

An Investigation into Sustainable Artwork for the New S.U.B.

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Abstract

The problem that this report seeks to address is the feasibility of installing an art piece in the new Student Union Building (SUB). The goal of the art piece is to promote sustainability within the UBC community and to visitors to the SUB. In making a recommendation, a triple-bottom-line assessment was conducted to determine the potential economic, environment, and social impacts of the art piece.

The project began with preliminary research into examples of environmentally themed and sustainably created art, and studies discussing the impact of art on society. The research was exclusively obtained from search engines, both scholarly and non-scholarly. It provided many ideas into possible art piece designs and implementations, but lacked in information about the social, environmental, or economic impacts of the pieces discussed. As a result, a survey was conducted in which the project group solicited opinions from the general public regarding a sustainable art piece in downtown Vancouver. As well, a local artist by the name of Sharon Kallis was contacted for an interview about her work in environmentally themed art, in order to gain more understanding about the economic cost of her works.

From the research, survey, and interview, a number of conclusions were drawn. It is strongly recommended that an art piece be installed in the new SUB. It was found that public art display can be an effective means of promoting sustainability. Furthermore, it was concluded that if the UBC waste stream can be used as the sole source of material for the art piece, then the economic cost and negative environmental impacts of the piece can be greatly reduced in scale. In addition, hiring an artist to work with students, within view of the public, provides a low cost solution to creating public interaction with the piece. As a result, the potential for promoting sustainability outweighs the minimal environmental impact and economic cost of such a project.

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1.0 Introduction

Our group has been challenged with the task of determining the feasibility of a sustainable art piece for the new SUB. In determining this feasibility we will be using a triple bottom line assessment which looks at the social, environmental and economic impact this art piece will have. As the University of British Columbia is a forerunner in sustainability, the new SUB is going to be yet another pillar of how sustainability can be reached while also providing a practical and visually pleasant building. Our research has entailed first person surveys, interviews with local sustainable artists, as well as online articles and publications. Upon concluding our research we have separated our proposal into five different aspects; art and society, other organizations implementing sustainable artwork, sustainable artwork outside of institutions, conduction of a one on one survey, and local sustainable artists.

2.0 Art and Society

For centuries art has been a means of communicating a message to society, whether that message be political, personal or inspirational. Da Vinci, Rafael, Picasso and Michael Angelo are all examples of artists who have shaped the ideas of society through artwork. It is well known that artwork has been used as a means of communicating a message to society of changes that are needed to progress mankind towards a more enlightened state. For example, Michael Angelo's paintings have forever influenced the Christian society, displaying the battle between good and evil as bloody, painful the cause of suffering. Being that the Christian religion at the time was the most powerful organization shows just how influential art can be. As with all artwork, Michael Angelo's was subject to interpretation by the viewer, allowing his followers to interpret the general idea of his artwork in different ways and provide their own thoughts and influences towards the most influential organization during that time period. Today society is starting to concern itself more and more with

sustainability and thus giving rises to sustainable artwork. As with Michael Angelo's work, this artwork will be subject to interpretation by the viewers, as long as the message is clear enough to inspire sustainable thoughts, the influence that sustainable artwork could have is endless. Institutions are already creating sustainable artwork that can be viewed by the general population and therefor bringing in a sustainable revolution that will be filled with new ideas and contributions my a large mass of the population.

3.0 Organizations Implementing Sustainable Art

The Smart Museum of art is among some of the organizations that are promoting sustainable artwork. The scope of the museum is growing in sustainability; their focus is on public outreach regarding sustainability. One of the exhibitions being held at the museum is the Beyond Green travelling exhibition, this is an group of 13 contemporary artists that address sustainability, activism and future through their work (Smith, 2005). Beyond green hopes to find an intersection between sustainable design and contemporary art. Finding such an intersection poses particular challenges such as how to be thrift and environmentally conscious in presenting, interpreting, packing and shipping works of art. They believe their artwork is a way of speaking to the general public regarding the wastefulness of our everyday lives.

A French association called the Coalition for Art and Sustainable Development (COAL) holds an art and environment award, which rewards a contemporary artist that has created a project regarding the environment. This contest is held annually and has a prize of 10000 euros. The winner is chosen by a jury of personalities from the worlds of contemporary art, research, ecology, and sustainable development. The coal prize supports the vital role of culture and creation for taking stock and then rolling out concrete solutions. COAL prize is helping to foster a culture of ecology (Coalition for Art and Sustainable Development, 2010).

We also discovered a website with the domain name greenmuseum.org. Green Museum is an online museum, which was created with the purpose of presenting and discussing environmental art. The website provides a list of artists that it features as well as exhibitions that discuss art projects which highlight environmental issues such as the inflexibility of mass transportation in highly populated urban settings, the low air quality within these settings, and the dependence on fossil fuels that our highly mobile lives, in North America, have create (Green Muze, 2011).

4.0 Public Displays of Sustainable Artwork

Artists around the globe have been finding ways to display sustainable artwork by using means such as dirty walls, recycled corks and recycled plastic bottles and caps.

Two British-based artist Moose Curtis and Mark Cameron created stencils to power wash on dirty city walls to create wonderful displays of art as seen in Figure 1 below.



Figure 1. Eco-friendly green car stencils power-washed onto a dirty wall in Munich
<http://www.greenmuze.com/art/artists/4206-eco-friendly-car-graffiti-.html>

Chicago-based Scott Gundersen upcycles wine corks to create bigger than life size portraits using the various stained patterns to illustrate different shades. Gundersen's cork portraits are his way of highlighting the importance of recycling and sustainability. As plastic stoppers replace real cork, old cork tree forests are being removed and replaced with other crops, affecting a centuries' old industry in many countries. A picture of Gundersen's work is seen in figure 2 below.



Figure 2. Scott Gundersen uses upcycled wine corks used to make larger than life size portrait.

<http://www.greenmuze.com/art/artists/4177-recycled-cork-art-.html>

Mary Ellen Croteau takes recycled plastic bottle caps and transforms them into stunning piece of upcycled art as seen in figure 3 below.



Figure 3. Plastic bottle caps transformed into stunning portrait by Mary Ellen Croteau.
<http://www.greenmuze.com/art/artists/4194-plastic-bottle-cap-art.html>

The past examples of sustainable art depicts that sustainable art doesn't have to have a message within. The materials an art piece is made from can be a strong enough motive to promote sustainability. Whether the art piece is a portrait, a random picture or a picture portraying a sustainable message, the artwork can have a large impact just from the materials used in building the work.

5.0 Wheat dozer

Vancouver's Wheat Dozer is an excellent example of the attempt to implement public display of sustainable art in our local city. During our investigation of local, environmental art we found the Wheat Dozer on the Vancouver Park Board website. The Wheat Dozer is a large bulldozer that is constructed from Wheat Boards. Artists Folke Koebberling and Martin Kaltwasser scrounged together leftover wheat board

from the Olympic Village construction in order to construct a large bulldozer on False Creek's waterfront. A picture of the Wheat Dozer can be seen below in figure 4.



Figure 4. False Creek's Wheat Dozer

<http://www.compostdiaries.com/2011/09/11/maintaining-balance/>

This piece was chosen as the site and subject of our survey because its construction is a good example of the potential for multiple recycling opportunities within a materials lifetime. The wheat chaff that is harvested to make the board is normally wasted bi-product of growing wheat for food. The excess board that was unused after the construction of the Olympic Village would also have been also have been discarded, had it not been used for the art piece. The energy required to transport the wheat board from the processing plant to the location of the art piece must be considered in regarding the carbon footprint of the piece. However, the project takes advantage of the fact that the board was acquired from a local construction site, so that the impact of transporting the material is not associated with the piece itself. Also, the unique life cycle of the art piece made it a good choice for soliciting opinions about its use. The dozer will eventually disintegrate and become one with the Earth, and we were interested in gathering response to this type of art. We stood

alongside the Wheat Dozer and asked passerby's a series of questions in order to better gain an understanding of society's take on sustainable art. We asked the following questions:

- Was it evident this art piece was made from recyclable material?
- Strictly from an artistic point of view, are you in favor of art pieces using biodegradable materials, or should the piece be long lasting?
- Is public art display an effective means of promoting sustainable practices (recycling)?
- Do you feel sustainability is just a "buzz" word or does it have a concrete meaning within society?

Summarizing our results, we found many people were not aware the dozer was made from recycled materials until they read the plaque consisting of the bulldozer's information. This made it quite apparent that if the new SUB is to have a sustainable art piece, information regarding the work is necessary. Our questioned pedestrians felt the dozer was very unattractive and thought they could have done something different in its location. They were in favor of sustainable art but they did not like the look or the longevity of the Wheat Dozer. All were in agreement that sustainable art is a fantastic method of promoting sustainability, however, they were not in favor of the Wheat Dozer. The Wheat Dozer is not pleasing to the eye and most wanted it gone from their neighborhood. The hatred the locals had toward the dozer makes it very apparent that sustainable art should not only be sustainable, but it should last long and look good throughout its lifetime. One lady mentioned she enjoys "art with a purpose". She feels if sustainable art has a purpose its message is received much better from society. We asked her if she had an example of art with a purpose and she explained an old culvert that was turned into a walkway. Regarding sustainability being a "buzz" word, many people would agree themselves, along with most of society, does not have a firm hold on what sustainability truly means. Only one person could answer they had a firm hold on what sustainability means. This is an

important result because it reiterates the need for a description of how the art piece is sustainable. Furthermore, a display discussing the art piece could also provide a suitable venue for discussing the sustainable goals of the new SUB in general. We concluded sustainable art is a useful tool in promoting sustainability, but it must be displayed in a proper manner, include the needed information, and look pleasing throughout its lifetime.

6.0 Sharon Kallis

Through online research we were able to find a local artist in the Vancouver area that has been previously involved in sustainable artwork. Sharon Kallis is a great example of how an artist can promote sustainability and provide inspiration for the future through artwork. One of the many sustainable art projects Sharon has been a part of the Means of Production (MOP) community garden in central Vancouver. This project involves artists using material grown in the garden to create short-lived pieces of artwork that will eventually return themselves to nature through natural means such as wind, rain and decomposition.

Our group had the pleasure of interviewing Sharon regarding her artwork and the possibility of her contributing to a sustainable art piece that could be displayed in the new Student Union Building. Our main goal during the interview was to determine the approximate cost of having a local artist such as Sharon contributing to the project and also determine what sort of materials and methods she would be using. We received such figures as \$65 per hour with a minimum of 3 hours for making the commute to the UBC campus. Sharon was very enthusiastic about the project providing many ideas such as using UBC's waste stream as the main source for material for the artwork and also offering to do an artist talk with a class of art students that could be involved in the creation of the artwork. The thought of having a local artist with experiences such as Sharon could not only increase the quality of the sustainable artwork created but also allow the artwork to have a greater social impact

on society. This greater impact would be due to involving members from outside of the UBC community to contribute and therefore further enhancing the probability of her followers and the greater Vancouver population to be inspired by the efforts put forth.

7.0 Conclusions

Art serves as an important tool to influence the views of a large audience, with the genre of sustainable growing within the art community; we can hope that the public will be influenced to live a more sustainable lifestyle. If a properly developed sustainable art piece is implemented in the new SUB, it can greatly promote sustainability. We can conclude that the message of art need not be encapsulated by the theme of the piece but also by the material of which the piece is made. From examining our survey we can conclude the sustainable art is a very strong tool in promoting sustainability: However, certain aspects are necessary to promote the wanted message. A plaque is invaluable in communicating the message of sustainability to those who may be unfamiliar with such artwork. Also, our survey made it clear that we must consider the longevity of the piece and the look of the artwork. A piece of art that can last multiple years while being visually pleasing is key for society to thoroughly enjoy the art.

The cost of implementing a sustainable art piece is somewhat unknown. Although we give a general cost per hour to provide a sustainable artist, the total hours that that artists services will be needed is subject to interpretation. We were also unable to acquire the exact cost of previous pieces on display in other UBC facilities. With these uncertainties still in mind, it is not a far stretch to say that the cost of creating sustainable artwork for the new SUB would be comparable to other types of artwork being installed. With possibilities of using UBC waste stream and having students contributing to the efforts of creating sustainable art work, the only relative cost would be to have an artist come in to assist the project. Having a sustainable

artist contribute to the project would be approximately \$65 per hour, which is within the relative cost of having other non-sustainable artwork on display.

The environmental impact of sustainable artwork for the new SUB can be said to be purely positive. If we use only materials from UBC waste stream, such as recyclables and waste from construction sites on UBC campus, we can extend the life cycles of these materials. The future disposal of this artwork would be no more harmful to the environment than the original disposal of the materials had they not been used in the creation of the artwork. With this artwork only extending the life cycle of previously transported and now unneeded materials, we can say that the carbon footprint of this artwork is relatively low as apposed to other forms of creating artwork.

8.0 Recommendations

After completing our research on sustainable artwork for the new SUB we have furthered our understanding of the impacts that such artwork could have on the UBC community as well as the surrounding community. With such an understanding of the economic, environmental and social impacts sustainable artwork will have, we are recommending that we hire Sharon Kallis to come in and conduct an artist talk to a class of art students who will be involved in the creation of the artwork as a class project. After the artist talk, Sharon and the students involved in the project, should then research materials that can be taken from UBC's waste stream and used in the creation of the artwork. Once the Student Union Building is built, Sharon will be hired at a cost of \$65 per hour to set up material as well as a booth to create artwork in the SUB along with the art students involved in the project. As students pass by the booth they will be encouraged to participate in the creation of the art and therefore learn more regarding sustainable artwork and feel a stronger connection to the artwork that will soon be displayed. With a stronger connection to the sustainable artwork, the social impact of the artwork will therefore be enhanced. Another

contribution to the social impact of the artwork will be due to having Sharon contributing to the artwork. This contribution will be due to having a local artist contributing which display to a larger community (such as Sharon Kallis's followers and the Vancouver art community) the possibilities for sustainable artwork along with the sustainability efforts that UBC is putting forth. With these initiatives being implemented we can maximize the social impact of the sustainable artwork along with keeping the cost acceptable and the environmental impact minimal.

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List of Abbreviations

UBC – University of British Columbia

SUB – Student Union Building

COAL - Coalition for Art and Sustainable Development

MOP – Means of Production

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Appendix A

Survey

Questions:

1. Was it evident this art piece was made from recyclable material?
2. Strictly from an artistic point of view, are you in favor of art pieces using biodegradable materials, or should the piece be long lasting?
3. Is public art display an effective means of promoting sustainable practices (recycling)?
4. Do you feel sustainability is just a “buzz” word or does it have a concrete meaning within society?

Responses:

Subject 1

1. Yes, but the plaque is important in portraying this.
2. It used to look nice, but now it looks run down and messy.
3. Yes extremely effective!
4. “I feel I have a decent sense about sustainability, but I feel it is a word thrown around throughout society with no one taking steps toward a sustainable environment.”

Extras: - Likes art which not only looks nice but has a purpose
- The plaque is very important.
- Build art that looks nice for a longer period of time.

Subject 2

1. Not until I read the given information.
2. I find the art interesting but not very pleasing for the neighborhood.
3. Yes, this could inspire thinking outside of the box.
4. She feels sustainability is just a buzzword.

Subject 3

1. No (didn't read the plaque yet)
2. Find it to be unattractive and uninteresting.
3. Yes, but not the bulldozer. There are better art pieces to display sustainability.
4. Didn't understand sustainability until we explained its meaning.

Subject 4

1. Not at first glance. The plaque explained it well.
2. Used to be an interesting piece of art, but not the way its sits right now.
3. Great method of promoting sustainability!
4. Isn't very clear on the meaning sustainability.

Subject 5

1. Had no idea, until they read the given information.
2. It has a "neat" aspect to it, but it's not very pleasing to look at.
3. Absolutely!
4. Has heard a lot of talk regarding sustainability, but doesn't know the true meaning of it and how it's being implemented in our society.