Bearing Witness: Art of Alabama

Panel Discussion: Public Art in Alabama

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts
Saturday, November 16
9:00am

Facilitated by Elliot Knight, Executive Director of the Alabama State Council on the Arts
Dennis Harper,
Curator of Collections and Exhibitions

Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art
at Auburn University
Dennis Harper
Curator of Collections and Exhibitions
Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art
CAME EXPLORERS Bringing MEAT SUPPLY
UNTIL THE LAND CAME A NEW CIVILIZATION
HOME and FAMILY LIFE BEGINS.
TOOLS and LAbor SAVE the HARVEST
The COTTON LOAD IS too HEAVY
THE FARM SUPPORTS Itself.
Science on the farm is bringing an improved Alabama agriculture, with timber, better livestock, more food and feed.
Chintia Kirana

Multidisciplinary Artist,
Exposé Art & Montgomery Art Project
Photo by Mickey Welsh for the Montgomery Advertiser
Deborah Velders

Executive Director, Mobile Museum of Art
PUBLIC ART (in Alabama):

Content . Character . Community

Deborah Velders

November 2019
First -- 3 questions:

1. WHAT IS PUBLIC ART?

2. WHAT IS ITS FUNCTION or PURPOSE?

3. WHO IS IT FOR?
From “Americans for the Arts” website; Public Art 101: Art in public spaces plays a distinguishing role in our country’s history and culture, It reflects and reveals our society, enhances meaning in our civic spaces, and adds uniqueness to our communities. Public art humanizes the built environment . . . . (it) matters because our communities gain cultural, social, and economic value through public art.”

From Forbes Magazine: “Public art can provide a new way to experience the city . . . .It is ‘government sponsored or funded artwork created by or with professional artists and legally sited in publicly accessible venues.’ . . . . But we don’t just need (public art) for the money—we need public art because it improves our quality of life, because it makes us stop and open our eyes….to something that ignites conversation, to something sublime.”

From the Association for Public Art Forum: Public art can express community values, enhance our environment, transform a landscape, heighten our awareness, or question our assumptions. Placed in public sites, this art is there for everyone, a form of collective community expression. Public art is a reflection of how we see the world – the artist’s response to our time and place combined with our own sense of who we are.
Public art has served as a vehicle or expression of political, religious and economic power and prestige for millennia: In 450 B.C., the Athenian general Pericles deployed public money, (dues paid to Athens by its allies) to support the city-state’s artists and thinkers, in an effort to win political support (through job creation, and awe-inspiring scale and magnitude of the new art and architecture.

This has motivated subsequent municipalities, states, countries, Church, and businesses ever since . . .
PURPOSE & FUNCTION OF PUBLIC ART IN THE PRESENT: POWER & PRESTIGE--AWE?

- Metalmorphosis by David Cerny (Charlotte, NC)
- Anish Kapoor, Cloud Gate (Chicago)
- 16th Avenue Steps by Aileen Barr and Colette Crutcher (San Francisco)
Concurrent with the official, governmental or corporate commissions of “Public Art” for more official purposes—artists continued to create “public” or outdoor art privately as personal, and even visionary expressions

**THESE PRIVATE CREATIONS WERE OFTEN SUBSEQUENTLY INTRODUCED INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN** (through populist interest, professional recognition and public demand)

A few examples:

Nek Chand’s Rock Garden of Chandigarh, India (1957-1976)


Veijo Rönkkönnen’s Garden of 500 concrete figures, Parikkala, Finland (1960’s – 2010)

John Milkovisch “Beer Can House” (Houston, TX) (1968-1988)

Gee’s Bend Quilters

James Hampton’s “Throne of the Third Heaven of the Nation’s Millenium”

Grafitti art, Architectural wonders & follie, backyard environments . . .
And in Alabama . . .

Tinglewood Carvings, Orr Park (Montevallo, AL),

Butch Anthony’s Museum of Wonder and The Drive-Thru Museum (Seale, AL),

Gee’s Bend Quilters, photo by Tom Pich

Joe Minter’s African Village In America (Birmingham, AL)
WHAT DISTINGUISHES PUBLIC ART IN ALABAMA?

The qualities that define and distinguish Alabama itself . . . Lacking the economic, corporate and political power of other states and nations—Alabama artists have simply utilized what they have, taking existing resources (recycling the man-made, using the natural environment) for their creative expression.

In a 2005 ASCA Publication dedicated to Alabama’s Public Art, former Executive Director Al Head, wrote:

“…in all cases, public art calls attention to something people feel is important . . . . Alabama has an abundance of public art that reflects the unique and colorful character of the place we call home.”
(Selected) PUBLIC ART

of

ALABAMA'S GULF COAST
(Mobile, Eastern shore)
A COMMISSION by the STATE OF ALABAMA (for Mobile, AL):

Caspar Buberl (b. Bohemia, American, 1834–1899) Portrait of Admiral Raphael Semmes, 1899 bronze [dedicated in 1900]

“The statue is eight feet six inches high. The pedestal is twelve feet high, which will be cut in granite in Louisville, Ky., after my design. On this is a bronze panel with the ship ‘Alabama’ and an inscriptive plate with the words: ‘Raphael Semmes, Commander C. S. Steamer Alabama, Rear Admiral C. S. Navy, Sailor, Patriot, Statesman, Scholar and Christian Gentleman.’

Caspar Buberl
COMMISSION BY THE CITY OF MOBILE (for its Civic Center, 1964):

CONRAD ALBRIZIO (1894-1973) MOSAIC MURALS IN MOBILE: Mobile’s strong identification with Mardi Gras was expressed in Albrizio’s two massive mosaic murals, 1964-65, created for and located in Mobile’s Civic Center building (opened 1964):
CONRAD ALBRIZIO (1894-1973) MOSAIC MURALS IN MOBILE: An additional Albrizio mosaic is located in the University of South Alabama's College of Medicine, created on the theme of the “History of Medicine” for the school in 1965. Albrizio completed several prior public artworks: a small mosaic of mother/child in a YWCA building in 1958; a mosaic of the history of law and justice for Mobile County Courthouse in 1958; a cycle of frescoes on maritime trade and commerce in 1949 (relocated in the lobby of Mobile’s Waterman-Smith Building on St. Joseph St.). All Abrizio’s works reflected his commitment to depicting uplifting views of human achievement, and express the idea of the artist as “socially conscious leader”—a strongly held belief held by the artist.
University of South Alabama Moulton Bell Tower Mural,
Jason Guynes, 2013
Jason Middlebrook, (American, b. 1966)
“Growing in Mobile” mosaic (GSA commission, 2018)
for the new US Federal Courthouse, Mobile, Alabama
Raine Bedsole, (American, b. 1960)
“Justitia” steel sculpture (GSA commission, 2018) for the new US Federal Courthouse, Mobile, Alabama
MUNICIPAL, PRIVATE ENTITY COMMISSIONS OF ARTWORK BY AREA ARTISTS -- FOR THE CITY OF MOBILE:

- Bike Rack, 2008, Corey Swindle
- Equino, 2017, Casey Downing
- Moblobz, 2013, Kenny Scharf, Al. Contemp. Art Cntr
- Oyster 11, Wintzell’s, 2013, Devlin Wilson
- Bruce Larsen, Sentry, 2012
- Lucy Gafford, Flowers (at Recycling cntr) mural
PUBLIC ART INITIATIVES BY THE MOBILE MUSEUM OF ART -- FOR THE CITY OF MOBILE:

Government Plaza Gallery (Showcase For area artists)

Sculpture Trail

A Pop Up Museum for Mobile, Satellite space in downtown Mobile
MUNICIPAL, PRIVATE ENTITY COMMISSIONS OF ARTWORK BY REGIONAL, LOCAL ARTISTS IN THE CITY OF FAIRHOPE (a small selection):

Marietta Johnson sculpture, Fairhope Park by Fran Neumann, Barbara Casey and Richard Arnold Dedicated 1997

Seahorse by Bruce Larsen and John Rezner

Deedee Morrison, A Matter of Fiction, corten steel and lucite

ABORIGINAL SEA LIFE by Ameríca Jones Gallaspy is a mural funded by FEEF (Fairhope Educational Enrichment Fund) in 2002.