

## **PUBLIC ART BETWEEN HERITAGE AND IDEÁRIO. THE ARTISTIC ITINERARY OF SIAH ARMAJANI**

**José Guilherme Abreu**

Research Center for Science and Technology of the Arts, School of Arts, Catholic University of Portugal, Portugal

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### **ABSTRACT**

Siah Armajani (1939-) is an Iranian born sculptor who quite young emigrated to USA, where he began an artistic career in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Beyond being the author of a vast and acknowledged sculptural work, Siah Armajani is also an essayist, having authored “Manifesto to public sculpture in the context of american democracy” (Armajani, 1995), which was written for the exhibition “Reading Spaces” he presented, in 1995, at Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). The value of Armajani’s work comes from its engagement to an unequivocal social-utopic-artistic ideário that problematizes the prevalence of the authorship’s statute regime, while rejecting the self-referential character of the artistic work, being both aspects quite unusual in the field of contemporary art production. Aesthetically contemporary, Armajani’s work succeeds to solve one of the bitter dilemmas of modern and contemporary art, as Arnold Schoenberg brightly put into words: “if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art” (Schoenberg, 1950, p. 124). Curiously, Armajani’s public sculpture ideário is not absolutely unique. In several points, it matches the one of the movement in favour of public art, which by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century had been formed in Belgic, giving birth to the organization of four public art international congresses, two of them having documented Portuguese participation, as we will see in the first section of this paper.

### **KEYWORDS**

public art; International Institute for Public Art; heritage; Siah Armajani; manifesto

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## **A ARTE PÚBLICA ENTRE PATRIMÓNIO E IDEÁRIO. O ITINERÁRIO ARTÍSTICO DE SIAH ARMAJANI**

### **RESUMO**

Siah Armajani (1939-) é um escultor de origem iraniana que ainda muito jovem emigrou para os EUA, onde empreendeu uma carreira artística, sediada em Minneapolis, no Minnesota. Para além de autor de uma vasta e reconhecida obra escultórica, Armajani é também um ensaísta, sendo autor do texto “Manifesto public sculpture in the context of american democracy” (Armajani, 1995), que acompanhou a exposição “Espaços de Leitura” que apresentou, em 1995, no Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA). O interesse da obra de Armajani decorre da mesma resultar de um inequívoco *engagement* a um ideário sócio-utópico-artístico que problematiza o estatuto do regime autoral, e que rejeita a autorreferencialidade da obra, circunstância rara no contexto da produção artística contemporânea. Esteticamente contemporânea, a obra de Armajani logra resolver um dos dilemas mais amargos da arte moderna e contemporânea, formulado por Arnold Schoenberg: “se é arte, não é para todos, e se é para todos não é arte” (Schoenberg, 1950, p. 124). Curiosamente, o ideário veiculado por Armajani não é em absoluto inédito. Em múltiplos aspetos o mesmo coincide com o do movimento em prol da arte pública que se formou na Bélgica, nos finais do século XIX, e que deu origem à organização de quatro

congressos internacionais de arte pública, dois deles com participação portuguesa documentada, aspeto por onde se inicia o presente estudo.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

arte pública; Instituto Internacional de Arte Pública; património; Siah Armajani; manifesto

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#### BACK TO THE ORIGINS?

Public sculpture attempts to fill the gap that comes about between art and the public, to make art public and the artists citizens again.  
Siah Armajani (1995, p. 112)

The beginning of the so-called public art goes back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century last quarter, when it first appeared in Europe, under the influence of *Arts and Crafts* movement's ideário, from where the aesthetical premises and the artistic programs it will be adopted.

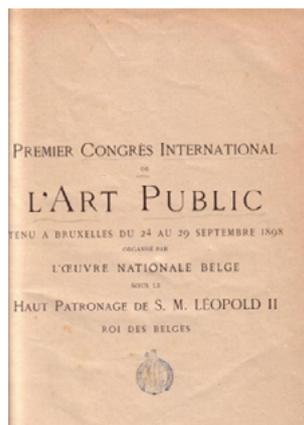
A little later, a similar drive emerged in the United States (US), under the influence of the *City Beautiful* movement, whose eclectic premises and monumental programs will be soon adopted, in opposition to the European movement, grounded in the ornamental and social aims of the British movement.

Although distinct, in both movements we can find an interesting masonic affinity, established by the filiation of some of their main supporters, such as the architect and then Brussels' Burgomaster Charles Buls (1837-1914). Affiliated to the Masonic Lodge *Les Vrais Amis* of Brusells, since 1862, from 1894, Buls will become president of the Société l'Œuvre Apliquée à la Rue et aux Objets d'Utilité Publique, which soon will be the embryo of the Belgian public art movement (Abreu, 2010, p. 24). Besides Buls, also Victor Horta, famous architect and creator of Brussel's Art Nouveau, was both a notable franc-mason, affiliated to the Lodge Les Amis Philantropes (Ressler, 2013, p. 93), and a supporter of the four international public art conferences.



Figure 1: *L'Art Appliqué à la Rue et aux Objets d'Utilité Publique*

Source: Broerman, 1895 (photo of José Guilherme Abreu)

Figure 2: *Premier Congrès International d'Art Public*

Source: Broerman et. al., 1898 (photo of José Guilherme Abreu)

The same happens, curiously, with the North-American public art movement, in which one may find names such as architect Daniel Burnham (1846-1912) author of the Masonic Temple of Chicago (1892), director of the “Columbian Universal Exhibition of Chicago” (1893), and yet author of the Urban Plan of Chicago (1909). Burnham, as Michael Johnstone says, “was one of the most visionary masons, architectonically speaking” (Johnstone, 2018, p. 179), and besides Burnham, Richard Watson Gilder (1844-1909) was a franc-mason too, being, in 1899, the founder of Public Art League of the United States and its president, being the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens its vice-president, and Glenn Brown its secretary-general (Mechlin, 1922, p. 185).

Centered in Belgic, the European public art movement led to the organization of four international public art conferences, between 1898 and 1910. These conferences gathered a large number of official delegations, which included prominent experts and state members of European, North and South American governments, and even from Asia, as well as a lot of delegates from many municipalities, urban communities and city halls, among which delegations from Lisbon and Coimbra, and also from Madrid, could be found.

Three of these conferences produced large and detailed catalogues (Broerman et al., 1898; Broerman et al., 1905; Broerman et al., 1910), and we should enhance the fact that one of the resolutions took by the 3th International Conference, of 1905, was to create an international and permanent Institute for Public Art, named Institut International d'Art Public (IIAP), which had, from 1907 until 1910, as periodical publication the journal *L'Art Public*, having edited eight quarterly editions, some double.

It is of some relevance to our scope to analyze the Institut Internacional d'Art Public's statutes, published in the first issue of the journal *L'Art Public*, in order to collect the themes, present in the journal's inaugural edition.

By the compilation made (Appendix, Table 1) it is possible to realize the fundamentals, the aims and the range of IIAP. The degree of institutional and political involvement and support enounced in IIAP's statutes is indeed impressive. Still more impressive is the

fact that in the years before World War I, the range public art concept had was much wider than it is now, as states Marcel Smets:

what mostly impresses, is the extreme variety of the issues treated there. Public art applies as well to education, as to theatre, to legislation, to restoration, to the qualities and the profession of the artist, to the conservation of sites, to the urban design and the public domain aspect. During the twelve years that separate the first and the last Congress, none of those domains prevailed, even if the number of communications related to the urban planning had gradually increased. (Smets, 1995, p. 146)

Thus, despite the diversity of languages and forms of nowadays multidisciplinary public art interventions, one must acknowledge that contemporary public art concentrates almost exclusively in the expanded field of plastic art, instead of what happened with the Belgian movement. There, the range of its incidence comprehended a quite large panoply of many and distinct areas, as we list:

- education;
- theatre;
- legislation;
- restoration;
- popular music;
- urban furniture;
- artistic profession;
- conservation of sites;
- urban planning;
- public domain aspect.

By the listed areas, one perceives the public art movement was thought not only as an artistic dynamic production, but also as a heritage safeguarding and appreciation movement.

Besides that, if there was a dominant tendency on this movement, it was that of preserving the artistic treasures of the past, as the public art movement, from its programmatic point of view, was conceived as a movement of defense and safeguarding of cultural and artistic heritage, although this one meant far beyond the cult of historical monuments. Including a vast panoply of cultural and artistic species, curiously it gathered under the same family, material and immaterial goods, what can be seen as an anticipation to post World War II concept of immaterial heritage, which was in fact premonitory, if not prodigious.

In one hand clearly progressive, due the wide range of its public art concept, and in the other a lot rhetorical, the public art movement was not able to establish a critical distance related to the fundamentals, aims and achievements of historicism. On the contrary, the *fin-de-siècle* public art movement was clearly refractory, *vis-a-vis* the rupture

of the fundamentals and practices of modern art, something that led to the erosion of its aesthetic orientations. So, it is no surprise that the movement collapsed after its 4<sup>th</sup> Congress that took place in Brussels, in 1910, whose catalogue is nothing but a shadow, compared to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress Catalogue of 1905, whose extension is of 744 pages, while the 4<sup>th</sup> Congress catalogue is only 176 pages long.

The tension between progressivism and traditionalism is paramount, among the recurrent subjects of the editions of IIAP journal. In the inaugural number, edited in June 1907, its index displayed the following subjects:

1. Public art, by Eugène Broeman
2. National traditions
  - 2.1. *Mistral and Félibrige*. Provençal poem, Marius Mistral
  - 2.2. Paris and 16<sup>th</sup> century public art, Marius Vachon
  - 2.3. For beauty, Carmen Sylva
  - 2.4. National artistic education, Walter Crane
3. Safeguarding of sites and artistic heritage
  - 3.1. The resurrection of Herculaneum, H. Carlon de Wiart
  - 3.2. Ardennes and the cave of Hans, Ed. De Pierpont
4. The artistic evolution of cities
  - 4.1. The transformation of Brussels, L. Dumont-Wilden
  - 4.2. On modern construction in German cities, J. Siebben
  - 4.3. The artistic developing of American cities, Glenn Brown
  - 4.4. The role of art criticism, Frantz Jourdain
5. The aesthetic culture
  - 5.1. Image in the school, A. Stuys
  - 5.2. The teaching of industrial art in Holland, von Saher
  - 5.3. The popular chant, Ft. Van Dayse
  - 5.4. Aesthetic learning, por Mario Pilo
  - 5.5. Letter from Florence syndic, J. Niccolini



Figure 3: *L'Art Public*, n.º 1, 1/6/1907

Source: Broerman, 1907 (photo of José Guilherme Abreu)

The journal's index restates the wide range notion of de public art. On the four sections focused by the several articles, and even more by their incidences, the wide and inclusive range of the concept of public art becomes unequivocal.

It seemed useful to us to display this sample here, in order to analyze, by an objective and rigorous way, the documental testimonies of the public art movement endorsed by IIAP, as in spite of the institutional dimension it accomplished, after World War I, it became absolutely forgotten, and even in the specialized field of public art studies, it is not a well-known matter.

By the assembled material, (Appendix, Table 1) we can pick up a few pertinent inferences for our study. Let us display them:

1. in its initial phase, the public art movement, above all, meant to become aware of its cultural and artistic heritage valor, conceived far beyond the limits of the safeguarding of the historical monuments, prompted by the vandalizations perpetrated by the demolishing fury of Paris' sans-culottes, during Convention times;
2. similarly, IIAP's movement struggles for the aesthetic appreciation of cities, so claiming the intervention of art, therefore rescuing it from the restrict domain of private and/or institutional collections, in order to focus its function and fruition mainly on pedagogical aims and concerns;
3. steadily watching over the heritage legacy, IIAP cares about the researching and appreciation of archeological heritage, promoting the organization of rigorous archeological excavations, in order to turn the testimonies of the past public;
4. confined not to the protection and promotion of artistic heritage, both objectual or monumental, IIAP denotes being aware of the heritage valor of the territory, fostering the preservation and appreciation natural landscape ant sites, predicting the contemporary cultural landscape notion;
5. beyond the appreciation of landscape contexts and natural riches, IIAP involves and cares for appreciation of the oral traditions and shared usages and customs of the communities, fighting for the safeguarding of popular and ethnographic chant, as well as popular theatre and feasts, thus anticipating the contemporary notion of immaterial heritage;
6. finally, IIAP defends, so to speak, an utilitarian understanding of art, conceding it a first range social function, in the domain of the formation of the human being and the fostering of progress, under the guidance of positivism, where one may recognize clear masonic connotations.

So enounced, these traces define, already in its origin, what I use to state as being the “public art ideario” (Abreu, 2015).

The methodology we just use, can be replicated in the remaining editions of the journal *L'Art Public*, but cannot be done here. Besides that, the thematic structure of subjects displayed in the index of the eight published numbers remains the same (Appendix, Table 2).

Similarly, if we make a punctual survey on the votes (recommendations) of the “4<sup>th</sup> International Public Art Congress”, held in Brussels, in 1910, we shall verify that the same structure of incidences and interventions persists, whose structure we now present with the amount of the number of recommendations, by section, as follows:

- section I: safeguarding of sites and art heritage (20 recommendations);
- section II: artistic extension of cities (13 recommendations);
- section III: aesthetical culture (15 recommendations);
- section IV: people’s artistic education (8 recommendations).

From these data, one can infer the methodologic consistency and the conceptual coherence of the epistemological and operative frame of IIAP.

It not yet well known the history of the extinction of IIAP, nor this point is relevant to our scope. What seems us the most relevant issue, is to find out if the ideario we have just detected as being the origin of the movement fostered by IIAP constitutes, indeed, a structural and effective element for any informed definition of public art, and if this ideario keeps actual, and so if we can find any common elements between the traces of this ideario, identified as above, and the theory and practice of contemporary public art, as will be following discussed.

## **PUBLIC ART IDEARIO IN ITS CONCEPTUAL COMPLEX**

In another study (Abreu, 2018), we have defended that contemporary public art is a field of tendencies, that complicates the formulation of a valid and comprehensive definition applicable to the several segments, among which nowadays it is still spread, even if its coverage range is smaller than during the years of its formation.

So, instead of creating a specific concept, we have therefore proposed a conceptual complex (Abreu, 2015), which is “composed” by successive layers, being one of them precisely the level of its ideario.

This conceptual complex is based on four pillars:

1. ideario: public art intents to bring art to all citizens, in order to help to turn common life better and to promote their cultural evolution;
2. impact: public art implicates a civic posture by the artist and provokes a social behavior of the public (appropriation or rejection);
3. inclusivity: public art seeks several recipients, and comprehends different production techniques, expressive means, plastic languages, expressive ways. Em coabitação pluridimensional;

4. regime: public art is the product of an allographic production regime (Abreu, 2013, p. 20) distinct of the remaining artistic production. (Abreu, 2015, p. 45)

In this conceptual complex, ideário is the first pillar, if not the main one.

We sustain also that there is a genealogy that connects and articulates, by successive adaptations and formulations, distinct enunciations of that conceptual complex, since the genesis of public art in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by *Arts and Crafts* British movement (Abreu, 2013, p. 18), until nowadays, overpassing thus the chronological barriers and the factual vicissitudes of 20<sup>th</sup> century troubled History.

When we talk about genealogy, we do not mean that its lineage forms a continuous chronological succession, without any hiatus and free of no direction variations.

That is precisely the case of Siah Armajani art. Although one cannot say that his line of production is marginal in the international circuits of contemporary art (cultural, institutional and commercial), it is important to recognize that his artistic production doesn't convey the aesthetical and/or conceptual assumptions which are predominant among contemporary artists. As a matter of fact, Armajani chose to give continuity to a production line that had been "discarded", when the cycle of historical avantgarde ended.

That discarded artistic current was constructivism and its repercussion on Armajani's work may be documented by the confrontation of Armajani's production with the explanation of constructivist precepts, in 1921, by Rodchenko itself:

construction is the organisation (sic) of elements.

Construction is the modern philosophy.

Art like every science is one of the branches of mathematics.

Construction represents the contemporary organisation (sic) and the utilitarian use of materials.

Constructive life is the art of the future.

Art which has no part on life should be filled away in the archeological museums of Antiquity.

It is time for Art to flow organisedly (sic) in life.

A constructively organised (sic) life is above the mystical art of magicians.

(...)

Conscientious, experiment ... the goal: construction. Technology and mathematics – these are the brothers of modern art. (Elliott, 1979, p. 129)



Figure 4: Rodchenko (1921), *Notes for a lecture*

Source: Elliot, 1979, p. 29

As we will see later, despite the chronological distance and the cultural moat between both artists, those premises integrate Armajani's material and conceptual production, as the artist, himself, recognizes:

I was interested in the constructivists because they were political, because there was no separation between the citizen and the artist - what we're trying to do now in public art. They are really our paradigm, Tatlin and Rodchenko and Malevich and the rest. (Tomkins, 1990, p. 54)

Rejected by the jadnovian normative of Stalinism, constructivism was afterwards absorbed by Bauhaus, to where, in the meanwhile, transited the avantgarde soviet artists, or close to them, such as Wassily Kandinsky, Nikolaus Pesvner and his brother Naum Gabo, where they would become prominent teachers. At the Bauhaus, however, constructivism evolved mainly in the sense of design, losing its social/civic dimension, as one may observe in the artistic production of both Gabo e Pevsner.

Non-linear genealogy, since Armajani's plastic language inverted, in its turn, the previous inversion induced by *Bauhaus*, evolving now from indoor design to outdoor equipment, centered, although not exclusively, in the construction of structures and spaces for leisure, created for urban public spaces, city's public gardens, reading places, sportive precincts or recondite natural areas.

Pedestrian bridges were the first sort of constructive structures designed by Armajani. The first bridge he built is from 1968 and was temporary installed in the ground of Bear Lake City Park, in Minnesota.

Of that installation remains only the model. It would be the first of a long series, whose primary examples express the idea of de-functionalization<sup>1</sup> and interpellation of its immediate practical use (Figure 5).

<sup>1</sup> See <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/siah-armajani-first-bridge>

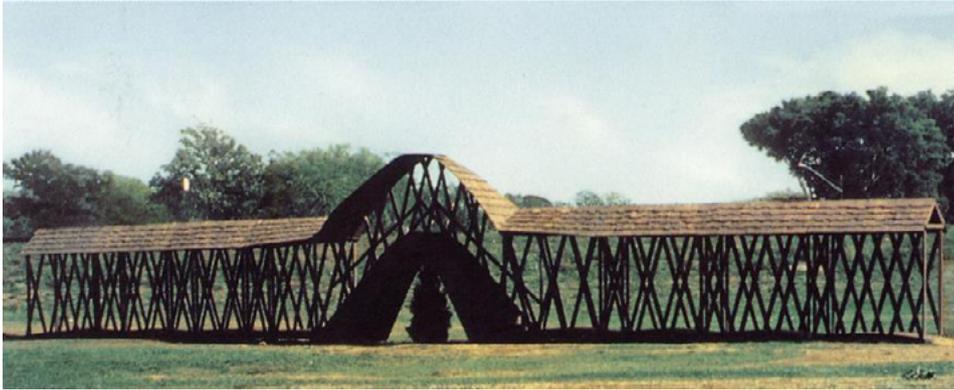


Figure 5: Siah Armajani (1970), *Bridge over a Nice Triangle Tree*, temporary work Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, United States

Source: "Return to exile Siah Armajani" (2010, n. p.)

However, the influence of architecture and construction in general are not the unique premises of Armajani's artistic work. Besides that matrix, another on radically distinct, if not opposed, shaped his artistic thinking: conceptual art, being so his work defined by the crossing of both currents.

In 1969, between the installation in Bear Lake City and the installation in Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, Armajani participated in the famous conceptual art exhibition: "Information", which took place in the MoMA, between 20 July and 3 September 1970.

In that exhibition, Armajani presented *North Dakota Project*: a drawing and the respective "calculations", about how high should be a tower whose projected shadow would be spread by the entire territory of that North-American State, as it is referred on MoMA's documental records of that exhibition:

in Information, Armajani is also represented by "North Dakota Project", photographs and photostats documenting his proposal for a tower to be built on the eastern border of "North Dakota" which will be high enough to cast a shadow across the entire length of the state to its western border. (Shaw, 1970, p. 1)

Sobre o referido projeto existe a imagem e os cálculos exibidos na exposição.

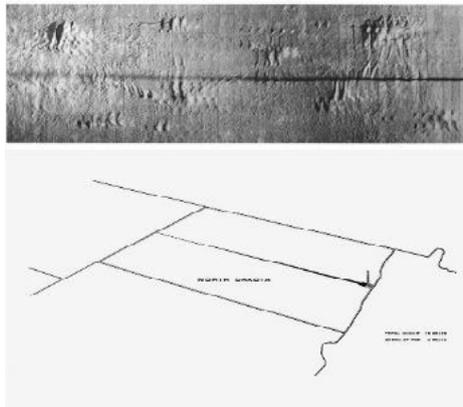


Figure 6: Siah Armajani (1970), *North Dakota Tower*, "Information", MoMA, 20/07/1970 – 03/09/1970, New York

Source: <https://walkerart.org/calendar/2018/siah-armajani-follow-this-line>

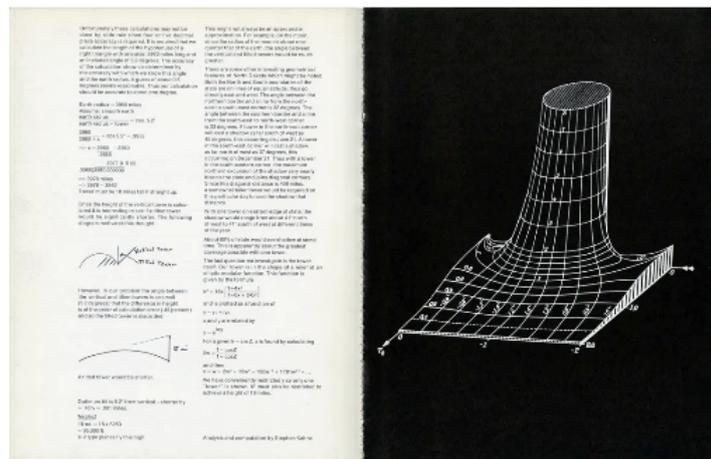


Figure 7: Siah Armajani (1970), *North Dakota Tower*, "Information", MoMA, 20/07/1970 – 03/09/1970, New York

Source: <https://walkerart.org/calendar/2018/siah-armajani-follow-this-line>

In the two images on the left, we can see, in the lower part, the tower's project, and above, the projected shadow over a model of the orography of that State territory. In the images on the right, are shown the calculations: the tower's high and its inclination, as well as a drawn detail of its colossal support base.



Figure 8: Siah Armajani (1969), *Moon Landing*, "Follow this Line",  
09/09/2018 – 30/12/2018, Walker Art Center, Minnesota

Source: <https://twitter.com/MarinRSullivan/status/1076572666402885635/photo/1>



Figure 9: Siah Armajani (1969), *Moon Landing*, "Follow this Line",  
09/09/2018 – 30/12/2018, Walker Art Center, Minnesota

Source: <https://walkerart.org/magazine/on-designing-siah-armajani-follow-this-line>

In the year before, Armajani had conceived the installation *Moon Landing* which gathered a TV set that the artist had bought just before the launching of mission Apollo 11, and the New York Times newspaper news of the Moon landing, whose print characters had been manually contoured, with a black ballpoint pen. On the monitor, Armajani pasted by means of stencil, in white characters, the following text:

This T.V. set has witnessed / The Apollo 11 Mission. (1)  
It was turned on for / the first time at 8:32 (2) A.M. / C.D.T., Wednesday  
July 16, 1969, and was in continuous operation until 11:50 (3) A.M. / C.D.T.  
Thursday July 24, 1969.  
(1) Armstrong, Aldrin, Collins

- (2) Liftoff
- (3) Splashdown

In order to understand Armajani's work, is therefore required to consider it in its doble nature<sup>2</sup>. On one hand, its constructivist matrix, adapted to an artistic production that "should be open, available, useful and common" (Armajani, 1995, p. 5). On the other, its conceptual slope, rooted in a political ideario, as he explains "my interest in politics was ignited by my grandmother Soghora. (...) Her stories of being in danger of losing her life on a daily basis, during this period, were extremely influential to me" (Armajani, 2011, p. 380).

In the next point, we will discuss how Siah Armajani's public work builds a heritage legacy in which modernity, tradition and ideario conjugate one another in an exemplary way, in which public art is meant as germen of a heritage to transmit to the future.

### THE ARTISTIC ITINERARY OF SIAH ARMAJANI

Siah Armajani (1937- ) is the author of a vast and well spread public work production, and of a not least important theoretical production, both denoting an unequivocal e assumed ideario, as the following quote clearly denotes:

public art does not care about the self, but about others. Do not deals with personal tastes, but with the needs of others. Does not care about the artist anguish, but with the happiness and well-fare of the others. Does not deal with the myth of the artist, but with his civic sense. Does not intent to make that individuals feel diminished and insignificant, but to glorify them. Does not deal with the emptiness between the culture and the public but seeks to turn art public and that the artist becomes a citizen again. (Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, 2000, p. 2)

Quoted from a brochure edited by Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, which came along with the exhibition "Fallujah", opened between 30 September 1999 and 10 January 2000, in Madrid's Crystal Palace. This quote helps us to fix the coordinates of Armajani's aesthetical thinking, whose exhaustive and systematic enouncement is condensed in "Manifesto public sculpture in the context of american democracy" (Armajani, 1995), we will later on refer to.

Right now, let us take a glance at Armajani's artistic production.

A quite recent case is *Bridge over a Tree*, whose first installation occurred in Minneapolis Sculpture Garden, in 1970, as we have already see (Figure 5), and that was rebuilt now in order to go along with the exhibition "Follow this Line", presented in the Met Breuer, New York, between 20 February and 20 June 2019<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> A synthesis of the doble origin of his ideario appears in the following document: <https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/listings/2019/siah-armajani-follow-this-line/illustrated-chronology>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.flickr.com/photos/publicartfund/33436432608>

Installed between 20 February and 29 September 2019, near to Brooklyn Bridge, New York, it is necessarily a temporary work because of the growing of the tree, which at once represents one of their most perplexing conceptual assumptions, since being the work connoted to a practical use, in fact its continued use is impaired in time, due to the cedar, which performs here the impermanent and transitory character of life itself.

The function of this bridge is not, therefore, to serve a mere practical use, but to create a relational and interactive experience, or as the artiste says, a neighborhood relation, between the users that cross it, even if there is no rational justification to do it, for much more easily and with less effort may the distance between its extremes be crossed, by avoiding it.

This work by Siah Armajani becomes thus an instrument for the interaction between the citizens that cross it and establishes a motive for reflection to each one of them.

To create instruments for the use and the reflection of the citizens, constitutes one of the fundamental assumptions of Siah Armajani work, as another emblematic work of his confirms it: The *Picnic Table for Huesca*, Aragon, Spain.

Conceived as a contribution for the public art program “Arte Y Naturaleza” – an initiative of Diputación Provincial de Huesca (DPH) – Siah Armajani was one of the invited artists who have participate in the project, and after the oral testimony of Teresa Luesma (Luesma, 2010), Director of Centro de Documentación Arte y Naturaleza (CDAN), she said that the way the artist conceived his intervention was quite different form the other artists. Instead of proposing a piece, he began by asking if anything was lacking in the natural space of Huesca.



Figure 10: S. Armajani, *Mesa de piquenique para Huesca*, madeira, acrílico e papel, Valle de Pineta.

Credits: José Guilherme Abreu

After some discussion, they arrived at the conclusion that picnic tables were lacking in Huesca. Then, Armajani created *Picnic Table for Huesca*: a piece entirely built in iroko wood, a material whose hardness and density resists to wear and putrefaction. With capacity for twenty-five users (Luesma, 2010, p. 104), the picnic table of Huesca differs by the fact that no user shall be seated with his back turned to anyone, engaging once again the interaction and the conviviality among users. Besides that, between the pillars that support the roof, protected by acrylic covers, in four lecterns, are disposed poems and drawings by Federico García Lorca, poet and dramaturg, shot during Spanish Civil War.

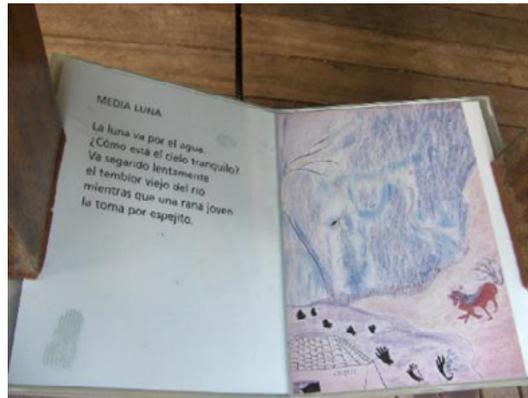


Figure 11: Poem of Federico García Lorca, integrated in the *Picnic Table for Huesca* (Armajani)

Credits: José Guilherme Abreu

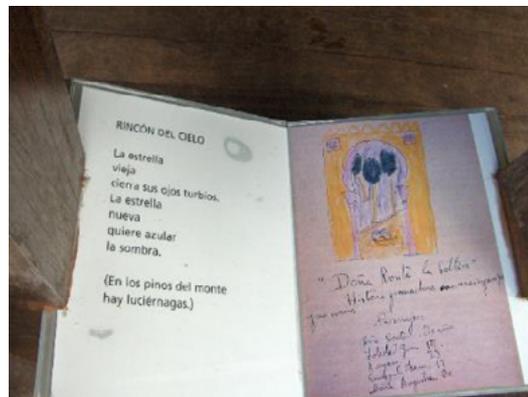


Figure 12: Poem of Federico García Lorca, integrated in the *Picnic Table for Huesca* (Armajani)

Credits: José Guilherme Abreu

The two referred pieces, one in relation with constructed work – the famous Brooklyn Bridge – the other inserted in a natural ambience – the Pyrenees mountain range – both testify about the symbiotic dialogue of contemporary art with cultural and natural heritage and simultaneously about their public appropriation.

So, as I use to say, Armajani's work succeeds in solving the famous dilemma by Arnold Schoenberg, when he says: "if it is art, it is not for all, and if it is for all, it is not art" (Schoenberg, 1950, p. 124).

In fact, Armajani's artistic work succeeds in remaining, at once, as art, and even more as contemporary art, and art for all.

How does the artist get that effect? By promoting the public appropriation of the work by its use, and simultaneously by fomenting the reflection of the citizens, through the disposal of philosophical or poetical quotes or artistic reproductions, which apostrophize the user, beyond the literal use, or the mere corporal activity, inviting them to discover the authors of those records.

As an art at the same time turned to action and to reflection, Armajani's pieces, in the meantime, are never rhetorical, something we must enhance. As a matter of fact, it is by the radical rejection of all and any rhetoric that they appear as contemporary works.

And it is also by rejecting of any rhetoric that Armajani's artistic production accomplishes the progressist and (per)formative ideario of public art that, as we have seen, was first formulated at its genesis, as well as it overcomes the rhetorical sterility of Eugène Broerman, secretary-general of international public art congresses, between 1898 and 1910.

#### **THE CONCEPTUAL IDEARIO OF SIAH ARMAJANI**

So, it is not by accident that Siah Armajani overcomes Schoenberg dilemma, but by a conscientious and reflected poetical and aesthetical option, as his manifesto (Armajani, 1995) proves it.

Composed by twenty-six propositions, Armajani's manifesto (1995) is indeed one of the most developed reflections about public art theory.

Once again, we use the methodology of analyze by topics, in Table 3 (Appendix).

Table 3 should be read relating the number of times each topic occurs with the order in which the same topic appears in the table. A topic appearing near the top (inferior number of proposition) should, in our opinion, be considered as priority. The same topic appearing in several propositions should be considered of critical relevance.

If we apply these premises, it means that the first and most important aspect of Armajani's public art theory is the assumption of modernity, when he says in topic number 1 that "public sculpture is a logical continuation of the modern movement and the enlightenment which was tempered and conditioned by the American Revolution" (Armajani, 1995, p. 111).

Similarly, we should say that the most critical aspect of Armajani's public art theory is the defense of the social dimension of public art work, when for example he says, in topic number 11, that "public sculpture is not artistic creation alone, but rather social and cultural productions based upon concrete needs" (Armajani, 1995, p. 112), being this assumption repeated by different ways in other propositions.

Particular enhancement should be given to the topic "Myth of the creator", which appears in the second place in the text, and is reiterated three times.

A possible statement, which intends to perform a synthesis of the text, as mere example, follows now: democratic public sculpture "assumes modernity", at the same time it "relativizes authorship". Intending to explore the social dimension of Art, democratic

public sculpture “refuses the self-referentiality of the work of art”, and simultaneously “rejects site specificity”. Created as an “art conceived for all”, democratic public sculpture is a “non-pretentious art” which seeks the “sharing of ethical values” and presents itself as a “available and useful art”. Remaining “independent before architecture”, democratic public sculpture discards its use for ‘propaganda aims’ and keeps permanently “open to the public opinion” (Abreu, 2019).

Despite its rigorous and exempted methodology, this analytical perspective is obviously established from a specific point of view, and that cannot be concealed.

Whatever, from this analysis and its synthesis, one may get the fundamental axis of Siah Armajani’s public art theory, and arrive to its explanation, as long as becomes possible to confront the theoretic enunciation with the artistic production, developed from the artistic discipline practiced by the author: public sculpture.

### **SIAH ARMAJANI VS RICHARD SERRA?**

We finish the text with the reference to a Siah Armajani’s work, that while it not displayed in public space, curiously, it reflects the same concern towards the public sphere.

It is the piece *Fallujah* whose title alludes to an Iraqi city, placed in the proximity of Abu Ghraib, the city where was located the sinister homonymous prison.

In the night of 28 April 2003, a crowd of two hundred people disrespected the curfew imposed by the American army and assembled in front of a secondary school, used as a military headquarters, claiming for its reopening. The soldiers of 82<sup>a</sup> Aerial Division shoot against the crowd, making seventeen deaths and seventy casualties.

A protest against those deaths was organized two days later, and prompted a new conflict with the American forces, and two people died, victims of gunfire.

In 31 Mars 2004, Iraqi rebels organized in Fallujah an ambush to a convoy that had four soldiers hired by Blackwater USA enterprise, which provoked a special mission from America armed forces to take back the control of the city. That mission caused thousands of deaths.



Figure 13: Armajani (2007), “Fallujah”, Artium, Vitória

Source: Raverty (2007, n. p.)

Finished in 2005, Siah Armajani's installation was publicly displayed, for the first time, in *Museo de Arte Contemporâneo de Vitória*, in Basque country, because its exhibition had been forbidden in the United States during George W. Bush presidency, even in a private art gallery, according to the following news:

70 years ago, on a day like today, the Nazi aviation that supported the rebels with General Franco bombed Gernika, inaugurating the infamous list of indiscriminate air strikes against civilian population. Picasso painted as a denunciation of that crime *Guernica*, one of the works of art that best reflects human barbarism. Yesterday, at the Artium, was inaugurated the *Fallujah* exhibition, by the Iranian artist Siah Armajani, a work that is inspired by Picasso's painting and denounces another act of war: the bombing of that Iraqi city by the US Army, in which 6,000 civilians died.

The inauguration of *Fallujah* at the Artium is also the international presentation of the work that Siah Armajani finished on August 29, 2005. The censorship that exists in the United States with everything related to the Iraq war has prevented this resident Iranian creator. In the American country he has been able to present his work, not even in a private art gallery. (Crespo, 2007)

In this installation, Siah Armajani shows a little two stores house, being the second knocked down over the first, falling over the objects and the people that was in the bedroom. A rocking horse, a carpet, an empty cage and other daily-use objects complete this scenario, covering the work with a dramatic note, which becomes unequivocal, because of the allusions to the well-known Picasso's painting of the bombing of *Gernika* by Nazi aircraft, just a few dozens of kilometers distant from *Atrium*.

In spite of it is not implanted in public space, wont it be legitim to consider *Fallujah* a public art piece too? Doesn't it fill the requisites previously formulated by Siah Armajani in order to define what should be, and should be not, a public sculpture?

About the prohibition that dropped over this piece during George W Bush presidency, Siah Armajani reacted as follows:

throughout my artistic life, I counted with ease to expose my work, even when I was young. Now, 68 years old, I had to ask for help to Spanish friends in order to present my work. (Siah Armajani, quoted in Crespo, 2007)

The opposition to exhibit *Fallujah* in a private gallery, to us is something of huge theoretical relevance. This case shows us something that we have been for a long time claiming, it is not the ownership that gives to the artwork the quality of being understood as public art.

Besides that, which is not less, this piece makes another point that should be enhanced: it deals with heritage legacy, as it conceives itself after the adoption of traces of the iconography/symbolism of Picasso's *Guernica*.

So, instead of opposing to the heritage legacy, Armajani's pieces and installations deal with it. *Bridge over a tree* establishes a dialogue with historical monumental heritage (Brooklyn Bridge). *Picnic table for Huesca*, integrates itself perfectly in the natural ambience of *Vale de Pineta*, in Aragonese Pyrenees, and the *Study Garden*<sup>4</sup>, Armajani's installation for 1987 "Skulptur Projekt Munster", integrates in edified heritage.

This permanent installation is part of the cycle "Reading Spaces", whose models and pieces Armajani presented in 1995, at Barcelona's MACBA, being his manifesto (Armajani, 1995) published in the catalogue of that exhibition.

As some kind of a counterproof, we could refer Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc*<sup>5</sup> case, for while being a piece commissioned by General Services Administration (GSA), a federal public art program, we think it is hard to acknowledge it as well conceived public art work, because the piece does not fit the conceptual requisites for public sculpture, as they are expressed in Siah Armajani's manifesto (1995).

After Armajani's manifesto (1995), *Tilted Arc* cannot be considered a public art work, because it clearly violates three of its defining topics, such as: relativization of authorship; refuse of the self-referentiality of the work of art; rejection of site specificity, besides some other topics that could also be legitimately invoked.

So, it would be no big surprise that one day *Fallujah* should be implanted on public space, in order to remind the dark period of North-American history, lived after the infame 09.11 terrorist attack to the Twin Towers, whose reedition happens still nowadays.

## FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Siah Armajani's artistic and conceptual itinerary allows us to pick up a few final conclusions which seem to us particularly relevant, as we state:

- a work of contemporary public art should not be thought as conceptually opposed or incompatible to historic-cultural heritage. Siah Armajani's case is on that matter eloquent, not only because when talking about his artistic production some of his most notable pieces cohabit symbiotically with historical and even monumental heritage, but also because when talking about his theoretical production there is a consonance of his ideário, with public art movement, as it appeared in late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as we have seen;
- a work of contemporary public art does not acquire the quality to be considered "public" just because it is displayed in the public space. There are many pieces which were never thought to be placed in the public space that are legitimately seminal works of public art. The cases of the painting *Guernica*, by Picasso and the installation *Fallujah*, by Armajani, are flagrant examples of that circumstance;
- just as the implantation on public space is not a sufficient criterium to concede the statute of public art to a work of art, so that the criterium of its financing is no sufficient criterium to concede the statute public art to a work financed with public funds. There are many works financed by private funds that cannot but remain public art works, as it happens with all the artwork integrated in private architecture outside and inside buildings which are meant to be open and accessible to public use, as for instance private hospitals, bancs, universities or shopping malls. And of course, similarly

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.skulptur-projekte-archiv.de/en-us/1987/projects/6/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://d2jv9003bew7ag.cloudfront.net/uploads/Richard-Serra-Tilted-Arc.jpg>

should not be also considered as works of public art, those pieces that although financed by public money, violate the values of democracy and brotherhood;

- it is not because a statue remains figurative or apologetic that automatically its propagandistic intentions turns it obsolete. There are, *a priori*, no good or bad sculptural typologies or pictorial models. There are only contents and/or functions which are compatible or incompatible with democratic citizenship and civic conviviality.

Among all the criteria, chronology is the most fallible, as shown by Georges Didi-Huberman in *Devant le temps: histoire de l'Art et l'anachronisme des images* (2000), after recognizing in the inferior panels of *Madona delle Ombre*, by Fra Angelico, dating from the middle of 15<sup>th</sup> century, unequivocal connotations with Jackson Pollock's action-painting, which internationally would become seminal, in postwar times.

Translation: José Guilherme Abreu

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## APPENDIX

ARTICLES	SUBJECTS	Nº DE §	CONTENT
Art. 1º	Objectives/aims	3	To disseminate public art in theory and practice; to realize the decisions of the public art congresses; to prepare the international public art congresses; to publish a periodic newsletter
Art. 2º	Headquarters and sections	7	Based in Brussels; divided into seven sections: aesthetic education (school and family); special education (technical, professional and industrial schools); museums and exhibitions; theater, shows and parties; aspect of cities, towns and landscapes; protective legislation and regulation for public art; documentation, bibliography and iconography
Art. 3º	Guardianship and members	1	<i>Guardianship</i> of states, provinces and adhering cities; composition: honorable members (heads of state, protective members), effective members; Permanent council of 40 members
Art. 4º	Executive organs	1	International college and Permanent council
Art. 5º	International college	1	International college (general affairs; delegates, full members, term of office six years, president, vice-president and secretary general, membership fees)
Art. 6º	Administration/direction	1	Permanent council of 40 Belgian members, appointed by the International college; Administrative commission; term of office six years

Art. 7º	International college	1	Every two years. Sets the place and date of international congresses and general assemblies of members of the institute
Art. 8º	Fonds	3	Contributions from protective members and effective members: state grants; donations, legacies, rights, etc.
Art. 9º	IIAP journal	1	Publishes information and documents of interest to each section and to all countries about the institute and its work
Art. 10º	Statute change	1	They can be changed by the International college after hearing the Permanent council. The amendments must be proposed to the Administrative commission six months in advance
Art. 11º	Dissolution conditions	1	The dissolution of IIAP must be decided in a document signed by at least a quarter of the members of the institute
Art. 12º	Dissolution (assets)	1	After the dissolution, the institute's assets must be allocated to artistic education works

Table 1: Institut Internacional d'Art Public's statutes

Source: Broerman, 1907

SUBJECTS	TITLES	AUTHORS	EXCERPTS
Edital	Public art	Eugène Broerman	Commemorative monuments, viaducts, buildings and objects of public utility: kiosks, fountains, lamps, banks, post boxes, telephone boxes, electric displays, signage, etc., must be works of art, as are the paintings and statues for museums, where only the works worthy of appearing in, despite the fact that this destroys art from its social mission, while on the street and in civil and religious monuments - museums of public life - vulgar forms are still tolerated. (p. 5)
	Provence (sonet)	Frédéric Mistral	Provence, you too, without money, without army - / Nothing but your beauty, nothing but to be loved / - You will forever be the Queen of the Sun (p. 11)
	The city of Paris and public art in 16th century	Marius Vachon	Ever since - at least since the 19 <sup>th</sup> century. XIII - the municipal administration of the city of Paris counted on an official having among his duties a kind of public art service, for the construction and surveillance of municipal buildings, a service to which the maintenance of streets and squares was attached. This official had the title "Master of the masonry and paving works of the city". (p. 15)
National traditions	For beauty	Carmen Sylva	So that beauty is understood and conceived by those who will try to express it in their work. Thus, they will dedicate themselves to contribute to the social beautification and will carry out for public education, of which the workers are the unanimous votes of the public art congresses. (p. 24)
	National artistic education	Water Crane	In its association with human life, we see perhaps the most important function of art in its public dissemination, permeating socialization and the refined spirit of the beauty and harmony of life and the appearance of our cities. In this direction, there is indeed a myth to be done in all countries and it is on this basis that all points of view of art seem to unite - educational, historical, technical, imaginative, monumental. Here, we have to educate the economist, the sanitary, the utilitarian, and fight against the narrow and sordid commercial spirit, which only thinks about the immediate monetary benefit, and forgets the vast and most genuine national investment - the well-being of the people, and the enrichment of public life, making beauty a common acquisition. (p. 26)
Safeguarding of sites and artistic heritage	The resurrection of Herculaneum	H. Carlon de Wiart	Charles Waldstein, who led important excavations in Platea, Erétria, Sicione, Sparta, Argos, and has taught for twenty-seven years at Cambridge University, belongs to this American strain for whom obstacles are nothing more than encouragements to action. He decided to bring about an international understanding whose object would be the resurrection of Herculaneum. Such a company, he said, would require large expenses, so it would be unfair to impose its burden only on Italy. On the other hand, it was advisable that this country had a predominant part in the organization and execution of the project. (p. 30)
	Ardennes and the cave of Hans	Ed. De Pierpont	The moving mountain excavated with its frozen interior movements hides fantastic constructions ornamented with diamond stalactites, magically original decorative works made by the drop of water and time, in balanced, wide shapes, true models of ornamentation provided. But it is necessary to see these rooms as they are: the weak torches did not allow them to reveal themselves... this was the result of electric lighting, an ungrateful problem, gloriously solved (p. 36)

	The transformations of Brussels	L. Dumont-Wilden	At the same time that those who order them [the cities] draw these straight lines that the roads trace through the houses, they believe it is essential to find in this accumulation of stones an oasis of greenery that reminds us of the variegated splendor of the forests. But it is the city center that, as a rule, is the only one that benefits from the sweetness of urban parks. The periphery of large cities is generally devoid of the joy of the leafy, and the agglomerations created abruptly by social centralization are surrounded by immense and leprous surroundings. It is the effort of all those who are interested in the city beauty and healthiness to air, to lighten, to beautify these suburbs for so long left to abandon. (p. 39)
	About the modern construction of cities in Germany	J. Siebben	From the point of view of art, the essential quality of the free markets is found in its framework; framing is an imperative necessity for market squares, for squares with gardens and, above all, for monumental squares, that is, intended to receive buildings and architectural motifs. The best implantation of buildings and grounds is on the periphery of the free surface, and not on the square itself; in the latter case, the considerations of framing and scale apply to what remains of the square. To complete the framing, doors are often used (city gates, triumphal arches, overlapping arcades of buildings or sculptural motifs) or porches and arcades delimiting street corners. It is necessary to avoid scale errors, and especially to avoid spaces that are too wide. When convex leveling a square, the concave surface will be preferred. Each square must be treated separately, as much as possible. (p. 48)
Artistic evolution of cities	The artistic development of American cities	Glenn Brown	The Mall model that offers the reintegration and development of Pierre l'Enfant's design, demonstrates what can be done for the frankness, simplicity and dignity in the treatment and grouping of classic structures. The composition includes two main axes, an east and west that begins with the Capitol and leaves the Washington Monument as the central element, ending with the Lincoln Memorial; the other, which starts at the White House, and has the Jardim do Monumento as its central element, ending with the Monument to the creators of the Constitution. The park's landscaping and footpaths, architectural adornments and the provision of new buildings were designed to enhance the dimensions of the Capitol, the White House, the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial and the Constitution Memorial which are the main points of interest and beauty in composition. (p 52-53)
	The role of art criticism	Frantz Jourdain	Our avenues, our crossings, our squares are dishonored by aggressive monuments that the Hottentots do not want; Mr. Puech, who rages against us without mercy, managed to relegate Marshal Ney, from Rude, to a dark corner and put his frightening sculpture in the place of this radiant masterpiece. Here is the silly Alfred de Musset from Comédie Française; there the grotesque Chappe of Boulevard Saint-Germain; further ahead is Shakespeare's lantern on Avenida Malesherbes, the narrow Jeanne d'Arc of Dubois, the surprising Victor Hugo de Barrias and, finally, the Garnier Monument, whose beautiful bust of Carpeaux has turned into a bottle stopper and whose blinding gold and wild evokes the memory of a zinc nightmare. And against these horrors, the criticisms did not emit a single cry of indignation and anger, nor did a man of letters claim the revengeful choice of the wreckers! We smiled, applauded, and rushed through to finish a lucrative advertising case with an art dealer or an amateur eager to liquidate his gallery at the highest prices. Informed and intelligent reviews can have a significant influence on the accuracy of vision and the artistic production of an era. An energetic effort would still save us from the discomfort that surrounds us. Let us hope that the press takes up the tradition of the past and finally understands that its true mission is the education of the people. (p. 55)

	The image in the school	A. Stuys	By application of a desire of the III Congresses of public art, a Commission was created in the city of Brussels, a few months ago, in charge of choosing about twenty picturesque and characteristic places of the country; artists will be responsible for performing them; The Rycker and Mendel lithographs will reproduce them in a large, colorful format, which will be sold at low prices. All schools will soon be able to place beautiful artistic representations of the various aspects of their homeland under the eyes of the students. Three councils have already been approved by the Commission: two from Cassiers (a Flemish farm near Bruges, the beach) and one from F. Toussaint (Meuse downstream from Dinant). Then there are the views of Brussels, Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Liège, Campine, Ardennes, industrial region, etc ... (p. 60)
	Teaching of industrial art in the Netherlands	M. von Saher	The teachers are almost all men of the trade: architects, sculptors, decorators, metalworkers, etc., and they teach at school two days a week, the other days they work with students in the workshops. In this way, the school's relations with the studio are ensured. The objective of the program is to develop the craft technique and allow the artisan to find new forms, to disappoint inspired by nature, responding to the subject and the practiced material. The high conceptions of ancient art are also cultivated. Students who leave school are in great demand in workshops and many of them occupy different places in teaching arts and crafts. (p. 61)
Aesthetical culture	Popular chant	Florimond Van Dayse	The Liederavonden, since their creation in Ghent, have been organized in Antwerp, in several other cities in our country and in the Netherlands. They are certainly one of the best ways to develop the moral sense and artistic feeling in the working class, and must contribute effectively to the preservation of the mother tongue, the maintenance of national genius. (p. 67)
	Aesthetical degree	Mario Pilo	Art will therefore be made by everyone, it means that it will be made for everyone: the same economic and psychological reasons, of freedom ... at least most of the day, of equality ... at least in the face of the first needs, even aesthetics, life and brotherhood ... at least in the desire for someone's pleasure to grow, to rebound, as a pleasure for others, for the same reasons, therefore, they require that all art be available and made for the benefit of others. all men: most beautiful and most monumental buildings, as well as cathedrals and royal palaces, will now be people's homes, municipalities, schools, galleries, markets, stations, public buildings of all kinds; and the smallest, but no less comfortable and happy, will be the small houses for a family each. (p. 74)
	Letter from the Florence superintendent	J. Niccolini	Florence is represented by her Superintendent to the International College of the Public Art Institute, with the hope that the Institute, acting under the auspices of the most binding promises, will powerfully raise its voice to the new needs of art, so that all productions of modern civilization come to life with a new, invigorating breath. Florence, which at other times was at the forefront of this great evolution of the arts and letters that illuminate the world, sees with great satisfaction the meeting of the living forces of civilized nations, to react against the mundane in modern life and direct their creative activity towards the purest foundations of Belo. (p. 76)

Table 2: Excerpts of Institut Internacional d'Art Public's journal

Source: Broerman, 1907

CLASSES OF TOPICS	NUMBER OF PROPOSITIONS	POINT OF VIEW DEFENDED ON THE TOPIC
Modernity	1	Assumption of the modern
Myth of the Creator	2, 3, 12	Relativization of authorship
Social Dimension	4, 6, 9, 11	Refusal of the self-referentiality of the work of art
Spacial context/Place	5, 10, 16	Rejection of site specificity
Citizenship	7, 22, 24	Art designed for everyone
Aesthetical Domain	8, 13, 23	Art not pretentious
Ethical Dimension	14	Sharing ethical values
Funcionalidade	15, 25	Available and useful art
Relation to Architecture	17, 18, 19	Independence from architecture
Great Narratives	20, 26	Rejection of use for <i>propaganda</i> purposes
Public Sphere	21	Openness to public opinion

Table 3: Topics of “Manifesto public sculpture in the context of american democracy”

Source: Armajani, 1995

**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Invited lecturer, PhD in Heritage Studies, PhD in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage, master in Conservation and Restoration of Cultural Heritage. Permanent researcher of Research Center for Science and Technology of the Arts, coordinator of R3iAP.

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4022-7771>

Email: [jgabreu@porto.ucp.pt](mailto:jgabreu@porto.ucp.pt)

Address: Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Rua de Diogo Botelho, 1327, 4169-005 Porto

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