



Week 1

Creation in public space: Overview > Introduction

Jean-Sébastien:

Hi everyone! We are going to spend four weeks together exploring the exciting theme of artistic creation in public space. This week we'll start by discovering what that means. What exactly is art in public space? The field is often defined implicitly, unlike other well-identified art forms such as theatre, dance, music and visual art.

The main idea is that art in public space is not an artistic discipline. It is a particular way of bringing art to unusual spaces or spaces that are not designed for art. To discover this field of contemporary creation, we will focus on three areas that correspond to the three lessons for this week:

The first lesson covers the historical angle. It looks back at the birth of street arts in the 1970s and 80s, and covers the later emergence of the concept of art in public space. It also highlights similarities and differences between these two artistic movements.

The second lesson focuses on artistic projects. It provides keys for understanding them and identifies the main themes explored by artists. It also examines the aesthetic trends of the last fifteen years.

The third lesson looks at the professional organisation of this artistic sector in Europe and internationally.

Get ready for more than a month of exploring a world of huge possibilities. I hope that we'll pique your curiosity and that you'll learn lots.

It's time for me to hand over to your guides, Léa and Guillaume.

I'll see you next week!



Week 1

Creation in public space: Overview > Bases > Origins

In the nineteen seventies, an entire generation of artists took to the street. They rejected the restrictions of academic arts and the development of a new kind of austere and dominating urbanisation.

This was the golden age of major urban building complexes and commercial retail centres. Artists sought to create a festive counter-response to this mass architecture.

This new artistic movement developed across Europe, taking on different forms and names depending on the country. For instance, in France, it became street arts, in Germany, street theatre and in Poland activist theatre.

Artists used the traditions of village and agricultural celebrations, fairs and carnivals. They intended to revive what was named the **public-population** community. This artistic movement was clearly political: they chose the city as the ideal place for gathering, meeting and building a collective identity. Indeed, leaving the confines of places dedicated to culture meant presenting art to all passers-by and city users, regardless of their cultural or social background. For the duration of a performance, the audience would become a group, a temporary community rooted in a place. Hopefully, it would generate a feeling of being together, sharing a common citizenship.

In terms of aesthetic, street artists got inspired by avant-garde artistic research, developing at that time in Europe and in the United States. A series of US artists travelled to Europe, and their works had a strong impact among artists. This was the case of Judith Malina and Julian Beck, who came to Europe with their Living Theatre.

In Austria, Fluxus Viennese actionism also inspired many artists of the continent. The intention of these avant-gardists was to challenge the traditional theatre model. Their purpose was to emancipate and liberate the audience. The new generation of street artists therefore naturally became engaged in the sweeping social movements of the time. They contributed to **turn the street into the new theatre of history.**

This new outdoor theatre, as **a three hundred- and sixty-degrees theatre** gradually established its own rules. Many artists created fixed or moving structures. The construction of wood, metal and plastic floats for instance or even puppets gave rise to enormous, or minimal forms. Mobile theater imposed its own rules. By doing and testing, companies invented new ways of using spaces, but also new ways of writing and using texts and language,

The theatrical aspect remained important in most works. However, artists invented new ways of doing theatre, really different from what you could find indoors. They were constantly breaking the rigid rules of tradition and institutions.



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Creation in public space: Overview > Bases > From street arts to arts in public space

Artistic creation in public space is obviously a direct descendent of street art. Yet, the social and political climate has changed over the last 40 years.

In Europe, street arts have become a sector. Professional organizations have been created covering the local, national and international scale. With the years, aesthetics and formats have also been renewed.

The name has transitioned from street arts to artistic creation in public space. Beyond the words, this change addresses two major issues.

It merges practices such as architecture, urban planning, street art and landscape art. Indeed, these are increasingly being used together to work on developing the city and social ties. Many artistic projects question the city, the landscape, and our relationship to space and housing. They don't define themselves as artistic projects only, but also as social and cultural projects. This merging of practices and concerns also brings some aesthetic evolutions.

On the other hand, the change in vocabulary also reflects a practical necessity. It allows to create a common vocabulary across Europe, to define artistic practices that are different from one country to another. In addition, by helping identify organizations sharing the same concerns, this new vocabulary encourages collaborations between professionals from different countries.

In the early 2000's, networks dedicated to arts in public space began developing across Europe. Amongst them, Eunetstar, the IN SITU network and Circostrada. They put in relation producers and artists from different countries, sharing practices and ideas and offering opportunities for artists to present their projects abroad. By doing so, they contributed to blending practices and inspirations.

English is the main language of these international networks. This also generated a new artistic vocabulary, often insufficient in national vocabulary. Locally, many artists continue to identify their work as street art.

The term art in public space, on the other hand, has incorporated a whole new generation of artists and works: they do not associate themselves with street arts, but do focus on the city and social ties, and interactions between art and the places.



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Creation in public space: Overview > Bases > Public space

Public space generally means any physical, symbolic or virtual space that is accessible to everyone. There is some debate about the origins of this term. It's said to have been created by the German philosopher **Jurgen Habermas**. When studying the formation of the bourgeoisie in the 18th century, he developed **the concept of the public sphere**.

For him, public sphere described different communication strategies used by the bourgeoisie to influence government decisions. It referred to an intangible space for debate and discussion that acted as a political counterweight. This conception of public sphere, or public space, has often been compared to the Greek agora. It's understood as an ideal gathering place for exercising and expressing citizenship.

Around the same time, American sociologists known as interactionists defined public spaces as all the social interactions that occur within the anonymity of the city. They revealed **the social strategies we use to coexist in social places**, showing that public spaces are socially ruled and controlled by each of us: we constantly hide emotions, negotiate spaces or control our gazes... Here again, public space is not directly defined by physical spaces. It describes usage rituals associated with non-private spaces.

The material aspect appears more in the nineteen sixties and seventies, when geographers began using it to describe **all public spaces that are openly and freely accessible**.

Today, the term public space usually refers to places open to the public, regardless of their legal status. A place can be considered public although it is privately owned. For instance, shopping centres are often considered public spaces. Standard definitions are not enough to reflect the social reality that arise from customs and collective representations.

This brief overview should make you understand that public space is not a fixed, simple notion.

Yet, it's far from being complete: there are many debates around what public space is, should or should not be.

This rich diversity of meanings leaves a broad freedom of interpretation for artists who use and create in, for and with public spaces.



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Creation in public space: Overview > Bases > An unlimited stage

It may sound obvious: art in public space takes place in sites that aren't dedicated to art. It uses the city or the landscape as if they were **open stages**. This simple fact directly impacts the way of writing, staging, and thinking the relationship with the audience. There are limitless possibilities to open up the stage and make an entire city part of the performance.

You'll find some works that are designed for very specific spaces: let's say a metro station, an industrial wasteland or a bus stop. But you can also find many projects that don't rely on specific types of spaces. They can be adapted, or remounted (as professionals say), in many situations: in cities or the country, for buildings or landscapes... Some are even played for both indoors and outdoors.

You can thus understand that art in public space projects consider the relation to space in many different ways. We will develop some of these in the upcoming weeks of this MOOC.

What you should remember for now, is that there's always an **interaction between the works and the places**, that artistic teams and producers need to take into account when developing a project. They need to conduct **field work** to explore spaces to understand where they are and who lives there and test in real spaces. For each remount, they also have to adapt the works to the surroundings.



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Creation in public space: Overview > Bases > Plurality

Art in public spaces covers a wide range of different formats. Plurality could be a keyword at every level of creation.

Art in public space and street arts are not considered an artistic discipline in their own right like theatre or dance. They are by nature a **hybrid across different traditional disciplines** such as dance, theatre, visual arts, music and circus. They also touch on other fields that border art, social sciences and technology: such as architecture, light and robotics.

In some cases, by crossing disciplines, art in public space has contributed to emergence of new artistic practices and forms of expression. This is the case with vertical dancing, where performers are attached to cords and interact with architecture, facades, buildings and bridges. A number of companies now practice this, including Retouramont and Compagnie Lézards bleus in France, Vertical Dance Kate Lawrence in Wales or Histeria Nova in Croatia.

Plurality also addresses **scales**: Until the early two-thousands, large format shows or works of art had the highest public profile. Shows also often gave priority to large audiences, from several hundred to several thousand audience members. Over the last 15 years, these two trends have expanded with new projects intended for just one person or a small audience. They focus on unique or extremely small-scale experiences, instead of huge productions. All in all, performances go from micro to huge format works.

The duration of productions has also significantly evolved. Earlier, performances lasted a few minutes or hours. Certain projects are now running over several days or weeks. Some locally-oriented projects, based on the relationships with local inhabitants, can even last for more than a year! The time factor has a major influence on the relationships developed with the audience and local community.

Modes of communicating with the audience are another factor of plurality in the sector. Some productions continue to use conventional staging patterns that create an invisible wall between the actors and the audience. It is known as the fourth wall. Others get the audience involved before or during the production, making them active participants in the artistic project.

Olivier Grossetête's project the Fleeting City is a perfect example of these participatory projects. Here, the audience combines forces to build a cardboard monument. This type of audience participation can take place at each stage of the project and to varying extents.



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Creation in public space: Overview > Aesthetics > Vision

Street theatre gives prominence to collective in situ projects. These unique production conditions mean that there is a limited formal repertoire and few written records of artistic works. They leave a **trace in people's memories** more than a concrete trace of their existence.

This concept of trace is important because it incarnates the collective and social memory of a moment in time shared in a given space. Artists use the performance to try and stimulate the senses and emotions associated with spaces in order to enliven them with new imagination.

Modernity and commercialisation tend to gloss over public spaces and empty them of their symbolic content, but lots of artists are working to **revive these spaces** and **reawaken their symbolic meaning**.

At the same time, they are standing up for **art that is open to everyone**, and not just experienced or privileged audiences. Street theatre has sought to restore a direct connection with the people. To do this, street festivals and buskers have often been seen as a reference.

Although these references are from the past, there is nothing old-fashioned about the approach of street artists. Rather, they directly explore the contemporary city as a rich and complex place for expressing social interactions.

The city is transformed into **a 360° stage**, the perfect place for play and dialogue between artists and their audiences. In this approach, the audience is the local population. In France in the 1980's, there was even the idea of a **public-population**.

The performance is put on for the culturally and socially diverse population passing by as they go about their day. It stops them and gathers a crowd, creating a collective identity. This can last for just a moment, but it needs to be powerful enough to regenerate a sense of community.

Outreach is another important principle that can structure this temporary collective identity over time. By accompanying audiences as they discover the artistic work, it highlights its activist intent and the idea of art's integrative mission.



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Creation in public space: Overview > Aesthetics > Main topics

It's impossible to cover all the major themes of art in public space. The following is a simple overview of the main trends in contemporary artistic creation.

In keeping with the cross-cutting concepts of return and public-population evoked earlier, many artists like to play with **the idea of myth and ritual**. They draw inspiration from history or mythology, and conjure up a common memory to create a shared emotion.

The giant puppets of the French company La Machine are inspired by popular mythology and offer a great example of this theme. Their latest project, *Le Minotaure*, was presented for the first time in Toulouse in November 2018. The event was presented as a myth in four acts. The giant character was portrayed as the protector of the city, looking for its lost temple in the middle of the labyrinth-like city.

The issue of community is also highly present in the field. Many artists use different forms to explore new ways to create unity or a sense of community. Some major projects, for instance, need an entire community to participate and join forces. This is the case of *Dominoes*, from the British company Station House Opera, where a line of breezeblocks crosses the town over several kilometres. Hundreds of volunteers work together to set up the line and make sure it doesn't fall down before the official time. The experience is therefore a shared responsibility that gets people to pool their energy together for a common goal.

Other works explore **forms of democracy**. For example, in *The Night*, the Danish company, HelloEarth gives the audience an entire night to be together and rethink the future of humanity.

Street arts were historically born of a desire to challenge the existing power and the traditional constraints of art. It therefore comes as no surprise that **demanding fundamental rights** such as freedom of expression and equality is the breeding ground for many projects.

This is the case of *Super Tunisian* by Moufida Fedhila. In May 2011, during the Arab Spring, the Tunisian artist wandered the streets of Tunis wearing a Superwoman costume and carrying a sign that said Super Tunisian. She asked passers-by to vote for the character and her political plan, coming to the rescue of Tunisia. By doing so, she challenged the stranglehold of power over the arts and hoped to awaken citizen, political and artistic consciousness.

Denunciation can also be indirect. The all-female Kosovo-based collective HAVEIT provides a great example. They use a series of symbolic performances to denounce social violence against women in their country. For instance, with *Shoening*, they offer to shine people's shoes, according to local custom. But while they're shining their customer's shoes, they talk about the daily domestic violence they experience at home.

Other projects use **plagiarism and hoaxes** to get their message across. In 2017, CIFAS and La Fabrique de Théâtre organised a week-long residency for ten artists, accompanied by the American duo, Yes Men. At the end of the week, the performance – or hoax – titled *RefuGreenery* was presented in central Brussels. The idea was to ask illegal migrants to pedal bikes to recharge the mobile phones of Brussels residents. In exchange, they would be given three Euros per day and 24-hours of amnesty. The whole thing was made to look like the launch of a bona fide start-up. The project mocks existing rhetoric and criticises inhumane ideas disguised as civility.

Let's continue our overview of the main themes in artistic creation. Some projects seek to **document and expose day-to-day social, political and cultural issues** that we often ignore. They appear neutral but often carry a strong political component.

For example, Italian visual and sound creator Marco Barotti installs robot woodpeckers in the city. They capture the electromagnetic waves emitted by our mobile phones and play them back as rhythms tapped out on urban architecture. He gives



perceptible form to an omnipresent yet impalpable phenomenon.

Another example is the German company Rimini Protokol's *100%* project. It uses real-time statistical analysis of a panel of one hundred participants chosen to reflect the population of the place where it is staged. They use this simple approach to show the social, cultural, generational and human diversity of the analysed city.

In *No Man's Land*, by Dutch artist Dries Verhoeven, each audience member is invited to follow a character. They walk from the train station to different neighbourhoods of the city, listening to stories from their immigrant guide through a headset, sharing a highly moving experience in a camera obscura. There is clearly a political intent to create empathy and better awareness of refugees in a society that ignores them.

Many artists also explore and create around different ways of **living and using shared spaces**. Sometimes this means showing shared spaces for what they are, or suggesting other ways of seeing or occupying the city. In *Sketch*, Belgian artist Lucas de Man gives residents the opportunity to create their own project for the future of their city.

He provides them with a paper canvas the size of a small house, installed in public space for three days. With *Nouvel Art de Ville*, the French company Ici-même Paris created a series of urban furniture with new uses: a bench that turns into a convertible bed, a public shower in a telephone booth and other inventions that spur reflection about our uses of spaces and suggest new ones.

In Europe, many architecture, urban planning and sociologist collectives have been developing over the years along similar lines. They work on the local surroundings without necessarily calling it art. Their actions explore the uses of public spaces in order to reinvent them.

For example, the Danish collective, Bureau Detours, creates temporary urban utopias. They build urban furniture in public with the help of passers-by and close off a street to create temporary space for relaxing and socialising.



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Creation in public space: Overview > Aesthetics > New trends

The transition from the term street art to art in public space reflects the coming together of several forms of artistic and social intervention. Art in public space is an evolving field that is constantly changing in line with what's happening in the world. Over the past ten years, a number of underlying trends are guiding these changes.

First **in terms of format**: although statistics are lacking, professionals are clearly seeing a **decrease in the average size of performances**. This is mainly due to a decrease in available financial resources. Fewer large-scale projects are produced, bringing to the forefront small- and medium-scale productions that directly play on the individual experience of the audience members.

This is accompanied by a growing number of productions that question the **sensory perceptions** that audience members have of the world. These approaches take form in immersive projects that model the audience experience. The implicit goal is to transform our relationship with society by changing our intimate perception of the world.

Another important aesthetic change is that **visual arts are increasingly present** in artistic creation: as a point of reference for artists from different disciplines and as a specific practice.

The relationship with the local area and social ties is also a major trend. A growing number of projects involve the artistic action in the working process, more than in the final product. The documentary and human approach is central. The idea is to incarnate concrete utopias: re-examine and reoccupy living spaces, and create a scale where human relationships, projects or mobilities seem controllable, on a human scale.

New technologies, little used until recently by public art artists, have been making their way into the artistic landscape. They give the audience new and potentially infinite sensory matter: paradoxically, technological interfaces are sometimes used to better immerse people in the world. They are also used to examine our day-to-day relationship with technology. New technologies are generally an open playing field for artistic creation. The only constraint is to make sure the technical challenge doesn't stifle the artistic content.



Week 1

Creation in public space: Overview > Organisation > Professions

Creating and organising events in public space brings together key players who are not all part of the arts and culture sphere. It involves stakeholders working in production and artistic dissemination, alongside public authorities and road safety and security services.

When going on in this kind of projects, artists need to know the various parties. The professionals involved in artistic creation in public space can be broken down into 6 different categories: artists, local governments, producers, event organisers, public safety and security services, local organizations and volunteers.

Artists are at the very heart of art in public space. They can work alone or be organised into collectives or companies. They manage their own shows but can be included in the program of an event or initiate one. Indeed, some artists create festivals and creation centres open to other artists.

Local governments are usually the firsts in line when it comes to using public space. They are responsible for ensuring that events in their city run smoothly. They grant permits and establish the requirements for bringing art to public space. In some countries, they also define cultural policy at different levels. They adopt budgets and are in a position to grant financial and material resources to artistic teams. In some cases, the local authorities themselves organise events with the help of administrative or external services.

Producers are responsible for the artistic programming of their organization (like curators in museums and galleries). They can also produce shows or organise entire events. They can be artists, directors of cultural affairs for a local government or heads of a non-profit organization.

Event organisers help artists and producers with managing the delivery aspects of artistic productions. They find the resources needed to bring an artistic creation to life and organise the production resources required for preparing and managing an artistic event. Event organisers are legally responsible for the safety and security of property and people. So, they have the power to cancel an event if they feel that proper measures haven't been taken in this area.

Public safety and security services work with the organiser and assess the event beforehand in order to give an opinion to the town or city hall. They give recommendations, stipulate measures for managing crowd control and protecting the safety of people during the event. The extent of public safety and security services needed before and during an artistic event depends on the scale of the event. In some countries these services include the local authorities, for example the fire department or police.

Local organizations and volunteers sometimes participate in supporting events and sometimes lead them. They also liaise with local residents and may handle some services such as organising accommodation and hosting artists. They can also provide communication services for the show, inform the audience or manage ticketing. Sometimes they are even part of the performance, as performers themselves.



Week 1

Creation in public space: Overview > Organisation > Programming networks

For the most part, public space performances are presented **at festivals**:

Some are dedicated to this type of art. They give companies opportunities to show their work to other professionals. Examples of this include the international Eclat festival in Aurillac, France, and FiraTarrega in Catalonia.

These events offer a professional showcase and are vital to the economic organisation of the sector. They host companies invited as part of the program's official line-up. However, companies can also perform unofficially at their own expense: hoping to sell their show later on or passing a hat around to their audience, to try to make money from their performance. These festivals often attract audiences of experienced regulars.

To broaden their reach to other audiences that are not used to attending cultural events, producers also try to programme shows **outside festivals**. They may work with artists to develop specific projects that take place over an entire year in a designated site like a village, a neighbourhood or a city, for a season or several events.

An example of this is the project *the year of thirteen moons* (*L'année des treize lunes*). It was curated by French organisers Lieux publics and Karwan from 2002 to 2003. Over this period, at each full Moon, they programmed a performance in a different town of the Bouches du Rhône region, in southern France. The whole series of performances was curated as a single, one year-long event.

To create and produce their shows, artists also need **residency periods**. These phases of work and rehearsal allow them to explore their artistic intentions in depth before their works are completed and presented on the market. They provide opportunities to meet the local population and **field test** their work at full-scale so they can fine-tune the way they handle the spaces and experience the audience reaction.



Week 1

Creation in public space: Overview > Organisation > Sector's actors

There are currently no observers that track street art internationally. Global and scientific data is therefore non-existent. However, in a given place, several factors influence the presence of artistic productions in public space.

Politics, with varying levels of acceptance of public criticism of government depending on the country and national cultural policies.

The presence of **active professional and specialised networks**, including production houses, centres for artistic creation and dissemination and resource and training centres. These play a major role in organising the professional sector.

France is a very interesting example. The street arts field has gradually become more structured over the years. It has developed an extensive professional network: **street artists** were the sector's first players.

In the 1980s, they organised themselves into professional bodies to represent and support their work. Their ability to organize themselves is what gave them a voice with public leaders and allowed funding schemes to develop.

One of the outcomes of their common work is the **national street arts federation** that was founded in 1997. It represents the interests of artists and the entire sector. It fosters dialogue with public authorities such as the Ministry of Culture and regional governments.

French artists can also count with thirteen **national centres for street and arts in public space**. These centres are often workplaces for artists located in former abandoned buildings or industrial wastelands. They were certified by the French Ministry of Culture in 2005 and are mainly publicly funded. Their mission is to support, finance and bring to the public artistic creation in public space.

Organiser

In addition to the national federation and thirteen national centres, an official organization works on documenting the sector. Called ARTCENA, this **resource centre** collects data, footages and press reviews on circus and artistic creation in public space on a national scale.

France also has a **specialized training for street artists**: the FAI-AR. Established in 2003, it is the only school in the world devoted to training students who want to write, design and produce artistic projects in public spaces.

All these organizations combine to strengthen the sector. They stimulate collaborations, peer-learning and ease the access to information. They also play a role in the international recognition of French artists.

This example based on France is quite specific. Street arts and arts in public space have developed differently from one country to another. Following this lesson, you'll find a series of interviews focusing on other countries. But beyond the national scale, it's also interesting to look at the international exchanges between artists, producers, and organisers of the sector.



Week 1

Creation in public space: Overview > Organisation > International networks

In arts in general, an innovative or new production from elsewhere can cause a shift in artistic practices. We already gave you an example of this in lesson 1. You learnt that US avant-garde artists who crossed the Atlantic played a role in the emergence of European streets arts.

Therefore, it's easy to understand that, in general, international circulation of artistic projects drives aesthetic changes. Relying on this principle, some professionals develop **international collaborations**, encouraging the mobility of artists and productions. Individuals travel increasingly, to discover new practices and projects.

At the same time, professional networks are helping circulation of people and artistic works as well as sharing skills. Apart from the artistic content of exchanges, professionals learn a lot by discovering other contexts and ways of working.

At a European level, two networks in particular work to support art in public space.

IN SITU and Circostrada were both created in 2003. They are both largely financed by the European Commission which provides funding for specific 3 to 5-year projects.

The IN SITU network includes 24 European and international organizations and festivals. It discovers, supports and disseminates artistic creations in public space across Europe. Its activities focus on providing tools to support artistic creation and dissemination on workshops, art laboratories, European and international residencies. Its members also finance and mentor a series of shared artistic productions.

Circostrada is more involved in developing and organising circus and street arts in Europe and beyond. The network has over one hundred members in 30 different countries. It works to provide them with development tools such as resources, observation and research as well as professional exchanges and dialogue.

These networks initially focused their activities within the European Union but have now expanded their work to other countries. In South Korea, for instance, an emerging street arts sector is developing in close cooperation with a number of professionals in Europe, including the FAI-AR.

In Arab countries, Circostrada organises annual meetings to help the local actors meet and share ideas. Indeed, in this area, the status of public spaces was profoundly changed by the revolutions of 2011: overnight, public space became a place where an entire generation of people and artists could express their political and social desires.

In this lesson we've focused mainly on the European scene, for a simple reason: Europe is probably where arts in public space are most developed. However, it is not the only place where you can find them. In fact, nowadays, in various countries, local scenes are emerging. They may be inspired by the European experience, blended in their local customs and culture.

This is the case of *Bienvenue chez nous* festival, which means "Welcome to our place", organised in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso since 2009. Rooted locally, it has always also worked closely with the French national centre for Arts in Public Space Atelier 231.