

## Ethical Public Art in Canada (Montreal, 24–27 Aug 22)

Université de Montréal, Aug 24–27, 2022

Deadline: Jan 10, 2022

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Public art – its past, present, and future – on the land we now know as Canada has been addressed through an ever-increasing number of initiatives in the last decade. In addition to the work of professional organizations such as the Creative City Network of Canada and the holding of sporadic academic, community, and government-sponsored roundtables and panels, some key publications (Gérin and McLean 2009; Gérin et al. 2010; Radice and Boudreault-Fournier 2017; Vernet 2021; Alvarez Hernandez and Fourcade 2021), conferences, and curatorial projects have dwelled on issues pertaining to art practices in public spaces, with an entire or predominant focus on the Canadian context. However, the practice of public art could still benefit from further investigation on its nature, temporalities, materials, places, mechanisms, actors, and publics, and extending these discussions has not necessarily been an objective or an achievable goal of these initiatives, especially roundtables and conferences. The organizers of Ethical Public Art in Canada therefore aim to create a recurrent colloquium, starting in Montréal in August 2022, that can offer a collective, critical, and ongoing space for dialogue and reflection on public art matters. The colloquium will be held every three years in different cities across Canada.

Twelve years have passed since the publication of *Public Art in Canada: Critical Perspectives* (Gérin and McLean, 2009), one of the first scholarly contributions to focus critically on public art specifically in this country, although public art has been widely scrutinized and theorized in the United States (Webster and Senie 1992; Doss 1995; Hein 2006; Krause Knight 2008). Although we recognize the later contributions and build on some of the most insightful ones (Raven 1989; Lacy 1995; Deutsche 1996; Kwon 2002), we seek to situate this colloquium in light of Canada's current demographic, sociopolitical, ecological, and economic realities, and of plural approaches to public art. Because Canada has experienced major societal upheavals and challenges to the status quo in the last decade, we would like to explore not simply public art, but ethical public art, in this country.

What does it mean for public art to be ethical? Why does it have to be ethical? What are the rules or principles guiding the conception and creation of public art in Canada today, and how can they be updated and reinvented? What does it mean to think and build public art not for communities but with them? We are not seeking a single form of ethical public art; rather, we want to explore the links between ethics and public art with regard to the current Canadian context. This context, overloaded with distress, contradictions, antagonism, struggles, and environmental and health crises, has also embraced decolonizing and Indigenization methodologies, anti-colonial discourses, and anti-oppression and ecological practices. In light of this complex backdrop, especially

regarding the current glocal crisis of commemoration, ethical public art holds the potential to be part of ongoing and future transformations. It could help to improve institutional processes and practices, and even generate a sense or spaces of commonality. Some Canadian actors engaged in the field of art in public spaces, including artist-run centres, artists, independent curators, and collectives, have been leading the way by disrupting, altering, relaunching, and reinventing art practices outside the gallery and the museum. What and how could other public art actors learn from them?

Building ethical public art practices today depends on opening counter-channels of expression for mutual listening. Ethical public art is therefore responsive to current contemporary conversations, engages with people's interests, places, and ecosystems, and cares about them. In this sense, it leads to a rethinking of the terms of collaboration in public art practices and mechanisms. Ethical public art entails pluriversalism rather than unique, separate, and consensual points of view: it does not look necessarily for objective truth and goodness but reflects what is at stake. It can bring forward consensus, but also hosts ambiguity and conflict.

Ethical Public Art in Canada invites artists, scholars, critics, curators, students, public art administrators and managers, cultural workers, and organizations to explore a wide range of public art-related topics, including but not limited to:

- Public art and the ethics of listening/care
- Public art and the ethics of collaboration
- Public art and the ethics of identity
- Public art and the ethics of creativity
- Public art and the ethics of curating
- Public art and the ethics of sharing knowledge
- Public art and the ethics of place
- Public art and environmental ethics

Types of proposals:

- Presentations by individuals (25-minute presentation; abstracts for papers should be approximately 300 words in length and sent with 50-word biographical statement).
- Presentations by institutions (not-for-profit organizations, artist-run centres, and governmental agencies that work with art in public spaces) (25-minute presentation; abstracts for papers should be approximately 300 words in length and sent with 50-word institutional statement).

The colloquium will be bilingual. Proposals may be submitted in either French or English.

How to send a proposal:

All proposals must be sent to Raquel Cruz Crespo: [raquel.cruz.crespo@umontreal.ca](mailto:raquel.cruz.crespo@umontreal.ca), by January 10, 2022, for a colloquium to be held August 24–27, 2022. Potential participants will be notified of their acceptance by mid-January 2022.

Please note that colloquium format, additional venues, and conditions for reimbursement of travel and accommodation costs will be determined at a later date, based on funding and on the evolution of the health situation.

Organizing Committee:

Laurent Vernet (Université de Montréal)  
Analays Alvarez Hernandez (Université de Montréal)  
Ciara McKeown (Independent Public Art Curator/Consultant)

References:

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Senie, Harriet F., and Sally Webster. 1992. *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context, and Controversy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.

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Reference:

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