

Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki (eds), *The Everyday Practice of Public Art* Abingdon, Routledge, 2015, £26.99. ISBN 978-1-138-82921-3

Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie (eds), *A Companion to Public Art* Oxford, Wiley, 2016. £120. ISBN 978-1-118-47532-4

As both of these volumes acknowledge from the outset, public art is a difficult discipline to define. The field's broad parameters extend beyond and encroach upon those of other artistic disciplines more assuredly defined by their formal characteristics. But in the process of calling into question the attributes of public art, these volumes pose important questions that should prove useful for those invested in the study of sculpture.

As Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki identify in their introduction to *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*, the field has long since escaped its mooring within the narrow rubric of public sculpture, with the establishment in the United States of the National Endowment for the Arts' first public art programme almost fifty years ago proposed as year zero for the expanded field. They reference *The Practice of Public Art* from 2008 which Cartiere co-edited with Shelly Willis, in which they offered a four-part working definition for public art: art situated in public space (but outside of museums and galleries), of public interest, for public use, or funded by the public (p. 2).¹ And though each of these points must be treated independently, the result of such broad distinctions is an opening out of the field of study that situates public art not as a category so much as a status that draws attention to an artwork's social role.

What these two books both help to propose, then, are a set of questions and frameworks from which to analyse, distinguish and question public art practices in order to continue to give shape to the ongoing development of the discipline. In so doing, the two volumes complement each other amicably. Cartiere and Zebracki's volume focuses on proposing definitions and directions for contemporary public art practice with particular concern for its real-world effects, while Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie's volume is directed

towards offering a rough shape for the field of study.

As both noted scholars in the field and editors of the journal *Public Art Dialogue*, Knight and Senie are uniquely suited to providing such an overview of public art, and this volume serves as a wide-ranging and informed overview of the current and future state of public art theory. The *Companion* has been divided thoughtfully into four sections that help to distinguish distinct approaches to public art and to mediate the discipline's multivalence. The first three relate to what might be the most logical points of departure for research and criticism – the questions of tradition, site and audience – while the final part proposes a variety of frameworks within which the study of public art might continue to develop. Each of these sections is supported by contributions from a variety of public art practitioners: from art historians, critics and artists invested in its advancement through to the curators, administrators and audiences involved or invoked in the commissioning of public art. The coincidence of these voices serves to illuminate the cooperative and collaborative nature of public art, as does the inclusion of both 'established and emerging figures' in the field and the recourse to both (in) famous and less well-known chapters in its history. All of this complements the inherently democratic nature of public art. It has 'communal processes embedded in its development' write Knight and Senie (p. 10).

As such, it is the section on 'audience' that stands out in this volume. As a corrective to what they call the irony inherent in the frequent absence of audiences from critical readings of public art, considering that it 'identifies its audience in its very title' (p. 229), a variety of voices and perspectives related to the production, commissioning and reception of public art are introduced. Jennifer McGregor and Renee Piechocki interview a series of artists and practitioners 'about how she or he came to work in a socially engaged way, interfaced with individuals and organizations, and defined an audience as well as the roles of collaboration and cooperation' (p. 268), and Charlotte Cohen and Wendy Feuer present their findings on the 'divergent approaches

1. Cover of Cameron Cartiere and Martin Zebracki (eds), *The Everyday Practice of Public Art: Art Space, and Social Inclusion* (photo: courtesy Routledge)



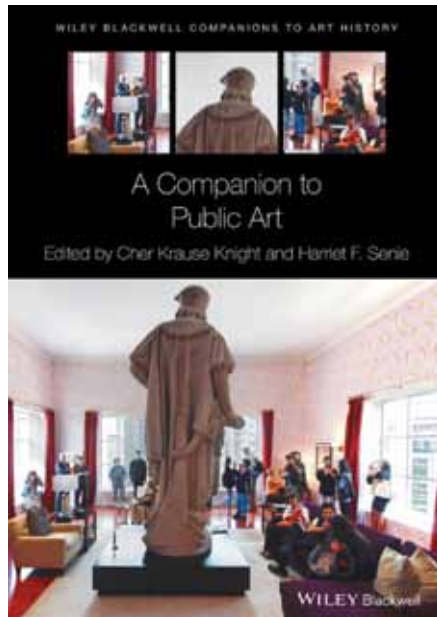
to and attitudes towards audience from the perspective of arts administrators', following a series of interviews with noted curators, commissioners and executives in the field (p. 285). These are followed by Mary M. Tinti's reflections on 'the promises and pitfalls of public art selections from the perspective of a panellist' (p. 297). All are eminently useful additions to a broader conceptualization of what distinguishes 'public' art from the hubbub of artistic production, and looming over each of these texts is Mary Jane Jacob's important contribution to the section. Taking John Dewey's conception of art's democratizing potential and its close relation to lived experience as her point of departure, Jacob posits an approach to public art that levels out and assimilates the audience and the 'art expert's' viewpoints, calling into question 'whose expertise matters' and asking if there can be 'communication and exchange between participants, viewers, and world professionals if we share the goal that art at its core has a relationship to everyone's life?' (p. 254). In the process of muddying the lines between the place of the artist and the viewer, once again the collaborative nature of social practice is put centre stage.

This question of where value lies and who creates it reverberates through

Cartiere's epilogue to the *Companion* as she posits the need to 'lay claim' to the word 'public' that defines the discipline (p. 463). Doing so necessitates moving past the atomization of the field into numerous subdivisions such as those presented in the list of 'At Least 50 Terms for Public Art' provided in the introduction to the text ('relational art, intervention(ist), situationist, community based, grassroots, new genre, participatory', etc.). Such 'extraneous debate about the proper use of terms' serves only to 'claim new disciplinary or theoretical territory', she writes, suggesting that such attitudes work in the opposite direction to what should be an inclusive approach (pp. 457–64).

Cartiere's contribution to the *Companion* thus serves as a bridge between the two studies, since her call for inclusivity and purpose marks much of the content of *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*. Here, the emphasis turns towards a discussion of artistic and pedagogical initiatives, practices and processes that are directing the evolution of public art. Particularly useful as a starting point is Andrew Hewitt and Mel Jordan's analysis of the terms underlying the discipline. Acknowledging the complexity of the term *public* and its variety of potential meanings and ramifications for both scholars and producers of public art, they again return to the location of audience in contemporary art practice and criticism with recourse to Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere and Nicolas Bourriaud and Claire Bishop's work on participatory or relational art. In so doing, they raise important questions for historians of public and non-public art alike to face up to. 'Art criticism is limited in how it understands *publics* and relational artworks, because of its long-standing preoccupation with the object', they write. 'By further describing the ways in which publics are utilized and enabled within and for artworks (both as the content and material of certain works as well as the way that artworks address particular publics), we enable a more accurate understanding of art and politics' which demands 'a new articulation of [the relationship between] art and politics' (p. 42). This movement

2. Cover of Cher Krause Knight and Harriet F. Senie (eds), *A Companion to Public Art* (photo: courtesy Wiley-Blackwell)



away from the object and towards a focus on the interactions that both scholars and audiences might have with it – with neither view being prioritized – offers numerous avenues for further exploration.

The Everyday Practice of Public Art is divided into three sections, concerned with questions of practice, pedagogy and site. Here it is the section on educational initiatives that stands out. A series of essays by educators working in a variety of public art contexts gives a measure of the momentum that public art education has internationally. In Dean Merlino and Susan Stewart's petition for further collaboration in the field – the sharing of the skills and the lessons of practice – might be found the means by which

1. Cameron Cartiere and Shelly Willis (eds), *The Practice of Public Art*, New York, Routledge, 2008, p. 15.

both the practice and the teaching of public art will continue to be energized: 'The linking of courses into a global dialogue allows for the local, national, and international frames of practice to become the frames of a broader pedagogy ... In doing so, the practice can now begin to freshen up, as it were, and to respond to the conditions of today and the perceived conditions of tomorrow' (pp. 100–01).

The imbrication of an array of international voices in *The Everyday Practice of Public Art* effectively answers this call while gesturing towards the subject's current breadth. The writing of public art theory and its histories, however, continues to be a largely North American affair, and the collection of authors chosen by Knight and Senie, as well as their subjects, largely reflects this situation. This might not necessarily be to the collection's detriment, however; instead it should provide encouragement for historians from further afield to contribute to the advancement of this burgeoning field of study and to learn from the lessons of art practice.

With the *Companion to Public Art*, Knight and Senie have put together a collection of essays and ideas that will be as invaluable for scholars and practitioners already involved in the field as it is certain to be for those who are searching for a way into it. *The Everyday Practice of Public Art*, meanwhile, functions as both a rallying cry for the potentiality of public art and a fruitful reminder of the rapid and exciting evolution of the discipline.

Robert James Sutton