

Paper proposal Rogier Brom MA

Rogier Brom
Blankenstraat 113a
1018 RT Amsterdam
+31 (0)647952406
rogierbrom@gmail.com

Affiliation: independent researcher into the arts, their public and their policies. Currently working with the Lectoraat Art & Public Space at the Rietveld Academy.

Title: *Participatory abilities: a closer understanding of the value of art in public space.*

Abstract:

The participational, inclusive form of art has as its basic principle "feedback," and it is this loop which makes of the triad artist/artwork/observer an integral whole.

- Roy Ascott

In this quote, Roy Ascott shows an important characteristic of art that is often used in participative projects. It touches on art's capacity to forge a connection between art and its public by adding an active element of feedback. However, adding an element of feedback doesn't necessarily mean that a work's public is actually participating. There must be a form of urgency for the art work and the public to relate to one another.

I argue that, for an audience to participate, they need to feel a necessity on an individual level to join the network the art work is in. But this network can come to life only after the work of art has come into existence. Furthermore, complexity theory shows that the organisation of a system comes about as a result of the interaction between the various constituents of the system, hinting that the people within a community will not comply with a preconceived idea. And certainly within public space an art work will enter into a long process of interactive exchange, in which it could well be part of many more networks than intended. So in my view, the success of an art work in public space can be estimated from its ability to flexibly engage with the most relevant networks in its surroundings at any given moment. The work needs to be able to nudge its public into a willingness to actively internalise its proposition. In this respect, I consider a public to be a performative concept, a temporary community that is activated to relate itself to a whole of which it is part. I expand on this argument in my contribution to the publication *Being Public: How Art Creates the Public*, which I co-edit with Jeroen Boomgaard and is due to appear this spring at Valiz Publishers.

At the moment, I'm testing this thesis while developing a method as part of a project that aims to better assess the value attributed to sculptures in public space. I'm developing a method that starts from the premiss that most of the value attributed to such a sculpture is generated by the amount of activity it shows within a network. By gaining an understanding of the activity surrounding a sculpture in both its past and present, a better estimation can be made of its future potential for activity. The sculpture I'm working on is located at a high school in Heerenveen. Using the visual matrix method, I'm testing the current associations with the sculpture that are present within the population of students and teachers. These results will be combined with a scan of the situation up to the present day. In March, I should be able to concretise the theoretical framework with some preliminary results.