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ABSTRACT

Macquarie University Sculpture Park: promoting its value to ensure its continued development.

The benefits university museums and collections have to offer students, staff and the broader community, have been identified and discussed many times previously. The opportunities university museums and collections provide for both the staff responsible for them as well as the people that utilise them, are numerous. Yet these opportunities need to be visible in order to become recognised and valued, in the highly competitive university environment where museums/collections, teaching units and other services are vying for financial support.

The Macquarie University Sculpture Park is not exempt from these requirements. It needs to be known and valued, both on and off campus, to ensure its continued development. The Park's profile is essential to its existence. This paper will initially outline the development of university sculpture parks in Australia and how they have provided cultural and educational benefits for both on and off campus communities. Macquarie's Sculpture Park is then discussed and analysed regarding its development and specific public program devised and implemented to increase the awareness of the sculpture parks, both on and off campus.

PAPER

Introduction

There are four key words used in the theme of this year's conference – making university museums and collections **known, visible, accessible, and useful**. By achieving these goals we will secure our museums and collections future within the broader university context. Exposure and promotion leads to longevity.

The Macquarie University Sculpture Park is a good example of collection exposure, merely by its nature as an outdoor museum, in combination with a successful public program. University sculpture parks in Australia may

number few, but they are recognised by their institutions as serving an important purpose by creating a cultural space on campus. Commenting on the Sculpture Park at Macquarie, our Vice Chancellor, Prof. Di Yerbury states:

'The sculptures are intended as a complement to our physical environment. Equally they are meant to complement our intellectual environment'.¹

The inclusion of the Sculpture Park, campus wide, has transformed Macquarie into an environment where intellect and aesthetics are combined. Exposure of this resource is achieved through a successful public program titled *Sculpture Under the Stars* – twilight tours of the Macquarie University Sculpture Park, held every February and November.

Sculpture Park, Sculpture Walk and Sculpture Collection – some definitions

There appears to be three defining terms used when describing the exhibition of sculptures. All three have similarities, yet it would seem that the nature of the exhibition of sculpture in each case denotes the variables. The exhibition of sculptures in a museum setting has traditionally been in isolation, for example, one piece interspersed amongst a group of paintings in a gallery space; or one piece featured in an outdoor courtyard. This isolated phenomenon is being superseded by a trend of displaying sculptures en masse in the natural and built environments.

A sculpture collection can refer to a group of sculptures indoor or outdoor, but not necessarily on public display. A sculpture walk and a sculpture park usually consist of a group of outdoor sculptures, exhibited on public display, and indicated by positionings on a reference map or diagram. I suggest here that to further differentiate one from the other, a sculpture park consists of not only singular display of sculpture in one area, but also groupings of sculptures where many can be viewed at once within the landscape, and are not necessarily physically defined by a numbered labelling system. In a sculpture park, the works can be exhibited without imposing curatorial direction upon the observer – viewers can experience sculptures by chance and construct their own interpretation as well as form relationships between two or more sculptures encountered in a random manner.

A sculpture walk suggests movement from one sculpture in situ to the next without necessarily being able to view numerous sculptures in the landscape at one time. This presents viewers with a more systematic approach dictated by the numerical system of placement, forcing the viewer to follow a suggested path between two or more sculptures, and therefore constructing relationships between those works for them.

Making the utilitarian aesthetic

¹ Yerbury, D., 1992 VC message, original sculpture park booklet

Although placement of sculptural works has become a fashionable inclusion to many contemporary architectural designs – therefore increasing the profile of sculpture in society – the approach to sculpture exhibition in public spaces has remained of a singular nature. However, in the last half-century it has become more common to see groupings of a variety of sculptures available to the public through the development of sculpture parks, also referred to as sculpture gardens.

Inclusion of sculpture in a garden environment can be traced back to Roman times; excavations at Pompeii reveal that sculptures in bronze or marble were placed within rectangular atrium gardens and around decorative pool edges, within the private domain.² Garden design in Australia took its influence from European approaches, which have developed into two general categories – the classical formal and the romantically informal³ – traditionally sculpture featured conservatively within both. Contemporary approaches include ‘the concept of creating gardens specifically for the display of sculpture... a relatively recent phenomenon’.⁴

Sculpture is best appreciated in situ. A valuable cultural and educational experience is gained from the opportunity of observing the size, scale, and placement of a piece in its chosen landscape; the visual, tactile sensation of its surface and shape; and the ability to move around the work observing its changes in mass and void. As Ken Scarlett observes:

*‘when the general public tends to think that all welded steel sculptures are anonymous, and all look alike, it is a didactic experience to see a group of works placed in close proximity. Certainly there is a common vocabulary from the sheer fact that all are assembled from steel. Yet on closer observation the differences become evident, and discerning the individual qualities, comparing one with another, becomes part of the enjoyment of viewing these informally grouped works’.*⁵

European countries were the seminal thinkers in this concept of purpose built sculpture parks/gardens. One of the earliest sculpture gardens, the Vigeland Sculpture Park, in Oslo Norway, developed in 1924.⁶ Many sculpture parks/gardens have been devised and instigated over the last century with great variety in size and focus, some being palatial grounds of undulating acres of grass, woodland and water features, such as the Storm King Art Centre, New York, purchased in 1960, to create an open air sculpture garden.⁷ Whilst others are more topographically challenging such as Hokone Open Air Museum in Japan which opened in 1969, at the foothills of Mount Fujiyama.⁸

² Scarlett, K., 1993 *Contemporary Sculpture in Australian Gardens*, Gordon and Breach Arts International: Roseville, p13

³ Ibid., p 15

⁴ Ibid., p 15

⁵ Ibid., p 28 & 30

⁶ Ibid., p 15

⁷ Gene Sherman in Scarlett, K., 1993 *Contemporary Sculpture in Australian Gardens*, G + B Arts International: Roseville, p11

⁸ Ibid.

Contemporary sculpture parks are 'a relatively new concept in Australia and most are privately owned'.⁹ Yet their profile is being raised by transient events such as *Sculpture by the Sea* held annually since 1997 at Bondi Beach in Sydney, NSW and Cottesloe Beach in Perth, WA (since early 2005). These temporary sculpture 'expos' generate great public and media interest, increasing the opportunity to view sculpture outside the confines of public museum and gallery spaces, and showcase both international and local sculptors. Other promoters of mass sculpture exhibits include private collectors, commercial agents or corporate organizations who create sculpture parks open to the public, to display their investments or stock, and provide a fusion between cultural and natural spaces, allowing potential developers and buyers to view the works in outdoor settings and 'raise public awareness of the wealth of contemporary sculpture'.¹⁰

In company with these are universities, a number of which in Australia have recognised the benefits of this display approach. Yet, Australian sculpture parks differ somewhat to their overseas cousins:

'whereas most of the European, Japanese and American sculpture gardens have been designed by landscape architects, their Australian counterparts have generally been developed in already existing gardens or parkland settings, and are almost invariably of the informal, naturalistic style'.¹¹

Access to sculpture has therefore increased, and a revival in its appreciation and knowledge of its value as an art form has followed. Despite sculpture's limitations in size and weight, cost of materials and lesser potential for sale, in comparison to two-dimensional artwork, the advent of the sculpture park/garden has presented contemporary society with a new cultural space.

Australian University Sculpture Parks

Many universities in Australia have substantial art collections that include sculptures. But few have chosen to display their sculptural works in a dedicated exhibition space such as a park or garden. This is mainly due to landscape and architectural constraints within the layout of the campus.

'Most Australian universities were founded or developed substantially during this century [20th], modern works are dominant... university administrations readily install large abstract works in their grounds where they take on more organic properties than those in city plazas'.¹²

The University of NSW is situated in a highly built-up environment in the heart of Sydney. It is one of the most concreted campuses with very little open ground. Yet it has a sculpture walk, instigated by the founding Vice Chancellor, Sir Phillip Baxter, with the first sculpture commissioned in 1955.

⁹ Scarlett, K., 1995 *Public Sculpture in Australia*, Craftsmans House: Roseville, p 86

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 87

¹¹ Scarlett, 1993 *op.cit.*, p 17

¹² Scarlett, 1995 *op.cit.*, p 84

The walk consists of thirteen sculptures, exhibited mostly in isolation from one another in various courtyards or entranceways to buildings, or in small garden settings:

'Baxter recognised that the incorporation of art into the built environment is necessary to lift the spirit and humanise what could otherwise be a brutal and soulless place. Public art, when successful, provides points for contemplation and by its very presence reminds a community of its cultural heritage. It provokes dialogue which may be either scornful, admiring or non-committal, but with discussion comes ideas and an opening of minds – the very purpose of a university education'.¹³

At the other end of the scale, the Australian National University in Canberra, has the benefit of a more spacious campus. It has a sizeable collection of over 40 sculptures that are displayed across the campus amongst the buildings and in open space. A more recent addition in 2001, to the ANU sculpture collection, is a designated International Sculpture Park situated on the Acton Peninsular on the south-western side of campus, extending out into Lake Burley Griffin. The ANU art collection including sculpture, has been developed since the founding of the university in 1946, making ANU one of the first universities to approach sculpture display in this manner:

'landscape design and sculpture were planned so as to create an integrated environment. Works of art in a place of learning also enhance the academic environment, because their presence demonstrates a culture that values creative thinking'.¹⁴

Wollongong University situated south of Sydney, and founded in 1951, have also recognised the value in displaying their sculpture collection as a sculpture park. No. works?

Macquarie University took this display approach one step further by declaring the entire campus as a sculpture park, rather than designating part of the campus. Established in 1992, by curator and sculptor, Errol Davis. It began with 26 sculptures placed around the campus, some in solitary positions, and others grouped together, and has since grown in size to a total of 94 works in the collection. That's a collection increase of over 360% in 13 years, making Macquarie the largest known university sculpture park in the Southern hemisphere.

Although Macquarie is not alone in including sculptures in their art collection, our approach to exhibition of the sculptures, campus wide, and as a permanent feature, is unique amongst Australian universities. This is largely due to the foresight of the curator, and his experience of and exposure to international sculpture parks. This display approach is assisted greatly by the nature of Macquarie's campus, located on 126 hectares at North Ryde, approximately 18 kilometres north-west of the Sydney CBD. The grounds are

¹³ http://www.artcollection.unsw.edu.au/sculpture_walk

¹⁴ <http://www.anu.edu.au/facilities/sculpture/about.html>

a combination of wide open spaces, wooded areas, a lake, and deliberate plantings of green belts in and amongst the buildings, lends itself to this type of sculpture placement. Stretching right across campus, the Park creates a fluid interaction between the sculptures and their surrounding landscapes and buildings:

'some of these works are placed singly in isolated courtyards, outside the library, in foyers or on the edges of lawns, but the maximum impact is gained where sculptures have been placed in compatible groups'.¹⁵

In a similar vein the Edith Cowan University, Joondalup campus, launched its Sculpture Park in April 2002, making it Western Australia's first designated University Sculpture Park. ECU has a substantial art collection of which sculpture featured strongly enough to warrant the decision to develop that area of the collection further by implementing a campus wide sculpture park and commissioning works to increase its size:

'Visiting a sculpture garden is a very different experience to visiting a gallery. Works can be viewed more easily from multiple perspectives; the spaces are generally without barriers; there are no constraints about touching the works; the open-air settings invite people to relax and contemplate the works'.¹⁶

Sculpture Parks – a valuable asset on campus

Like any university museum or collection, a sculpture collection is a valuable cultural asset:

- It provides a unique, unrestricted cultural space on campus
- It highlights the aesthetic attributes of the built environment often creating contemplative areas for staff, students and visitors
- A wide audience is catered for ranging from fine arts and museums and cultural studies students, to staff and the general public
- The profile of the university is increased within the arts and broader community through making their sculpture collection accessible. This access is on an extended basis in comparison to indoor museums on campus
- It provides opportunities for outreach via tours and workshops and interfacing with other creative outputs such as music and poetry

Macquarie's Sculpture Park has developed a good reputation over this 13-year period, illustrated by the number of works that are on loan (15%) and donated (35%), because sculptors appreciate the exposure and benefit from listing on their Curriculum Vitae that their work is represented in our collection. This reputation has led to our staff being asked to advise other organisations on how to start their own sculpture collection – the *Friends of the Hawkesbury Art Collection* have been in consultation with us for over 12 months whilst they campaign the local council for funding to support a sculpture collection in their region. We have also been invited to work collaboratively with the NSW

¹⁵ Scarlett, 1993 op.cit., p 27

¹⁶ <http://www.ecu.edu.au/vco/curatorial/exhibitions.html>

Department of Education Distance Student Program in compiling an education kit based on our Sculpture Park.

We want Macquarie's Sculpture Park to be known as accessible to all. Guided or self-guided tours of the Park have always been available. Unfortunately though this is not enough to engage the wider community within the University community. You would think that it would be difficult to **not** notice some of the large examples of sculpture we see here in the presentation, yet some people don't know the Macquarie University Sculpture Park exists, where it is located, or how to access it.

Exposure – Developing a specific public program

The University Art Gallery was established in 1999, which assisted in raising awareness of the Sculpture Park through developing joint events. The Art Gallery formed the central location to access or ask about information on the sculpture collection.

In 2002, despite a new detailed brochure of the Sculpture Park – which highlighted public interaction – as well as the availability of a virtual tour link on the main University Web page, the features of the park were not fully recognised by the broader community. Moreover, public accessibility to the park was also hampered by the incorrect assumption that access to the campus was limited to staff and students. Macquarie's campus is actually a public space rather than private land like some other Australian educational institutions.

Staff launched a campaign in late 2002, to further increase the awareness of sculpture on campus. Considering the demographic and target audience it was decided to offer free tours during twilight, titled *Sculpture Under the Stars*. This would ensure access to a wider group of people outside of normal school or working hours. Presenting the park at this time of day also gave those attending a chance to experience and witness the differing light interactions with the works. This allowed visitors to connect with the work on both an intellectual, social and physical level, at a more relaxed time compared with the experience of viewing the same sculpture by day or through a virtual tour by the website.

A light supper was served before and after the tours to promote a casual and friendly discourse between the visitors and the staff, and gave the tours a feeling of 'sophisticated' entertainment.

After the success of the first and second season of twilight tours, an extra element was added to further entice visitors. Poetry readings were included during the tours adding a different creative dimension. The response was amazing – the atmosphere was enlivened by the recitals amongst the lit sculptures and the poets appreciated a different kind of 'venue' to voice their work in. Continuing on from the success of the fusion of poetry readings with sculpture appreciation, the November 2004 tour included music U acoustic and percussion instruments and a performance by an opera singer.

Sculpture Under The Stars tours have consistently increased in terms of visitor numbers and we receive requests throughout the year from people wanting to know when the next tour is held. Information from the commentary is invaluable to the experience, which in turn encourages discussion amongst the audience to form a sociable occasion.

Conclusion

The benefits to the university of opening their sculpture collection to a wide audience, by declaring the entire campus an open air museum, have been identified. Sculpture parks create cultural spaces that are unique to a specific landscape, and present three-dimensional works in a positive, accessible, placement allowing for intellectual and aesthetic appreciation.

The value of the Sculpture Park as a cultural space on campus has been further highlighted by the introduction of the Twilight Tours. Exposure of the collection in this manner has cemented the access to the collection in the minds of the on campus and local community, as an annual event. This successful public program has also built a stronger community outreach with the University Museums and Collections through cross promotion – giving opportunities for the wider community to interact with the other campus collections. In addition, the tours have promoted Macquarie University as a cultural centre within the region. The wider community can access significant cultural events on their doorstep without having to travel into the city.

To return to those four words from the conference theme – making collections **known, visible, accessible, and useful**, this approach to collection display and implementation of a specific public program has succeeded in attaining these goals.

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