

William Annis
Public Art in the Community of Palm Beach Gardens

Community is a place of life. It is a place where people come together and experience the good times and the bad. It is a place where houses become homes, and men and women become fathers and mothers. Communities grow and shrink, they tell stories, and they love. The community I live in is the place where I was born, raised, and am now raising a family. The community is Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. It was founded in 1959 by John D. MacArthur, a wealthy insurance man. He envisioned the city to be a place where someone could raise a family and make the American Dream a reality. Today I believe that the city holds true to his vision and is a great place to live and call home.

Through the years much of the city has changed. What used to be quaint, ain't quaint anymore. The city has grown by 15,000 residents over the last decade (Bureau). Though the population may be changing, the community's history is still evident throughout the architecture, roadways, and public displays of art. For the purpose of this paper, I'd like to take a close look at the public artwork displayed throughout the city of Palm Beach Gardens, Florida. I want to examine what our civic art says rhetorically about the community. I want to bring awareness to the unspoken yet verbal cues that are created through these civic art pieces.

Suburbanization has shaped the culture in the United States since the late 19th century. We live in a post-modern world which was formed through the suburbanization of major cities throughout the United States. During the mid-20th century, technologies boomed, space programs launched, and the middle class was truly born. It was during these formidable years that the mid-century style began to blossom, while at the same time Palm Beach Gardens was taking form. As such, surrounding cities have the mid-century style. Palm Beach Gardens was heavily built during the 1970's and 1980's as a result of people moving from big cities in the northeast US and is booming with new construction again today.

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Our history creates the influence of what is seen today. We can look to books and catalogues and catch a glimpse of what was being said and talked about from a particular moment in time. It is interesting to visit old cities to view the history that is hidden throughout. The architecture of buildings, the construction of roadways, and the network of public spaces is all captured through their design and speaks of the rich history and mindset of those who were involved in its construction. We have a lens in which we can view community life, mindsets, intentionality, and hidden meanings within structures standing before us.

It is most interesting to look upon art and to understand the form in which it represents. Aristotle wrote much about forms and geometry. Emily Katz in her published article about Aristotle's Philosophy of Geometry, interprets Aristotle's understanding on geometric form, stating, "that geometrical objects are sensibles qua quantitative and continuous," meaning "that they inhere in the... sense of being 'present in a subject'" (p. 468). Essentially that geometry is intrinsic to what is, giving everything its elementary form. Aristotle's works created a philosophical boom, and great rhetors like St. Augustine of Hippo took much time studying these forms to understand the meaning of beauty and the relationship with geometry.

Whether it is a blade of grass or the Washington Monument, geometry is the root of all forms and shapes. Color is light, in form, and the combination of the shape and the light's reflection or refraction gives the appearance to what is beheld. This first art piece below, located outside of an art gallery in PGA Commons, is one elevating geometry in human form. It is mirrored and uses triangles to create the appearance of a person sitting. At first this piece seems alien, but the more you look at it, it looks right back at you. I believe that this comes from the geometric patterns creating the essence of the sculpture.

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The art piece was put on display about six to eight months ago. It exists within our community, speaking to the community, and resonating with minds who share in what this object is representing. I believe that the sculpture is that of a woman posing with legs crossed and with hands placed upon the hips. Though the geometry could easily be made into a male, the bust and composure of the sculpture speaks with eloquence and feminine beauty. This art, though privately held, is still a type of civic art because it is displayed in a public space frequented by community goers.



PGA Commons Entrance Art

The space that this sculpture is displayed is near the driveway entrance. It is an entrance to not only a community of residents, but shoppes and restaurants called PGA Commons. Kristina Krasulia's Celebration's Rhetorical Architecture: Observing Island Village article says that the "use of proximity encourages the use of local spaces that are designed in a way that supports face-to-face interaction" (Krasulia). These combined residential/commercial spaces in Palm Beach Gardens are "more than a destination or commute; it deeply influences livelihoods and perspectives" (Krasulia). These convergences are designed to bring people and community together. I believe that Krasulia is right in saying that "it is the communal use of space that truly expresses the town's rhetoric" (Krasulia). Just as in Krasulia's Island Village, Palm Beach Gardens is no different.

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Additional PGA Commons Artwork

PGA Commons is a destination within the city for not only residents, but for people from all over the county. It hosts a multitude of fine art, restaurants, and residences. This area is inundated with artwork that speaks to the network woven through the architecture of the community. Some pieces are more updated than others, as one can see, the pieces above belong to a time period of the early 2000's. During this time the city was going through a developmental boom. The community was growing quickly, and to prevent it from losing its identity, the city required that the developers put in civic art. This was the solution, some of it tacky, some of it beautiful, but both fulfilling the purpose of keeping the community together. Development doesn't necessarily mean loss of culture. And this is the reason that architectural rhetoric is vastly important. Had these buildings, pathways, and residences been put in without public art, the area would not have held together its values. It can be seen by the multiple art galleries that are within

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500 feet of these civic art pieces that the community has maintained its rhetorical values as an art hub.

Asen's 2018 article, *Public: A Network of Relationships*, reinforces the idea that public areas like PGA Commons create "a web of relationships that constitutes one's public self" (Asen). These "public self's" form relationships held by people experiencing public places, who enjoy and engage the richness of what the civic and private art say. For instance, the giant chess board behind the butterfly display isn't just a game. It brings the art to life. People who are out experiencing public space have the opportunity to engage with it, take pictures with it, and look at it on their daily commute. This forms personal relationships with the art and with the community. It has the capacity to evoke feelings of love, joy, contentment, and peace from within, and this in turn creates a ripple within the community.

An example of these deep relational bonds being created can be seen in this excerpt I wrote on Yellowdig February 22, 2025. This was my response to a question requesting personal "instances of spaces serving a rhetorical end that they've encountered personally?"

"Yesterday I went to dinner with my wife. It was a romantic evening out, one that we don't get very often since we have young children. We decided to go to an Italian restaurant in town, a fancy one. My plan was to go to an art gallery and then go to dinner. We parked, and then walked down the path, walking where people eat at different restaurants, and following a path that is decorated with large pieces of art. The space has many works of art displayed outside, and there are several galleries that sell art in the space. The restaurants share in the rhetorical nature, art, complimenting it in a romantic atmosphere. There are brick paved paths, hanging lights, and beautifully landscaped areas all connected together using the same space as the public and private art displays. They all work together, giving

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a romantic atmosphere at night, and a cafe style in the daytime. The whole space is artistic and beautiful.”

These places form relational bonds with the spaces, the architecture, the community, and the atmosphere. Each one is speaking into the moment. It is when we can slow down, stop, and take in the moments where great treasures are realized.

A prime example of how dynamic interactions with civic art can form relationships and bonds in the community is in the next picture. This sculpture was put in in the early 2000’s on a failed community project called Downtown at the Gardens. The builders of Downtown at the Gardens constructed the area inwardly. To visit the outdoor shopping plaza, you had to park and walk to the middle of the property. If you didn’t visit, you wouldn’t know there were any stores except for a movie theater and Whole Foods. Even through its failures, certain areas have been community builders for the past two and a half decades.

This sculpture is a childhood memory to many because Downtown at the Gardens has allowed children to interact with it. These are my two girls climbing all over it, using it as a slide, and hiding under it. This sculpture is one of the most successful playgrounds that I’ve witnessed kids playing on. They



Downtown at the Gardens Sculpture

don’t grow tired of it, and new children are consistently drawn to it. The intention of the art piece was not as a toy, but the community adopted it as a playground. The people of this community

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view art as a lifestyle, and because of its intimacy, has allowed spaces for youth to interact with it.

The convergence of public space and displays of civic and private art in Palm Beach Gardens has drawn attention to artists and art festivals. Artigras Fine Arts Festival is held yearly in Palm Beach Gardens. The festival “is consistently named one of the top fine art festivals in the country and showcases a juried exhibition of gallery-quality art from 300 artists” (JP Media LLC). Without a doubt, Artigras rhetorically speaks to the creativity and value that the city possesses.

Another organization rooted in the community is called Zero Empty Spaces (ZES). ZES takes “vacant commercial real estate into temporary working artist studios that serve as vibrant



Zero Empty Spaces Artists

hubs for creativity and community engagement” (Zero Empty Spaces). These artist studios are open to the public. The artists rent space to create within and form a network of creativity within the space. The location used to be a spa but went out of business. Today, it is a place where people can engage with artists and learn about their cultures.

The Palm Beach Gardens community has a special bond with art. There are many more fascinating pieces that I could display, but the one that really needs to be seen is the last one. I believe that the plaque at the bottom of this last sculpture says all that is needed:

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“Named For Bruce
E. Borland, a loving
and caring man of
genuine character
who dedicated his
life to his family, to
his God, and to the
community he so
dearly loved. He



worked tirelessly to *Bruce Borland Center Building Bridges*

fulfil the dream of building a bridge for this community by establishing a gathering place where all could learn of faith and enjoy the arts in the warm atmosphere of true fellowship. Tragically, on October 15, 1999 the lives of Bruce Borland, Van Arden, Stephanie Bellegarrigue, Robrt Fraley, Michael Kling and Payne Stewart ended in a plane accident.

Symbolically “Reliance” is both a gateway and a bridge-connecting people within the community, and demonstrating that one side cannot stand without the other. As a tribute to Bruce Borland’s life, work, love and vision, may the ideals that brought this place and sculpture into existence remain and inspire long after his name is forgotten.”

Public art displays in Palm Beach Gardens are more than visual appeal. They change the heart and bring feelings of freedom and love into the inward parts of the soul. It is character and resilience that give the community its shape. Through all of the ups and the downs of the community, the art life in Palm Beach Gardens is alive and well. It is a place that is welcoming, builds bridges, and has an emotional wellbeing. These static and dynamic public spaces where

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art thrives is where the community truly exists. Though most people cannot afford to buy the art, everyone is invited to be with it and enjoy it. This public art creates a sense of wellbeing, community engagement, and wholesome life values. It speaks to the hearts of people and joins the community through building rhetorical bridges to live together in peace and harmony.

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