



**THE ART OF PLACEMAKING:**  
*Interpreting Community Through Public Art and Urban Design*  
 Ronald Lee Fleming  
 London, New York: Merrell, 2007  
 384 pages, \$49.95 (hardcover)

Ronald Lee Fleming, founder and president of the Townscape Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is not only an eminent urbanist, he's a good storyteller—and that makes this encyclopedic primer on public art and placemaking easily digestible as well as eminently useful. *The Art of Placemaking* is a well-written and intelligent book that provides a richer mix of material than most books about public art.

After a series of project case studies, there is a section on making connections among placemaking, urban design, and public art, followed by a discussion of interpretation and cultural tourism and an overview of public art master planning. The varied and interesting case studies include facts and figures, a brief history of each site, information about the projects and brief profiles of the artists. Funding and the economics of public art are presented in an unimimidating way.

Vivid details and anecdotes endear these projects to the reader, and there are artist quotes and thought provoking "tangents" on subjects like racial bias in the art world and the idiosyncrasies of the public art airports. Fine-quality photographs illustrate the text throughout.

Of the case-study categories, only the section on murals has an introduction, providing information about mural activity worldwide; the other categories could have used this sort of context. Including plans of each project showing both site and context would have helped the reader gain a better grasp of them and strengthened Fleming's argument for a systems-scale, context-driven approach to public art and placemaking.

There are problems in the interpretation and planning sections, too. Fleming fails to connect issues of interpretation with placemaking and public art, and it's not clear why the project examples he offers have been separated from the case studies. The sequencing in the planning section is confusing and distracting, including things—like a series of artists' perspectives on public projects—only tangentially related to planning issues.

In an undertaking as ambitious as this book, of course, a few flaws are inevitable. Overall, *The Art of Placemaking* will play an important role in increasing an interdisciplinary understanding of public art.

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**MARY MISS**  
 Mary Miss and Daniel M. Abramson  
 New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004  
 252 pages, \$85 (hardcover)

For more than thirty years, Mary Miss has been a leader in expanding the role of sculpture to embrace the environment in which it and its viewers live. Her work also makes fruitful use of elements already in place, so it makes sense that a book about her would incorporate reprints of older texts. In this case, though, the result is uneven; *Mary Miss* is a pretty good book about a very good artist, marred by dangling references to absent images and by repetitions—the expansive scope of Miss' major pieces means there are not many of them, so throughout the book the same works are examined and re-examined from viewpoints that don't widely differ.

Art critic Eleanor Heartney opens the discussion with an essay that reminds us how startling Miss' work appeared in the late 1960s. Public art, Heartney says, had become "a neglected byway of the larger art world" and "the last refuge of mediocre artists." She credits Miss as a pioneer in making public art "one of the most intellectually vibrant fields of art endeavor." Architecture critic Joseph Giovannini discusses her indoor constructions and her thoughtful transformations of landscape, and architectural historian Daniel M. Abramson fits her career into the larger scene.

After these specialists' reflections, couched in a professional vocabulary, it is a pleasure to come to Miss' own clear prose. She says, of *Perimeters/Pavillions/Decoys* at the Nassau County Museum in New York (late 1970s), that "the visitor becomes an active participant, engaged emotionally as well as physically," and describes the everyday materials she uses in everyday language.

Reprints include an essay by Sandro Marpillero that first appeared with an exhibition called "Mary Miss: Photo/Drawings" at the Des Moines Art Center in 1996. Miss' beautiful manipulated photographs, which she uses to further her own thinking about her work, are a worthy addition here, but the essay makes reference to photographs not reproduced. And Miss' 1984 essay, "On a Redefinition of Public Sculpture," has historic value, but would be of greater interest if she had added some reflections on the essay's relevance today. Sculpture, like any living art, continues to evolve, and surely Miss' thoughts on it do as well. I'd like to know where they are now.

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