Graphic design and public art: a comparative study in message communication

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//Recepción: 03/04/2023, Aceptación: 04/09/2023, Publicación: 09/10/2023

Abstract

This article aims to reflect on the concepts of public art and graphic design. To facilitate their understanding, the framework is made from general to particular with meanings of the concepts: art, public art, design and graphic design. Consequently, conclusions are developed on these, seeking to analyse and reflect on their differences and similarities, namely, how they communicate their message.

Keywords
Graphic design; public art; communication; message

Diseño gráfico y arte público: estudio comparativo de la comunicación de mensajes

Resumen

Este artículo pretende plantear una reflexión sobre los conceptos arte público y diseño gráfico. Para facilitar su comprensión, al inicio se realiza el encuadre de lo general a lo particular con los significados de los conceptos: arte, arte público, diseño y diseño gráfico. Posteriormente, se desarrollan conclusiones sobre los mismos, buscando analizar y reflexionar sobre sus diferencias y similitudes, es decir, sobre cómo comunican su mensaje.

Palabras clave
Diseño gráfico; arte público; comunicación; mensaje

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Introduction

Public art and graphic design are two concepts that often need clarification, and although this happens, they have significant differences. This article will analyse and reflect on the differences and similarities between public art and graphic design, focusing on how each concept communicates its message.

It is increasingly common to see the so-called public art, which consists of artistic intervention in a public space attracting all kinds of people. With this article, we intend to approach the concepts of Public Art and Graphic Design concepts and try to answer the question: Is there any relation between Graphic Design and Public Art? To facilitate the understanding of the concepts previously mentioned, initially, a framework is made from general to particular, so and for that will be essential to understand the concepts of Art and Design better.

We are often questioned about what Art and Design mean; as soon as we enter the world of design, we are taught that there are differences between both, as if they were distinct themes. The two concepts have evolved over time and consequently reached different definitions; they have gained and lost characteristics depending on the historical moment in which they occur; nowadays, it is difficult to assume that there is an objective meaning. From a very rough perspective, we can even state that art is seen as something more ephemeral and spontaneous while design requires thought, a methodology to get a message across:

> It is clear that graphic design involves more than just drawing; the presence of a plan or a concept forces thought and reflection to be included in the process of producing written or drawn brands. The ultimate purpose of such marks inevitably focuses on the effectiveness of capturing the interest of the presumed recipients, that is, the ability to establish an efficient and sensitising communication channel for the potential recipients. (Lourenço, 2018, pp. 45-46)

Changes in making art lead me to the question: Are all kinds of art spontaneous? Is there a relationship between public art and graphic design?

We can start by comparing the concept of the artist and that of the designer. Bruno Munari (2004) describes that the artist works in a very personal way, expresses visually the sensations and stimuli he receives from the outside world, and is the author of his handmade works, which are therefore usually unique, working for himself and for an elite that understands him. Munari (2004) considers the designer to be a designer with an aesthetic sense who works for the community; that is, he does not work for an elite like the artist; on the contrary, he aims to produce objects in the best possible way, ordinary and of current use. His mission is to solve a problem.

Based on Munari's assumptions, we intend to reflect on these definitions and their current state. Are these definitions already obsolete? Do these notions make sense nowadays? Do we know today what art is, precisely, public art? Do we currently know what design is, or more specifically, what graphic design is? Through these broader concepts, we intend to find a meaning for public art and graphic design, trying to understand if they coexist.

Evolution always happens naturally over time through the interventions/attitudes taken at the artistic and design levels. As there is no single path, society generally influences which approach should be followed, so each one ends up looking for their own. However, it seeks to reflect on the various dimensions involved in public art and graphic design to awaken the reader to other issues and perspectives.

Framework

Before going deeper into the analysis, it is essential to define the concepts.

Based on the concepts of Munari (2004) previously stated about how the artist works, we can deduce that art should be unique and personal, transmitting to the interior and exterior of the artist; it is designed for an elite and not for the general public, the artist is indifferent to what his work transmits to others, it is made for himself. On the other hand, the designer should work for the community, creating objects of everyday and ordinary use, functional and valuable, with a purpose. Below we will briefly refer to definitions of art, public art, design and graphic design to reflect on these concepts later.

Art

We consider that there are two types of art: pure and applied. Pure art refers to visual artworks of two or more dimensions, while applied art refers to artistic work in music and literature, among others. For our reflection, we will take into consideration only pure art. According to Bishop (2022), art is not just about the objects themselves but also the experience that arises around them. It involves the active engagement of the audience and raises questions. Art stimulates dialogues on

relevant and provocative themes and goes beyond mere aesthetic appreciation. According to Munari (2004),

> this constitutes the presentation of the artist's world in paintings, sculptures and all the currently existing forms of imminently personal creative manifestations: piles of plates or old iron, white canvases or randomly coloured panels, printing sheets found in a typography and reworked by hand, various already used or damaged objects and piles, piles of earth, wood or blades, in short, the most unusual objects and things but which, invariably, we end up finding hanging on the walls of an art gallery. (p.33)

The relationship between the viewer and creator of any work of art naturally means an aesthetic experience. As Jauss (2002) says, it is a complex experience as it enables the enjoyment of beauty seen from different perspectives. It is interesting to underline the communicative aspect that the aesthetic experience is imbued with. In fact, according to Jauss (2002), between the creator of any artistic expression or potential artistic expression and its receptors, there is an identification which is sometimes associative and induces a sharing of experience which leads to the recognition of social codes and norms to be accepted or rejected (Jauss, 2002, p.87-88). In this sense, the tactics adopted to put art creators and art receptors in communication have encouraged reflection on other ways of showing the objects collected, whether permanently or temporarily, to sensitise audiences that were hitherto strangers to this dialogue.

Answering the question, is every kind of art spontaneous? Not necessarily; not all types of art are lucky since there are different approaches and artistic styles that may involve more elaborate and planned processes. Art historian Lucy Lippard (1997) states that art can be produced in many ways: with meticulous planning, careful research, experimentation, improvisation or intuition.

Many artists use the creative process as a free and personal expression without necessarily following a pre-established script. However, it is common for artists to be associated with spontaneity. As contemporary artist Ai Weiwei (2012) states, "Art is a spontaneous and intuitive expression of life".

Public Art

The concept of public art is addressed by Regatão (2007), Manzanares (1999), Miles (1997), Philips (1998), Atkins (1997), Caeiro (2014), Brennan (2019) and Milne & Pojani (2023), who, in general, consider that it is composed of artistic projects intended to be shown in public spaces, being susceptible of diverse approaches. It is also public art due to the nature of the issues it chooses to raise or contemplate, with the public constituting one of the essential elements in its production and constant transformation.

Public art, due to its location in public spaces with free access, is one of the ways of involving the inhabitants of the city or town in memories or in any references that may make them feel and awaken a sense of belonging. For Regatão (2007), public art is susceptible to several approaches beyond the simple distinction between art found in the public space and art exhibited in museums and galleries, which, according to Maria Manzanares (1999), is the initial premise of its definition: "... for the promotion and dissemination of contemporary art stands out, (...) the commission of artistic projects intended to be shown in public spaces, considered one of the most prominent objectives of the new laws" (p.17). Also, Malcolm Miles (1997) adopts the same idea by stating that "the term 'public art' broadly describes works that have been commissioned for freely accessible public places" (p.5). Lissovsky (2010) considers "public art refers to the production of art in public spaces, such as streets, parks and buildings, with the intention of transforming or improving the urban environment" (p. 11).

Patricia Philips (1998), however, goes further in reflecting on this concept because she considers that public art is defined not only by its location but also by the objectives it aims at:

> Public art is not public just because it is outdoors (...) it is public because it is a manifestation of activities and strategies that take the idea of public as the genesis and subject of their analysis. It is public because of the nature of the issues it chooses to raise or contemplate and not by virtue of its accessibility or number of observers. (pp.297-298)

For this author, public art involves audiences, this being one of the essential elements in its production. Also, Chaves (2013) considers that "public art is a form of artistic intervention that seeks to involve the community in a creative process, promoting reflection on the urban space and the construction of collective identities" (p. 70).

Robert Atkins (1997) summarises these perspectives on public art by defining it concisely as "simply art produced for, and recognised by, the community" (p.159).

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"In public art as I understand it – the art of creating publics – , less an art in the city and more an art of the city, vernacular, populism and everydayness should be read and above all made critically operative as pieces of a game of communication and interaction with social dynamics" (Caeiro, 2014, p.573).

Hansen (2015) considers "public art has the potential to transform urban space into a place of encounter, dialogue and coexistence, where cultural and social diversity is valued and celebrated" (p. 9).

These definitions highlight the importance of public art as a form of artistic intervention that seeks to improve and transform the urban environment, promoting reflection on space and collective identity. Public art is seen as a means to engage the community and celebrate cultural and social diversity.

Public art is a form of artistic intervention that seeks to transform the urban environment and promote reflection on space and collective identity. Through various creative elements, such as sculptures, murals, installations and performances, public art becomes a powerful tool for creating more pleasant, accessible and inclusive public spaces.

Brennan (2019) considers that public art allows for various participation, including public involvement in planning, selection, creation, installation, maintenance and collective appreciation. Public art best reflects a community's identity, culture and history if the experience of creation and interaction is shared with the community, strengthening its cohesion. Public art can arouse people's curiosity, creating debate and reflection on cultural, political and social issues. It can stimulate individuals' sense of belonging and collective identity, making them feel more connected to the urban environment. Furthermore, public art can transform abandoned and undervalued places into attractive and vibrant locations, attracting tourists and contributing to the economic development of cities. According to researcher Zielinsky (2008), "public art has the potential to transform urban spaces into more human places, where beauty and aesthetics can improve people's quality of life" (p.168), highlights the importance of public art in promoting citizen participation and building a more democratic and inclusive city.

In short, public art is a form of artistic intervention that aims to transform and improve the urban environment, promoting reflection on space and collective identity.

Design

According to Redström (2017), design is a process rooted in the human ability to create tools, dating back to our ancestors, and it is about mentally conceiving and planning with a specific purpose or function.

Within the framework of professions that, over time, have become autonomous, it may be considered that the profession of designer is relatively new and, as happened in many other cases, the praxis revealed itself before consolidating itself as a recognised profession. The design practice that produces utensils and/or products for end use constitute attributes proper to human beings, distinguishing them from other species (Lourenço, 2018, pp. 34-35).

According to Lourenço (2018), the word design has many meanings, something familiar, namely the idea of service. Designers are generally involved in providing services, and the result of their work meets human needs, with a role of increasing importance in individual and community experiences. All goods and services depend on the impulse to imagine or design a situation that improves the existing one. The design offers a set of tools that help improve living conditions. Design is therefore presented as a process. Also, Redström (2017) adds that design is a creative activity that extends beyond the mere creation of objects, encompassing conceptual thinking and the exploration of hypotheses.

Given the growing number of what, in our time, are considered "needs", the performances of this area encompass a wide range of disciplines that involve organisation and planning, among them: industrial design, graphic design, textile design, furniture design, information design, process design, product design, interaction design, transportation design, educational design, systems design, urban design and design management, as well as architecture, engineering, information technology and computer science (Friedman & Stolterman, 2015, p.viii).

Graphic Design

According to Lourenço (2018): "graphic design constitutes one of the most visible facets of design as a major area of creativity and activity, its etymology being at the basis of an area of current meaning of great impact on society" (p.45).

Design is omnipresent in today's daily life. Although it often seems invisible to the average passer-by, the design product accompanies individuals in their everyday gestures and journeys:

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the lights and letters on the watches they wear, the colours, shapes or letters on an ordinary toothpaste tube, the signposting of various public services, (such as the prohibition of smoking or the entry of animals into specific enclosures), advertising on television and/or in newspapers, etc.

Whether with purely commercial or informative objectives, the individual comes across countless indoor and outdoor symbols. The appeal that these messages transmit and their effectiveness with the presumed receivers derive from the tools used in the design, which confirm their relevance in our society. However, it is taken for granted, and we are not even aware of its existence because it is part of the visual culture of everyday life. Frascara (2022), on the other hand, considers that the designer today, in addition to ensuring that a project achieves the expected result, must act with professional, social and environmental responsibility as he works with people from the beginning to the end of the entire design process.

Inattention to graphic design, in particular, may be justified by the fact that newspapers, websites, and other media where it is present are often taken for granted in their content, with no awareness of their layout, choice of font or colour, or other image elements. For example, most people must consider the newspaper's serif font or how a specific product's nutritional information has been placed on the packaging. In this sense, graphic design is paradoxically invisible. However, only some things that the graphic designer does remain ignored; sometimes, the adverse effects awaken the conscience to the phenomenon.

Graphic design obviously involves more than just drawing; the implementation of a strategy or concept demands careful consideration and introspection while developing the visual components. These visual representations must create an effective and lasting communication channel with potential viewers if they are to achieve their ultimate purpose, which is to effectively engage the intended audience (Lourenço, 2018).

Twemlow (2007) is evident in stating that "Graphic design is a type of language used to communicate" (p.6). It is used to communicate with people about things they want or think they want. For Costa (2011), graphic design sells ideas and products, makes money, or highlights political agendas. It serves to clarify concepts and also enrich everyday life. It helps people to understand and organise data, lose themselves in new ideas, narratives or landscapes, and question and challenge the information presented to them.

Graphic design is a form of visual communication that aims to create clear, understandable and compelling visual messages through graphic elements: "graphic design is an activity that aims to create clear, understandable and effective visual messages through graphic elements. These elements include images, symbols, colours, typography and layout" (Frascara, 2006, p. 21). The author emphasises that graphic design is an activity that requires a deep knowledge of the culture, language and society in which it is inserted, in addition to technical skills to deal with materials and design tools.

Frascara (2004) also highlights the importance of graphic design as an agent of social and cultural change, influencing how people perceive the world around them. He states that graphic design can build cultural identity and transmit essential values and ideas to society. "Graphic design is an activity that requires a deep knowledge of the culture, language and society in which it is embedded. It is necessary to understand the target audience's needs, cultural trends and market demands" (Frascara, 2004, p. 45).

In summary, for Frascara, graphic design is an expressive form of communication that combines aesthetics and technological know-how to create clear, convincing messages that affect how people see their environment and interact with it. It highlights the importance of cultural and technical knowledge for developing graphic design practice.For Frascara (2000),

> the graphic designer is a specialist in visual communications, and his work relates to all the steps of the communicational process, in which context is the act of creating a visual object is only one aspect of the process. This process includes problem definition; Objective determination; Communication strategy design; Visualisation; Production scheduling; Production supervision; and Evolution. (p.20)

Conclusions

Public art today is more than just a work displayed in an open space with free access; artists increasingly think of it as a means of communicating, passing on a message and not simply exposing personal feelings. We have the example of the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson who, in collaboration with the geologist Minik Rosing, showed his concern for the environment in a temporary exhibition in London. The work called Ice Watch London (Figure 1 and 2) took place in December 2018. It was composed of thirty blocks of ice distributed in front of the Tate Modern, the

Figure 1. Ice Watch, Olafur Eliasson, Bankside, outside Tate Modern, London, photo: Charlie Forgham-Bailey, 2018. In Eliasson, Olafur, (2018) *Ice Watch London*. https://icewatch.london

Figure 2. Ice Watch, Olafur Eliasson, Bankside, outside Tate Modern, London, photo: Charlie Forgham-Bailey, 2018. In Eliasson, Olafur, (2018) *Ice Watch London*. https://icewatch.london

UK's National Museum of Modern Art and outside the headquarters of Bloomberg, the city's financial district.

The installation was made from materials that are centuries old, large pieces of snow frozen from the Nuup Kangerlua fjord. The blocks were part of the Greenland ice sheet, the second largest (after Antarctica) body of ice in the world, from which thousands of similar blocks of ice break apart every second.

Eliasson recovered the ice floes from the ocean after they broke apart due to the effects of global warming. In London, visitors could interact by touching and walking between them as the ice melted in real time.

Eliasson aimed to allow people living or visiting London to have a real encounter with the consequences of their actions, allowing them to feel and see what we are losing.

Public art encourages the participation of the community in the initiatives; today's artist intends to pass on a message or a concern he feels. This point is familiar to graphic design in that it also wants to communicate with the population; that is, both plan to have utility in work developed. Of course, other points continue to be distant between these two concepts and make them different. Art continues to be, in its majority, ephemeral, such as the work of Eliasson, which then disappeared and remained alive only through photographic/video registration and the moment experienced. However, this ephemerality is physical; something has remained present in the people who experienced this installation and even in others who knew of its existence (of this work) afterwards.

Artists nowadays work together, often existing in a team that supports the development of the work; however, several people execute the result, and only the primary author gets the credit, omitting the name of the remaining elements that participated in the project. On the other hand, designers now do work for the community. In series, products with designs for the elite have appeared, which despite not being unique, are scarce and limited to people with great economic power.

Public art and graphic design are two distinct areas. Still, they can have a relationship in urban intervention projects that aim to decorate the city, make it more accessible and encourage coexistence between people.

While the public art artist usually works with sculptures, murals, installations and other forms of expression that occupy the public space, the graphic designer can create visual solutions for communication in urban areas, such as road signs, information panels, and posters, among others.

In some cases, public art projects may have a more conceptual approach and not necessarily follow the logic of direct communication with the public. On the other hand, graphic design is more focused on visual communication, seeking to convey a clear and objective message to the public.

Despite the differences, both fields can benefit from the collaboration between artists and graphic designers, resulting in projects that combine art and visual communication creatively and efficiently.

It is taken from this reflection that some artists already apply the "process" of design because

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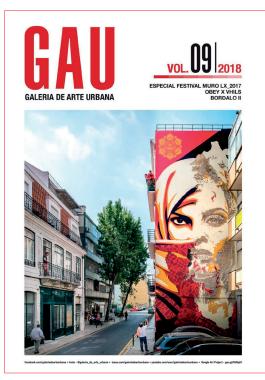documentos de diseño gráfico
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Figure 3. Magazine cover GAU, Urban Art Gallery. In GAU. (2018). Revista GAU - Vol. 09 2018. GAU - Galeria de Arte Urbana. http://gau.cm-lisboa.pt/publicacoes.html

Figure 4. Poster to promote a conference on the theme of urban art. In GAU. (2023). 10° Conferência da urbancreativity.org, Galeria de Arte Urbana, Organização governamental. https://www.instagram.com/p/CuWs3iKtLki/?img_index=1

they have a methodology and an intention to communicate. When they make a work, it is with a purpose/motive. Art and Design are not such distant concepts with precise barriers because sometimes they intersect.

As graphic designer Bierut (2015) highlights, public art and graphic design share a common goal of communicating a visual message to a broad audience. Both fields can work together in urban intervention projects that aim to beautify the city, make it more accessible and stimulate coexistence between people.

Graphic Design can be used in Public Art projects to create visual solutions that help communicate the artist's message, such as posters, signs, and information panels (Figure 3). And Public Art, in turn, can inspire Graphic Design, generating new ideas and concepts for projects in other areas (Figure 4). As highlighted by the architect and urbanist Gehl (2010), graphic design can help to make the urban environment more readable and accessible, making cities more pleasant and efficient.

While public art and graphic design may share some visual elements and have cultural and so-cial similarities, each communicates its message fundamentally differently. Public art can be abstract and ambiguous, intended to provoke the viewer's emotional or reflective reaction. On the other hand, graphic design is created to be clear and direct, planning to communicate a specific message effectively.

Art, design, public art and graphic design are distinct concepts (figure 5 and 6) with some essential similarities. Although cultural and social factors influence them and share visual elements, the way each communicates its message is fundamentally different. Public art primarily provokes an emotional or reflective reaction in the viewer, while graphic design expresses a specific message clearly and directly.

The relationship between Graphic Design and Public Art can be seen as an opportunity for collaboration and the exchange of ideas, resulting in creative and innovative projects for the city and society.

We believe that the topics covered in this article hold a wealth of information and can lead to several avenues of future research. We have identified some potential areas below:

ART	DESIGN
It is not only about the objects themselves but also about what arises around them;	Praxis revealed itself before it was consolidated as a profession, yet it is relatively new as a profession;
It stimulates dialogues on relevant and provocative themes, seeking to go beyond mere aesthetic appreciation;	It is about mentally planning and designing for a specific purpose or function;
Presentation of the artist's personal world through paintings, sculptures and creative manifestations;	The result meets human needs;
Aesthetic and complex involvement;	It has common meanings including the idea of service;
Associative identification that induces the sharing of conductive experience and the recognition of social codes;	It provides a set of tools that facilitate the improvement of living conditions;

Figure 5. Comparative table between the concepts of art and design, author, 2023.

1. Influence of public art on public space: Research the impact of public art installations on people's perception, use, and appropriation of public space and analyse how visual elements can make the urban environment more understandable, improving people's behaviour in public areas.
2. Community involvement in public art projects: Investigate collaborative and participatory approaches to creating public art projects and analyse how graphic designers can include the community in conceiving and developing artistic interventions.
3. Indoor urban art exhibitions: Explore the emergence of urban art exhibitions in indoor venues, and analyse the relationship between urban art and graphic design in the context of these exhibitions.

PUBLIC ART	GRAPHIC DESIGN
Artistic projects intended to be shown in public spaces;	Recipients do not always realise its existence, yet it is part of everyday visual culture;
There can be different approaches, choosing to ask or contemplate questions;	It is an activity that requires deep knowledge of the culture, language and society in which it is inserted, as well as technical skills to deal with materials and design tools;
The public is essential in production/transformation;	A form of visual communication that combines aesthetic and technical elements to create clear and effective messages that can influence the way people perceive and interact with the world around them;
Uses memories and/or references to engage inhabitants (sense of belonging);	It can be used to build a cultural identity and to convey values and ideas that are important to society;
Works that have been funded to be in freely accessible public places;	Final purpose of capturing the interest of the presumed recipients;
A place of encounter, dialogue and coexistence, where cultural and social diversity is valued and celebrated;	Communication process: problem definition, goal determination, communication strategy design, visualisation, production scheduling, production supervision and evolution;
Manifestation of activities and strategies that take advantage of the idea of the public as the genesis and subject of their analysis;	Existence of a plan or concept;

Figure 6. Comparative table between the concepts of public art and graphic design, author, 2023.

These potential research areas offer valuable opportunities to expand knowledge and promote innovation in these fields. By bringing new perspectives and approaches to the table, we can enrich current practices and contribute to society.

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