

URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC ART DOWNTOWN – OBSERVATIONS & QUESTIONS

**(Recognizing that Urban Design is driven
by Urban Planning)**

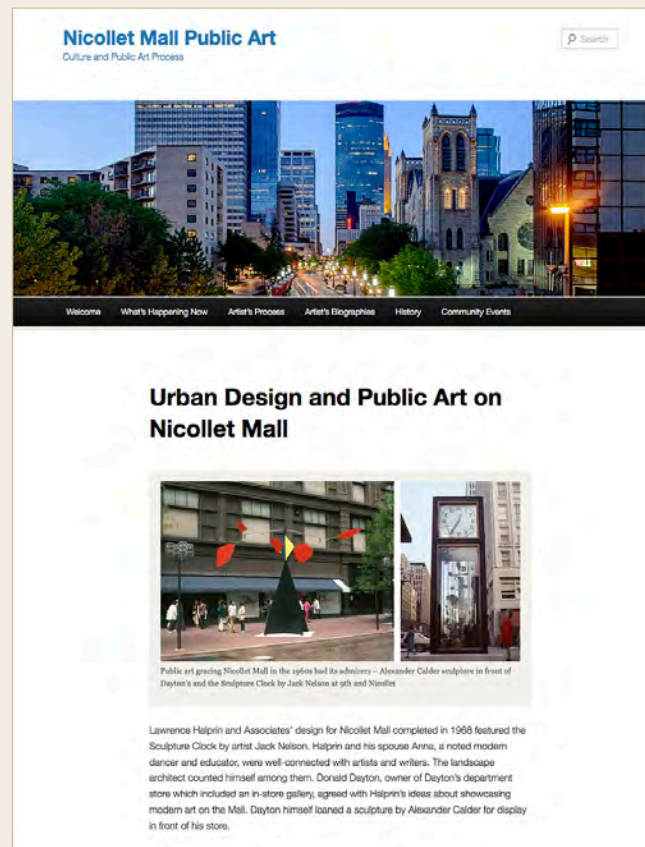
**Brown Bag Conversation with
Staff of City of Minneapolis Planning and
Economic Development, Downtown Council
and others**

March 6, 2017



Regina M Flanagan
Art • Landscape • Design LLC
in her role curating and
integrating public art
in the Nicollet Mall project

The materials in this presentation are from recent content added to the **Nicollet Mall Public Art, Culture and Public Art Process** website: <http://nicolletmallart.org/>





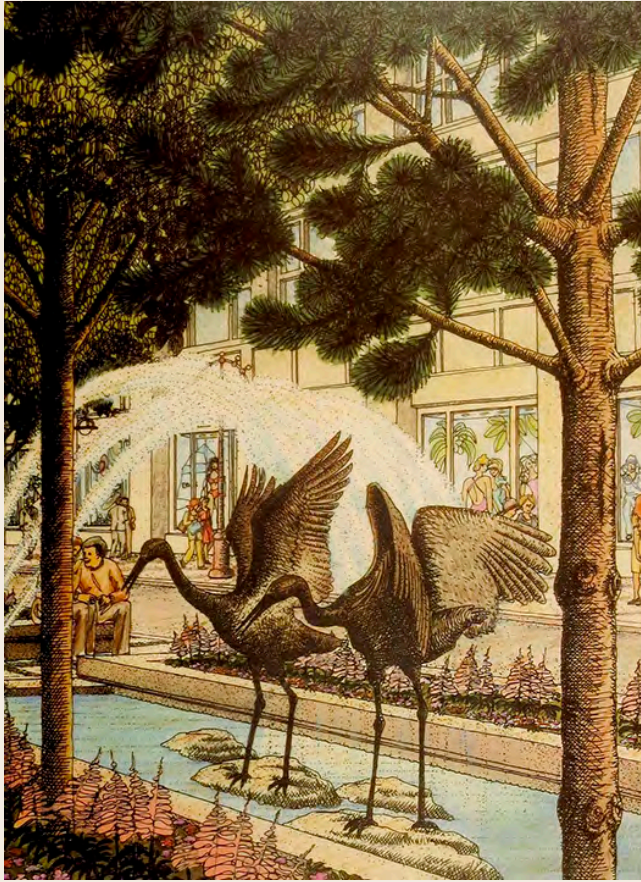
1968 – Alexander Calder mobile in front of Dayton's department store and *The Sculpture Clock* by Jack Nelson; both featured in landscape architect Lawrence Halprin's original design for Nicollet Mall.

... cultural additions to the public realm before any plans, policies or ordinances were established to include art as a visible part of the downtown public realm.

URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC ART DOWNTOWN



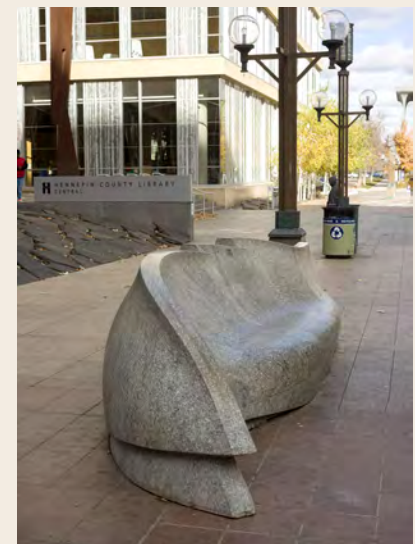
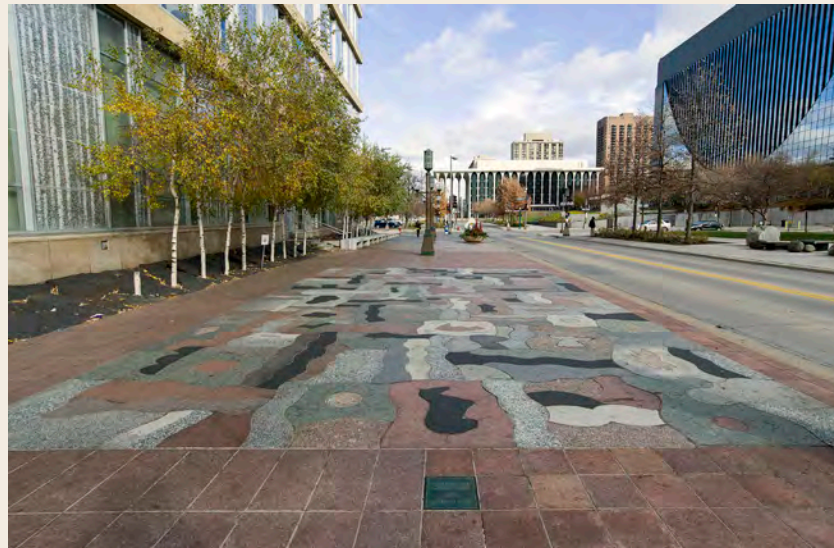
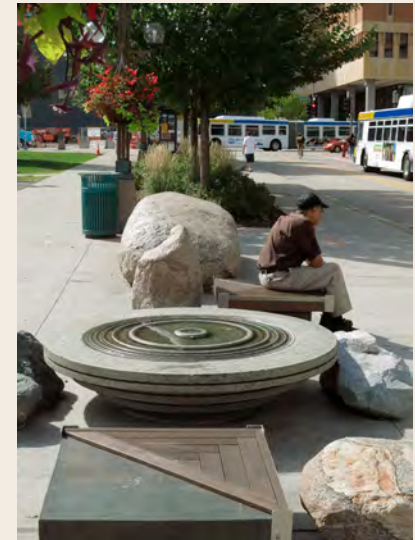
1987– the Minneapolis Arts Commission launched its Art in Public Places Program four years after sponsoring a series of artist-designed manhole covers. Later in 1988, the Commission's artist-designed bench project installed four fanciful but functional benches along Hennepin Avenue.



1987 brochure about The New Nicollet Mall declared, "Art for People's Sake: Excitement will be added to the Mall by public art and open spaces reflecting Minnesota themes, such as the northern cranes pictured here." In 1992, Great Blue Heron, Loon and Sage Grouse fountain by sculptor Elliot Offner came to the Mall.



(Clockwise from above:) Kate Burke, Philip Larson, Kinji Akagawa, Stanton Sears, George Morrison and Seitu Jones and Ta-Coumba Aiken



Additional 1992 Nicollet Mall artwork was site-specific, integrated and/or functional.

URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC ART DOWNTOWN



Left and above: *Gathering Vessel*, Howard Ben Tre at Target Corporation (2002).

Right: *Continuum*, Brad Goldberg at US Bancorp (2000).



2000 – 2002 integrated plazas designed by artists.

URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC ART DOWNTOWN

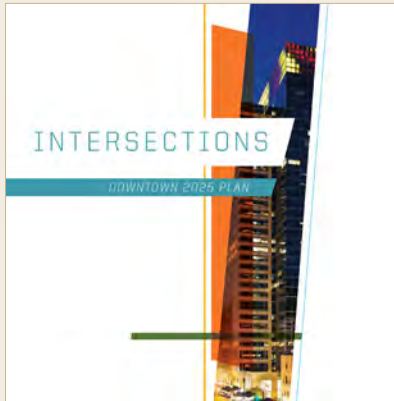
If public art reflects its time, then...

1970s = Modernist sculpture, discrete free-standing iconic works.

1980s = Site-specific works, functional works.

1990s = Site-integrated works often with social commentary and cultural awareness.

2000s = Entire sites/plazas designed by artists. Community-oriented and community-driven work.



INTERSECTIONS – DOWNTOWN 2025 PLAN

... calls for “the transformation of Nicollet into more than a “must-see” stop; it will be a “must-do” experience.

The street should provide the region’s premier walking experience with many “must see” destinations along its route...

Public plazas featuring stunning art pieces should be interposed at intervals.”

Commentary:

The language of the Plan seems to conceive of public art primarily as physical aesthetic objects, i.e. something you look at – and less about its potential for offering experiences. It calls for “public plazas featuring stunning art pieces” (a 19th-century idea) and “a major art piece that becomes a signature for Minneapolis” (a mid-20th century notion of the Modernist iconic sculptural object).

INTERSECTIONS – DOWNTOWN 2025 PLAN

Commentary (continued):

To draw a distinction between art-as-object and art-as-experience, a useful example is Chicago's Millennium Park and the variety of art experiences it offers – from the interactivity of the Jaume Plensa's Crown Fountain, and the reflective stainless steel Cloud Gate by Anish Kapoor, to the lushly planted Lurie Gardens with its splashing watercourse.

These highly engaging artworks make the space and invite, even demand, interaction. People flock to the park, creating its ambiance.





The new public art coming to the Mall is predominantly phenomenological and experiential – capable of providing the “must-do” experience called for by the Downtown 2025 Plan.

INTERSECTIONS – DOWNTOWN 2025 PLAN

The Plan asserts that although Minneapolis has a concentration of arts, theater, design and music, “that those creative expressions seldom pour out into public places, or penetrate the consciousness of the wider public.

...art and design will no longer be sequestered in institutions, but will spill out onto the streets to define who we are as a city and celebrate where we live.”

Commentary:

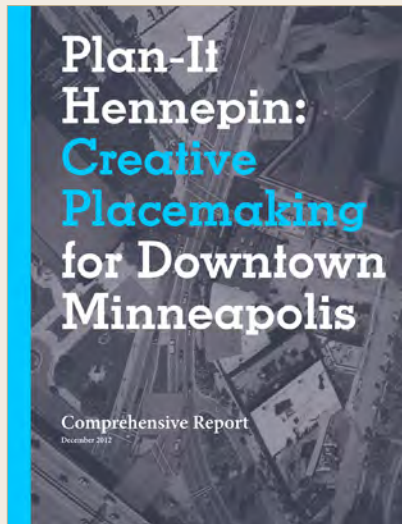
This assertion is surprising, given that nearby Northeast Minneapolis opens wide its doors to the public during the intensive three-day Art-A-Whirl event each year, and there are numerous other examples of engaging public events such as the May Day Parade in Powderhorn Park.

Artists live and work in these neighborhoods which ring downtown. Artists and artist-run organizations program these events and make them happen. Downtown could have similar events, if was a priority to coordinate with the arts community and program them.

Why is the arts community
perceived as being invisible?

Who can partner with arts
organizations to program the arts
downtown?

Does it fit the arts community's
mission to take this on?



PLAN-IT HENNEPIN: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Public art features significantly in the 10-Year Outcomes section of the Plan.

One of five outcomes is the desire for Distinctive Public Art "of an eclectic and unpredictable nature reflecting different cultural aesthetics and appealing to the growing diversity of people visiting and living downtown."

PLAN-IT HENNEPIN: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

In several sections of the Plan, key locations and opportunities are identified for public art including:

1. Iconic pieces anchoring either end of the district at the Hennepin Avenue bridge in the Gateway Park and the I-94 overpass in the Hennepin-Lyndale Gateway;
2. Major outstanding public art for the Hennepin Light Rail Transit Station Area that reflects culture and heritage, creativity of Minnesota artists, and the values of Minneapolitans; and
3. Interpretive art installations including historical markers and/or commissioned public artworks.

PLAN-IT HENNEPIN: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

The Plan also asserts that artists should participate in a consistent, meaningful way in planning and design processes.

The Plan also envisioned artists involved in the design of street re-building, green spaces, wayfinding, transit and infrastructure improvements.

PLAN-IT HENNEPIN: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

The Long-term Opportunities section generated by public input has a grab-bag list of notions and ideas including locations, qualities, subjects/themes and practical requirements for public art:

- Reflecting the importance of the American Indian populations and significance of Saint Anthony Falls and of the Avenue as a cross-cultural meeting ground.
- Making aesthetic connections and helping ground people within the Cultural District (i.e. signage).
- Inspiring curiosity and compelling pedestrian and bicycle movement.
- Embracing the District's density and "urban-ness" while also offering rest, escape, contemplation and areas to interact.
- Responding to the needs and desires of diverse audiences and stakeholders.
- Celebrating the social environment and engaging visitors and residents in ways to reinforce community connections.
- Investing in structures that require little maintenance.
- Secure significant public and private funding to conduct an international design competition to select key iconic public art commissions to enliven the underside of the I-94 overpass, both temporarily and permanently, and for iconic works at the River Gateway, the Hennepin-Lyndale Gateway, and entrances to the Theatre District.

PLAN-IT HENNEPIN: CREATIVE PLACEMAKING

Commentary:

Public art is conceived broadly in this Plan, and as a product of extensive public input; it must meet a wide range of expectations. However, it seems the public is less interested in work that is about creative expression, or work by visionary individuals.

As expressed by comments in this Plan, the public is more interested in work that is a reflection or interpretation of local culture and heritage – art that is basically about themselves.

Many of the public art ideas mentioned in the Plan are not substantially dissimilar from other public art activities that have been ongoing in the district since the early 1990s. Familiarity with what has been successful in the past may have overly influenced the perception of what is possible in the future.

Why is there the expectation that public art needs to be about us – the public?

...That it be proscribed to reflect/incorporate/interpret local culture, values and heritage?

How open are we to what artists have to offer or to say?

Shouldn't we encourage and enable artists to speak from their own contemporary viewpoints?



DOWNTOWN PUBLIC REALM FRAMEWORK PLAN

While the Plan does not include a discrete emphasis on arts and culture, it does recognize public art as “contributing, along with active ground floor uses, street furnishings, greening, façade improvement and bike and pedestrian amenities, to enhanced street character and a sense of place.”

Minneapolis public art has a pragmatic streak that has its roots in the early projects – functional things like manhole covers, benches, bus shelters – and now, utility box wraps.

Is it public art's role to disguise or mitigate inherently mundane, ugly things?

Or is it because if the art is functional, it's a more readily defensible public expenditure?

How could expectations for public art be raised higher?

DOWNTOWN PUBLIC REALM FRAMEWORK PLAN

Public artist Stephanie Glaros was engaged to collect and catalog interviews with Downtown visitors, residents and workers. Her interviews and photographs are sprinkled throughout the plan, adding multiple voices, observations and depth.



Figure 2.16 Hani Ali, photograph by Stephanie Glaros

"I work at Macy's and I also go to school here. The Art Institute, Fashion Design. I take the train. It's very convenient. Three stops later, I'm everywhere...I like to eat, especially in the skyway, there's a lot of food and restaurants. We do grocery shopping sometimes, and then the veggies and fruits, like, on the streets. Me and my aunt get them sometimes, like every Thursday...I see a lot of people come out to bars and stuff like that, but I can't relate to that...(My) favorite thing (about downtown) is you see everybody. People that do work, people that don't work. For me, in the mornings, I get motivation a little bit, where everybody's going to work, or doing something. In the summertime I see a lot of musicians and stuff like that. But I wish there was more art, or multicultural stuff. You know, people can go to hang out and get to know people. For example, 'Cultural Night,' or something like that. Somewhere where people were expressing themselves. I would like that kind of thing. It would be really good."

-Hani Ali, Worker



DOWNTOWN PUBLIC REALM FRAMEWORK PLAN

When people were asked, “what would you like to see happening in parks and public spaces downtown?” – arts activities and cultural events figured prominently. Responses included attending festivals and events; seeing or making art, dance or music; and learning about art, history or culture, among others.

Commentary:

Arts activities and cultural events predominated. These things result from programming but physical spaces/ places downtown could also be made more hospitable and flexible, enabling them to happen.

Our community has a growing cohort of social practice artists, many involved in social justice work. Their work is often performative and interactive. Recent examples include the Creative City Challenge projects, the result of a collaboration between the Minneapolis Convention Center, the Office of Arts, Culture and the Creative Economy of the City of Minneapolis and Northern Lights.mn.

Is there a disconnect between the perceptions about, or understanding of, what contemporary public art is and its potential and the current practices of local artists?

If public art reflects its time, then...

1970s = Modernist sculpture, discrete free-standing iconic works.

1980s = Site-specific works, functional works.

1990s = Site-integrated works often with cultural awareness or social commentary.

2000s = Site-integrated works often with social commentary and cultural awareness.

2010s = Social practice, relational, experiential works.