

sustainable settlement

green infrastructure

Public Art and Landscape



Australian Institute
of Landscape Architects

National Policy Statement

The Australian Institute of Landscape Architecture (AILA) advocates the role which public art can play in successful urban design, place making and development of social and cultural capital.

The AILA encourages all levels of government and those agencies involved with the planning, design and management of the public realm to embrace site appropriate, contextual public art of cultural and environmental significance that is embedded in the design process.

The AILA recognises the valuable contribution that artists can make through the integration of art with landscape architectural practice. The successful integration of art with public space across the range of urban and natural environments can deliver a range of benefits including:

- greater access to, appreciation, and enjoyment of art by all sections of the community
- a deeper level of design narrative (meaning and related understanding) achieved through all elements of design and use of a public space
- an ability to promote a range of educational, environmental, and social messages through public space design

Contemporary Public Art Practice

In Australia contemporary public art practice has become incredibly diverse, covering activities ranging from physically integrated artworks to ephemeral digital projections and temporary installations.

In the past public art had been primarily focused on “installations” or permanent sculptural objects within a landscape setting and on the integration of artwork elements into the fabric of the landscape environment, as both ‘place making’ and functional measures.

Artists now demonstrate a growing focus on environmental issues through their practice by the use of sustainable materials and processes and through exploring, highlighting or challenging community attitudes and environmental standards.

Whatever the final form of the artwork might be it should wherever possible be based on concepts that are site specific and culturally relevant to the place and the people who will use or visit the place. Public art can add to the understanding of a place, its past, its physical environment, and cultural fabric. It may also pursue a specific theme or message related to a place or its culture. To achieve this it is important that public art is considered at the outset of a project and fully embedded in the design process. Whilst specific “installation” artworks will remain a relevant aspect of public art, public spaces and landscapes provide enormous potential for art themes that are also subtly embedded in design of a place and its materiality.

Government Policy Context

Across Australia the majority of State and Local Governments have either a specific Public Art Policy or a stated position on the commissioning of public art as part of their capital works programs and cultural initiatives. Some have percent for art schemes associated with government infrastructure projects while another model is a public art grant scheme to which state government agencies, local government and the private sector can apply for funds. Increasingly local government is developing Public Art Policies and Public Art Plans to inform the commissioning of art across the municipality.

In addition to the policy setting involving public art in public sector capital works projects there are examples of public art obligations within planning approval processes at a state and city level. Some examples include: Government state bodies administering a percent for art requirement in relation to inner city urban development precincts and on joint venture development projects with the private sector; Local Government adopting a percent for art requirement as part of CBD development approval processes; Local Government including public art in Urban Design Bonus schemes.

These are just three examples of ways that Government agencies are being proactive in incorporating public art in planning processes for the benefit of the wider community.

Public Art and Landscape

The Australian Landscape Principles articulate an ethical decision-making framework for landscape planning, design and management within the built environment. Their purpose is to strategically direct landscape interventions – both in our existing and future built environments - towards more sustainable, holistic outcomes. In this context the commissioning of public art might mean:

Value Our Landscape: by commissioning site specific artworks that are culturally relevant and environmentally appropriate to place. Artworks that conceptually engage with a sense of place will encourage a high level of ownership and respect from residents and visitors alike.

Protect – Enhance - Regenerate: by exploring artwork opportunities that: have minimum impact on the environment; provide an interpretive role in telling the site's history and related stories; and contribute to the site environmental narrative and function.

Design with Respect: by commissioning artworks that: engage with community aspirations; are respectful of ethnic and social diversity; thoughtfully address the needs of people of all ages and abilities; and acknowledge indigenous cultural values.

Design for the Future: by working with artists to create artworks that have a conceptually timeless quality and are designed and constructed from appropriate materials for the required life span. An artwork should strive to instill a sense of ownership and pride, bringing the community together to ensure the artwork is cared for respectively now and in the future.

Embrace Responsive Design: by exploring the wide range of contemporary public art practice to identify the most appropriate artwork solutions for the site. This may include: temporary and ephemeral works; integrated and functional landscape elements; stand alone sculptures and landmark artworks; interpretive and narrative artworks.

The AILA encourages all levels of government to include Registered Landscape Architects on juries and panels to ensure the relevance of public art decisions to the Australian Landscape Principles.

Key Factors

Opportunities for the incorporation of public art should be integrated from the outset and through subsequent planning and concept stages of relevant landscape architecture projects.

Relevant contractual arrangements should reflect artwork budgets and include appropriate professional fees for the artists to enhance the delivery of quality outcomes.

Clients and landscape architects should collectively ensure that qualified professional public art curators and consultants are engaged to manage artwork opportunities and appropriate commissioning processes.

Public art projects require collaboration and negotiations between the landscape architect, other professionals and the artists concerning the respective roles and responsibilities of each party.

As with all collaborating professionals, the artist's intellectual property needs to be appropriately attributed in feature articles, awards and promotional material.

Professionals and clients involved with public art need to be aware of and conversant with relevant state or local government policies and city planning obligations relating to public art. Artists should be allowed to express their creativity and contribute positively to the overall design process and not be constrained by overly prescriptive briefs.

This Policy statement is part of the AILA's Sustainable Settlement suite of Policy Statements on Australian Landscape Architecture, the profession committed to the creation of meaningful and enjoyable outdoor places and to the sustainable management of our built and natural environment.

The AILA acknowledges the assistance of Richard Brecknock in drafting of the Public Art and Landscape Policy.

More details on AILA National Policy Statements: www.aila.org.au/policies

All queries on National Policy should be directed to the AILA's CEO.

Copyright - Australian Institute of Landscape Architects, GPO BOX 1646, Canberra, ACT, 2601, Australia

Ph: (02) 6248 9970,

Email: admin@aila.org.au

www.aila.org.au

November 2010