

The Story of Public Art

– Dancing in the Streets (On Power)

"The art object should not be still, unmoving, and independent of its circumstances. Nothing is,"
Rosemary Mayer, 1978.

The Story of Public Art is the story of manifestations, situations, and temporary fleeing forms. It is about movements, attitudes, and energies rather than monuments, statues, and public commissions. It is not curated as a single story but as a network of narratives that unfold locally and are connected globally. It aims to tell the story of how art and life are intertwined and how 'every force evolves a form.'

The exhibition is shaped as an organic being, changing throughout the exhibition period. Just as art changes within its context and with its time, the exhibition's tone and form shift over the days, allowing the seasons and daylight to transform the spaces. *Dancing in the Streets (On Power)*, the first act of this two part exhibition, explores how politics, technology, and sociality are connected to psyche, sensibility, and aesthetics, both in the formation of our way of life and in art. Curatorially, the show is exploring how artists have infiltrated, intervened in, and manifested themselves within public spaces, offering us new perspectives on power dynamics—how art has destabilized power, countered power, exposed it, mimicked it, and infiltrated it – and explored it.

The Story of Public Art - Dancing in the Streets (On Power) tells the story of art in public space from the perspective of choreography and dance. The museum's foyer has been transformed into a dance stage with Maria Hassabi's choreographic mirror installation *Forwards*, opening up the museum as a stage and public space. The curatorial ambition is to create an exhibition format that acts as a meeting place, offering a museum experience where not only the visual takes center stage but where the body, relationships, and presence also find space.

The first act of the exhibition begins the story with the major choreographers and artists who, in the late 1950s, experimented with bringing everyday life into the art sphere and moving art out of institutions. Throughout the show presenting artworks up to the contemporary, the exhibition seeks to highlight the ones who dared to address the difficult questions, the ones who were persistent in their experiments with new formats, the underrepresented, and the many significant women artists who have shaped what we today understand as public art, from Anna Halprin, Trisha Brown to Mierle Ukeles Laderman, Ewa Partum, and Rosemary Mayer, and on to 'New Genre Public Art' pioneer Suzanne Lacy – and Pussy Riot. In a field that, as the feminist activists Guerrilla Girls have pointed out since the 1980s, is male dominated, the curatorial choice has been to feature large-scale installations primarily created by women: Maria Hassabi, Suzanne Lacy, and Rosemary Mayer.

Music and different voices run throughout the exhibition, just as dance, hedonism, and vitality do—from hip-hop in Basquiat's work and Acid House in Jeremy Deller's parallel history of England, to jazz in Theaster Gates' *Art Histories*. These are artists who use their own (pop-)culture to create their art.

The Story of Public Art broadly explores the tension between art and life, and the curatorial process has been accompanied by my research on how the Art/Life constellation has manifested itself in new ways over time. The exhibition aims to present different approaches to the notion of Public Art as well as Public Space, and to offer an expanded view.

The Story of Public Art is also the story of the platforms and infrastructure that, across the world, continue to support experimental public art—ranging from Womanhouse in LA in the 1970s and Creative Time in the 1980s to new formats such as Red Clay Studio in Tamale, which has commissioned artists for significant manifestations that push the boundaries of art's exploration of society. It is also the story of the communities of photographers, filmmakers, and curators who have followed artists and captured ephemeral works for posterity.

An exhibition with such a broad scope can always be enriched by artists from other scenes, contexts, and periods—and this exhibition presents only a small part of the legacy of groundbreaking public art found worldwide.

—Charlotte Sprogøe, Senior Curator, MAPS, Feb. 2025.