PUBLIC ART, POLITICAL POWER AND PUBLIC SPACE (CASE STUDY: SCULPTURES OF TEHRAN)

Narciss Sohrabi Mollayousef

Narciss M. Sohrabi
Université Paris Ouest, Nanterre La Défense,
Laboratoire LADYSS-UMR7355

PUBLIC ART, POLITICAL POWER AND PUBLIC SPACE (CASE STUDY: SCULPTURES OF TEHRAN)

Summary

Public space, in the sense of the public form of the urban areas, is accessible to all and thus can initiate political debates by highlighting the specificities of society. It is in encounter of the abstract space of politics which are in contrast with the essential characteristics of the public spaces. From the viewpoint of social considerations, public space is the framework of the path of individuals and groups to exposures and avoidances. The contemporary socio-political and religious movements in Iran which took place in several time periods, by their form, put the public space and public spaces under question. Today, it is impossible to talk about the public space in Tehran without mentioning the events such as Islamic Revolution or some anxious movements after the presidential elections in 2009. It is therefore a matter of questioning what is the citizens' participation and the right of scrutiny over the political, social and cultural transformations, as they are manifested in public spaces. After more than thirty years of Islamic Revolution in Iran, our questions concern the role of power in civic engagements and public art. What are the impacts of Islamic Revolution on public spaces? To what extent would public spaces be used for ideological purposes? What forms of occupation of these spaces would result in a form of 'counter-space' for a real or symbolic seizure of power? Can appropriation be considered as a form of collective action in public space?

Introduction

If politics is defined as the 'organization and operation of power in a society', it can be considered in the form of government and formal or informal political institutions. In contrast, art as a medium to convey meanings encounters the weaknesses of politics through various forms such as cinema, novels, paintings and sculptures. Among these different forms of art, the statue as a symbol of public art can be raised in a public space of Iran in general, and the capital, Tehran, in particular. In recent years, the importance of sculpture as a part of urban art has been raised for municipalities. This study aims to deal with the role of urban-scale sculptures, with an emphasis on the city of Tehran in the power structure and government of Iran during the Islamic Revolution (1978) and afterwards. To do this, the paper presents a quantitative approach based on field study and library research.

The dialectic of art-politics

Numerous forms of relationship exist between art and politics in accordance with two main concepts: support-based and contrast-based. These two concepts can be considered in four

different forms: art in support of politics, art in opposition to politics, politics in support of art, and politics in opposition to art. From the methodological viewpoint, these forms are not completely comprehensive or mutually exclusive.

Art in support of politics

Art can be a kind of political activity. If politics, by definition, applies to political entities such as official government, the role of art in relation to politics will be trustworthy and positive. In this context, governments, for example, employ artists to design different types of stamps, banknotes, and architectural or sculptural monuments. Thus public art plays a useful and targeted role for government agencies and other groups in civil societies. It often pays attention to military prowess and ability. In the case of Iran this attention is manifested in war memorials, revolutionary art in Palestine Square (the first figurative artwork after Islamic Revolution), or statues and busts of the martyrs of the revolution and war in the different parts of Tehran like Velayat Park, streets, highways and squares.. It is indisputable that art can perform a useful service to enhance credit to the political structure. Public art in the service of politics promote political stability and support of the people for their government. Since political regimes need the citizens' adherence, art can be valuable for making symbols that create general correlations and affirmation of loyalty to some core values such as equality.

Art in opposition to politics

Just as art in its various forms could do service for politics, it is also obvious that it can rise against the regimes and political blocks. According to this concept, being opposed to one political regime can easily be interpreted as serving another political regime. In other words, 'denouncing an ideology' is itself some kind of an ideology.

Therefore, in the study of art in opposition to politics generally by the street art and especially by different forms of graffiti, an appropriate method is to refer to the contrary artistic and political units. This means that the contrary art and politics are fundamentally defined within a specific political regime.

One of the prominent characteristics of art in opposition to politics is the formation of what is known as 'protest art'. If art is focused on the field of critique of social issues, it can be explicit or implicit; however, it could target a wide or narrow subject. In the case of Iran, especially Tehran, there are street artists like *Nafir* or *Black-Hand* whose works are politically conscious and remonstrative against the authorities.

Politics in support of art

In the areas where the state and its political authorities want to pay costs and support artistic activities, the role of politics will be as an entrepreneur. Moreover, in this situation, it is the government who provides and supports the principles of art and how it should be presented. Although the government's commission is considered as a source of income for artists, it can cause serious conflicts between political units and artists because of the differences between artists' claim of creative autonomy and claims of public interests. It may

happen that the government commissions an artist to carry out an architectural or sculptural project, however, after completing it, the artist's work is faced with opposition. In this situation, the political regime may neglect the created work of art. Naturally, such a possibility depends on the type of the society where the artist lives and its politics enforcement. In general, if the government assistance to artists is infused with political considerations, it cannot be considered a reliable source of support.

Politics in opposition to art

Political regimes, in formal or informal ways, can act in opposition to art by criticism. Of course, the type of opposition to artistic or cultural categories accords with the requirements of the prevailing ideology. Government officials, leaders of political parties and representatives of various social movements can be against the political content, usual cultural and social consequences and moral claims of artworks. The definition of politics as the process of ensuring the monopoly, organization and operation of power, causes governments to act like an artificial, natural or contractual bridge between politics, society, and the main source of decision making. Naturally, the government, commensurate with its ideology, gives special attention to the arts. This ideology can reflect democratic or totalitarian policies. What is important is that there is no avoiding the relationship between politics and other areas of economic and cultural activity. Among these, art is a medium through which the transfer of meanings is finely achieved. Of course, different types of artwork help to transfer these meanings with their distinctive characteristics. The strong presence of public art appears in specific conditions, such as revolutions, wars, and multiple political and economic crises. Obviously, in these conditions, politics has to determine its status vis-à-vis what Antonio Gramsci defined as 'civil society'. In other words, the type of encounter, interactive or conflicting, can indicate the desirability or undesirability of the political power system from the perspective of public opinion or world policy.

In Iran, sculpture art has always been in support of politics and vice versa. The construction and installation of contemporary sculptures in Iran is always faced with the direct or indirect manipulation of the ideology of the urban political management, both before and after 1978. From the viewpoint of developments in sculpture, the history of Iran can be divided into two periods: before and after the Islamic Revolution.

My research work on the War memorisation in different period from Qajar period to 2010 presented the different polities about sculpture culture in Iran.

Challenges and features of sculptural artworks before the 1978 Islamic Revolution

As Yashar Shah-Biglu has mentioned in his publication of the archival documents pertaining to the installation and care of sculptures in different parts of the country before the Islamic Revolution, on 10 September 1975 (19 Shahrivar 1354) the news daily *Kayhān* with the title 'Information on sculptures recorded in Tehran' stated that there were 84 statues and sculptures in Tehran. These statistics were prepared by the 'beautification centre' of the Department of the Municipality of Tehran. Of the 84 statues and sculptures identified, 18 statues of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 12 statues of Reza Shah Pahlavi, and a statue of Reza, son of

Mohammad Reza Pahlavi were recorded. The oldest statue belonged to a female in Javadieh Park (Tehran-Pars neighbourhood), which was installed more than 54 years earlier, about 1920s. The newest one was installed on 31 August 1975 in Farahabad Park. The figure of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, installed in the Amjadiyeh Stadium (*Shahid Shiroodi*), was the tallest statue, 3.5m high. Among the monuments, Aryamehr Shahyad Tower (now 'Azadi Tower', located in Azadi Square) 45 m high was the tallest. (*Shāh-Bīglū* 1384 [2006-2007]. P. 235)

According to the reports and documents, special council offices were established for the provision, installation and maintenance of statues and figurines. One of these councils was 'the Commission of installing statues and monuments' at the Ministry of Culture.

The proposed construction, replacement or installation of the statues in important squares of the cities was delivered to the National Organization for Security and Intelligence (SAVAK). After that, based on reports and documentation, the offices and special commissions in the Ministry of Culture made the final decision after review, and proceeded with the procurement, installation and maintenance of the created statues, sculptures and monuments. Monitoring the supply and installation of statues, figurines and monuments in public places was the task of these commissions. The activity of these commissions was under the supervision of Ministry of Culture. According to the documents in the Organization of Islamic Revolution, there is evidence that SAVAK had influence over the implementation of sculpture in public place. (*Ibid*. P. 235–236)

By studying the statues surviving from before the Islamic Revolution and the available documents, it can be claimed that the general ideology of the public art, especially in the second Pahlavi period, was in two different directions: whether with regard to the era of ancient Iran before Islam, which tried to embody symbols of Iran before Islam; or presenting modern art concepts on the world scale. The first direction was pursued in such a way that all values and symbols of the period after Islam were somehow overshadowed, while elements from before the arrival of Islam to Iran were constantly highlighted. Fig. 1 shows some samples of sculpture in Tehran before Islamic Revolution.

After the 1978 Islamic Revolution

The development of urban management in relation with the sculptural art in Tehran can be analysed in three periods. After the Islamic Revolution, Iran in general and Tehran in particular, was involved in the war against Iraq, which lasted eight years. After that, the decade of 1990s can be considered an era of construction and reconstruction of Iran after the war. According to the changes in the management of Tehran, several urban planning aspects such as the form and the beauty of the city and activities related to public places were given attention. After that, the changing ideologies of the political regime changed the policies about the role of sculpture in public spaces.

The first period: Tehran after the1978 Islamic Revolution till 1990

Although the jurists of Islamic religion have accepted sculptural art, the effigy of the tyrant in the shape of statues that represented the values of the Pahlavi era, one of which was

an archaism, ensured that sculpture was not accepted as art for years and in the period following the Islamic Revolution, sculptural art was ignored completely. The Islamic Revolution of Iran made structural changes in society and by presenting new patterns in social, political, and cultural aspects of society, caused a massive evolution in using public art and messages that are reflected by ideological use of the art in the public space. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, values that were most associated with the internationalism of Islam appeared. Emerging societies or governments, or those that have faced tremendous social developments such as revolution, have to deal with new ideas and new tools to eliminate problems and concerns. In this situation, new symbols and new methods arose that reveal the concerns of the new society and political systems. The city symbols were changed after the Islamic Revolution along with the change of the political system in Iran.

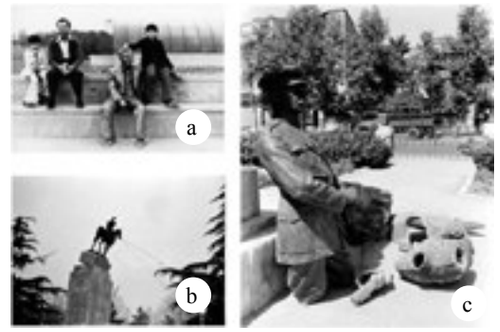

Fig. 1. Samples of sculpture in Tehran before Islamic Revolution; (a) sitting man on the pavement in front of the Contemporary Art Museum of Tehran, made by Parviz Tanavoli in 1974 (this is not in this place now); (b) the horse statue of Reza Shah in the place Tupkhaneh, and (c) sculpture of Reza Shah in the Tupkhaneh, made by an unknown artist in the period of the Islamic Revolution

After the Islamic Revolution, symbols in general can be classified in two groups. The first remains from the past and is the result of a cultural and political tendency of governments and people in different periods of the history of Iran. The second group of symbols has been formed in the period of the Islamic Revolution. These symbols have religious slogans and were created after the period of Pahlavi sovereignty to negate its western realist and archaistic ideologies.

Fig. 2. (a) Statue of Firdowsī made by Abo'l-Hassan Khan-e Sedighi; (b) the struggle between right and wrong (The battle of Garshāsb and the Dragon) made by Arzhang Rahimzadeh.

Hidden Islamism in the essence of the Islamic Revolution in 1978, combined with the anti-Islamic efforts of the Pahlavi dynasty during the previous 50 years caused the revolutionary government to establish an Islamic republic after the revolution. During the war of Iran against Iraq, all the efforts focused on the reconstruction of the Iranian-Islamic identity. The new identity was based on Islamic values, which overshadow the Iranian ones. Radicalism in the negation of Iranian, secular and ancient elements was one of the characteristics of the Islamic Republic in the early years after the Islamic Revolution.

Following the change of structure of political power, existing values and norms were denounced and abolished and replaced with new ones. All these changes caused the cultural

Fig. 3. (a) Statue of the Mother in Mirdamad made by Zahra Rahnavard; (b) statue of al-Bīrūnī in Laleh park by Mohammad-Ali Maddadi; (c) statue of martyr Modares in Baharestan made by Dadyar Garousian and Nader Ghashghai, and (d) Ferrous Goat in Jamshidieh Park made by Esmail Tavakol.

profile of society, which appears manifested in the form of symbols, adopted a new form. The nature of being Islamic for the Revolution of Iran caused the negation of several of the values that were known as non-Islamic (secular) and sometimes anti-Islamic in previous eras. In addition, Islam which inspired the Revolution, negates some instruments of symbolic representation, like statuary and painting, in its traditional jurisprudent teachings.

The ideology of the Pahlavi dynasty in regard of the use of sculpture as a symbol of political power in public places caused an inverse effect, because attacking the statues of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi by people in all cities and the complete destruction of all these statues was the symbol of the end of the Pahlavi dynasty during the Islamic Revolution. During the Revolution, all statuary of the Pahlavi dynasty was completely removed from the public space. At the same time, statues of some Iranian celebrities also would not be safe from the radical revolutionaries. Statue of ‘Umar Khayyām was seriously damaged due to stones thrown at the statue and its fingers and face were smashed. They also smashed the head of statue of Firdawsī; however, it was later repaired.

During the Islamic Revolution phase, some values became prominent and several norms were strengthened or invented. After the Revolution, no new statue was created for many years. In addition to the aspects of jurisprudence, which can be considered as an important cause, the authorities of Islamic Republic tried to avoid association with any particular personalities, which can produce a negative effect on the production of statues.

The second period: Tehran from 1990 till 2000

In the mid-1990s, the installation of some statues with abstract subjects and without the traits of a real person were gradually erected in some squares and parks, their themes mostly expressing Islamic ideology. For example, we can mention the symbolic statue of the Mother in Mohseni Square in Mirdamad (fig. 3a) or a sculpture related to the Palestinian struggle in Palestine square. Following this, the possibility arose for creating statues for great celebrities of Iran such as al-Bīrūnī in Laleh Park (fig. 3b), Sa‘dī, Ḥāfiẓ, Vaḥshī Bāfqī, Nīmā Yūshīj, and Kamāl al-Mulk in Mellat Park, and martyr Modarres in Baharestan Square (fig. 3c). In recent years, the creation and installation of sculpture has especially speeded up in the squares and parks. The artistic sculptures of ‘goats of the Mash Ismail’ in parks such as Jamshidiyeh Park are another example (fig. 3d).

It should be noted that in the past periods, due to the restrictions in the production and installation of sculptures for religious reasons, shrines of the Imams and religious jurists were constructed as religious symbols in towns and villages. According to the head of the Endowments Organization of Iran, about 8,000 shrines exist in Iran, the domes and minarets of which play the role of statues as a symbol for Islam.

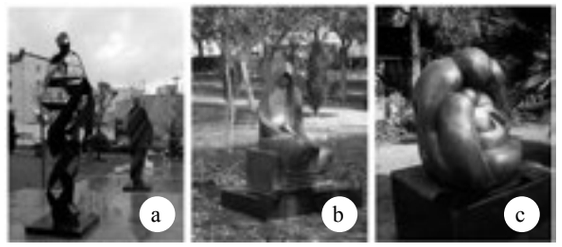

Fig. 4 (a) Metal sculptures entitled Colour Pencil in Velenjak made by Mohammad Salarian; (b) statue of the Mother, in sculpture garden (Iranshaher Park) made by Malek-Dadyar Garousian, and (c) mother and enfant in a sculpture garden (Iranshaher Park) by Nahid Saliyani

The third period: the flowering of sculptural art after 2000

With the change in structure of political power in Iran, Iranian values appeared along with the Islamic ones. Tehran Municipality, as the organization responsible for the management of the public spaces, has used this evolution as an opportunity. In 2006, the first Sculpture Symposium was held in Tehran. So far, six international symposiums have been held by Tehran municipality. In the years 2011 and 2012, two symposiums about the creation of statue of the martyrs were also held by Tehran municipality, and chosen statues were installed in public spaces of Shohada Park and Shohada Street.

Tehran municipality has ordered the installation of statues and sculptures in different regions of Tehran, temporarily or permanently, on different occasions, such as the beginning of the year, the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution (Fajr decade), or ritual and religious events (Moharram and Safar), and Ramadan (fig. 5). With regard to the macro structure of Tehran, different public spaces such as roadsides of highways and loops have been selected for the installation of stand-alone sculptures or group compositions (fig. 6). Table 1 presents the statistical data on sculptures installed in different Municipal districts of Tehran and the periods of their installation.

Fig. 5. Installation of sculptures at ritual and religious events (Moharram and Safar) in Mellat Park by Mojtaba Mousavi

Statistical data of installed sculptures in different districts of Tehran and periods

Table 1.

Period Municipal District	1920-1979	1980-2005	2005-2012
1	9	6	15
2	0	12	9
3	5	16	8
4	0	0	13
5	0	1	6
6	1	7	22
7	0	1	19
8	0	0	4
9	1	0	7
10	1	3	3
11	1	0	7
12	1	1	5
13	0	0	3
14	0	1	7
15	0	0	11
16	0	0	5
17	0	0	5
18	0	1	5
19	0	0	8
20	0	3	7
21	0	0	5
22	0	0	5

Information of stolen statues in Tehran in 2011

Table 2

Name of statue	Creator	Location
Bronze sculpture of Mother and child (fig. 7a)	Sho'lehHozhabr Ebrahimi	San'at Square
Bronze head statues of Sattar-Khan and Bagher-Khan	Shahryar Zarrabi	Shahr-Ara Square
Bronze head statue of Avicenna	Ozra Abd Aeini	Behjat-Abad Park
Bronze head statue of Shahryar (fig. 7b)	Ali Ghahhari	Vahdat Music Hall
Bronze head statue of Dr. M. Moein	JafarNajibi	Dr.Moein Blvd.
Bronze head statue of Dr.Shariyati	Hamid Shans	Shariyati Park
Bronze head statue of Khatam	Hamid Shans	Mellat Park
Bronze sculpture of Life	Fatemeh Emdadian	Artists of Iran
Bronze abstract sculpture of Human	Mohammad Ali Madadi	Artists of Iran

Fig. 6. Installation of Bicycles sculptures in highways and loops (in Hemmat Highway) made by Ashraf Karimi

Fig. 7. Two of the stolen statues in Tehran in 2011 (a) Bronze sculpture of Mother and child (b) Bronze head statue of Shahryar

The most important act of vandalism in this regard happened in 2011, when 9 statues in Tehran disappeared. These statues were located in crowded places and weighed between 100 to 400 kilograms and their height was in the range of 1 to 6 meters. Information on these statues is presented in Table 2.

Three theories existed about the sudden disappearance of these artworks. The first theory assigned the robberies to those whose motivation was to possess the bronze material of the statues. Other analysis is that the theft was totally conscious and was done by those who love the world of art and collecting artworks. The third theory assigned the robberies to radical religious activists who had ideological motivations insight opposed to installation of statues in public spaces of the city.

It is clear that sculptural art is not still completely free from the burden of belief issues and although many religious scholars agree with the principle of freedom and the possibility of producing these artworks, there are still views opposed to it. One of the arguments in favour of this analysis is that the stolen artworks, beside the two abstract ones, had human subjects.

Conclusions

The characteristic of art and politics is influencing public opinion and in this field, each of them wants more desirable conditions to maximise their benefits. The government as the only power of the political sovereignty in Iran determines the economic and social aspects of urban art– sculpture in particular. In this article, the process of change in urban sculpture during the years before the revolution and afterwards is analysed with the empha-

sis on the power structure as the decision maker in the creation and installation of statues. During the years before the revolution, power factors and political and security organizations such as SAVAK were effective on the formation of urban sculpture in the public space. Urban art like sculpture has always been directly influenced by political movements, the structure of power, and the action and reaction of obvious and hidden political forces.

Bibliography

Babai A. 2012. Placement of urban sculpture // Tandīs: Duhaftah'nāmah-'i hunarhā-'i tajassumī. Vol. 136. P. 23–25.

Bourriaud N. 2001. Esthétique relationelle. Paris: Les presses du réel.

Brenner A. 1971. Concerning sculpture and architecture // Leonardo. Vol. 4, issue. 2. P. 99–107.

Bourdieu P. 1993. La misère du monde. Paris: Seuil.

Crowther P. 2007. Space, place, and sculpture: Working with Heidegger // Continental philosophy review. Vol. 40, issue. 2. P. 151–170.

Delbar S. 2010. City and city art // Tandīs: Duhaftah'nāmah-'i hunarhā-'i tajassumī. Vol. 153. P. 3–4.

Deutsche R. 1992. Art and public space: Questions of democracy // Social Text. Vol. 33. P. 34–53.

Dion F. 2005. Art actuel et espace public // Espace sculpture. Vol. 71. P. 24–27.

Gérin A. 2003. Art in space: Public Art in an expanding world // Espace sculpture. Vol. 64. P. 36–37.

Grande J. K. 1999-2000. L'oeuvre/site comme échange et action // Espace sculpture. Vol. 50. P. 27–32.

Ismail S. 2001. The paradox of Islamist politics // Middle East report. Vol. 221. P. 34–39.

Kwon M. 2004. One place after another: Site-specific art and locational identity. Cambridge, MA: MIT press.

Lacy S., Jacob M. J., Phillips P. C., Gablik S., Májozo E. C., Gómez-Peña G. et al. 1995. Mapping the terrain: New genre public art / Ed. *S. Lacy.* Seattle: Bay Press.

Lefebvre H. 1974. La production de l'espace // L' Homme et la société. Vol. 31, issue. 1. P. 15–32.

North M. 1990. The public as sculpture: From heavenly city to mass ornament // Critical inquiry. Vol. 16, issue 4. P. 860–879.

Mitchell W. T., ed. 1992. Art and the public sphere. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nettleship W. 1989. Public Sculpture as Collaboration with a Community // Leonardo. Vol. 22, issue 2. P. 171–174.

Pour Asgharian M. 2000. The sculpture in the urban areas // Nigarah: Faṣlnāmah-'i 'ilmī-pazhūhishī. Vol. 8–9. P. 31–39.

*Pourmand H., Mousivand M.*Making sculpture in the public space // Journal of Fine Arts. Vol. 44. P. 51–58.

Rose B. 1975. On Mark di Suvero: Sculpture outside! walls // Art Journal. Vol. 35, issue 2. P. 118–125.

Rosler M. 1994. In the place of the public: Observations of a frequent flyer / /Assemblage. Vol. 25. P. 61–79.

Russell B. 2004. Power: A new social analysis. London: Routledge.

Senie H., Webster S. 1989. Critical issues in public art // Art Journal. Vol. 48, issue 4. P. 287–290.

Shāh-Bīglū Y. 1384 [2006-2007]. 'Akshā va mujassamahā [Photographs and statues] // Muṭāliʿāt-i tārīkhī. Vol. 8. P. 234–269.

Sohrabi, N. M. 2014. Les murs comme support politique. Les espaces publics à Téhéran.

Sohrabi, N. M. 2018. Memorialization of war between conflicts of interest before and after the Islamic Revolution: public art and public space in Iran. ARTis ON. Vol. 7. P. 161–170.

Soltanzadeh H. 2009. The sculpture in the public space // Tandīs: Duhaftah'nāmah-'i hunarhā-'i tajassumī. Vol. 139. P. 7–9.