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Analyzing Factors Affecting the Quality of Urban Sculpture

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ABSTRACT

In the present time, various urban spaces with different textures and traffic status, urban design, and configuration have become an appropriate place for raising harmonic and inharmonic phenomena. One of the desirable aspects of these spaces having a lot to say in the field of semantic-formal aesthetics and coherence is urban sculpting. Urban sculpting as a solution to tackle visual and aesthetic disorders with its functional role has found its way into public environmental spaces and broad mass of urban citizens-art audience. But it has not been successful. The question now is: What factors are involved in the quality of urban sculpture? In this article, this factor is evaluated in two parts: 1. Configuration status of urban sculpting and 2. the role and function of urban sculpting. In both cases, the components and factors affecting the quality of urban sculpting and its functional presence are analyzed with respect to some cases across Tehran. Descriptive- analytic is the method which has been employed here in this study.

Key words: Urban Sculpture, Role and Function, Configuration, Location and Space

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, although the world is abundant with human's novel achievements – those which have come around to bring move, well-off and peace for humans- these artefacts have, in fact, sacrificed humans. The outstanding example can be found within cities and their spaces. Vehicles, traffic and its respective elements and accessories, inappropriate urban furniture, urban trains, etc. all accelerate works but they have also banned modern humans in some other ways. Each and every place you go in the city, heavy visual burden of artefacts across spaces and congestion of inharmonic phenomena all lead to spatial chaos and disorder and many psychological disorders especially lack of visual peace for citizens.

Urban art, urban sculpting in particular¹, is an entity trying to treat some of these disorders using its basic features though it has not been so much successful despite its fundamental objectives. This lack of success has caused much of these urban volumes to add to visual chaos of urban spaces as an annoying element.

¹ By specific artistic definition, there is a delicate difference between “sculpture” and “volume”. The latter by artistic definition, is an aesthetic, artistic work which has at least three features of length, width and height and that one can

This problem arises from the lack of proper understanding of how these works shall be designed, practiced and put up. Herein, the major problem lies in the lack of appropriate relationship between form and shape of an urban volume with its environmental and surrounding space. This issue highlights the necessity of detailed research in the field of urban art. Reaching to a due comprehensive approach can contribute to relevant authorities, urban designers and artists with proper planning and also offering designs corresponding to the environment and finally creating fine and artistic spaces which in turn help the mutual relationship of the citizens and increase of artistic awareness and public vision. Now, the question is: what factors affect the quality of urban sculpting process-from design to practice- which finally end up at an urban volume which would be an artistic work and consistent with the environmental space? With the perspective of functional role of urban sculpting, what roles or functions can be defined for urban sculpting?

This study attempts to deal with this issue using the evaluation of some successful works in the scope of Tehran urban volumes and also a score of unsuccessful inconsistent works in Tehran urban spaces.

2. Sculpting in Urban Spaces

In order to get a proper insight into the art of urban sculpting and understand its right status within cities, it is necessary at first to define urban spaces and basically which urban spaces are more appropriate for design and practicing urban volumes?

Around a city, there are various spaces ranging from private and family spaces to public spaces belonging to all citizens of the city. The sorts of spaces where all citizens have a sense of belonging to and are in connection with are undoubtedly public spaces of the cities. It is obvious that dealing with family, private and non-public spaces is of no necessity and is beyond this essay's scope of study. So, we start the discussion with public spaces.

Public spaces of cities have nearly been places out of individual borders or small groups anywhere anytime rather than building a connection with private and friendly spaces. Thus, public spaces have been an interface and used for a variety of symbolic and real objectives. Therefore, from the viewpoint of explanation, public spaces are available and multiple ones, distinguishable from the exclusive realm of both households and individuals. From a normative view, when these spaces are created and managed by state authorities, they are counted as public in such a way that they address the whole community, are open to all and used by all members of the society [1].

Public spaces belong to all citizens and are places of traffic. So they must be considered in the process of urban design and planning lots of places can be classified under public places among which some of the most important ones are squares, pavements, circles, underpasses, parks and gardens.

Each of the urban public spaces includes requirements, elements and desirable/undesirable phenomena concerning the type of function, structural and city-planning characteristics. Nowadays, in many public places, we are facing a vast volume of elements dictated to citizens in many cases which, finally, pave the way for the visual chaos of urban spaces and provide visual disturbance for the citizens. One of the necessities of the presence of urban volumes is to help part of the visual disorders in public spaces. This rises form the therapeutic and healing approach of urban sculpting art. But, in fact, it is not all expected from this type of art and observed either. These works are not basically created for this reason. Rather, urban sculpting art includes functions and features discussed in detail below. The main challenge of the present study is to deal with the quality of urban volumes. As pointed earlier, the main question and problem is that what points and characteristics urban volumes shall have so they are valuable, desirable artistic work corresponding to the structural features and probably the sense of its environmental space?

This issue is analyzed within the context of two following issues:

develop visual touch with it from various sides. Even in some novel styles and approaches like Alexander Calder works, there is a fourth dimension (motion) as well. However, sculpture is a familiar volume usually a depiction of the body of human, animal or other creatures. In fact, volume includes sculpture. Because sculpture is often used for volume, especially within the field of urban art even among artists, in the present study it has rarely been used and in some cases "urban sculpture" has been preferred.

1. Configuration of urban sculpting (form and space relationship)
2. Roles and functions of urban sculpting
 - 1.2 configuration of urban sculpting

Usually in design and construction of an urban sculpture, we, at first, face a space made and provided by others-urban designers, architects, city planners, etc.

In other words, this is a sculpting artist who should coordinate himself and his work with environmental space though in few cases, it is, at first, the artist who creates his own work with power and independence, environmental and surrounding space is designed and built after creating urban sculpture. This is, in fact, the urban space that should assimilate and define itself to urban sculpting but, in some cases, the artist deals with already made and determined space. In general, elements and factors affecting the quality of volume works in urban spaces can be categorized this way:

1. Analyzing volume works in terms of both form and shape.
2. The relationship between volume works and its environmental place and space.
3. Paying attention to the materials used.

Analyzing volume works in terms of both form and shape:

Proportions: refer to formal size, shape and form of the work. “Apart from the shape, of the visual characteristics of the form, one can refer to size meaning its real dimensions of form, length, width and depth. While these dimensions set the proportion, form scale is set by the proportion of its size to the size of other existing forms in its environment” [2].

In urban sculpting, it is highly significant to pay attention to dimensions, shape and form of the work as an artist cannot merely express his/herself rather he/she is supposed to be defined as an element within the whole of an urban space so he/she faces both few specialist and large public audience. Therefore, regarding the work’s form, he has to think about clarity of the form and vast majority of the citizens’ relationship with it in address to thinking about aesthetic principles.

Color: in the process of urban sculpting, it is highly significant to care about spaces’ environmental color and subsequently selection of the work’s color. “Color is the most outstanding feature distinguishing a form from its environment. In social life, color plays a big part and tries to cover both daily and continuous life, and it also affects the visual side of the work’s form (ibid, 11). Color comes to sight before the form and material used, that is the reason why it is more effective. But in the meantime, what is essential is the coherent move of all elements of a design towards integrating with the environment. Color should be considered part of the total, a kind of whole moving towards unity. Besides, another factor affecting color selection is the work’s function. It must not be used temporarily and merely for attracting the pedestrians’ attention [3].

Selection of an appropriate color effects influential relationship between urban sculpting and environmental space and also the potential message of the work. For instance, if a work is designed with contrast concept for an urban space, selecting the work’s color and naturally its contrast with that of the environment is undoubtedly one of the methods of reaching to desirable results.

Light:

Natural or artificial “light” can offer a special emotional feeling. Reflexing and light change on the form’s smooth surface strengthen the concept of movement. When light passes through the forms created in the space, there would be perplexing pictures, so light plays a fundamental role in the basic content of the space [2].

When designing a volume work, both color and light-especially at night when emotional feeling is different from day- play the same important part. The thing often neglected and the reasons why most of the volume works are not clearly visible for inappropriate lightening prove the specialist’s failure in presenting the work. Proper lightening is able to introduce a volume work the best way possible and as pointed out, with a different emotional feeling from daylight.

2. The effect of Place and Environmental Space on Urban Volumes

One of the most important features of urban sculpting is the set-up location as sculpture and its location are in direct relationship with urban art's definition and context. "The first thing to be considered in using sculpture is the set-up location. The proper location helps the beauty of the city and creates a specific meaning for successful citizens. For example, when a sculpture is put up in a busy street, citizens will never understand it since there are many deterrent factors of emotion which stop proper and correct understanding of the sculpture. On the other hand, due to individuals' different perceptions, in the case of a sculpture supposed to be a monument, in the event that the location is correct, the sculpture would be additional with no correspondence with the surrounding environment, so the viewer would face chaos and contrasting pictures within the bustling of traffic and visual pollution of the environment" [4].

Considering the relationship of urban sculpting with its environmental space, we face two entities: whether the space is already prepared and sculpting artist must design and practice his work with respect to space and environment conditions or from the beginning an urban area is given to a group of artists-city planners, sculptors, etc.- to create their intended environment and space and at the same time sculptor creates the urban sculpture with greater freedom and finally volume and space would form in a way they are in consistency and harmony to each other. There are some points must be taken into account regarding the relationship between the sculpture and environmental space:

1. Space type: square, circle, streets, underpasses, etc.
2. Visual features of environmental space: the rate of discipline in space, structure of imaginative elements in space-lines, orientations and horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curved axes, coherence or disturbance of visual lines, etc.
3. Space density (empty and static space versus crowded and bustling space)
4. Color of environment
5. Light

In order to reach to an appropriate approach of the above branches of urban sculpting and consider the key factors mentioned above, it sounds necessary to elaborate the issue through giving examples:

Here is an example of an urban sculpture in Tehran:

At a point on the pavement near student's park, there is recently a mixed sculpture set up. This is the embodiment of a blind person depicting a child, perhaps his son, who has become his stick. They are pedestrians like all other citizens inviting others to their watch with stoppage of time: it summons people to pay attention to the blind living in the community but the majority of people don't care about.



Pictures 1 & 2: Blind, University Park, Northern Pedestrian, Personal Archive

Here is the sculpture totally fitting the space and spirit and its fairly large size is for emphasis and more visual attention. Regarding the relationship this work builds with the surrounding environment, it is enough to imagine what would have happened if it were set up in the middle of another square; what kind of meaning would it take

then? Would it be seen at all? In such case, the work would have picked up a confusion sense in the surrounding environment. In other words, changing the set up location would have impacted the sense and concept of the work. Another example is the bust of NavvabSafavi martyr at the beginning of Navvab highway (pictures 3, 5). This sculpture is a successful work individually and in terms of proportions, aesthetic principles and resemblance to its subject. However, when it is analyzed within environmental context, the result is reserved. Considering vast dimensions of surrounding environment and its location amidst the crowded and bustling streets ending to it, it is an inconsistent and inappropriate work and it is not easily observed by the viewers. Therefore, its major function that undoubtedly starts when the viewers –citizens- see it and with which build a visual relationship has not been regarded. Moreover, its dark color has added to the obscurity and disappearance of the work among the visual density and darkness dominating the space in a way that this work as a visual form has lost among visual elements of the environment.



Pictures 3-5: Navvab Safavi Martyr Sculpture (Upperpart), Crossroad of Azadi Street and Navvab Martyr, Personal Archive

3. Materials' Significance

Type of the material used in an urban sculpture can be effective and influential in the process of its implementation and success. Especially, there must be a suitable relationship between a sculpture's form and shape with the used material so that they would be complementary.

Modern definition of urban sculpting is different from the past. Nowadays, there are temporary sculptures with temporary material for urban spaces. In fact, it is a kind of approach which has drawn attentions across the world as there are unstable and sand sculptures. There must be necessarily sustainable and stable sculptures but unfortunately it is not true in some cases in society for reasons of which one can refer to lack of familiarity with new material and technology to build stable sculptures in unstable climate or paying low expenses to the sculptor resulting in using vulnerable material. In this group of the works, we should care about sustainability of the works. There are even know-hows to maintain the works which are sadly disregarded in our society. In general, apart from a sculpture's set-up location, when creating a high quality, long-lasting sculpture, municipal authorities and people must keep it safe and sound [5].

For better understanding of the issue, there is a successful work with a balance between the form and materials used. “Balance”¹ sculpture was made by Parastou Ahouvan, supposed to be set up at the open space of Tehran University (picture 6).



Picture 6: Parastou Ahouvan, Balance, Stone and Metal

It is made of stone in which metal elements have also been used. Architecture is observable in both its form and dimension. Its metal elements play a kind of music in the open space, exposed to breezing and give a sense of balance to the hardness and roughness of the stone. “I was thinking of an urban sculpture as a kind of form which I couldn’t put its majesty, greatness and dignity into any other material but stone. It is possible to use all materials in building urban sculptures provided that its quality can respond to city’s open space. Stone gave me both senses of balance and heaviness simultaneously and I always considered my own feelings as the first addressee of the work. Thus, I thought about impressing my addressee and the way I could transfer a kind of solidity and strength coupled with the freshness and delicacy through the work” said Ahouvan [6].

In short, it is essential to consider the following items regarding type of the material used in urban sculpture:

1. Identifying the climate and weather conditions.
2. Identifying various materials.
3. Suitability of the materials used in the work with climate environments

2. Roles and Functions of Urban Sculpting

Considering sculpting in urban spaces and given the fact that the work is exposed to a large number of addressees from various spectrums in public space, it is necessary to define requirements, roles and functions for it. Basically, urban sculpting art enters into open, public spaces from indoor galleries and exhibitions so it can ultimately perform a mission. This is realized within various goals, roles and functions which are dealt with in the following:

The most important function and role of urban sculptures: of the basic components for measuring and evaluating urban sculptures, its function and play a big part. In general, there are five functions to refer to regarding volume presence in urban spaces:

1. Beautifying the environment and improving quality of urban spaces.
2. Inducing or boosting indigenous or cultural spirit.
3. Creating a sense of place.
4. Sign formation and granting identity to space
5. Creating pause and hesitation and raising public awareness

1. Beautifying the Environment:

One of the most important functions of urban sculpting is beautifying the environment. This happens through specific actions and strategies which lead to a desirable result through proper understanding of space and using creative and artistic intelligence. In a space which is dealing with elements, the presence of an inappropriate sculpture can add to the chaos of visual space.

One can refer to Omar-e Khayyam sculpture as one of the most successful urban sculptures regarding urban beautifying (picture 7). This valuable sculpture was made by Abdolhasankhan-e Sedighi- high-profile sculpture of

¹ Selected Work of International Urban Sculptures Symposium

Kamalolmolk School. It has been set up at a place in LalehPark where addressees –citizens- can communicate with. This has also made an artistic and aesthetic change in the typical space of the park. Choosing an appropriate set-up location for such a great work has led to the mutual relationship of the work and space and vice versa and eventually has reasonably softened and beautified this part of the park.



Picture 7: Abdolhasan Khan-e Sedighi, Sitting Sculpture is the Scientist, Omar-e Khayyam, Laleh Park, Personal Archive

2. Boosting Indigenous or Cultural Spirit: of other functions of urban sculptures is to boost cultural spirit of the space, meaning that some urban spaces and environments given their geographical and historical conditions, are reminder of events and happenings which can be traced in the collective memory of the citizens. This mentality can double that collective memory with the presence of an urban sculpture including symbols, signs or elements of that cultural or indigenous issue.

For example, one can refer to former volume symbol at Engelab square, Tehran which had been designed by the sculptor IrajEskandari and made by FeridounSedighi (picture 8). This work is negotiable in terms of the relationship between form and space¹. However, regarding the content of the work, it was consistent with Islamic revolution developments and concepts 1978 and events and happenings about revolution and its relevant values. During its life, this work led to the boost of revolutionary spirit of the square².



Picture 8: Iraj Esakandari & IrajSefighi, Islamic Revolution Monument, Personal Archive

¹According to Iraj Eskandari, design of this work was supposed to be a raised epigraph to be installed in one of Tehran's urban spaces. It is obvious that implementation of such a plan in the form of a big spiral volume in the middle of a square can get the work away from its initial principles as it happened here.

² In recent years and given the infrastructure of this part of Engelab square and Tehran's subway attempts in this space, the work was removed and transferred to western part of the square.

3. Sense of Place

In an urban space, there are several factors involved for creating sense of place such as architecture and enclosed buildings, city planning, collective memories and etc. “sense of place refers to public’s mental perception of environment and their more or less feelings of their environment which put the individual in an internal connection with environment in such a way that the individual’s understanding and feeling integrate with semantic setting of the environment. This feeling causes the space to change into a place with specific sense and behavioral characteristics for specific individuals. Sense of place not only does create a comfortable sense of the environment but it also supports public’s intended cultural concepts, community’s social and cultural relationships in a given place and helps the individuals to reminisce and gain identity” [7].



Picture 9: Mohammad Ali Madadi, AbouRayhan-e Birouni, Southwestern Corner of Laleh Park, Personal Archive

In the southwestern corner of the park in the middle of a pond, there is a sculpture of AbouRayhan-e Birouni, a great scientist, mathematician, astronomer and historian, made by the late Mohammad Ali Madadi (picture 9).

Considering the scientific and historical services of AbouRayhan, providing a circular form with symbol of planets and stars and placing this sculpture in the middle of a circular pond in an open vast space of this part of Laleh Park, the sculpture has set the scene and redefined the former environmental space successfully.

4. Sign Formation and Granting Identity to Space

“Signs are turning points of the city face which have come to existence through appearance, function or sense of a phenomenon and used as the basic point in orientation. Usually objects with a certain appearance: buildings, signs, supermarkets or even museums can “produce signs”. Dominance, formal or functional contrast, uniqueness, etc. can change an element into a sign. Now it is clear that signs have their relevant hierarchies in urban hierarchy. Each city has got signs ranging from urban level to neighborhood level. This is why everything from a mountain to a door handle or its color can be visualized as a sign” (or as people tend to call it address) [8].

One of the best samples of this function is the sculpture of Abolgasem’eFerdowsi at Ferdowsi square, which is in fact the factor of granting identity to this environmental space. This sculpture made by Abdolhassankhan-e Sedighi has been set up on a tall stone stand which is quite observable from different directions of the square and from the viewpoint of pedestrians (pictures 10 & 11). This sculpture is, in fact, a common sign present in all the citizens’ mind and the signifier of collective memory of Tehran citizens or even passengers or guests to the capita. This is a factor which can be proved in the citizens’ mind more than its environmental place and space. This work is now one of the most important and successful samples of urban sculpture of Iran. This has substituted for the former sculpture of Ferdowsi scientist, designed, practiced and set up by a group of India’s sculptors¹. Given the total understanding of the citizens from this work, one can say that this work has reasonably managed to turn into a single sign in the citizens’ mind.

¹ This sculpture is now placed in Tehran University campus in front of human sciences department.



Pictures 10& 11: Abdolhassankhan-e Sedighi, the Scientist Abolgasem-e Ferdowsi

5. Creating Pause and Hesitation and Improving Public's Awareness

A desirable sculpture can cause pause and hesitation in citizens and build a visual and aesthetic relationship with them. In the event that an urban sculpture is set up at an appropriate urban space where there is a fine relationship between its form and environment's configuration, it can stop the citizens and cause an effective visual communication with addressees. This is a reminder of the factor of "place" as there is not a suitable set-up location and no dissent relationship between form and environmental space, distortion of pause and hesitation factor would be possible. A clear example is some volumes by highways and sidewalks citizens pass by quickly. In such cases, there is not a suitable relationship between the work and citizens. Expectations from urban sculpting or its analysis and evaluation happen during pause and hesitation process. This incidence can result in concept transfer intended by authorities to citizens, realizing predicted expectations and roles of these works and improving public awareness in different historical, cultural, scientific fields and in particular increasing the level of artistic literacy and public's visual interest (picture 12).



Picture 12: Sculptures of Martyrs, Laleh Park, Personal Archive

It is necessary to note that none of these functions can be analyzed separately and distinctively and a sculpture doesn't only have one of those functions either. Ideally, it is expected that a successful urban sculpture be a combination of a set of roles and functions. Giving examples of urban sculptures within a single function was merely for categorization and coherence. Nevertheless, it is obvious that these works bear other functions and potential to be analyzed for other functions.

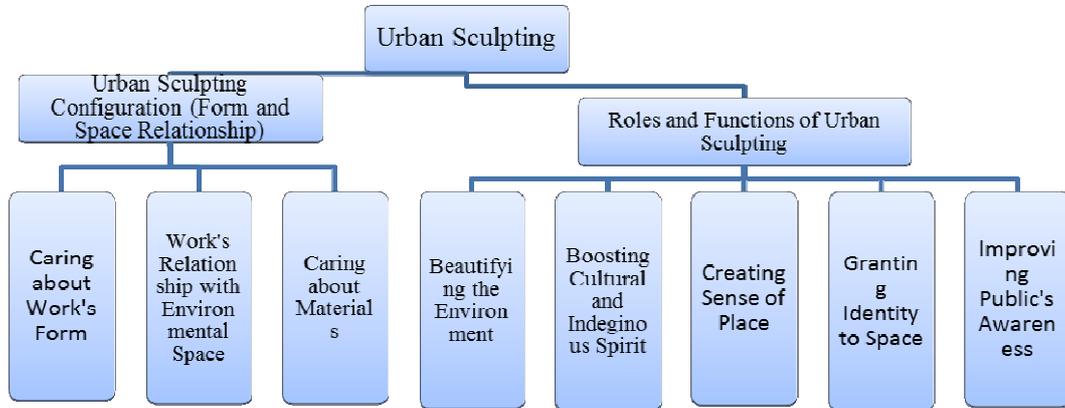
CONCLUSIONS

Considering the issues discussed for urban sculpting, we can consider two general headings:

1. How to configure urban sculpting

2. Roles and functions of urban sculpting

In either case, there are basic and influential components without which you cannot make sure of ultimate outcome. This set of factors has been summarized in an organized and coherent diagram.



Desirable and successful result of urban sculpting has a direct relationship with the factors and elements discussed here. If from the start of planning to beautify an urban environment using the art of urban sculpting, factors affecting the quality and intended roles and functions are quite professionally considered, we can expect an aesthetic and successful work in urban environment so that citizens-as the main addressees of these works can communicate well with the work and finally there would be mutual relationship between urban sculpting and addressees of this art.

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