporary building, the Century Center...(in South Bend)...Far more controversial was his *Snowplow*, a work of found materials that started out in downtown Indianapolis but was so widely reviled that it seldom remained in one location for more than a few years. It finally found a home at the Indianapolis Museum of Art.”¹⁰

The Helmholtz is di Suvero’s a large, steel sculpture found adjacent to the Arts United Center and Freimann Square. Perhaps Fort Wayne’s largest stand-alone sculpture, The Helmholtz was donated to the Fort Wayne Museum of Art by the Alcoa Foundation and Mark di Suvero in

¹⁰ Greiff, Glory June. *Remembrance, Faith and Fancy: Outdoor Public Sculpture in Indiana*. Indianapolis, Indiana Historical Society Press, 2005, pp. 74-75.

honor of Rea Magnet Wire in 1986. First situated directly in front of the Arts United Center, it was relocated to the west side of the AUC when the plaza was installed.

In June, 2013 the Helmholtz was severely damaged by a drunk driver. A number of editorial letters were submitted by the public, lamenting the destruction of one of Fort Wayne's important works, while others suggested that the community was better off without it. The artist is currently working with the damaged pieces, and testing for structural stresses that might affect its reinstallation following repair.

The mixed reception of Helmholtz at its unveiling, and again a when it suffered the damage last summer illustrate some of the difficulties of understanding and gauging the interaction between public art and its publics.

A recent study in the Netherlands investigated how to empirically measure public response to public art, and investigated what generalizations could be made from the responses received. As they set up their experiment, which focused on a variety of public art sites in Europe, they identified five attributes that have an effect on public perceptions of such work, including: educational background, familiarity with the public artwork, appropriateness (or degree of suitability), sociable-ness (degree of invitingness to meet) and meaningfulness (degree of inciting symbolic interpretations and place memories).¹¹

The findings indicated that the public is most positive about pieces displayed in areas that are considered "attractive," and that the public art is perceived as more attractive when its site is also perceived as such. The study also found that decorative-figurative public art was received more positively than abstract works. Interestingly, the study found no difference between members of the public with different educational levels with respect to appreciation for the pieces included in the study, even though those with higher educational attainment professed a greater interest in art in general. Another surprising finding was that lower-educated respondents assessed the artwork more positively as a social meeting place, but that higher-educated respondents gave higher marks to the artwork in terms of the extent that it conveys

¹¹ Zebracki, p. 5.

meaning about the place where it is situated. And, the study also found a strong relationship between familiarity with the site and familiarity and positive feelings about the artwork.¹²

How is Public Art placed? What is the rationale for embarking on a public art project? I recently asked Ruth Stone these questions. Ruth is the project manager for the IPFW Sculpture with a Purpose project being completed by IPFW as part of its 50th anniversary. Stone described the rationale for the project as IPFW began planning how best to celebrate its longevity in Fort Wayne, they investigated how to tie in the dramatic push to bring vitality to the community through the trails system, legacy planning, and other activities. They learned about several public art projects that had been completed in Toledo and Louisville, and determined that a public art project would be the centerpiece of the anniversary. She noted that Toledo—which has a 1% tax for the arts—had begun a bike rack sculpture program that was very successful.

I also asked Ruth how IPFW planned to measure the impact that the new artwork would have on the community. IPFW plans to dedicate the sculptures—there are 50 in all—with a celebration called “Kickstart” in May, and will be measuring the attendance at that event, and also counting the number of responses received with a contest that will begin at that time, involving taking photos with the artwork, and submitting them to a Facebook page.

One of the first of the IPFW pieces was installed near the entrance to my business at the Auer Center for Arts and Culture a week ago. Entitled “Giant Party Toothpicks,” the multicolored metal sculpture elicits smiles from people walking by, and will, no doubt become a useful landmark for meeting and gathering downtown in good weather. I’m growing to like it better each day.

¹² Ibid. 15.

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