

The Many Complexities of Art

When I first heard that we were going to be going on a tour of public art I was very excited. As someone who enjoys art, I felt like this would be a fun trip around campus during which I would see the art I'd seen before and, though I wouldn't necessarily learn anything new, I would enjoy taking the time to really see the art instead of simply glancing at it while walking by. However, I could not have been more wrong. On this trip, I realized how much I had to learn about public art and art in general. While I went into this trip feeling like I had a solid grasp on how to evaluate and look at art, I quickly understood that I had a lot more to learn. Whether it be considering how the environment determines the effectiveness of a piece, how to look at the elements of a piece of art and how they come together to create meaning, or how to classify art, I learned a great deal on this trip, which made it quite a satisfying experience.

One of the first things that I realized was how important the environment was when considering where a piece is placed and how the surroundings affect the value of a piece of public art. Unlike paintings or statues that sit in a museum, public art can be placed anywhere, and where the art is placed can really affect its meaning and effectiveness. This was first made evident to me when viewing Sol LeWitt's *Circle with Towers*, which was tucked away in front of the computer science building. Our tour guide Catherine Zinser pointed out that the simplistic, quiet nature of the piece was emphasized by the minimalistic and simple architecture of the building behind it. While I didn't notice this at first glance, as I thought it over I noticed that it was true that the surrounding environment helped to emphasize the minimalism of the statue. This was again highlighted when we visited Nancy Rubins' *Monochrome for Austin*, which was a

tree-like structure made out of canoes held up by tension. Catherine pointed out this time that the piece was inspired by the surrounding foliage, specifically the numerous trees. She emphasized that if this piece had been placed where LeWitt's piece was, then it would have seemed out of place and, therefore, been less effective. While I had walked past these pieces at least twice a week for the past eight weeks and had stooped to look at them, I had never considered how crucial their environments were in determining effectiveness. This new perspective made me realize that I had a lot more to learn, which was simultaneously humbling and also exciting in that I realized there was so much more than what I thought I knew.

Another way that this experience made me more aware of how much I had to learn in the field of art was through our discussions of how the elements of art came together to create meaning. As soon as Catherine began asking about how we would describe specific pieces such as Donald Lipski's *The West* using the elements of art, I realized that I didn't actually know that much about art. When looking at pieces in museums, I would usually just consider how they made me feel and why they made me feel this way which, while important, is not really an academic way of looking at art. While she gave some away with examples like line and emphasis, I didn't feel comfortable trying to describe my ideas through these new terms. While I was disappointed that I didn't know as much as I thought I did, I was excited to learn this new way to describe art, as it would allow me to explain not only what the art made me feel, but also how and why it made me feel that way. Overall, this new way of describing art made me feel like, if I could master it, then I would be able to talk about art with more preciseness and exactness.

Lastly, this trip taught me a lot about how to categorize art along with the new vocabulary that I could use to describe it. Whether it be the minimalism embodied in Sol LeWitt's *Circle with Towers* or the idea of conceptualism, exhibited by LeWitt's *Wall Drawing #520*, I realized that I needed to learn the vocabulary of art in order to succeed in my journey to understanding. While I knew a little bit about minimalism, having a tour guide to explain what it was and was not really helped solidify its meaning. Conceptualism, on the other hand, was a topic with which I was entirely unfamiliar. When Catherine posed the question of whether it was the idea or the physical object that counted as art, I was truly vexed, as this was a question that I had never considered before. While I can't say that I've found the answer in just one week, I can say that this experience has made me think of art in an entirely different way, which is quite exciting. Rather than just seeing a piece of art, I have vocabulary that I can use to contextualize or, at the very least, describe a piece, which is very useful.

Overall, I would say that this experience was quite a pleasant one. While it may seem like I learned that I didn't know anything, I consider it more of a realization that there's more in the field of art for me to discover than I previously thought. This tour definitely piqued my interest in art, and more specifically public art because, as I learned, public art is entirely different from art you might find in a museum. I'm very glad that I got to participate in this experience that I otherwise might have missed out on, and I look forward to seeing and truly thinking about all of the art that the LandMarks project has brought to our campus.