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## Everywhere and Nowhere: Public Art Interventions in Qatar

Barbara Charrue

*Virginia Commonwealth University*

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# *Everywhere and Nowhere*

Public Art Interventions in Qatar

Barbara Charrue



*Everywhere and Nowhere*  
Public Art Interventions in Qatar

Barbara Charrue  
Doha, Qatar  
May 2016

## ***SIGNATURE PAGE***

Approval certificate for **Barbara Charrue** for the thesis project entitled **Everywhere and Nowhere: Public Art Interventions in Qatar**.

Submitted to the faculty of the Master of Fine Arts in Design of Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar in partial fulfillment for the degree, Master of Fine Arts in Design.

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## ***ABSTRACT***

Qatar is rapidly becoming an internationally renowned art hub not only through the construction of numerous museums and galleries, but also through the development of public art projects.

I strongly believe that Qatar can be more than a place to work; it can be a space where art is part of public spaces. But how can we fully and effectively integrate art into public space in Qatar? How can Qatar be more than a place where we work, eat, sleep, and go to the mall from time to time? How can public art involve / benefit the community and local artists? Can it shift behaviors from less of an exclusive to more of an inclusive community?

This research is an investigation on public art in order to enhance its development. Instead of commissioning internationally renowned public artworks that are massive and monumental, the objective of this research is to encourage social interaction between communities and local artists through participatory public art projects. This type of art engages users directly in the creative process, permitting them to be both co-actors and observers of the work. The outcomes tackle social engagement through public art interventions that trigger conversations and interactions among communities.



## ***INTRODUCTION***

### ***Definition: What is Public Art?***

Defining public art is tricky in the context of Qatar. Until the twentieth century, public spaces in the West incorporated works such as commemorative statues, triumphal arches, and shrines that served as displays of political and religious power and stimulated the faith of believers. Recently, it has evolved into different forms, shapes, sizes, mediums and purposes following a number of shifts prompted by broader art movements. Indeed, according to the American for the Arts' monograph, "public art is a multifaceted field of inquiry; it encompasses a wide variety of creative expressions in the public realm."<sup>1</sup> In the contemporary era, public art is often conceived of as a type of social intervention, purposely created to be experienced and to attract attention in the public realm outside conventional display spaces such as galleries and museums.<sup>2</sup>

While this is how the meaning and role of public art is often perceived in the West, in many ways Qatar presents an intriguing case study. Compared to many other places, the modernization of the country is a relatively late, twenty-first century phenomenon, and yet it is quickly developing into an international art hub.<sup>3</sup>

***“public art is a multifaceted field of inquiry; it encompasses a wide variety of creative expressions in the public realm.”***

### ***Impacts of Qatar's rapid development***

Driven by the industrial harvesting of fossil fuels, Doha is currently experiencing an economic boom, a state of affairs that has attracted significant migration from around the region as well as globally. In Qatar, migrant workers constitute more than 80% of the population.<sup>4</sup> This large foreign labor force has been recruited to develop many of the large-scale urban projects and developments that are significantly re-shaping the country, such as the Pearl-Qatar, which is devoted to public commercial space, Education City, which is dedicated to bringing higher education to the country, and Aspire Zone, which features stadiums and other athletic facilities. Those urban developments help Qatar create an identity to attract the local population as well as tourists. However, construction projects are creating shifts in Qatar's demography. For instance, Msheirib project, the "New Downtown," will re-locate part of the population towards Barwa City. This shift will affect the lifestyle of urban communities through the expansion of wealthier properties.<sup>5</sup>

1 Becker, Jack. *Public Art: An Essential Component of Creating Communities*. Americans for the Arts, 2004, 1. [http://blog.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/Jack%20Becker%20Public%20Art%20Monograph\\_0.pdf](http://blog.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/Jack%20Becker%20Public%20Art%20Monograph_0.pdf).

2 Bach, Penny Balkin. *Public Art in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.

3 Wiedmann, Florian, V. Mirnicheva, and Ashraf M. Salama. "Urban Reconfiguration and Revitalization: Public Mega Projects in Doha's Historic Centre." *Open House Int* 38, no. 4 (2013): 27–36.

4 Orient Planet PR & Marketing Communications and MADAR Research and Development. "GCC Population Growth." *Arab Knowledge Economy Report 2014*. 2014, 14. <http://www.orientplanet.com/akereport2014.pdf>

5 "Msheirib Downtown Doha." Msheirib Properties. <http://www.msheireb.com/>



Qatar's expatriates have all come to Doha for one reason: to work. Where do you come from? What do you do? These are common questions you hear when living in Qatar. Communities are grouped according to nationalities and classes. They are spatially divided by Doha's urban discourse. It is easy to locate where each group is placed. For instance, Nepali migrants are usually found in the Industrial Area, foreign professionals can be found in compounds, and Qataris live in villas in a "Qatari Neighborhood."<sup>6</sup> The communities tend to be disconnected and disengaged within the country. In this context, how can social engagement be addressed?



*The communities tend to be disconnected and disengaged within the country. In this context, how can social engagement be addressed?*



<sup>6</sup> Gardner, Andrew. "The Transforming Landscape of Doha: An Essay on Urbanism and Urbanization in Qatar." *Jadaliyya*, November 9, 2013. [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15022/the-transforming-landscape-of-doha\\_an-essay-on-urb](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/15022/the-transforming-landscape-of-doha_an-essay-on-urb).

## Public Art in Qatar; 2.0

I strongly believe that Qatar can be more than a place to work; it can be a space where art is part and parcel of public spaces. But how can we fully and effectively integrate art into public space in Qatar? How can Qatar be more than a place where we work, eat, sleep, and go to the mall from time to time? How can public art involve / benefit the community and local artists? Can it shift behaviors from less of an exclusive to more of an inclusive community?

Implementing interactive public interventions have the power to energize our public spaces, stimulate our thinking, and alter our surroundings. It can change our perception of the city and behavior in a completely refreshing way - as if it was being experienced for the first time.

The focus of this research is public art in Qatar. My purpose is to investigate public art in order to enhance and promote its development. While Qatar is creating an art hub by commissioning famous artists, designers and architects from all around the world, I would like to explore new ways to promote public art by involving the community and bringing back the innocent and childlike drives of the public to explore and interact with the world around them.

Indeed, Qatar Museum Authority installed many renowned artworks from Damien Hirst, Richard Serra, Urs Fischer, Tom Otterness and El Seed in order to create awareness and develop an art hub. Although most commissioned public artworks in Qatar are massive and monumental in terms of sculptures or murals, my intent is to encourage connections between the community and local artists through interactive

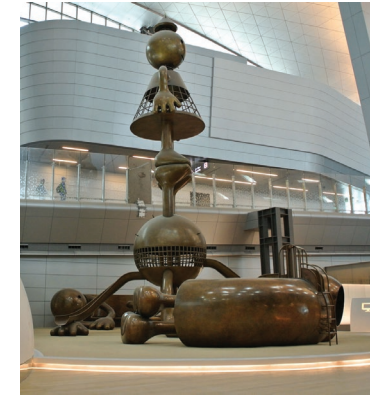
public art projects. This type of art engages users directly in the creative process, permitting them to be both co-actors and observers of the work. In addition, I aim to tackle social engagement through public art intervention that trigger conversations and interactions among communities. My aim is to engage the public in ways they otherwise might not be engaged.

Putting myself in the position of the artist working in public spaces will enable me to understand the outlines and possibilities of interactivity and behavior shifts. First of all, I will investigate how public art in Qatar has evolved through time and how it continues to shape its society. I will then analyze and define public art in order to show that it is an experience for the local population, enriching public space while taking into account diverse considerations. In parallel, I will investigate and apply interaction methods such as cues, actions and feedbacks to create a successful user experience. Finally, since the experience of public art is local, I examine diverse projects that bridge the gap between tradition and modernity in order to underline the importance of involving the community and local artists. My approach to this research is more practical in the sense that my focus is on creating playful participatory public art interventions to encourage interactivity within the community rather than contributing a theoretical or purely intellectual framework.

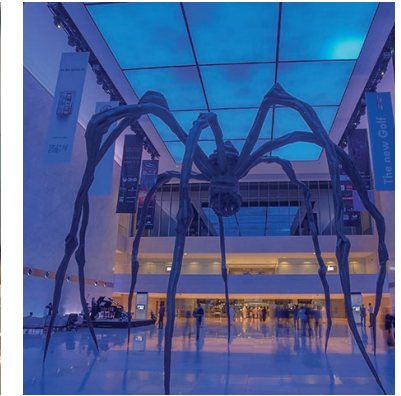
*I would like to explore new ways to promote public art by involving the community and bringing back the innocent and childlike drives of the public to explore and interact with the world around them.*



[1] Urs Fischer - Lamp Bear



[2] Tom Otterness - The Playground



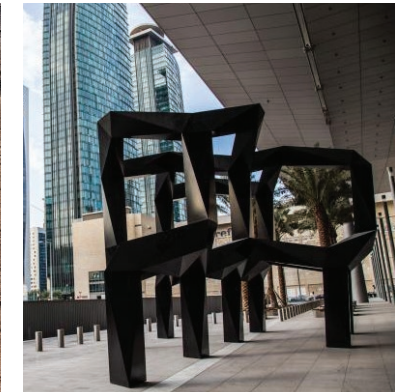
[3] Louise Bourgeois - Maman



[4] Richard Serra - 7



[5] Richard Serra - East-West/ West-East



[6] Tony Smith - Smoke



[7] Damien Hirst - The Miraculous Journey



[8] El Seed - Calligrafiti



[9] Sarah Lucas - Perceve



[10] Oryx Roundabout

## ***THE EVOLUTION OF PUBLIC ART IN DOHA***

### ***History of Public art***

Modern public art in Qatar was initially integrated through roundabout sculptures and mosaics of the past.<sup>7</sup> These secular works differ from projections of political or religious power often seen in nearby countries. In Abu Dhabi, for instance, there is a large portrait of Sheikh Zayed on the corniche that marks his Accession day.<sup>8</sup> Outside of the region, in Barcelona, Spain, there are several memorial bronze statues of Christopher Columbus dedicated to celebrating his discovery of America.<sup>9</sup> Even if the roundabout sculptures in Doha were mostly decorative, they nevertheless constituted an expression of the city's identity, becoming landmarks as well as tools to navigate. In the recent past in Qatar, when someone asked directions, the response was typically something like: "go to Oryx roundabout then turn..." While this type of public art wayfinding was common in the recent past, Qatar is evolving and transforming as much of the preexisting infrastructure is demolished and re-configured. Roundabouts are being replaced by traffic lights, and these sculptures are either destroyed or re-located to another position in the city.

7 Grichting, Anna, Sara Al Sada, Angelica Caccam, and Urshi Khan. "Public Art and Public Space in an Emerging Knowledge Economy: The Case of Doha." *World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic and Management Engineering* 9, no. 2 (2015): 582.

8 UAEINTERACT. "UAE Interact, United Arab Emirates Information, News, Photographs, Maps and Webcams." Accessed October 3, 2015. [http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Zayed\\_portrait\\_in\\_Abu\\_Dhabi\\_spruced\\_up/17220.htm](http://www.uaeinteract.com/docs/Zayed_portrait_in_Abu_Dhabi_spruced_up/17220.htm).

9 "Columbus Monument in Barcelona." Accessed October 3, 2015. <http://www.barcelona.de/en/barcelona-columbus-monument.html>.

### ***Current Public art and Public Space***

Qatar has recently articulated a need to "bring art out of the walls of the museums."<sup>10</sup> It has done so by incorporating internationally famous artists' work into public or semi-public spaces around the city.<sup>11</sup> In Qatar, public space is not clearly defined. Historically, it was understood as "open space." Only recently has public space in Qatar been perceived as accessible to the public,<sup>12</sup> meaning that spaces like the corniche, souq, desert, beach, bus stops, malls, parks, streets, and so on, are theoretically public or semi-public spaces where art can be displayed.

Lately, public art pieces commissioned by Qatar Museum Authority have generated negative criticism. An example is "The Miraculous Journey" by Damien Hirst, located in front of Sidra Medical & Research Center, which generated controversy for its direct representation of the human body. Even if the series of fourteen large-scale bronze sculptures representing the development of a fetus from gestation to birth is in accord with the spirit of the building, it has been criticized by many residents and citizens in Doha. "The sculptures are hideous", "it keeps getting worse!" or "people were complaining about Zidane statue and

10 See note 8 above.

11 See note 8 above.

12 Tonnelat, Stéphane. "The Sociology of Urban Public Spaces." *Territorial Evolution and Planning Solution: Experiences from China and France*, 2010. [http://www.lcis.com.tw/paper\\_store/paper\\_store/SFURP-Tonnelat-published-20151151534649.pdf](http://www.lcis.com.tw/paper_store/paper_store/SFURP-Tonnelat-published-20151151534649.pdf).

now this” are examples of comments about Hirst’s sculptures.<sup>13</sup> According to a survey, “50% of the people thought that these sculptures are not appropriate to the Qatari culture.”<sup>14</sup> Despite these criticisms, Her Excellency Sheikha Mayassa believes that controversial topics are important for people to discuss, allowing for open-mindedness.<sup>15</sup>

In a society where 80% of the population is international, it is unreasonable to expect that everyone will appreciate all types of art.<sup>16</sup> One of the main purposes and functions of art is to attract attention and generate critical conversations. Diverse opinions are expected; as Penny Balkin Bach explains, the existence of debate is an indication that public surroundings are noticed rather than overlooked.<sup>17</sup>

**“50%**  
*of the people thought  
that these sculptures  
are not appropriate to  
the Qatari culture.”*

13 Haddad, Jaimee. “PHOTOS: Damien Hirst’s ‘Miraculous Journey’ Unveiled at Sidra,” October 9, 2013. [http://dohanews.tumblr.com/post/63393059748/photos-damien-hirsts-miraculous-journey#disqus\\_thread](http://dohanews.tumblr.com/post/63393059748/photos-damien-hirsts-miraculous-journey#disqus_thread).

14 See note 8 above., 587.

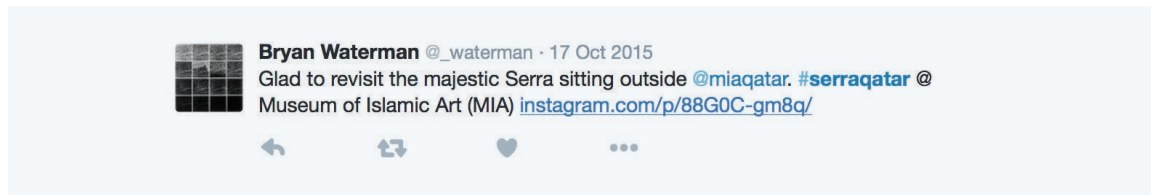
15 Ibid., 583.

16 Ibid., 583.

17 See note 2 above.



Other officially commissioned public art pieces have been more successful, particularly ones that more carefully consider space and cultural context. A pertinent example is Richard Serra's artwork called Seven, a tall seven-sided corten steel plates sculpture assembled in a heptagonal shape inspired by mosques' minarets. It "celebrates the spirituality and scientific importance of the number 7 in the Islamic culture."<sup>18</sup> The simplicity of this sculpture attracted the public and elicited positive responses such as:<sup>19</sup>



18 See note 8 above., 585.

19 "#serraqatar." *Twitter*, n.d. [https://twitter.com/hashtag/serraqatar?src=hash&ref\\_src=twsrc^tfw](https://twitter.com/hashtag/serraqatar?src=hash&ref_src=twsrc^tfw).

As can be observed, serious themes expressed by "The Miraculous Journey" tend to create controversies in Qatar, while abstract and non-figurative artworks similar to Richard Serra's sculptures do not trigger as much cultural debate.

Certainly, it is important for Qatar to invest in art, but it must thoroughly also understand its impact; it can revitalize urban space by contributing to diversity, tolerance, unity and identity.<sup>20</sup> It can also deepen preexisting social and cultural division as some artworks' examples suggest.

### Results and Effects of Public Art

A study on contemporary art explains that an artwork does not simply exist by virtue of its form but also through its environment. The place of work is also the place of life, thus creating a dynamic synthesis between the two spheres. Work gets embedded into our gestures and movements of daily life; art gives an identity to its setting. The environment is included in the artwork and in return, the artwork gives an identity to the environment.<sup>21</sup> In the 1950s, public art ceased to be seen around western cities as commemoratives sculptures, but emerged in various forms and mediums. It was an opportunity to create unexpected, ludic and surprising environments.<sup>22</sup>

20 See note 3 above.

21 Vernet, Laurent. "La Vie Sociale Des Oeuvres D'art Dans Les Espaces Publics: Une Étude Des Publics Au Square Saint-Louis." *Environnement Urbain/Urban Environment*, no. Volume 8 (2014). <http://eue.revues.org/292>.

22 Ibid., 29.

Indeed, as stated by Qatar's research and data collection, public art creates emotions, reactions, provokes curiosity, thoughts, interactions and shift behaviors in public spaces.<sup>23</sup>

One of the key arguments of my thesis is that re-locating art outside of museums and galleries is an opportunity for Qatar to make art accessible to a broader audience, create conversations, challenge the functional use of spaces, disrupt routines, trigger curiosity, build local identity, and encourage communities to gather. Most importantly, it has the capacity to generate new experiences.

Qatar Museum Authority centralizes on monumental public artworks from renowned artist like Damien Hirst with "The Miraculous Journey" at Sidra, Richard Serra with "East meets West" at Zekreet and "7" at the Museum of Islamic Art park, Urs Fischer with the "Lamp Bear" and Tom Otterness with the "Playground" at Hamad International Airport. All are massive sculptures placed in controlled, public or semi-public, spaces. Those artworks exist and work without the audience participation in any way. Qatar Museum authority uses top-down strategy. My objective is more a bottom-up approach where the focus is to create playful participatory public art experiences that engage the public in ways they otherwise might not.

23 See note 8 above., 587.

## THREE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF PUBLIC ART

### *Enhances Experience*

As mentioned above, public art is more than a material object situated in a physical space—it is an **experience**. John Dewey, an American philosopher, offers a pragmatic approach towards an aesthetic of art and experience. Dewey critiques conventional places that display art such as museums because they remove the opportunity for the audience to engage in a complete experience between themselves, the object, and its environment. Full, meaningful engagement only occurs when the viewer invests part of herself / himself in the encounter with the content. To achieve this, artists need to stimulate their audience by creating a new experience, one that de-familiarizes and enables the audience to experience the world anew.<sup>24</sup> As the French artist Francois Morellet remarks, contemporary public art is “a picnic where each brings whatever they want to consume.”<sup>25</sup> The spectator is not only an observant but also an actor; he or she interacts with various art pieces and gives artworks a reason to be by the way he or she approaches them. Those experiences provide a way to awaken consciousness in order for them to be more fully alive and aware of their existence through their senses.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, as Jiun-Jhy in “Playing Interactivity in Public Space”

24 Dewey, John. *L'art comme expérience*. Folio Essais. États-unis: Gallimard, 2010.

25 CQFD Francois Morellet. MAC VAL. Catalogue de l'exposition “L'Effet Vertigo,” 2015, 6.

26 Ibid., 16.



[12] Luke Jerram - Play Me, I'm Yours

explains, the idea of “play” is an important factor in a meaningful interaction, as it is a captivator, thanks to its dynamic nature.

In order for a public space to feel “playful,” the experience must be enjoyable, ambiguous, effortless and is open-ended rather than narrowly goal-oriented.<sup>27</sup>

The “Play Me, I’m Yours” project embodies Dewey’s point of view. It consists of a simple principle: installing pianos in public areas. It is a simple, yet powerful strategy. The British artist, Luke Jerram, invaded public spaces all over the world with pianos personalized and decorated by artists or the local community.

27 Her, Jiun-Jhy. “Playing Interactivity in Public Space.” *Advances in Multimedia (MMEDIA)*, 2010 Second International Conferences on, 2010, 22–28.



[13]

The pianos' appearance varied from classic, funky, with illustrations, stickers, painted, anything that can cross one's mind! The connections between all of them are two consistent elements: the instrument with its title.

Imagine an individual encountering a piano unconventionally placed, for instance in a train station, a park, a market or in the street. First, curiosity builds and then comes the desire to play. Would that individual dare to play in public, or would he / she just listen to the melody that a courageous stranger starts playing?

As simple as it is, the location and participation of the community has an influence on the behavior shift in the environment. The pianos are available for anyone in the public to play and enjoy. It is fascinating to watch how individuals come closer, like magnets, to listen to a person playing. It creates a place of direct and indirect exchanges, inviting the public to get involved, participate and meaningfully engage their urban environment. According to Daily Mail, "it was estimated that over 140 000 people played the pianos or listened to others play in Birmingham alone when the project was unveiled in 2008."<sup>28</sup>

*encourage  
spontaneous  
interactions between  
strangers.*

A TIME documentary supports the statement above as users convey encouraging opinions about "Play me, I'm Yours"; "I think it is a great project because it brings the community together that may have never even met each other" and "it is a real treat [...] somehow there's a real neighbor feeling [...] and I think people just enjoy the treat."<sup>29</sup> As these users commented suggest, these pianos encourage spontaneous interactions between strangers.

This project inspired the SNCF, which is the French Railway Company. They placed black classic pianos in train stations all over France. The project is called "À vous de Jouer." It has a similar concept, yet targets frustrated passengers waiting for their transportation. It shifts from an environment that is often frustrating to one where time is pleasant and flows by. A train user confirms by asserting that it is "always a pleasure to find JP at the Strasbourg train station waiting for my train, he delights our ears!"<sup>30</sup>

Public art is not limited to an artist placing an object in a space. It needs to also involve the community. Providing tools in a public space for individuals to interact with enables creativity, engagement, and participation with the environment. The act of providing pianos like Luke Jerram or SNCF allows the community to influence a shift in behavior and attitude. These projects clearly demonstrates Dewey's philosophy as a complete experience occurs between the users, the object, and its environment.

28 Cable, Simon. "Taking Music around the World! Amazing Pictures Show How Public Piano Project Started by British Artist Has United People All over the Globe." Daily Mail, January 18, 2015. [http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel\\_news/article-2913248/The-eight-year-old-performs-Chopin-homeless-man-gives-classical-masterclass-Amateur-musicians-play-street-pianos-springing-parks-bus-shelters-train-stations-world.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/travel/travel_news/article-2913248/The-eight-year-old-performs-Chopin-homeless-man-gives-classical-masterclass-Amateur-musicians-play-street-pianos-springing-parks-bus-shelters-train-stations-world.html).

29 Robin, Jeremy. "Play Me, I'm Yours: An Outdoor Piano Project." TIME, n.d. [http://content.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,110982207001\\_2006449,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/video/player/0,32068,110982207001_2006449,00.html).

30 "Jean-Pierre B, Gares de Nancy et de Strasbourg." *Concours En Gares*, September 30, 2014. <http://www.concours-en-gares.com/video/jeanpierre-gares-nancy-strasbourg/>.



[14] SNCF - À Vous de Jouer !



[15]



[16]

### *Enriches the City*

Public art doesn't only positively affect individual experiences; it also **enriches the city** itself. A study from the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* demonstrates that the presence of public art can ameliorate the lived and felt dynamics of the city, which would create more agreeable spaces if the art considers context and placement.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of Joost Golidriaan's Chesterfield Park Bench in the Netherlands, the artist seeks to vitalize dull park benches, transforming individuals' perception and use of an ordinary object. Benches are functional objects, yet often unnoticed or overlooked. This Dutch Designer modified the Chesterfield Park Bench's look and style as a usable, comfortable, cozy and fashionable piece of art. He provides the park with a bordeaux, oxblood leather upholstered tufted seat and back. Accompanied with walnut wood and gold components, it is a very old-fashioned, classic and traditionally crafted furniture piece.

Surprise is what most users feel when encountering this unconventional bench in a public area. How would you react to and/or sit on it? Would you use it like you were at home, or as if you were at a fancy restaurant? Would you take a seat carefully and slowly? The particular and peculiar re-design of the bench changes the way individuals perceive or interact with an otherwise unremarkable object. "The stylish way to watch your kids at the park" is an effective comment supporting that the perception of and interaction with the bench shifted upon using it.<sup>32</sup>



[17] Joost Golidriaan - Chesterfield Park Bench



[18]

31 Motoyama, Yui, and Kazunori Hanyu. "Does Public Art Enrich Landscapes? The Effect of Public Art on Visual Properties and Affective Appraisals of Landscapes." *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 40 (December 2014): 14-25.

32 Kenyatta. "Chesterfield Park Bench by Joost Goudriaan." *Kaboom*, 2011. <http://kaboom.tumblr.com/post/8180147804/kenyatta-chesterfield-park-bench-by-joost>.



[19] FriendsWithYou - Rainbow City



[20]

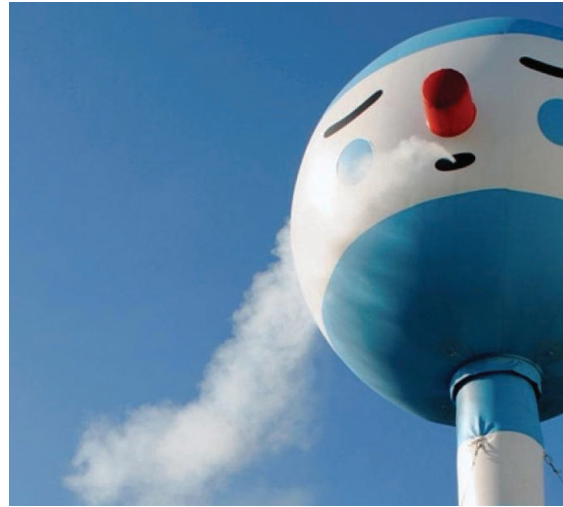
The psychological and physical responses of user preferences studied in the *Journal of Environmental Psychology* show that public art can add value to public spaces and make them more attractive and enhance the city's image.<sup>33</sup>

Temporary installations like "Rainbow City" from FriendsWithYou, a New York city artists' collective, is an example of the above. It is an edgy, colorful installation that consists of forty inflatable sculptures situated in a public space. "Rainbow City" resembles the popular board game Candy Land, where play and excitement are involved. Its large scale and bright striped pop-colors, green, red, blue and yellow, attracts attention and curiosity from afar. This installation transforms a banal street area into a sculptural gathering place.

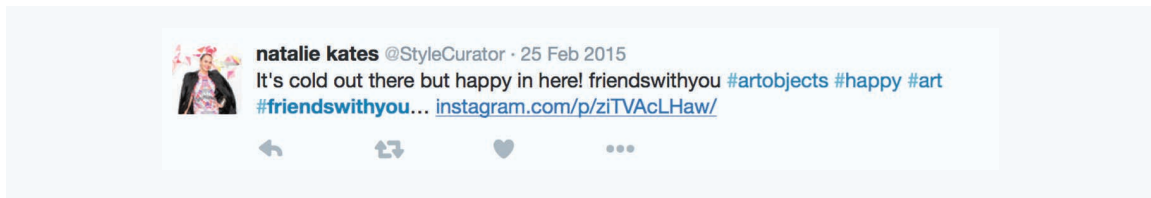
33 Ibid.



The simple inflatable structures and minimal forms are inspired by toy aesthetics. The structures are personified by giving them eyes and mouths inspired by Asian cartoons. In addition, its large-scale creates a shrinking sensation embracing behavior shifts. These aspects trigger a sense of free-spirited playfulness. FriendsWithYou built a surreal landscape aiming to rekindle a childlike awareness - the feeling of electric enthusiasm, a pure and joyful emotion, triggered from our inner childhood emotions. Like Peter Pan, people wish to never truly grow up, an ecstatic feeling shared amongst individuals within the space that allows fun and encourages childlike interactions. This can be observed through users comments, which capture the magical, playful and happy sensation they experienced:<sup>34</sup>



[21]



34 "#friendswithyou." *Twitter*, n.d. <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23friendswithyou&src=typd>.

While Rainbow City aims to create excitement, Quincy Court in Chicago, suggests a calmer setting, encouraging individuals to pay more attention to and appreciate their environments both ecologically and culturally. Context matters. The installation transforms a fearsome street into a gathering space. This example of public art integrates a local element through the abstract, tree-like structures: the honey locust-tree. These species of trees are native to central North America, and principally from Chicago, Illinois.<sup>35</sup> "The honey-locust is to downtown Chicago what the pine is to Maine. Daley Plaza, the First National Bank Plaza, the State Street Mall are all shaded by honey-locusts."<sup>36</sup>

The Quincy Court plaza contains seven tree-like shades made of steel and green translucent acrylic leaf shaped panels that are lit from above. It also has four large acrylic leaves arranged on the pavement. The light produces patterned shadows on the ground, creating a tranquil ambiance. "The installment is perfect, especially in contrast to the gloomy symmetry of van der Rohe's Dirksen building. After all, Chicago is known as a serious, hard-nosed city. Why not add a little piece of ironic-pop-glowing-alien-like paradise to our otherwise blue-collar streets? Hell, I'll take fake palm trees over urine stains any day of the week. And the view at night ain't bad either."<sup>37</sup> This statement verifies the shift in perception and behavior.

35 "Thornless Honey-Locust." *The Morton Arboretum*, n.d. <http://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-plant-descriptions/thornless-honey-locust>.

36 Krohe Jr., James. "Green Streets." *Reader*, January 18, 1990. <http://www.chicagoreader.com/chicago/green-streets/Content?oid=875072>.

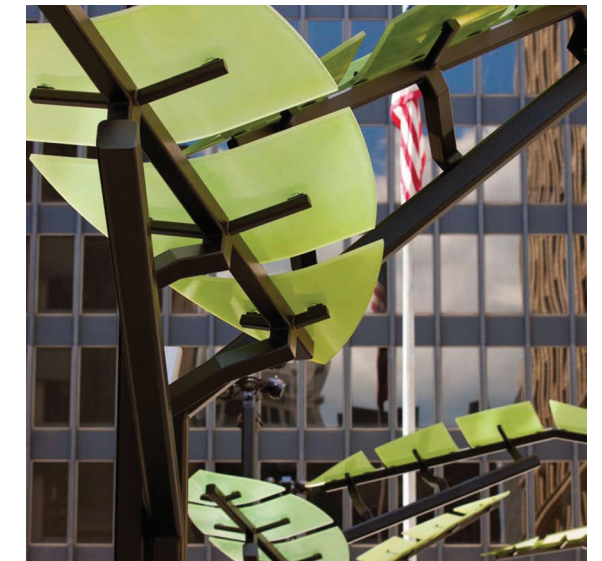
37 "Welcome to the Neon Jungle." *The Bee's Knees*, November 24, 2009. <https://beeknees.wordpress.com/category/great-architecture/>.

*the environment affects the community's emotions and behaviors.*

When individuals gather in a setting that transforms their mindset, it provokes trust and confidence to act and behave with others in similar manner. From the serenity of Quincy Court to the sanguine experience of Rainbow City, the environment affects the community's emotions and behaviors.



[22] Rios Clementi Hale Studios - Quincy Court



[23]

Besides adding value, shifting behavior and enriching the city, public art can also “work as a resource of tourism.”<sup>38</sup> The forgotten village in Tunisia, for example, where 150 street artists were commissioned to create murals, was transformed into a surreal outdoor museum. These vivid, local, dynamic and “jaw-dropping graffiti art” creations enliven the place and attract tourism.<sup>39</sup>



[24] 150 Street Artists Covered an Old Tunisian Village



[26]

38 See note 25 above.

39 “Surreal Graffiti Art Transforms Ancient Tunisian Village.” Fox News, October 17, 2014. <http://www.foxnews.com/travel/2014/10/17/artists-decorate-old-tunisian-village-with-stunning-street-art/>.



[25]

Another relevant example of this pattern is Nantes, an industrial city that invested heavily in public art and became a trendy, pleasant city to visit in France. As time passed by, “the metal factories lay silent [...] Now, Nantes is the hot spot in the European art world, a middling-sized city re-thought, re-imagined, re-built on the notion that public art is a smart investment that promotes itself as France’s most “bizarre” city.” In 2011, “200,000 visitors passed through Nantes during the high summer tourist season, spending 42 million Euros.”<sup>40</sup> Introducing bold, strange and local contemporary art around the city has had a positive impact by attracting tourists and boosting its economy.

40 Browning, Frank. “Art Saves a City: 5-Story Elephant Prowls the Streets.” *The Huffington Post*, 2012. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-browning/nantes-elephant-art\\_b\\_1614553.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/frank-browning/nantes-elephant-art_b_1614553.html).



[27] François Delarozière & Pierre Orefice - Great Elephant



[28] Baptiste Debombourg - Stellar



[29] Daniel Buren & Patrick Bouchain - Les anneaux

### Consideration of Context

In order to achieve a positive impact on the people and the city, the **context of a public installation** needs to be carefully analyzed.

An engaging experience requires a holistic understanding how people use their time, skills, knowledge and imagination. Through an analysis of three interactive installations, examined in the report “Understanding the Dynamics of Engaging Interaction in Public Spaces” research published in *Human-Computer Interaction – INTERACT 2011* by Peter Dalsgaard, Christian Dindler and Kim Halskov, four primary components were identified:

- **Cultural:** conventions and norms that influence practices and behaviors
- **Social:** relations and interactions between users
- **Physical:** existence and presence in the world as a physical being
- **Content:** idea, subject and medium of a project that an audience invests part of him or herself

Those four aspects are connected to and affect each other over the course of time. In addition, they are necessary to consider in order to observe, learn, understand and create a successful project in a public space.<sup>41</sup> The idea of “play” is a crucial element for a meaningful interaction, as Jiun-Jhy explains. “Play” charms and captivates its users thanks to its dynamic nature. In order for a public space to feel “playful,” the experience must be enjoyable, ambiguous, effortless and is open-ended rather than narrowly goal-oriented.<sup>42</sup>

41 Dalsgaard, Peter, Christian Dindler, and Kim Halskov. “Understanding the Dynamics of Engaging Interaction in Public Spaces.” In *Human-Computer Interaction–INTERACT 2011*. Springer, 2011, 212–29. [http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-23771-3\\_17](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-642-23771-3_17).

42 See note 27 above.

For instance, Scott Snibbe shifts users' behavior with playful interactive projections. The Shadow project is a simple and pure white light projected onto a wall. The projection reacts to viewers as soon as they step between the screen and the projector. A simple outcome influences the individuals' comportment, as it is making the users active and the screen receptive. The audience is not only an observant but also an actor; he/she interacts with the art piece and gives it a reason to exist by the way he/she interacts.

As expected, the users in front of the projection see their shadows. However, when they start moving, creating a path or dance, the movements of their black silhouette are replayed over and over, slowly disappearing. Afterwards, the screen returns to project only the pure white rectangle. The users experience a disconnection between their shadow and their physical body.

When the mechanism of play is understood, it engenders excitement and a desire to perform in front of the projection to discover various free-spirited choreographies. As it is a fascinating interaction, sometimes the users forget about their surroundings and start performing funny and ridiculous movements.



[30] Scott Snibbe - Shadow



[31]

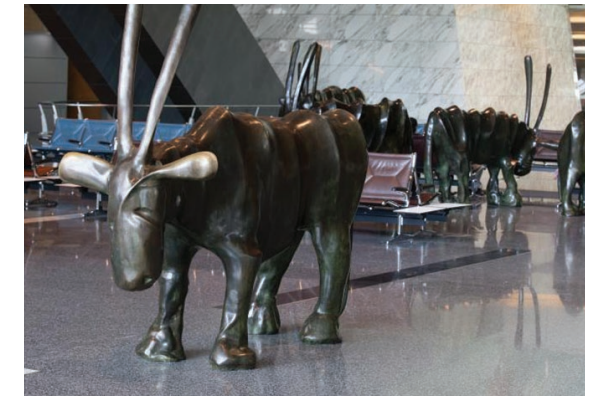
If we apply insights from the article "Understanding the Dynamics of Engaging Interaction in Public Spaces", to two different examples in Qatar, we can see how the audience could respond more positively and meaningfully to public art. The first one is the large-scale bronze sculpture Zinedine Zidane, the French footballer – which depicts him in the midst of delivering a "headbutt" to the Italian football player, Marco Materazzi. The sculpture captures a well-known moment in the 2006 World Cup. The public reaction would dramatically change depending on the cultural and social background of the individual. Some people would "play" with the "content," perhaps acting as if they were the other player. Others would see an act of violence and perceive the sculpture as offensive to their culture or religion. Due to the latter criticism, the sculpture of the French footballer, which was originally prominently installed on Doha's Corniche, was eventually removed.<sup>43</sup>



[32] Adel Abdessemed - Headbutt

43 See note 8 above., 584.

Another example to consider would be the Oryx sculptures that are spread around the chairs of the waiting area at the Hamad International Airport arrivals area. From my perspective, these pieces are smartly embedded within the environment, creating a unified, interactive space. This series of life-size bronze animals symbolize Qatar both socially and culturally. Children at the airport are often seen riding the sculptures while parents proudly take pictures, suggesting a sense of investment and physical engagement.<sup>44</sup> The sculptures become a lively playground where children can find stimulation instead of focusing on the long, monotonous waiting periods that accompany modern airline travel.



[33] Tom Claassen - Oryx

In order to cultivate a more positive and dynamic interaction with the public, research suggests that the artist must take into account the cultural and social background of the local population, which is why I believe that local artists can have a strong impact by integrating their art deep into the city fabric of Doha, the subject of the next section.

44 "Airport Installations." *Qatar Museums*. Accessed October 3, 2015. <http://www.qm.org.qa/en/project/airport-installations>.

## THE INVESTMENT OF SOCIETY INTO PUBLIC ART

### The City is the Canvas

While public art in Qatar was generally neglected during the 1980s, Doha has revealed new urban morphologies and typologies in the last decade or so. For instance, Msheireb project will replace an entire district in Doha, modifying the existing urban structure and combining cultural heritage, tourist attraction, the public realm and leisure space. However, a significant portion of the project integrates modern dimensions, which are more reminiscent of European city centers than traditional Islamic cities. This underlines that an important role of the artist is to consider the cultural identity of the city. For instance, the Qatar National Museum project represents a fusion of modern design and traditional appearance, which was achieved by Jean Nouvel in creating a space inspired by the desert sand rose.<sup>45</sup> It reflects the personality of the country by reminding us that Doha is attempting to sustain its traditions and despite rapid modernization, will remain a little rose of the desert.<sup>46</sup>



[34] Jean Nouvel - Qatar National Museum

45 See note 7 above.

46 McManus, David. National Museum of Qatar – Jean Nouvel Building. 2014. <http://www.e-architect.co.uk/qatar/national-museum-qatar>

In Doha, fusing modernity and tradition appears more in architecture than in public art. One way to encourage more of a synthesis between tradition and modernity is to invest in local artists. The Dubai “Outdoor Art Project”, for example, involves UAE based artists in displaying artworks in various locations around the city. This creative and fresh intervention into public space adds a new dimension to experiencing the city, allowing the public to absorb the high levels of creativity brewing within its society. It also “aimed to emphasize a grassroots movement in the visual arts landscape, by highlighting their home-grown talent, and strengthening community involvement in Dubai’s art scene.”<sup>47</sup>

In relation to the above, recently, a new local public art project in Qatar has been commissioned. Three Qatari graffiti artists, Thamer Al-Dossari, Mubarak Al-Malik and Moza Al-Kuwari, are creating art murals at Qatar Academy. This project invites the public to come, observe and interact with them. Their artworks represent various local values such as “strength, kindness, momentum, history and anticipation.” This example demonstrates the importance of local artists’ interventions with the environment. Mubarak Al-Malik explains in an interview I conducted with him, on February 7<sup>th</sup>, that “art in Qatar is still a new thing, but at the same time it’s spreading. There are a lot of spaces that can be used [...] and it’s important that the

47 “Dubai Outdoor Art Project’: The Walk, JBR.” *ArtintheCity*. Accessed October 3, 2015. [http://www.artinthecity.com/en/events/2656/dubai-outdoor-art-project-the-walk-jbr/?z\\_ct=9&z\\_ci-d=675&z\\_lb=0&cct=101&ccid=2656](http://www.artinthecity.com/en/events/2656/dubai-outdoor-art-project-the-walk-jbr/?z_ct=9&z_ci-d=675&z_lb=0&cct=101&ccid=2656).



[35] Thamer Al-Dossari, Mubarak Al-Malik & Moza Al-Kuwari - Qatar Foundation Graffiti Wall

artists and artworks should be local and international. It is also important to show these kind of artworks to the Qatari society which will increase the artistic awareness.” Indeed, I believe in the involvement of local artists as it is creating Qatar’s identity, but I also believe in the community’s participation.

*“It is also important to show these kind of artworks to the Qatari society which will increase the artistic awareness.”*

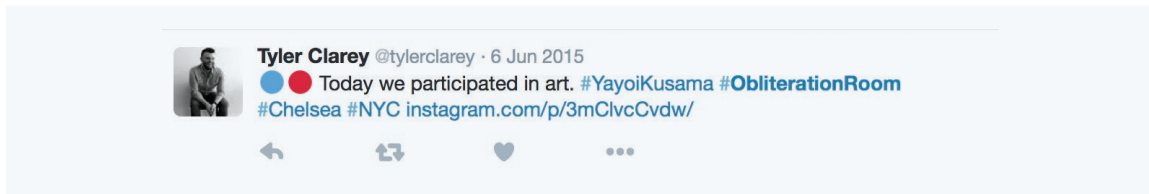
## The Artist is the Community

"The obliteration room", in New York city, is an example of users becoming the artist. The community's participation leaves a collaborative trace resulting in an art piece.

Yayoi Kusama created an installation that looks like an ordinary room filled with furniture, yet all painted in pure white as a blank canvas for visitors to interact with. Children and adults engage with the environment by putting bright colorful stickers shaped as polka dots on every surface of the room. According to user's opinions this uncomplicated task was appreciated: Many users stated that they appreciated the simplicity of the task.<sup>48</sup>



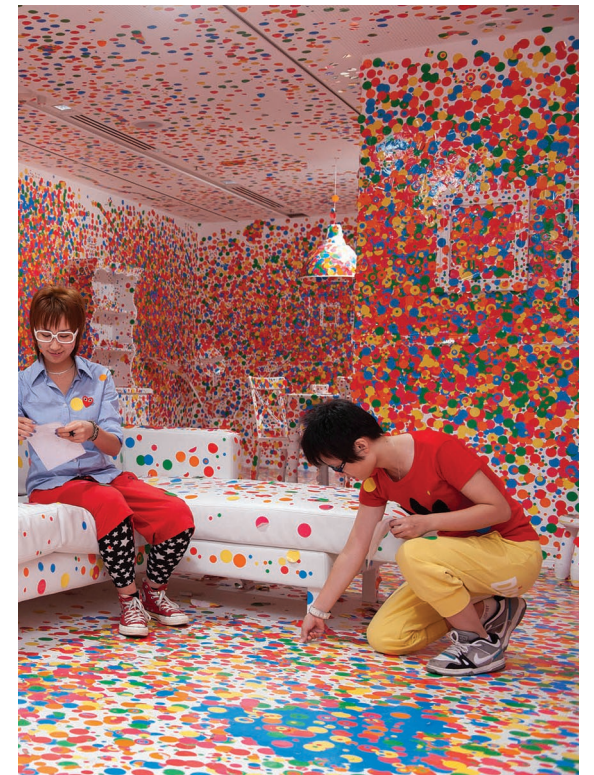
[36] Yayoi Kusama - The obliteration room



48 "#obliterationroom." Twitter, n.d. <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23obliterationroom&src=typd>.

This simple, elegant setting allowed users to collaborate, create and develop an art piece together, drastically transforming the pure white space into a room filled with intense colors. The merging of dots produces a random pattern that invades every surface in the room.

In this example, user participation is necessary for the piece to exist. A sense of user commitment and excitement can be perceived through the intense transformation of the space. As a long-term installation, after participating the user can return and see the evolution of the room since their interactions. In essence, the community's indirect participation and collaboration completes the art piece. According to the Downtown Magazine, "this white room turned into a polka dot storm very quickly. The exhibit has been insanely popular since its debut in the United States. Pictures of the room can be found all over social media, dotting the internet much like the stickers dotting the walls."<sup>49</sup>



[37]

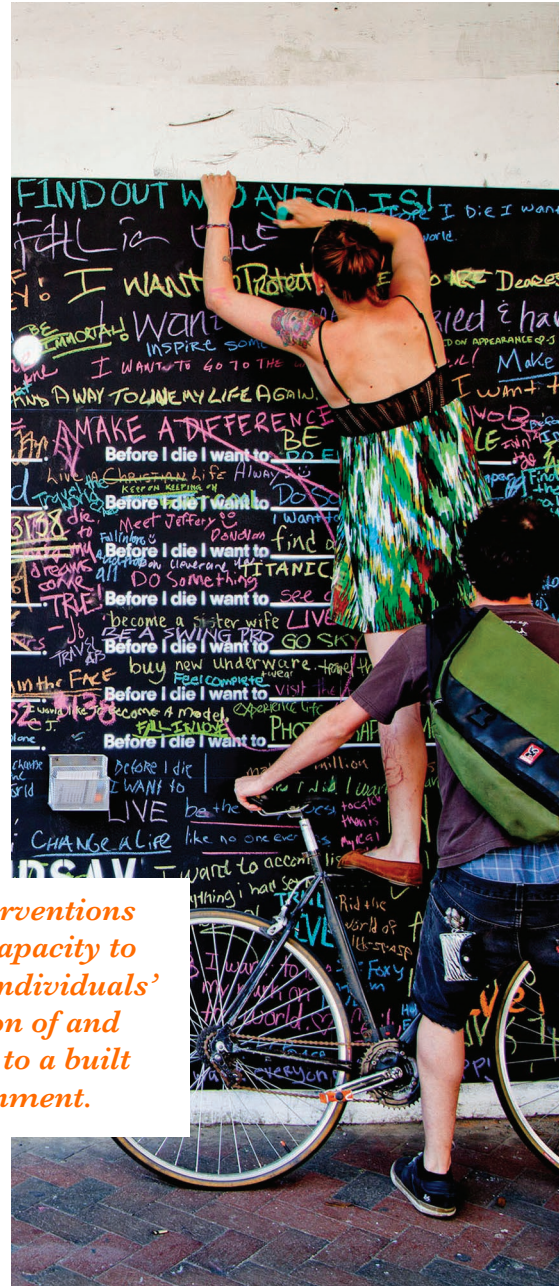
49 Seaman, Laura. "The Obliteration Room Exhibit." *Downtown*, June 11, 2015. <http://www.downtownmagazinenc.com/obliteration-room-exhibit/>.

Another example of community involvement creating an outcome is Candy Chang's chalk wall project. Before I die... is a participatory project that provides an opportunity to complete the art by finishing a sentence.

It is an interactive chalk wall that invites individuals to share their personal thoughts in public. This project has been installed all over the world, in locations as diverse as Japan, Argentina and Portugal. The black walls are filled with white and colorful chalk writings, completing the "Before I die ..." sentence. From a distance it looks like a beautiful and poetic scribble with various types of writings. The walls are full of honest, sad, and fun responses. The space suggests a sense of nurture, trust and understanding. It encourages personal confessions.

Both Yayoi Kusama and Candy Chang rely on the community's participation to complete their work – where art transforms over time and is always changing. In the examples above, public interventions have the capacity to change an individual's perception of and approach to a built environment.

*public interventions have the capacity to change an individual's perception of and approach to a built environment.*



[38] Candy Chang - Before I die...

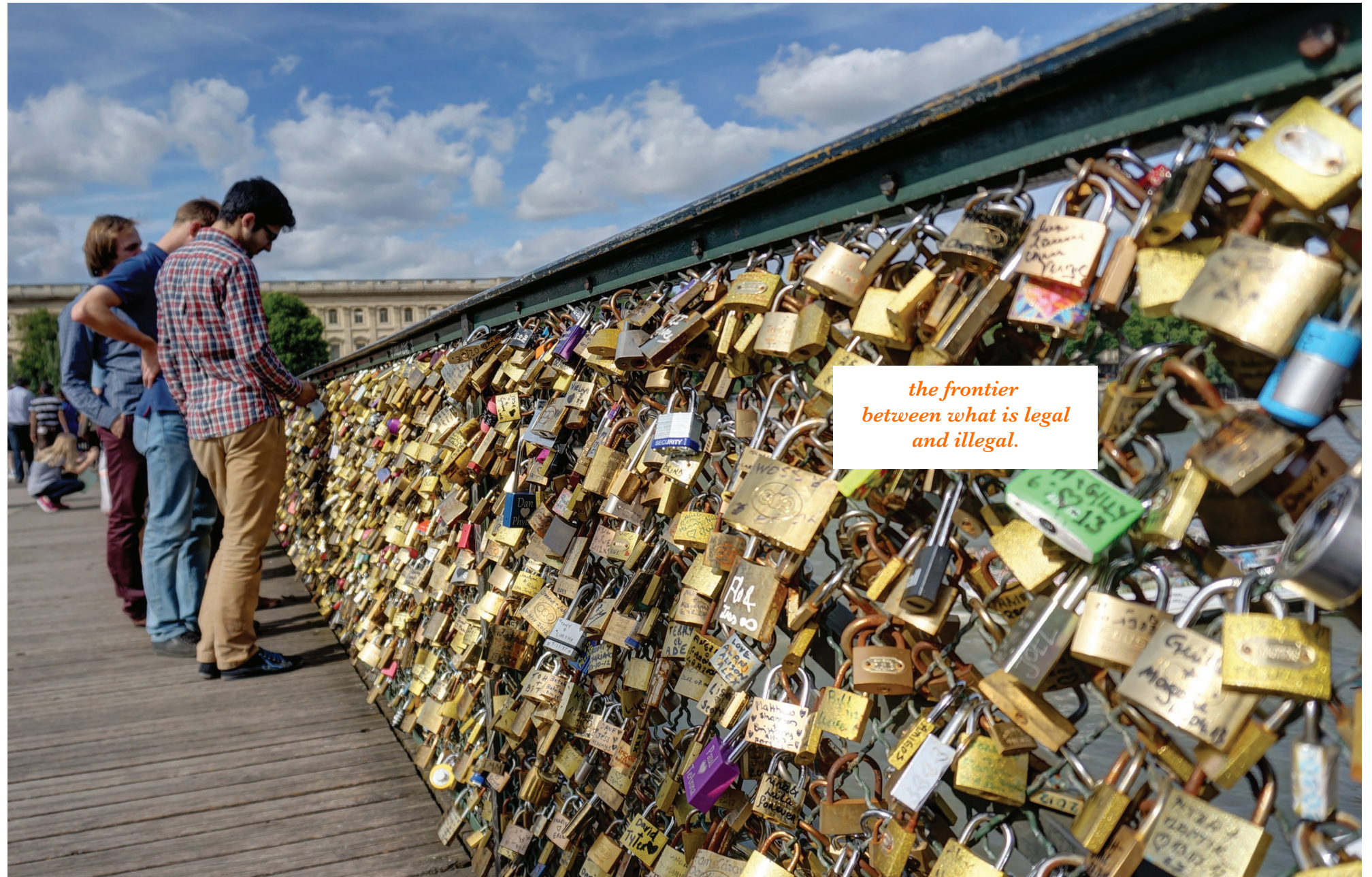


[39]

## *Limits of Public Art*

Public art, all around the world, has boundaries about issues like safety, legal aspects, artwork themes and context. To avoid those concerns most public art are commissioned. Despite this control some controversies or illegal art interventions occurs.

In France, 1% of public space is dedicated to public art.<sup>50</sup> Public art can be the product of artists, but it can also be created entirely by residents of a city without being commissioned. For instance, the lovelock bridge is a place where couples attach padlocks as a symbol of passion and fidelity. This romantic significance attracted many locals and tourists to participate and leave locks on the fence of the bridge representing their eternal love. The bridge was transformed into an ad hoc public art piece through public intervention. For security reasons, the bridge was replaced and modified to prevent couples from adding more locks. It has recently been subject to a significant amount of media and governmental attention. In fact, so many people participated in the movement by adding their lock to the bridge that one fence actually fell down. Despite the modifications, the movement is conquering other bridges crossing the Seine, demonstrating that public art is stronger than ever.<sup>51</sup> Of course, this also shows the limit of public art, stressing the frontier between what is legal and illegal.



50 "1% Artistique et Commande Publique - Drac Paca - Ministère de La Culture et de La Communication." Accessed October 3, 2015. <http://www.culturecommunication.gouv.fr/Regions/Drac-Paca/En-pratique/1-artistique-et-commande-publique>.

51 Grinberg, Emanuella. "Paris Removes 'Love Locks' from Pont Des Arts Bridge." *CNN*, June 1, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/30/travel/paris-love-locks-bridges-feat/index.html>.

[40] Love Locks - Pont des Arts

Both authorization and censorship in Qatar are heavily regulated, for instance as the “Headbutt” sculpture and “The Miraculous Journey” examples suggest. Few other examples have received negative criticism and were camouflaged from dilemmas.

For instance, in 2012, Qtel organized a flashmob to promote and advertise their phone service at Landmark. This fun and interactive act, where a group of people suddenly performed an unusual and seemingly pointless act for a brief time in a public place, has experienced mixed receptions: supports and critiques of the performance. However, the video posted on Youtube was quickly removed following complaints. According to *Doha News* “on Twitter, many tweeted their displeasure under the hashtag #QtelFail, while others responded directly to Qtel, calling the performance “an abomination” and “disgusting.”<sup>52</sup> Despite the playful action of bringing strangers together, the performance was perceived as inappropriate for the country, as both genders were dancing together in public space.

Moreover, as a Muslim country, Qatar has understandable limits on particular subjects that need to be respected. In the following examples, the theme is related to the body where for instance a sculpture of a horse at the Pearl was remodeled, after complaints, to censor the horse’s private parts. Censorship limitations of public art even came into question within our own boundaries situated inside of an American based art & design university, where the intent is to mirror the educational values and creative interventions of the home campus in the U.S., when a guest artist painted a mural that abstractly represented forms of a female figure.

Even though the mural triggered healthy debates among the internal and external creative community, it was quickly painted over and vanished from existence.

Lastly, a project done in 2014 by a group of graphic design students at VCUQatar was installed at the Souq Waqif for a day. The “WonderBox” project consisted of print-based analog animation stations triggering a sense of wonder. On January the 18th 2016, I conducted an interview with Abdul Rahman Anwar, one of the students who participated in this project to understand the process and experience of installing an interactive artwork in a public space in Qatar. He explained that they were nervous on various criterias; How would the audience react? Will they interact with the wonderbox? and If they would be caught by security guard?

As anticipated a policeman asked them to leave. Fortunately for the group, one of the student knew someone that could sort the issue out. Without knowing the right person it is extremely complicated to install art works in public spaces in Qatar. Despite the long negotiation and with the help of a connection, the group was allowed to document their work and observe how the public reacted. Once a user interacted with the piece, it triggered interest and curiosity to others. The public were involved and engaged with the creative project, which started conversation and interaction between strangers.

52 “Qtel Quietly Removes Flash Mob Video Following Complaints from Locals.” *Doha News*, December 17, 2012. <http://dohanews.co/tag/flash-mob/>.



[41] Abdulrahman Anwar, Nabila Lubay, Noora Al Fadala, Shahad Al Malki - The Wonderbox



[42]

It would be interesting for Qatar to promote local artists and regulate public art by dedicating areas for their residents to express themselves and create playful participatory public art. This would bring a new dimension to the city, allowing its residents to communicate but also to synthesize modernity and tradition.



## ***PARTICIPATORY PUBLIC ART INTERVENTIONS***

### ***Exploration Projects***

According to a journal article in Educational Action Research about redesigning space through participatory art installations, “the growth in community and public arts over the past decade has centrally concerned producing art to change the spaces and lives in communities.”<sup>53</sup> Public art is a significant component and a new strategic approach for urban regeneration.<sup>54</sup> In order to effectively transform space into a shared experience, action research is necessary. As the book Systemic Practice and Action Research explains, it is a method that adopts a “learning for change”<sup>55</sup> approach that considers how, “through inquiry, participants can come to know a situation differently in order to envision and open up possibilities for the creation of alternative futures.”<sup>56</sup>

For my exploration projects, I adopted this method because it focuses on social context and community development. I viewed this methodology as a step toward understanding and improving space in Qatar by using a human-centered approach. To understand and create behavior shifts where urban space becomes a communal social environment, I created several projects

53 Percy-Smith, Barry, and Clare Carney. “Using Art Installations as Action Research to Engage Children and Communities in Evaluating and Redesigning City Centre Spaces.” *Educational Action Research* 19, no. 1. (2011), 25.

54 Ibid., 24.

55 Weil, Susan. “Rhetorics and Realities in Public Service Organizations: Systemic Practice and Organizational Learning as Critically Reflexive Action Research (CRAR).” *Systemic Practice and Action Research* 11, no. 1 (1998): 37–62.

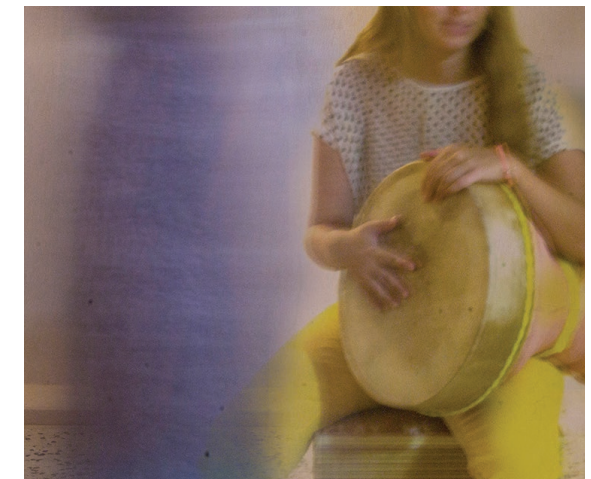
56 See note 1 above., 26.

that apply action research in a step-by-step approach that proceeds through the phases of planning, action, observation and results.

My first project was an analog sculpture that invited users to interact with it. “Play me...” is both the title of the project and refers to an Arabic drum made out of clay on a wooden stand and placed in public spaces. It was inspired by two prior projects by other designers—“À vous de Jouer” and “Play me, I’m yours”—particularly in the way that both viewed an instrument as a way to trigger dialogue among strangers. In testing the drum in different locations such as VCUQatar, Souq Waqif and the Corniche, I observed intriguing and pleasant alterations in users’ attitudes.

To jump-start public interaction, I played the drum at the Souq and Corniche. I noticed curious smiles, stares and laughs, as my ability is limited. One day, a man, who appeared to be Arabic, engaged me in a conversation by declaring, “this is not how you play it!” He took the instrument and showed me how to produce a beautiful and rhythmic melody. Playing the Arabic drum in an unsuccessful way triggered a successful interaction in public space.

As the man began tapping the drum, people drew closer, started clapping and singing. The social environment was transformed from a banal, everyday space into a ludic, communal experience.



For my next experiment, I asked a classmate to start playing the drum at VCUQatar. Once again, the sound of drum triggered a sense of curiosity in the users of the building. Students and teachers first searched for the source of the sound and then slowly approached the drummer to enjoy the music, capture the experience through video, and share it on social media. Some users even created a game that involved two users playing (and thus interacting) the same drum.

The advantage of using the Arabic drum is that it often generates festive and pleasant emotions that effectively resonate in acoustic spaces. Once a user starts playing, it triggers change and engages the community. "Play me..." considers local context, as it uses a local and familiar instrument, enriches the city's identity and enhances public experience as soon as it is placed in busy areas and activated by passing strangers.

The effectiveness of public art interventions as an action research process involves challenging and transforming people's behaviors and ideas about public space. It is a contribution to urban regeneration. Indeed, having the Arabic drum installation gave passers-by permission to see, think and act differently, being free to enter the unfamiliar and endless interactive possibilities that can manifest through creative social engagement. It added value to the space by helping to make people felt more comfortable to share, engage and become inclusive through play.

In a continuation of my exploration, I created a virtual public art project using an augmented reality platform called Zappar. It consists of two self-designed stickers graphically depicting fictive characters which are animated when users scan them with mobile phones. The objective was to install the designed stickers in various public spaces with instructions.

My purpose was to map the dynamics of the interaction by observing reactions. It was installed in various places such as bus stations, parking lots, parks, and smoking areas.

As the development of augmented reality is quite recent, I decided to test this technology in France and Qatar in order to compare results. The familiarity of this type of intervention in each country was visible in the platform's statistics as it tracked each time the sticker was scanned.

Over two months, the character called Miss Bobble was scanned 261 times in France; the character called Qatar\_Nomad was scanned 56 times in Doha. This contrast is not surprising as it requires many steps in order to see and play with the character.

However, public reactions in both settings varied from creative, joyful and playful to indifference. One of the unexpected behaviours noticed in both settings occurred when users took the sticker from the space after interacting with it. The users' satisfying engagement resulted in a constructive feedback. Their playful experience triggered a desire to extend the fun and to share the augmented reality intervention with relatives. Therefore, the experience was prolonged and was spread to others, viral-like, who may themselves try to look for the stickers around the city.

Mostly, users were curious and shared the interaction with friends or family, especially kids with their parents, an act that tended to encourage other people in the space to try it. As a result of this project, the atmosphere changed radically, enabling a pleasant, shared experience.

Augmented reality projects allow users to experience cities in a new way.<sup>57</sup> As Virilio, a French cultural theorist and urbanist, observes in *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*, "the integration of imaginative virtual art objects in public spaces not only gives us the opportunity to experience an "other" type of "being" in the world, the space itself exists as both real and virtual."<sup>58</sup> This type of intervention does not only encourage intercultural interactions in a space but also offers a mechanism for producing public art in Qatar that minimizes socially unproductive disruptions of space and culture.



57 Geroimenko, Vladimir, ed. *Augmented Reality Art*. Springer Series on Cultural Computing. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2014, 249. <http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-319-06203-7>.

58 Virilio P. *The Aesthetics of Disappearance*. In: Spiller N, editor. *Cyber Reader: Critical writings for the digital era*. New York: Phaidon Press Limited; 2002, 91.

In contrast to many public art projects in Qatar in which the artist and the renown monumental artwork are the focus, in my projects neither myself nor the material objects themselves are the main focus. Rather, they are simply mediums for raising questions about a users' environment, for creating social places where strangers interact directly or indirectly and for revitalizing space. In this sense, the users are the main focus. My role as an artist in these projects was not as a creator of artifacts, but rather as an action researcher seeking to engage, explore, arouse curiosity, invite questions, engender interactions and regenerate Doha's public or semi-public spaces. In each exploration project, I used different tools, such as keeping a research journal, documenting, collection and analysis, participant observation, and case studies to fully examine the situation.

As action research is "learning by doing," I decided to test other types of public art interventions that could shift behaviors and transform spaces into more socially intimate, communal environments. Other techniques like anamorphic illusion, sculptural sitting areas, installations, and projection mapping also have potential in bringing together the community to enjoy a shared experience.

In 2015, an anamorphic 3D painting of an underwater scene created by a Dutch artist, Remko Van Schaik, was used to attract shoppers at the City Center mall in downtown Doha. According to an article published in Doha News, "several children and adults could be seen posing on one of the many-painted land masses on the piece, while their friends and families stood on a designated spot to take their picture."<sup>59</sup> Introducing this playful interaction into the Mall's setting caused

shoppers to become aware, to reflect, and to question the way it was accomplished. This compartment is meaningful as it demonstrates a shared experience through art and generates an inclusive space. Strangers populate the shopping mall. As people walk around, the flow of the mall is monotonous, as their eyes or words do not exchange. The artwork is fulfilling an important missing element of everyday life in Qatar; playful interactions among culturally and socially diverse communities. Our dull routines are successfully challenged by public art interventions that trigger curiosity and provoke communities to engage with space and each other in an atypical way.

My space intervention at VCU Qatar had similar goals to the anamorphic 3D painting at the City Center mall. The project consisted of a vinyl sticker representing a blue rectangle with a cartoon-like character going through the door in a way that gestured attention towards a red diamond. The complete shapes are only seen when viewed at certain angles; otherwise, the viewer only sees random broken pieces. A Swiss artist Varini who uses this technique to transform space inspired this exploration project; the shapes construct a geometrical image. In my observations, I noted that it tended to affect the way people walked; it slowed them down, caused them to move and adjust their angle to see the image so that they could take a picture and attract other curious viewers. Users became more conscious of their surroundings and assumed the roles of both actors and observers. They became attentive and took the time to discover the space as if they had never experienced it before.



59 D'mello, Chantelle. "Life-like Water Scene at City Center Mall Attracts Qatar Shoppers," October 17, 2015. <http://dohanews.co/life-like-water-scene-at-city-center-mall-attracts-qatar-shoppers/>.

I noticed that some of these exploration projects offered to people—not home, not work—but a third place, which allows an increased degree of freedom when it comes to social interactions. This theory, which was first introduced by the American urban sociologist Ray Oldenburg, is about the beneficial impact of third places on a community’s well-being. It explains how public art interventions discussed in this research work the way they do and why they are important. This is a key element supporting the relevance of my experiments in public space. Indeed, the projects provide social anchors to community life. “Life without community has produced, for many, a life style consisting mainly of a home-to-work-and-back-again shuttle. Social well-being and psychological health depend upon community.”<sup>60</sup> Therefore, by putting in place public art interventions all around Qatar, it creates “third places” that shift routines and encourage civically healthy dialogue.

The following sculptural sitting area and projection projects sought to create a kind of safe space in which users could engage and discuss.

“Alter Ego” is the title of a sculptural sitting area that offers customized long chairs for the public to interact with. The plaster chairs represent an invisible body shape with a bathrobe. It is an exploration of the human form, leaving a second self as a unique chair on a contrasting setting between mass production and mass hand made products. Those specific formed floor chairs, inspired by the local way of sitting, affects the way a user rests on it and offers a shared experience with others. It also allows anyone to create their own chair and install it next to the others.



<sup>60</sup> Oldenburg, Ray. “Our Vanishing ‘Third Places.’” *Planning Commissioner Journal*, no. Article #184 (Winter 1996-97), 7.

“Mirage” is a projection project in which art literally cruises around the city. A looping animation of a camel that transforms into a yellow sports car is projected as shadows on the ground from a dedicated car. This symbolically reminds the local population what they had in the past as well as what they desire in the present. It is not restricted to one place or one type of audience. The car becomes a ludic attraction whereby cruising cars encounter this odd and disconnected shadow. It is designed to stimulate curiosity, discussion and a general all-around reaction to an unexpected activity in anyone’s car journey from point A to point B. As Qatar is not a pedestrian city, and this solution provides entertainment for drivers, who may honk for attention and thereby share this happening to others.

According to Ray Oldenburg, an urban sociologist, in the book *The Great Good Place* “the playful spirit is of utmost importance. Here joy and acceptance reign over anxiety and alienation.”<sup>61</sup> In both “Alter ego” and “Mirage” projects, the atmosphere becomes inclusively sociable where moments of interaction and entertainment occur.



<sup>61</sup> Oldenburg, Ray. *The Great Good Place*. Da Capo Press, 1999, 38.

Another dimension I observed in a different project was the opportunity to create indirect collaborative work in Qatar. “Share a chalk” is a participatory project that allows users to take part in an indirect collaborative artwork. The sculpture of a person sitting on the floor and holding a chalk is made out of plastic wrap and transparent tape. The position and frozen action extend an invitation to the public to interact and behave like a child by drawing with chalk on the floor. The innocence of the sculpture inspires confidence for potential users to participate in a childlike manner, as it is easier to be the second person to act rather than the first person. Moreover, adults are generally not comfortable acting differently and/or spontaneously, a state of affairs influenced, among other factors, by peer pressure and what most people learned during their childhood, which is “not to touch anything.” The sculpture that mimics someone’s action encourages users to engage.

These design experiments were productive in understanding how participatory projects in public areas impact space and behavior in Qatar. The fact that the projects were conducted in real situations as action research must be conducted, it allowed me to obtain qualitative information on which to analyze and reflect. Certainly, the functional use of space was challenged as all projects triggered curiosity, disrupted routines and encouraged communities to come together.

The temporary unauthorized projects did not offend anyone; on the contrary, they enlivened the space and created ludic experiences that generated interactions among strangers. The exploration projects had the overall quality of a third place, which are vital to creating a healthy, dynamic and inclusive community.

As Tonnelat, an urbanist researcher, in “The Sociology of Urban Public Spaces” points out, “the success of public space is [...] its ability to bring together two main and necessary quality upon which all the rest depends: accessibility and communication.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, as my projects suggest, creating available third places through public art interventions activates playful interactions within communities in Qatar.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.,8.



## Art Works

The aim of this research is to make public art accessible by adopting a bottom-up approach to create communal social environments. I have put myself in the place of an artist and generated three participatory public art projects, the interactive capacity of which has been validated through the above exploration projects.

All three artworks integrate local context, enrich the city, and enhance experience in some way. Mainly, they create third places that fulfill an individual need: creative and playful social interactions that increase the well-being of both the community and the individual who is part and parcel of it.

“Can you hear me?” is an ingenuous and lively interaction that consists of speaking tubes. Two main communication processes influenced the design: a game called, in French, “le Telephone Arabe” (a.k.a., “Chinese Whispers” in some English-speaking contexts) and the voice pipes on boats. The game requires one person to murmur a message to another. After going around all the players the message tends to have changed in the process and it often amuses the entire group when the last participant repeats it out loud. It shows that distortions can occur when a message is circulated socially, passed from one individual to another.<sup>63</sup> This playful disconnection can act as a social thawing device, relaxing the general atmosphere of a social situation. On the other hand, another analog technique can do the total opposite and transmit clearly without distortions a message from a distance.

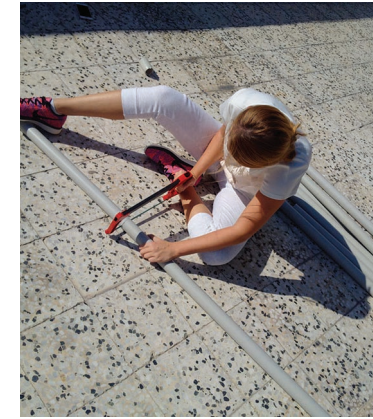
The voices pipes were a tool used on ships, particularly warships, allowing a person to talk or shout down to the pipe so that the person at the far end could hear the instructions and respond back.<sup>64</sup> There is a certain beauty in the simplicity of this tool that can attract users and create interactions.

The project, “Can you hear me?” is created with frequently overlooked materials and gives them a new purpose. It is composed of PVC pipes and funnels, allowing the possibility of a modular outcome. The aesthetics represent a dialogue between tradition and modernity. The PVC pipes and the hints of fluorescent orange color give the artwork a construction-site look that contrasts with the patterns transferred onto some of the tubes representing local and cultural elements. It suggests Qatar’s rapid development, where traditions remain despite all the ongoing changes in the physical, built environment. Another element that adds to this context are a few small-scale Arabic drums connected to the pipes, which allow for a distinct interaction in which users create a charming and playful cacophony. It has the capacity to awaken users’ senses through a gamelike interaction.

In order to rate its success, “Can you hear me?” was initially installed, tested and analyzed at VCUQatar in various prototype phases to evolve and strengthen the project. In the testing phase, I noticed that the PVC pipes alone were not triggering any cue for interaction. By simply adding bright red funnels at the end of the pipes solved the issue. Indeed, one user mentioned that “the red funnel looks like a microphone” and sang into it.

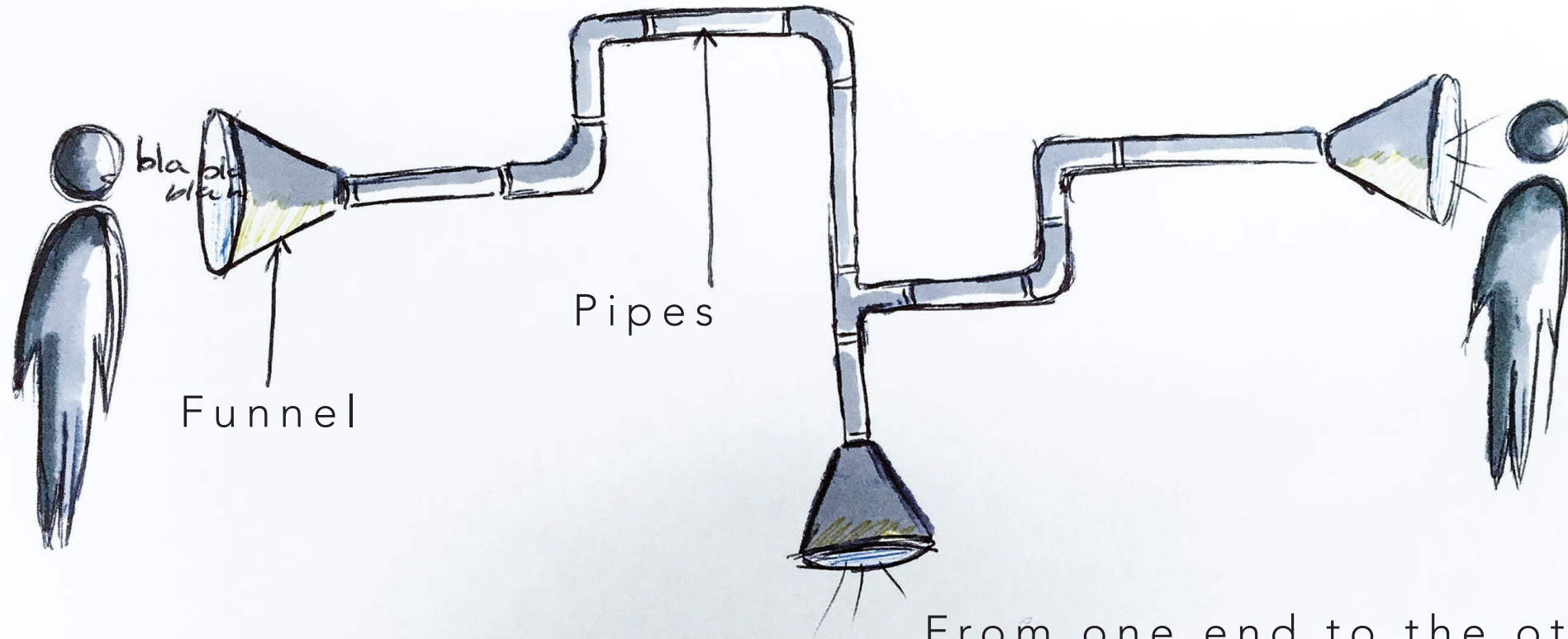
63 “Le Telephone Arabe.” *Tête À Modeler*, n.d. <http://www.tetea-modeler.com/activite/jeu/telephone-arabe.asp>.

64 US Navy Info. “Voicepipes and Speaking-Tubes.” *The Museum of Retro Technology*, March 15, 2010. <http://www.aqpl43.dsl.pipex.com/MUSEUM/COMMS/voicepipe/voicepipe.htm#speak>.



## Project 1

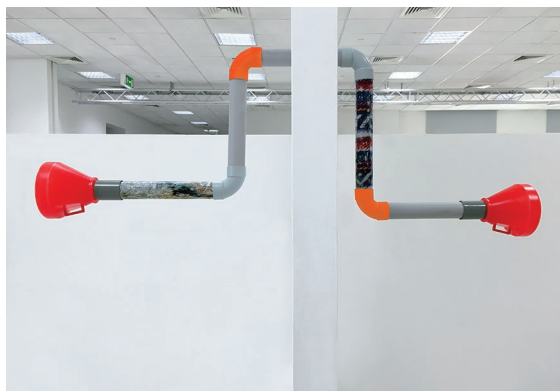
- Modular project



From one end to the other  
*Interaction*

I also observed during these two weeks that students and teachers were positively engaging with the artwork. In most cases, users always started by saying "Hello, can you hear me?" into the pipes. Behavior and space started to morph when curiosity and impulse prompted varied responses. Indeed, this fact was confirmed when one student asserted "we look like kids." Few other comments clearly demonstrated the excitement and experience, such as "Oh, that's awesome!", "I can hear you clearly", "if it was installed in a mall, I might go there just to play with this," and many laughs occurred.

To validate the data collected, I first installed the pipes in Al Markhiya and witnessed similar interactions. Once a person becomes curious and moves towards the artwork to interact, others are often intrigued and drawn closer to play. Despite the short timeframe in which this project was tested, the feedback was solid enough to reflect and support its intention. The public engaged and shared an experience in ways they might not otherwise have been engaged. Users were both observers and participants.





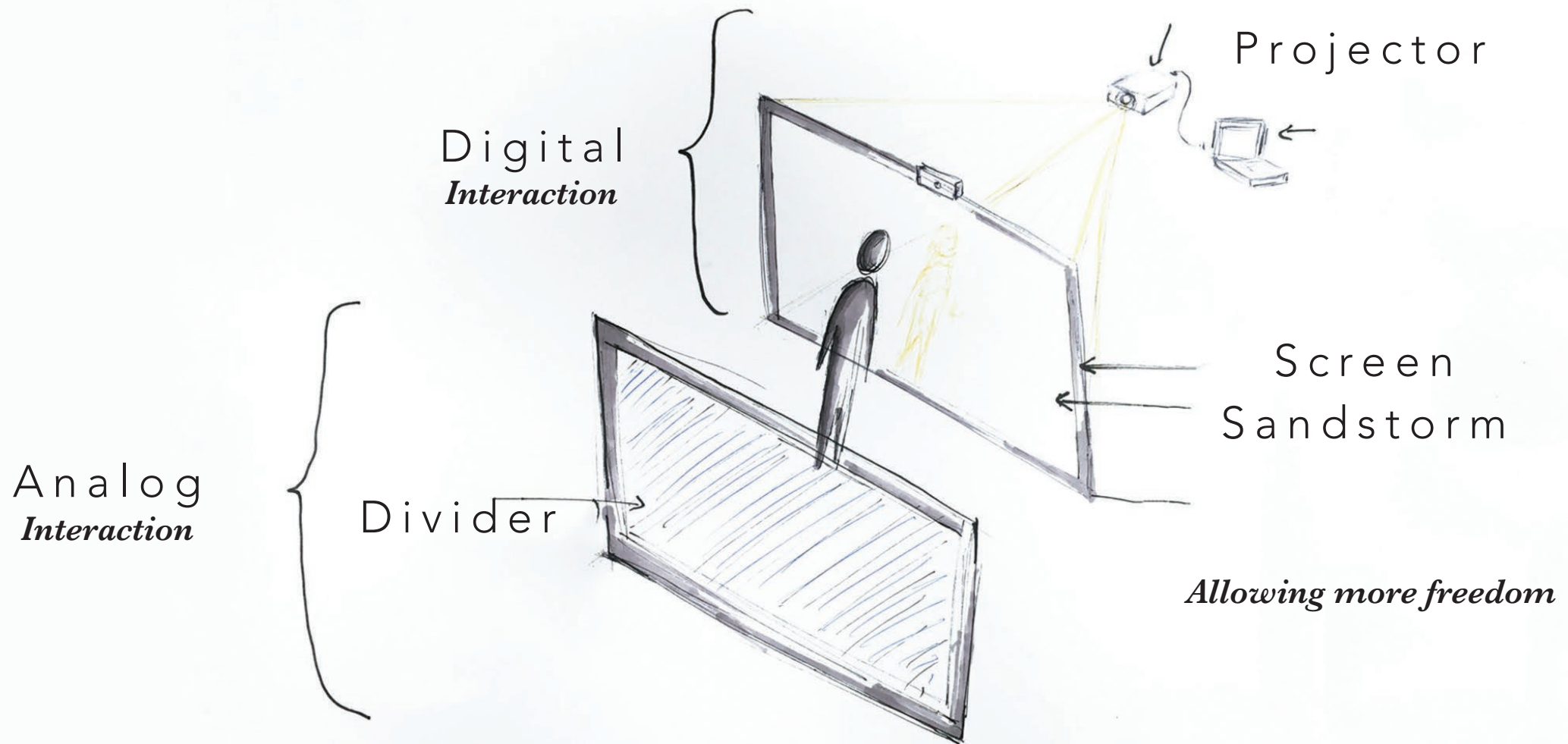




VCUQatar MFA Exhibition - "Can you hear me?" installation



## Project 2



It was observed through prototypes that context doesn't allow participant to openly interact and explore the artwork. Indeed, socio-cultural expectations on how people should act can actually inhibit interaction. For instance, QNCC has an interactive wall that "captur[es] both walking users & interacting users. As soon as someone enters the interactive zone, body shapes will be transposed into creative swarms. Every single passer-by generates its own swarm flow that meets other existing and moving swarms. This leads to unconstrained creativity and highly colorful surprising results."<sup>66</sup> I noticed that few adults actually stopped and playfully interacted because of social pressure; however most children innocently and joyfully explored the gesture-based interactive wall. This type of restriction can be also noticed at Novo cinema at the Pearl, where "they encourage the community to take selfies."<sup>67</sup> The interaction is simple; users stand on large floor poster saying 'take novo selfie,' with the hashtag #takeanovoselfie and look up at the screen until it takes a picture. Mainly children freely enjoyed the playful installation. Once again, pressure on how people perceive one another prevented users from interacting.

The solution for the "Sandstorm" project was to create some privacy. Two divider screens were installed to create a corridor path so that users felt less pressured by its highly public context. However, to not disconnect the possible creation of communal social environment by hiding participants, one of the screens is slightly see-through and has perforations on the sides to enable curiosity. The perforations are

inspired by mashrabiya; these architecture structures were "veils drawn against the outside world and behind their cool shield of latticework those inside did recline in shaded privacy while gazing out at the tumult of the streets below."<sup>68</sup> It extracts the same concept of inquisitiveness. However, during a discussion with participants it was mentioned that the projection's content and dividers had a disconnection. To link them together, the perforations were intentionally let to fray as if sandstorms occurred. Users would have the impression of being part of the artwork and causing this dynamic sandstorm effect. This project addresses digital and analog interaction where participants and observers are creating a cycle of curiosity, exploration and actions.

The project once again acts as a third place. "[P]eople get together for no purpose, higher or lower, than for the 'joy, vivacity, and relief' of engaging their personalities beyond the contexts of purpose, duty, or role."<sup>69</sup> The activity's aim is play but also to spark conversation.

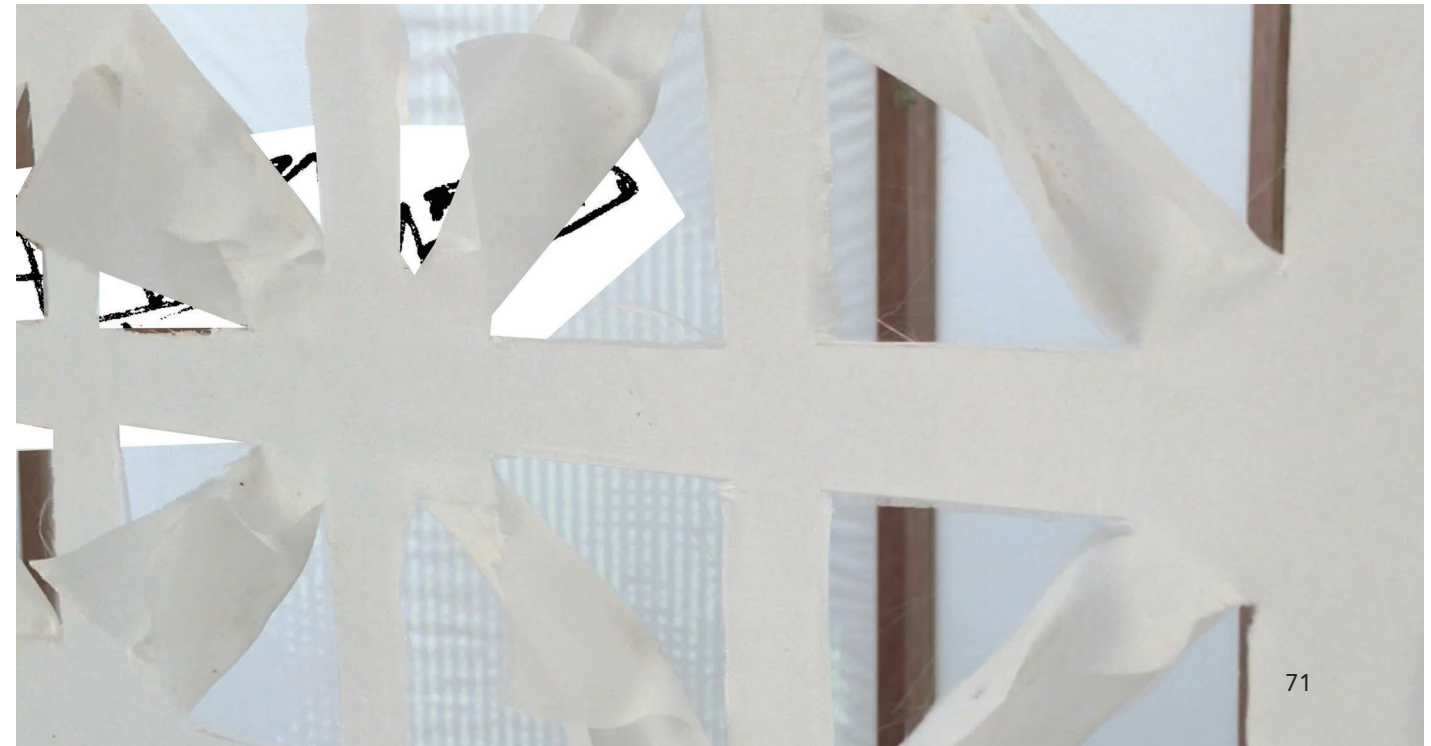
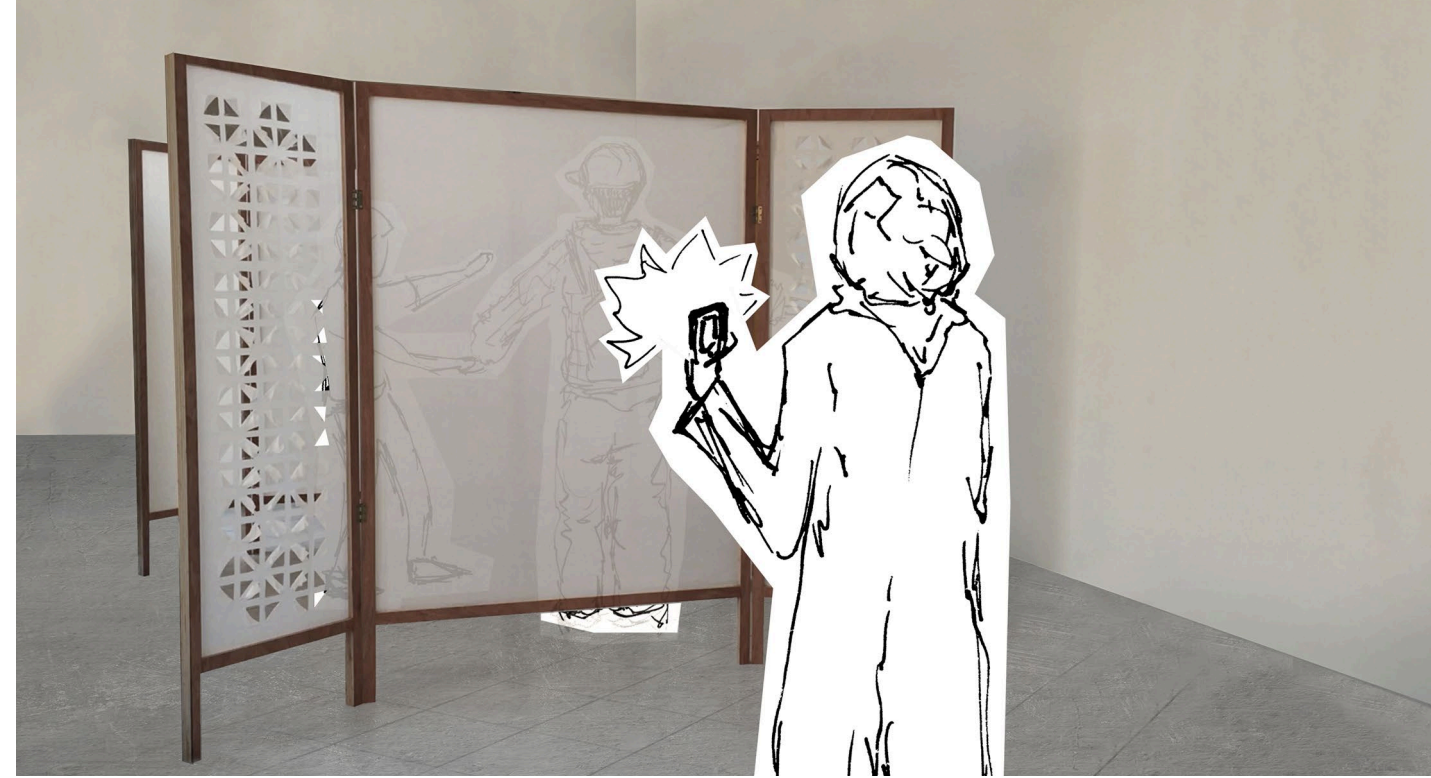


66 "QNCC – Gesture-Based Interactive Wall." *Brandfirst Interactive*, n.d. <http://www.brandfirst.be/project/en-qncc-interactive-wall/>.

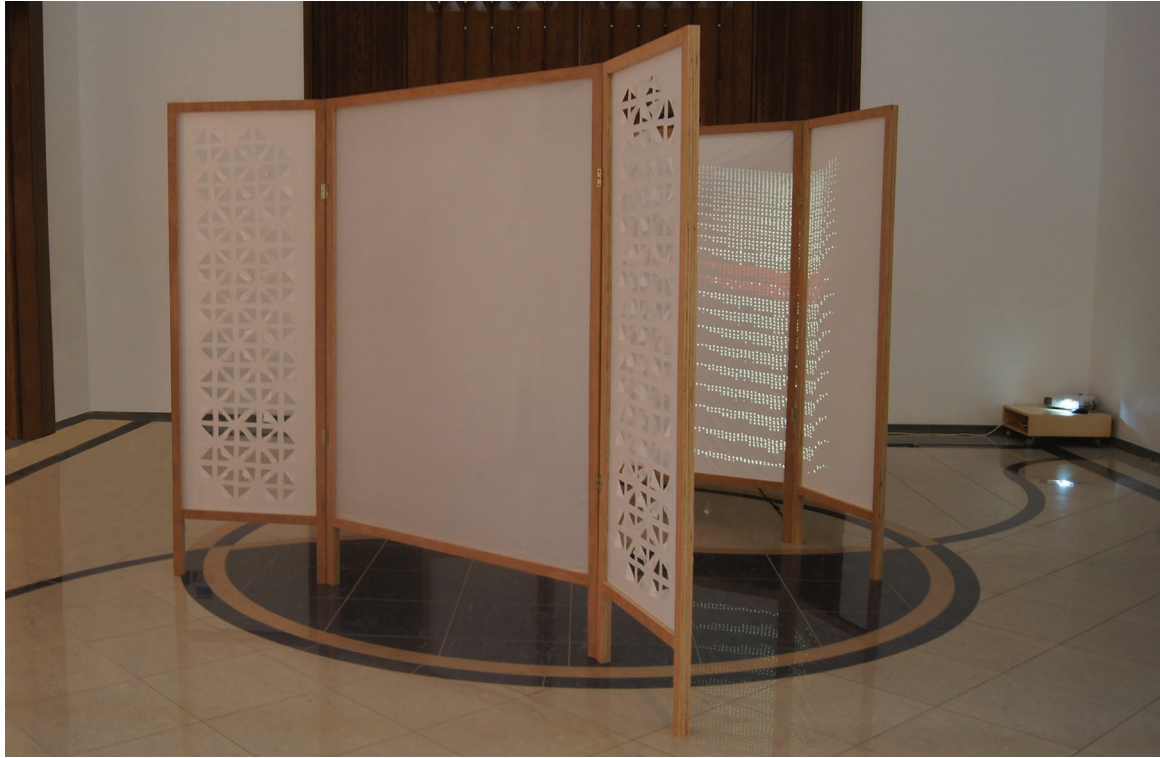
67 AKALSAAD. "Abstract," September 1, 2015. <https://akalsaad.wordpress.com/2015/09/01/abstract/>.

68 Feeney, John. "The Magic of The Mashrabiya." *Aramco World*, 1974. [http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/197404/the\\_magic\\_of\\_the\\_mashrabiya.htm](http://archive.aramcoworld.com/issue/197404/the_magic_of_the_mashrabiya.htm).

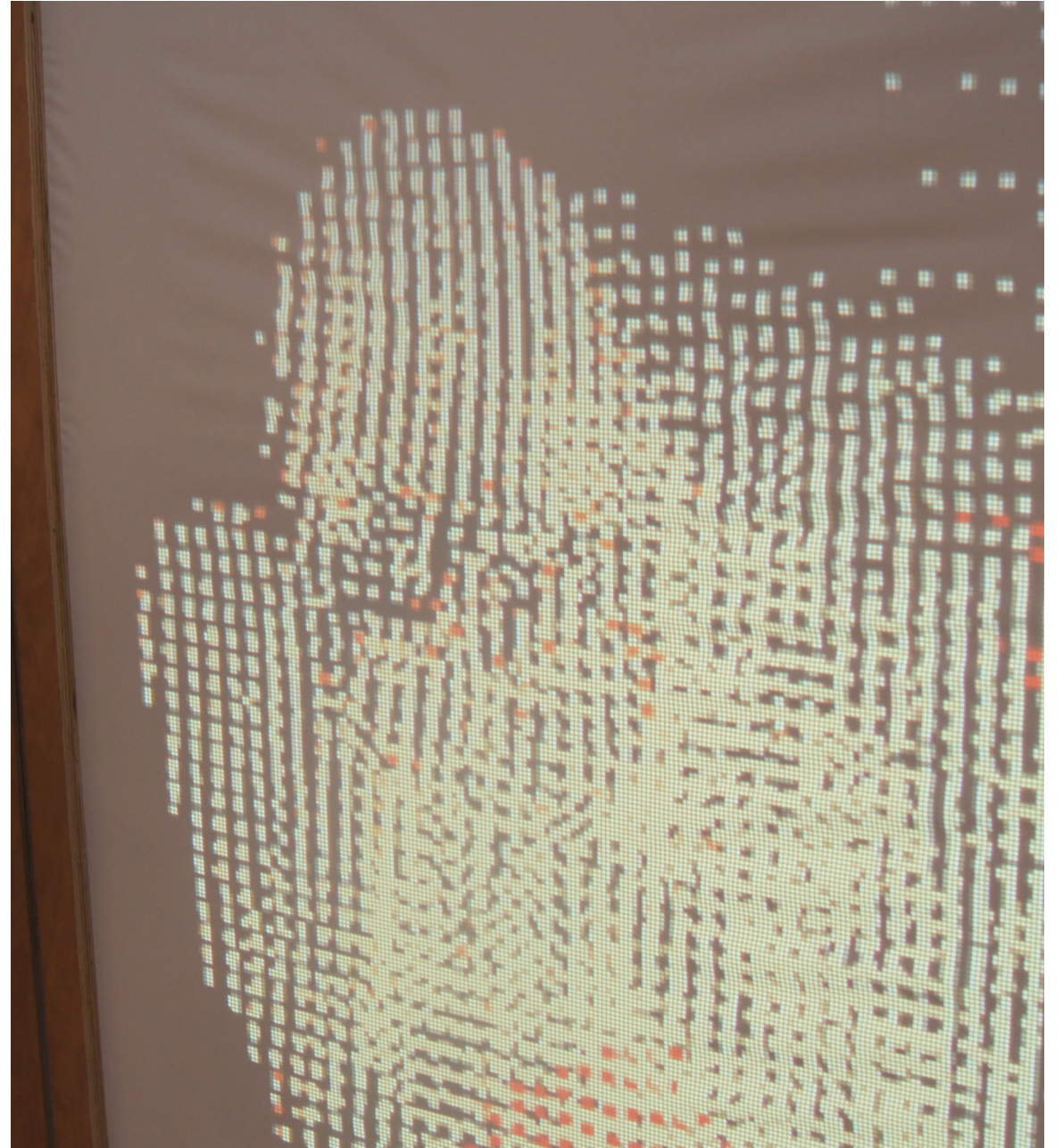
69 See note 61 above.,25.







VCU Qatar MFA Exhibition - "Sandstorm" installation



Previous projects tackle both analog and digital public art interventions. The last participatory artwork relies on another dimension discussed in the chapter called "The Artist is the Community": direct and indirect collaboration.

The project "Mosaic Invasion" consists of small adhesive wooden tiles that create a playful and collaborative outcome in different public spaces. Users leave a trace on specific areas, allowing for viewers to recognize the interaction and be curious to find others. They are developed into kits that permit individuals to add an abstract outcome to various surfaces in a neighborhood.

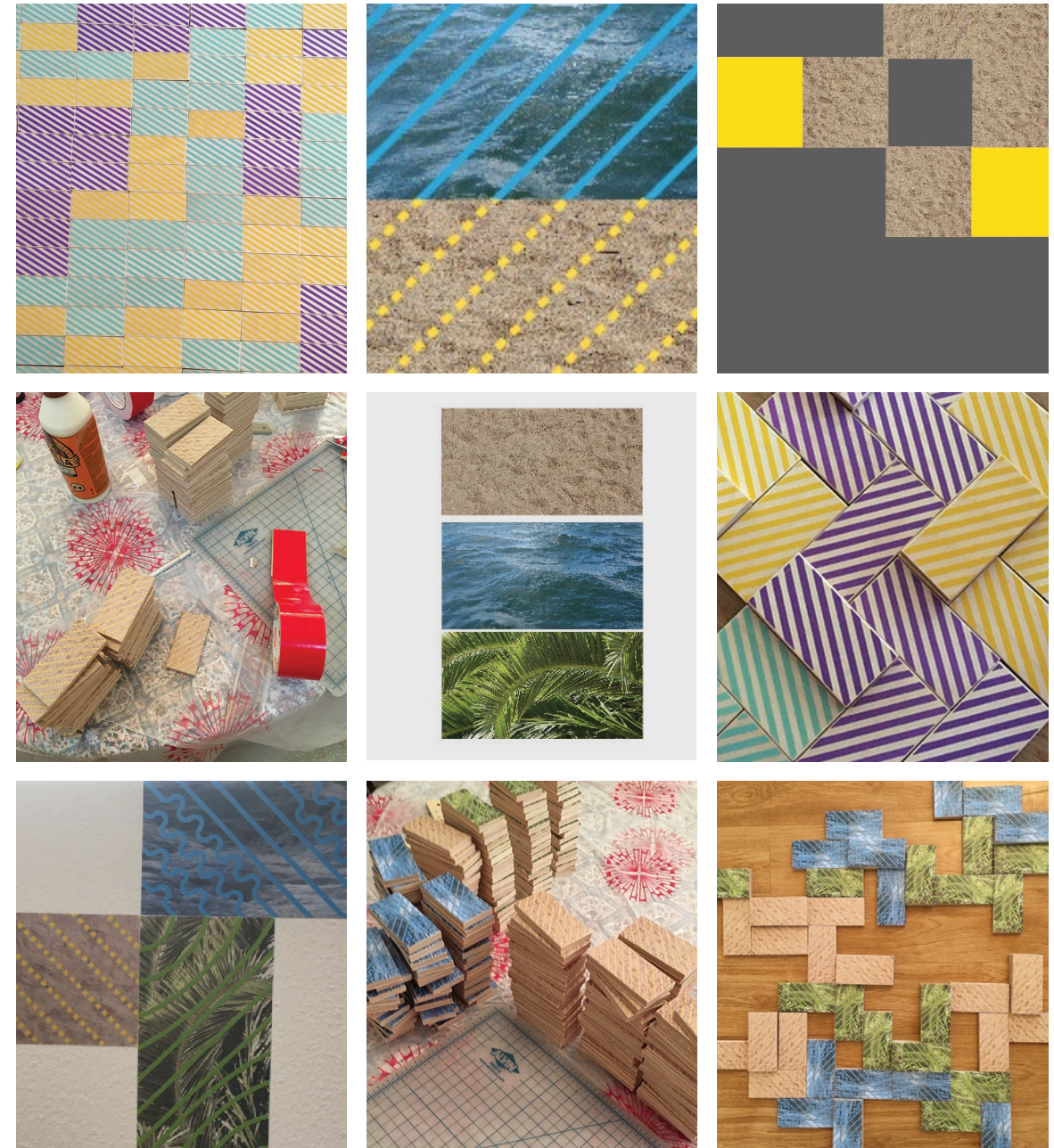
The kit contains three styles of tiles capturing Qatar's nature; the sand, sea and palm trees. Three key elements trigger users' creativity. First the imagery creating a texture and color in the background, secondly the puzzle like lines in the foreground inspired by the imagery allow users to generate links to one another and finally the uneven thickness of the tiles generating depth and a dynamic surface. The artwork can only exist when users interact and collaboratively create an abstract mosaic.

After several peer critiques and design development, the simplicity of the tiles and interaction were the main concerns. Indeed, the game like artwork needed to be enjoyable, ambiguous, effortless and open-ended. That is why the tiles relies on few and minimal elements. In terms of respecting space the adhesive was a solution as it doesn't affect or deteriorate the environment.

Ray Oldenburg observes that "the third place is just so much space unless the right people are there to make it come alive"<sup>70</sup> Indeed, the project offers a system in which users can be part of a bigger picture. This experience and participation in a collaborative artwork emphasizes the users' well being and energizes their existence in the city.

These three artworks focus on the community engagement, communication and well-being. They create a third place in which communities can playful interact and experience space through public art interventions.

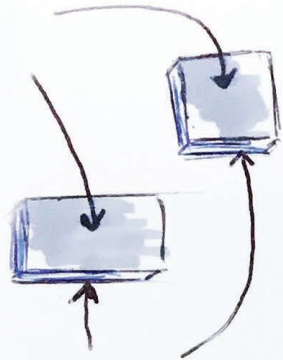
70 Ibid.,33.



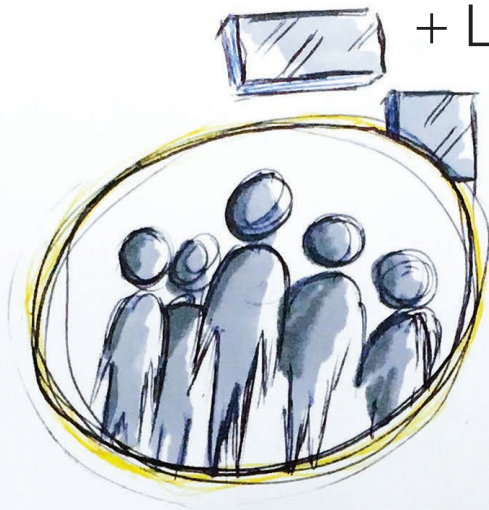


## Project 3

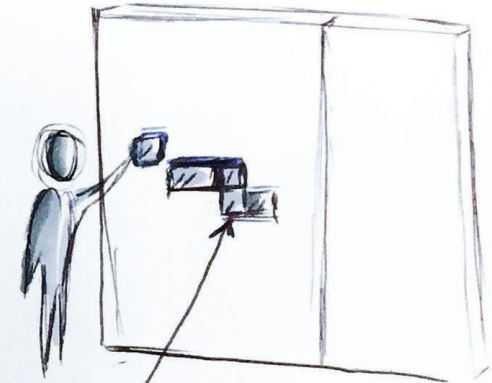
Tiles



Adhesive  
*Able to stick on  
≠ surfaces*



Community  
+ Local Artists  
*Interaction*



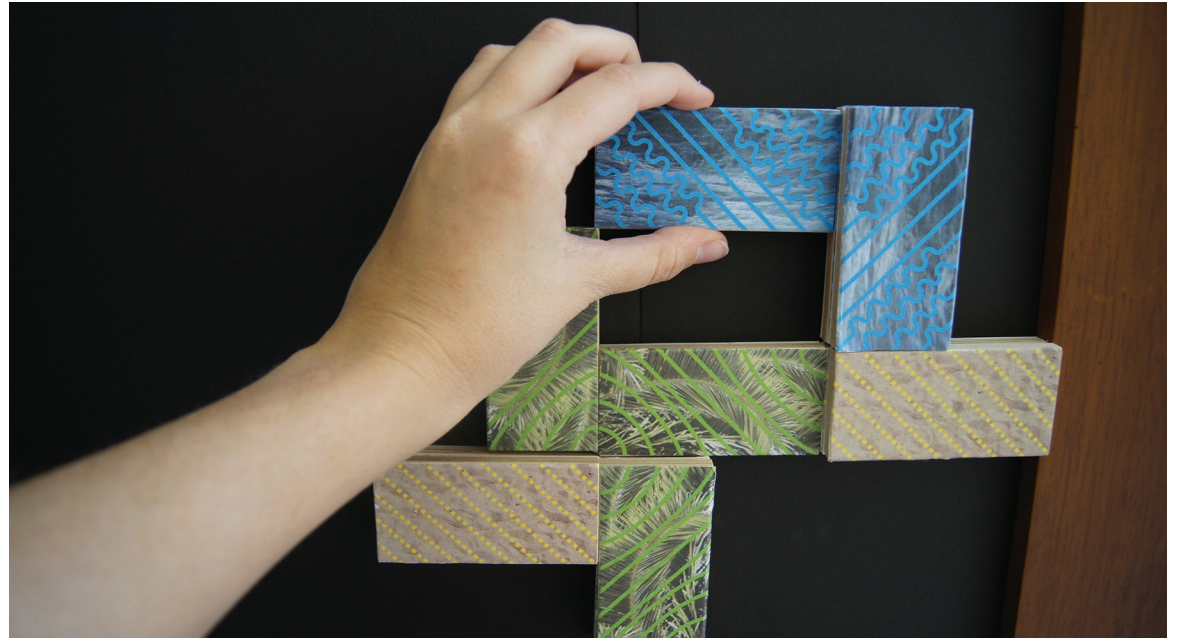
Leave a trace  
*Space becomes an  
interactive collaboration*







VCUQatar MFA Exhibition - "Mosaic Invasion" installation



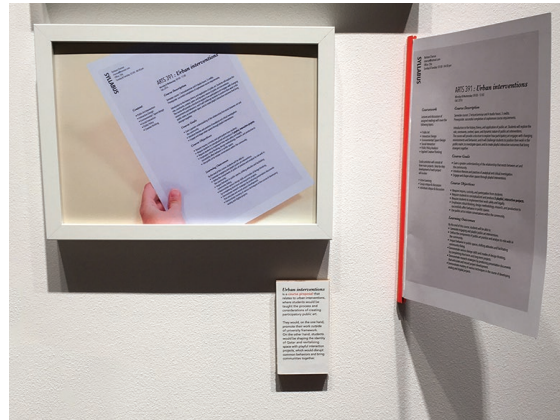
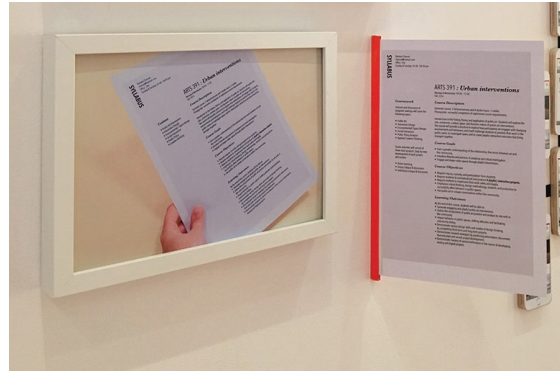
## Future approaches

My research on participatory public art challenges the functional uses of space and engages the public in ways they otherwise might not be engaged. If playful interactive artworks allow a change, how can we push local artists to install their work in public space in Qatar?

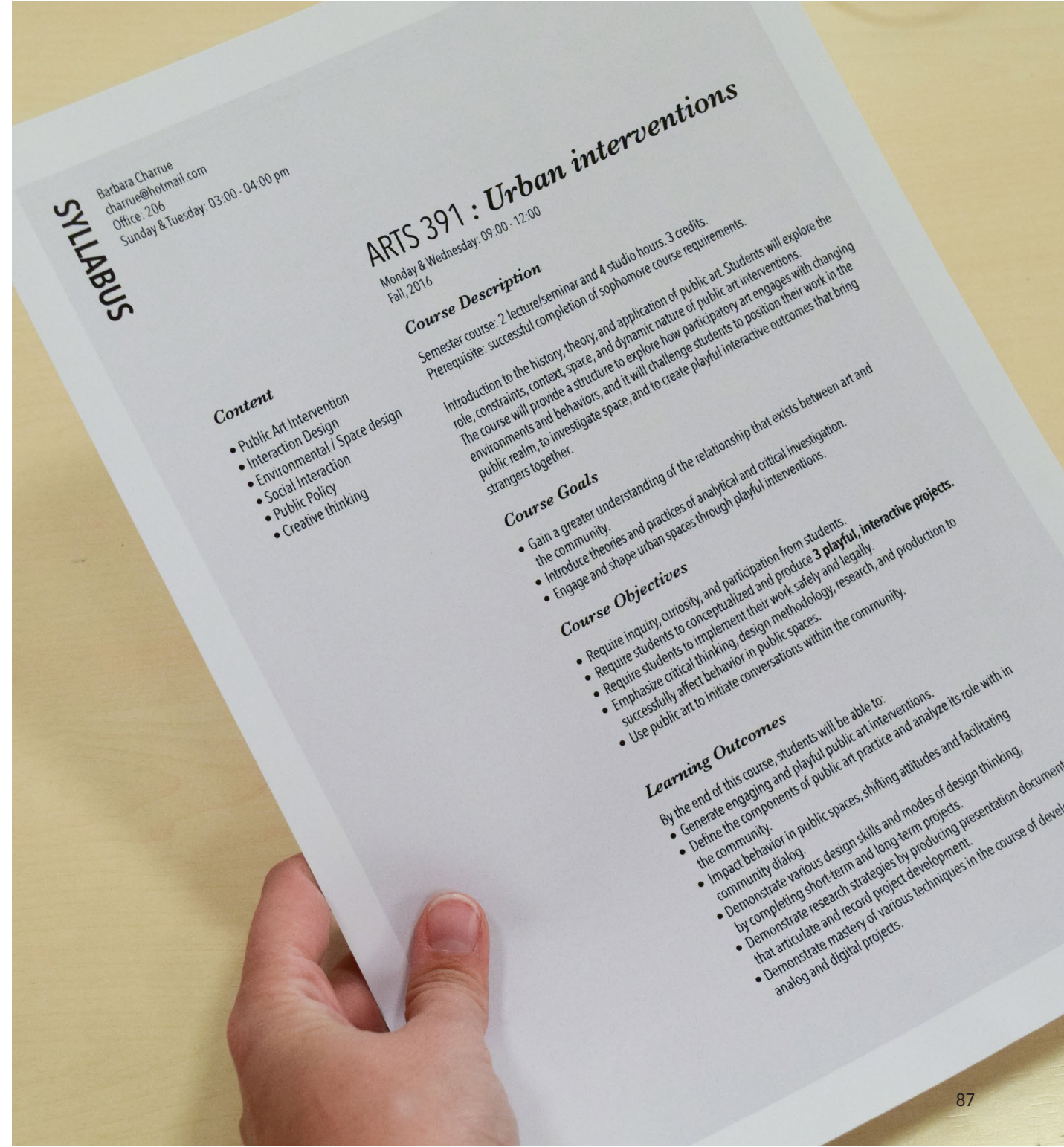
The movement of creating an art hub in Qatar could be therefore extended; from a top-down with commissioned renowned artworks to a bottom-up approach with local artists.

A key component to begin this evolution would be to let VCUQatar students to engage and install work in public spaces. Therefore, I have created a course proposal that relates to urban interventions, where students would be taught the process and considerations of creating participatory public art. They would, on the one hand, promote their work outside of university framework. On the other hand, students would be shaping the identity of Qatar and revitalizing space with playful interaction projects, which would disrupt common behaviors and bring communities together.

Students would be asked to conceptualized and produce three playful interactive projects. They would be taught about the role, constraints, context, space and shifts of public art interventions. The class would emphasize critical thinking, design methodologies, and design production in order to successfully shift behaviors in public spaces. The aim of the course will be to revitalize space and bring strangers together to boost a sense of well-being.



VCUQatar MFA Exhibition - "Urban interventions" installation



Barbara Charrue  
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Office: 206  
Sunday & Tuesday: 03:00 - 04:00 pm

## ARTS 391 : Urban interventions

Monday & Wednesday: 09:00 - 12:00  
Fall, 2016

### Content

- Public Art Intervention
- Interaction Design
- Environmental / Space design
- Social Interaction
- Public Policy
- Creative thinking

### Course Description

Semester course: 2 lecture/seminar and 4 studio hours. 3 credits.  
Prerequisite: successful completion of sophomore course requirements.

Introduction to the history, theory, and application of public art. Students will explore the role, constraints, context, space, and dynamic nature of public art interventions. The course will provide a structure to explore how participatory art engages with changing environments and behaviors, and it will challenge students to position their work in the public realm, to investigate space, and to create playful interactive outcomes that bring strangers together.

### Course Goals

- Gain a greater understanding of the relationship that exists between art and the community.
- Introduce theories and practices of analytical and critical investigation.
- Engage and shape urban spaces through playful interventions.

### Course Objectives

- Require inquiry, curiosity, and participation from students.
- Require students to conceptualized and produce **3 playful, interactive projects**.
- Require students to implement their work safely and legally.
- Emphasize affect behavior in public spaces.
- Use public art to initiate conversations within the community.

### Learning Outcomes

- By the end of this course, students will be able to:
- Generate engaging and playful public art interventions.
  - Define the components of public art practice and analyze its role with in the community.
  - Impact behavior in public spaces, shifting attitudes and facilitating community dialog.
  - Demonstrate various design skills and modes of design thinking, by completing short-term and long-term projects.
  - Demonstrate research strategies by producing presentation documents that articulate and record project development.
  - Demonstrate and record various techniques in the course of development analog and digital projects.

# SYLLABUS

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- Define the components of public art practice and analyze its role with in the community.
- Impact behavior in public spaces, shifting attitudes and facilitating community dialog.
- Demonstrate various design skills and modes of design thinking, by completing short-term and long-term projects.
- Demonstrate research strategies by producing presentation documents that articulate and record project development.
- Demonstrate mastery of various techniques in the course of developing analog and digital projects.

### Teaching Strategies

Lectures and discussion of assigned readings will cover the following topics:

- Public Art
- Interaction Design
- Environmental/ Space Design
- Social Interaction
- Public Policy Analysis
- Applied Creative Thinking

Studio activities will consist of three main projects. Step-by-step development of each project will involve:

- Active Learning
- Group critique & discussion
- Individual critique & discussion

### Ressources

*Art as Experience, John Dewey.*

*The Sociology of Urban Public Spaces, Stephane Tonnelat.*

*The Public Art: An Essential Component of Creating Communities, Jack Becker.*

### Course Calendar

**Week 01:**  
Introduction to Public Art Interventions  
**Project 1: Analogue Urban Intervention**  
Reading + Space Observation & Analysis

**Week 02:**  
In Class Making + Research  
3 Project Proposals

**Week 03:**  
Group critiques  
In Class Making

**Week 04:**  
In Class Making + Individual Meetings

**Week 05: Presentation - PROJECT 1 DUE**  
**Project 2: Digital Urban Intervention**

**Week 06:**  
Introduction to digital interactive approaches

### Assignments

#### Project 1 : Analog Urban Intervention

Research - Online process documentation  
Readings & Reading Discussions  
Design Outcome  
Presentation

#### Project 2 : Digital Urban Intervention

Research - Online process documentation  
Readings & Reading Discussions  
Design Outcome  
Presentation

#### Project 3 : Self Directed Project

Research - Online process documentation  
Site Selection  
Design Outcome  
Presentation

### Course Assessment

Students are expected to attend all classes, arrive on time, participate in class discussions and projects, read all assigned readings, and complete all projects on time.

Attendance: mandatory  
Class participation: 5 %  
Research assignments: 10%  
Design assignments: Project 1: 20 %  
Project 2: 20 %  
Project 3: 35 %  
Presentation: 10%

**A:** 100-93 % *Outstanding*    **B:** 92-83 % *Above Average*    **C:** 82-73 % *Average*  
**D:** 72-63 % *Below Average*    **F:** 62-0 % *Fail*

**Week 07:**  
In Class Making + Meetings

**Week 08:**  
In Class Making +Research (Reading +  
Space Observation & Analysis)  
3 Project Proposals + Critiques

**Week 09:**  
In Class Making  
Individual Meetings

SPRING BREAK

**Week 10: Presentation - PROJECT 2 DUE**  
**Project 3: Self directed Project**

**Week 11:**  
Lecture on Administration and Safety  
Site Selection

**Week 12:**  
In Class Making + Meetings  
Group Critiques

**Week 13:**  
In Class Making + Individual Meetings

**Week 14:**  
In Class Making + Individual Meetings

**Week 15:**  
In Class Making + Individual Meetings

**Week 16:**  
In Class Making + Individual Meetings

**Week 17: Presentation - PROJECT 3 DUE**

Involving VCUQatar in this evolution isn't the only step towards regenerating public spaces. The second proposal would be a Government mobile application presenting authorized public art free-zones to install work. It is a similar approach to "Legal Graffiti Practice Sites" where graffiti artists are allowed to paint on designated areas while respecting terms and guidelines.<sup>71</sup>

This application relates to Ray Oldenburg's notion of la joie de vivre culture. He explains that not only home and work places impact one's well being, but that third places are also crucial. Cultivating a "Joy in living" depends upon peoples' capacity to enjoy the company of those who live and work around them. Places to do this must be provided, and the time to do it will be available if those places are close to where people live." <sup>72</sup> Therefore, "'ayna THE ART" mobile application would provide spaces that are located in several neighborhoods, allowing people to discover Qatar, but also in close proximity to those living in the area so that they can interact with neighbors.

The application would show on a map various designated locations that allow public art but also terms and conditions and guidelines to follow in order to control and avoid detrimental social disruption. Below is an example of the conditions:

**Artwork:** 'ayna THE ART is not responsible for the Artwork that you may create at the proposed locations. You agree that your Artwork, if any :

- Will not be libellous, obscene, unlawful or in breach of any applicable laws or regulatory requirements in the State of Qatar; or
- defamatory or infringe the Intellectual Property Rights of any third party.
- will be in compliance with all safety and security standards in accordance with the industry and any applicable laws.

**Suspension of Services:** 'ayna THE ART reserves the right to suspend or cease providing any services relating to the apps published by it, with or without notice, and shall have no liability or responsibility to you in any manner whatsoever if it chooses to do so.

This app would not only designate potential locations for public art interventions, for local artists; it would also allow them to share images of their artworks. Posting the interventions would create curiosity and allow non-artists to be aware of what is happening around Doha.

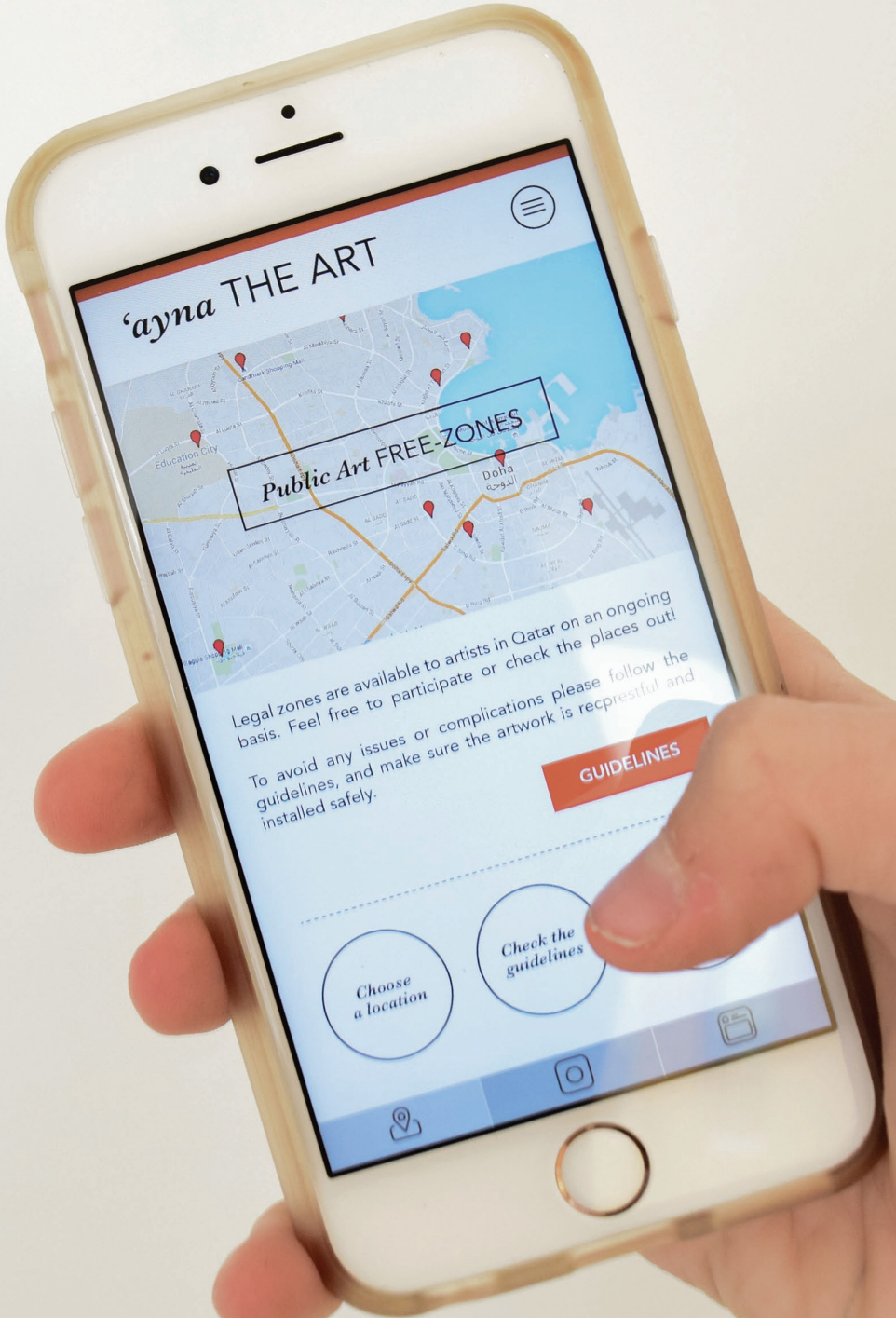
The aim of the app is to give local artists opportunities to showcase their work, which will outline a third place, revitalize social space, and shift individual behavior.

71 "Territory and Municipal Services." ACT Gouvernement, n.d. [http://www.tams.act.gov.au/city-services/public\\_areas/graffiti/graffiti\\_guidelines](http://www.tams.act.gov.au/city-services/public_areas/graffiti/graffiti_guidelines).

72 See note 60 above.,7.



VCUQatar MFA Exhibition - "'ayna THE ART" installation



# 'ayna THE ART

## Public Art FREE-ZONES

Legal zones are available to artists in Qatar on an ongoing basis. Feel free to participate or check the places out! To avoid any issues or complications please follow the guidelines, and make sure the artwork is respectful and installed safely.

[GUIDELINES](#)

Choose a location

Check the guidelines





## CONCLUSION

As the studies analyzed in this research and my investigations suggest, public art is important to forming and maintaining a city's identity, dynamism, and development. Thus, it would be useful to add a new dimension to Qatar's art hub, presenting public art as a new experience for locals and enriching public spaces. However, bringing only international artists to shape the city is only the beginning of an art invasion. Now, it is time to focus on the participation of locals, encouraging them to interact with the city itself in order to embrace their own creative and cultural identity.

The three different public art interventions prove the powerful impact that playful participatory projects can create in public spaces. It revitalizes space where the community becomes engaged and inclusive. To pursue the path in involving local artists, both the course and mobile application proposals are a step to take. Creating third places with public art interventions will open a door towards new experiences and community well-being in Qatar.

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