

Birgit Mersmann

Lacing Places.

Situative Practices and Sociopolitical Strategies in Korean Urban Art Projects

Urban art has not only become a globally visible public art genre, but meanwhile ascended to the epitome of global art, its definitions, meanings, and practices. Even though it would be a premature conclusion to completely identify urban art with global art, it has been shown that the relation of urban art to global art is indispensable for “situating global art”. As urban art is most virulent and powerful in global cities, it intensely reflects the developments, strategies, and effects of globalization in urban spaces. As it is a distinctly place-related art form, it can help to situate the globalization of art in its varied integrative and segregating manifestations and link it to the globalization of the city, its sociopolitical reality and cultural image.

The case study field chosen for illustrating the local urban placement of public art with and against globality is defined by Korean urban art projects conducted in Seoul since 2000. The analysis will include two different system angles: the official level of the local city government and the communal level of urban citizens and their neighborhoods. By investigating both local government-led public art projects and independent artist-led urban art projects in Seoul and its metropolitan area, it seeks to explore the conflict, cooptation, and cohabitation zones that emerge between local needs, urban living conditions and global art and city politics in Asian megacities like Seoul. The paper will center on three larger projects: 1. the Chunggye River restoration project (finished 2005) led by the Seoul Metropolitan Government combined with the *Mental Map* project (2001-2003) conducted by the urban research group “Flying City” in cooperation with the residents in the Chunggye River area, 2. the public art project *Art in City* by the public art and design studio “Insite” for improving the urban slam of Ewha-dong, and 3. the Korean Federation of Art Organizations (KFAO) squatting project by the urban artists group “Oasis” (2004). In comparing the site-specific works, practices and meanings of these three projects, special attention will be paid to how history in its tripartite junction of local community history, city history, and national history is resituated and restored at the redesigned places and how the wounds and damages inflicted upon the city structure and cityscape by high-speed industrialization and globalization are visualized and mended by localizing strategies that culturally and socially mediate between historization and futurization.

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recently established research network on “Art Practice and Art Theory in the Age of Global Migration”. In 2014 she was Visiting Fellow at the Neubauer Collegium of Culture and Society at the University of Chicago, and in 2013 Visiting Fellow at the Humanities Research Centre of the Australian National University (ANU), where she analysed the emergence of new urban museumsca-  
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