



## **Transforming Urban Space by Creating ‘Civic Art’; Defining What the Term Means**

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Civic Art has been defined as a way to enhance cities, strengthen neighborhoods and provide color and character to public spaces. It provides aesthetic enhancement of public facilities, and ensures civic space and conservation of new and heritage art objects. Oftentimes confused with the term “public art”, which is characterized by individual artifacts that act within themselves and independently, civic art blends beauty and meaning with function, involves an artistic approach to creating the built environment, fosters feelings of identity and belonging, and serves as a key component of helping a city form an identity. It is the identification of formal elements within spaces, and appreciating them as mimesis or representation - concepts with deep roots in the philosophical developments and teachings of Aristotle. Leo Tolstoy defines art as a way of indirect social communication, while contrary, Benedetto Croce and R.G.Collingwood, supported the idealist view that the product of the creators can only be valued and appreciated in the minds of the creators. This is a selfish-oriented definition of art that does not fit the social values of urban planning; a practice for the public whole and not the selfish expression of individual acts of people. However, Martin Heidegger has interpreted art as the means by which a community develops for itself a medium for self-expression and interpretation. Heidegger’s ideas were the core of developmental thinking that influenced the architect and theorist Christian Norberg-Schulz, who mentions that “man cannot gain a foothold through scientific understanding alone; he needs symbols, that is, works of art which represent life-situations”. Kevin Lynch stresses imageability and independence from practical functionality, as well as the will of meaning and symbolization. His theory of constructing mental maps inspires art proposed as grid, made up by reference points, independent from aesthetic or ideological evaluations within the city. In this case, a web of associations overlapping an urban tissue by means of an artistic project creates an important base for appropriation of a place. Artistic devices set up solitarily within the contemporaneous city setting, have the essential role of sustaining the cognitive process of memory. These images, in direct relationship to the surrounding urban fabrics, perpetuate familiarity for the observers, feeding a sort of habitable vitality of place. The intention of this paper is to study the history of usage of the term ‘Civic Art’, which has been used and abused through time; in a thoughtful and much investigated manner, or for the sake of bringing together the words ‘civic’ and ‘art’ in pursuit of a euphonic result that could make a good book or article title. Whereas it is almost an assurance, that when Vitruvius first used the term, he had much more in mind. ‘Civic Art’ definitions today are wide, unclear and unintentional; they lack the criteria to label a space in the civic environment as ‘beautiful’. The goal is to extract the correct definitions and begin to form a contemporary model of Civic Art for our cities, to enhance and transform the quality of urban space.

**KEY WORDS:** Civic art, imageability, representation