

Care and Longevity of Public Art

This document is meant to help artists inform themselves for best practice and longevity of their artworks.

The longevity of artworks and the ability to care for them depends on many things. These include (but are not limited to) material selections, craftsmanship, and the environment in which the artwork will spend most of its life. The issue of permanence is a bit of a misnomer: Many artworks that are considered to be 'permanent' exist today because they were, and continue to be, cared for properly as well as being well crafted initially.

Artists play a vital role in the longevity of their artworks the moment they begin to create an artwork. As an artist works through various stages of the creative process, answers to the following questions will have an influence on the permanence and aging qualities of the work of art.

1. Why is the artwork being made?

- a. Is it intended to be permanent or temporary?
- b. Is it intended for eventual sale or a direct commission?
 - i. Is the commission for a private or public collection?

2. What is the object being proposed?

- a. Is the object similar in scope and materials to the artist's normal artistic practice?

3. Who is going to make the object?

- a. Will the artist make it or have a fabricator do some/all of the work?
 - i. If someone else makes the work, will the artist oversee the entire production?
- b. Are written contracts in place that outline roles or responsibilities of the fabricator as well as manufacturing specifics and warranty information?

- 4. What materials will be used to make the object?**
 - a. Is the artist or fabricator familiar and experienced with the materials?
 - b. Traditional or modern materials? Artist quality or industrial grade?
 - c. What is the intended use? Are the materials suitable?
 - d. Are there warranty limitations to the proposed materials?

- 5. How is the object going to be made and where?**
 - a. Does the person making the artwork have experience with the fabrication process?
 - b. Is additional expertise required (i.e. structural engineer)?
 - c. Is a specialized space necessary for fabrication? Are there additional costs involved?

- 6. Where is the object going to be placed/installed?**
 - a. Interior or exterior?
 - b. What kind of interaction will people have with the artwork?
 - c. What kind of interaction does the artist and the owner desire?
 - d. Do alterations need to be made to accommodate safe display?
 - e. Will the artwork be subjected to adverse weather?
 - f. Are security measures necessary once installed?

- 7. When and how will the artwork be completed and installed?**
 - a. Will the artist or the fabricator coordinate the installation?
 - b. Will the installation have to be coordinated with other schedules (i.e. construction)?
 - c. Who needs to consult on the installation details (i.e. structural engineers)?
 - d. What equipment is necessary for installation?

- 8. How is the artwork intended to age?**
 - a. Should the artwork always look new or is the appearance meant to change over time?
 - b. What are the acceptable levels of change over time (based on the materials aging or weathering)?
 - c. What precautions have been taken by the artist or the owner to ensure the artwork is protected and ages appropriately?

- 9. Who will take care of the completed artwork?**
 - a. Once installation is complete, does the artist have any responsibility to the artwork or the new owner?
 - b. Has the artist provided a clear list of materials, details of fabrication and recommendations for care/maintenance?
 - c. Has the artist clearly communicated their wishes for how the artwork will age to the new owners?
 - d. Does the new owner have the ability to carry out routine maintenance or will it be carried out by a third-party (i.e. a qualified conservator or maintenance staff)?
 - e. Who will repair the artwork if it is damaged?

Regardless of the medium it is recommended that the artist use the best and most appropriate materials at all stages of creating an artwork. Art materials are not cheap and artists often regret watching their own artworks deteriorate over the course of their careers due to poor material choices. The completed artwork represents the artist and that representation can be positive or negative depending on the appearance of the artwork and how it ages.

Artists can gain a lot of knowledge of materials from senior artists, peers, artist societies, reference books, art supply stores, and supply manufacturers. If using materials similar to other artists, one can observe how they are used and how they have aged.

Traditional art-making materials have limitations and many artists are turning to modern materials and fabrication processes, often developed for industrial or commercial purposes. These are generally intended for specific applications, not permanent works of art (although many have been adopted by the art world). Many of these materials have not yet withstood the test of time, so one cannot always predict permanence beyond what manufacturers specify. In this instance it is the responsibility of the artist to be informed of the materials they are using.

****It is the responsibility of each individual artist to take necessary precautions for their own health and safety and to be familiar with the short and long-term effects of exposure to the materials and methods they use.**