

# The Role of Public Art Landscape Installations in Modern Urban Public Spaces

Yongni Zhong, Ruijin We, HuiyuZhang

Beihai Campus of Guilin University of Electronic Science and Technology, Beihai City, Guangxi, 536000

**Abstract:** This paper takes public art landscape installations as the research object. Integrating the practical cases of a comprehensive material landscape installation inspired by Guangxi's intangible cultural heritage butterfly culture and a landscape lighting installation celebrating the urban spirit of modern working people, and based on the theories of "Genius Loci" and public cultural services, it analyzes the cultural bearing, spiritual cohesion, and space activation functions of public art landscape installations in modern urban public spaces from dual perspectives of cultural inheritance and social value construction. This provides theoretical and case references for public art interventions in urban space practices.

**Keywords:** Public Art; Intangible Cultural Heritage; Labor Spirit

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## 1. Background

With the acceleration of urbanization, urban public spaces are not only physical carriers for citizens' activities but also important arenas for transmitting culture and fostering social consensus. Public art landscape installations, with their concrete expression and interactive experience, have become a bridge connecting urban space and citizens' emotions<sup>[1]</sup>. This paper, combining two physical works created by our team, explores their specific roles in modern urban public spaces, providing fresh case studies for public art practice and theoretical research.

## 2. Genius Loci and Public Culture

### 2.1 Genius Loci

The concept of "Genius Loci" was proposed by Christian Norberg-Schulz in his book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology of Architecture*<sup>[2]</sup>. He criticized modernism for reducing space to functional containers, arguing that the core of architecture lies in creating "places" with clear meaning, emotional belonging, cultural depth, and uniqueness. This requires integrating natural attributes, cultural memory, and human experience. Artistic installations serve as important carriers for realizing the "genius loci", transforming cultural symbols into experiential spatial narratives. By constructing narrative sequences that fuse function and culture, using metaphors and symbols to activate historical scenes, and abstracting regional characteristics with modern materials to encode them into "legible" carriers, they build bridges for emotional interaction between the environment and people. This helps people perceive the cultural connotations of space more intuitively, strengthens their identification with and belonging to a place, and makes the genius loci more easily perceived and resonated with.

### 2.2 Public Cultural Services

Public cultural services refer to the general term for public cultural products and services provided to the public, led by the government and participated in by society. They encompass services of cultural venues, the organization of cultural activities, etc. The core objective is to safeguard the public's basic cultural rights and interests, meet diverse spiritual and cultural needs, and thereby promote cultural inclusiveness and the cultivation of a social cultural atmosphere. The state strongly supports the promotion of high-quality development of public cultural services, which is an important task in deepening cultural reform and developing advanced culture, as well as an inevitable

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Author Biography: 1 Yongni Zhong (born 2004), female, Han nationality, from Chongzuo, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Undergraduate student, no professional title. Research interest: Public Space Design.

2 Wei Ruijin (born 2002), female, Zhuang nationality, from Nanning, Guangxi. Undergraduate student, no professional title. Research interest: Public Space Design.

3 Zhang Huiyu (born 2002), female, from Wuxuan, Guangxi. Undergraduate student at Beihai Campus, Guilin University of Electronic Technology. Research interest: Public Space Design.

requirement for meeting people's new spiritual and cultural expectations<sup>[2]</sup>.

Art installations play a significant role in public cultural services. They can activate public spaces by transforming abstract cultural connotations into perceptible visual and interactive experiences, attracting active public participation. They can also serve as carriers for cultural dissemination, designed in combination with regional culture and contemporary themes, allowing the public to understand culture and enhance their aesthetic sense through contact. This helps make public cultural services more grounded and impactful, facilitating the efficient reach of cultural resources to the masses<sup>[3]</sup>.

### 3.Design Elaboration

#### 3.1 Cultural Inheritance: Making Regional Intangible Cultural Heritage “Live” in Urban Space

In cultural exchange, the primary prerequisite for people to reach mutual respect and recognition is a deep understanding of each other's cultures. This relies not only on the accurate translation of written symbols but also on the direct transmission of non-written symbols. Sensory representations such as visual images and auditory impressions often have a more genuine and direct communicative effect than linguistic symbols<sup>[4]</sup>.

The intangible cultural heritage butterfly culture of Guangxi is a precious gem of local regional culture, encompassing not only the beautiful Yao ethnic butterfly dance but also the highly artistic traditional butterfly patterns. However, constrained by traditional transmission methods, such excellent intangible cultural heritage often faces temporal and spatial limitations, making it difficult to reach a wide audience. To break these limitations, the installation “The screen parctice of the Butterfly ”uses the body rhythm of the “Butterfly Dance” from Wuxuan County, Guangxi, as an implicit clue, incorporating the philosophical concept of “Zhuangzi's Dream of a Butterfly”. Through symbolic translation and innovative techniques, its abstract form is transformed into concrete works such as a 3-meter-high butterfly-shaped art installation (Figure 1) . This allows ethnic traditional patterns to be seen by the public more intuitively in a novel way. “The screen parctice of the Butterfly “not only directly presents the visual form of the butterfly but also restores the agile charm of the "Butterfly Dance" and the cultural texture of Miao ethnic butterfly patterns through light/shadow changes and material texture — for example, using translucent materials to simulate the delicate lines of patterns, showcasing their fluidity on traditional fabrics as light changes, awakening the public's sensory memory of the intangible cultural heritage through observation.

This approach uses visual interaction to deepen public perception of intangible cultural heritage. With the aid of installation art, it helps the Wuxuan butterfly dance of Guangxi break through communication boundaries, transforming it from interpersonal body language transmission into tangible art visible to all. Placing the butterfly dance in a novel form within public spaces such as city squares and community parks allows citizens to encounter intangible cultural heritage during daily walks and leisure time, achieving the “living inheritance”of regional culture.



Figure 1

### 3.2 Spiritual Cohesion: Building Urban "Consensus on the Value of Labor"

Modern urban development relies on the contributions of working people. The landscape lighting installation "Blossoms," which carries the spirit of labor, uses "visible respect" to break cognitive inertia, making the city's reverence for labor concrete and tangible.

The installation "Blossoms" draws inspiration from the 2023 TV drama of the same name and the group portraits of characters on Shanghai's Huanghe Road. It showcases the urban spirit of city strivers persevering through challenges—a belief shared by every vibrant city. The installation's shining lights reflect both the labor spirit of the strivers and the intertwined, enduring power of their connection with urban development (Figure 2). This work is not only an expression of integrating the "point" of public art into the "line" of roads and the "plane" of architecture but also a profound tribute to the urban spirit.

Located in the densely populated Shanghai Tiandi 298 commercial district in Nanning, this installation transforms the spirit of labor from an abstract concept into touchable, viewable public art. Citizens actively take photos and discuss it when passing by, gradually forming a value consensus of "respecting labor, honoring labor" within the city, thereby enhancing its spiritual cohesion.



Figure 2

### 3.3 Space Activation: Transforming "Idle Public Spaces" into "Vibrant Nodes"

Some public spaces in cities (such as street corners, spaces under bridges) are often left idle due to their single function. Public art landscape installations can serve as a "catalyst" for activating these spaces.

The campus outdoor public space where "The screen practice of the Butterfly" is located originally only had conventional sports facilities. After the installation was added, it became a "cultural check-in point" on campus. Teachers and students would stop to appreciate it, discuss its design, and gather for photos to share. The originally monotonous sports space gained an artistic feel, students' extracurricular activities became richer, and the frequency of campus space usage significantly increased.

The installation "Blossoms" not only provides night lighting but also retains citizens' footsteps with its warm atmosphere, encouraging people to linger in the night, thereby activating the vitality of urban nighttime public spaces.

## 4. Conclusion

Public art landscape installations in modern urban public spaces serve as "inheritors" of regional culture, "cohesives" of social spirit, and "activators" of idle space. The Guangxi intangible cultural heritage butterfly culture installation "Gilded Fairy" and the landscape lighting installation "Blossoms" celebrating the labor spirit, created by

our team, demonstrate through concrete practice that public art need not be detached from life. By integrating regional culture and connecting with citizens' emotions, it can transform urban public spaces from "physical sites" into "spiritual realms with culture, warmth, and vitality." Future public art practices could further strengthen "site-specificity" and "interactivity," allowing art to truly integrate into citizens' lives and contribute to the high-quality development of urban public spaces.

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