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Editorial



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Cover image

Welcome to the North.
Bryan & Laura Davies

An increasing public interest in art has prompted not only the assembly of fine new collections but also encouraged cultural tourism and inspired the development of towns, cities and regions worldwide. In England the Northern Way – a collaboration between the three northern regional development agencies – is seeking to do this with an ambitious public art programme that extends across almost half of the country. Initiated in 2004, it was created to address the seemingly ever present divide between an economically prosperous south and 'the north' – a region which has long felt removed and is confronted by a more recent need to re-invent itself as industries and markets change.

Inspired by the success of the *Angel of the North* – the towering figure constructed alongside the A1 and at the entrance into Gateshead in 1998 – this particular part of the programme has funded six new works by an impressive group of artists that includes Richard Wilson, Hans Peter Kuhn and Antony Gormley and development funding has been secured for four other projects.

Farther afield, and beyond Europe, the Federal Government in the United States has been commissioning public art as an integral part of the design of civic buildings since the 1850s. As a consequence, there is an impressive collection of sculpture, paintings, murals and installations located in post offices, federal offices, border stations and courthouses across the country. More recently that initiative has been advanced through the Design Excellence Program of the General Services Administration. *Skygarden*, one of the most striking projects to have come out of that programme, is an installation designed by James Turrell. Developed in collaboration with Morphosis, the architects for the new high-rise Federal Building in San Francisco, the vast outdoor artwork uses colour, space and light located in a 3-storey high space between the 11th and 13th floors and has already become a sign for the building and a spectacular landmark visible across the city.

While other national programmes are less conspicuous, a handful of American cities have developed initiatives that project art assertively into the public realm. In Chicago this has been achieved by overlaying urban infrastructure and private philanthropy. Millennium Park, a public green space located at the heart of the downtown, covers a site that has been newly created by constructing a roof over existing railway lines. Not only does this large urban park re-orientate the city but it also provides a focus for an impressive collection of art. It includes the *Crown Fountain* by Catalan artist Jaume Plensa, which combines light, water and moving images; *Cloud Gate*, the large reflective stainless-steel sculpture by Anish Kapoor and a footbridge and bandstand designed by Frank Gehry.

The Olympic Sculpture Park in Seattle has also been created by a public/private partnership. Located close to the centre of the city it is an outpost of the recently expanded Seattle Art Museum. Prompting the reclamation of an 8.5-acre brownfield site that slopes down to Puget Sound this was the last piece of undeveloped downtown waterfront in a city that had significant economic problems prior to the recent changes of fortune brought about by coffee and computers. Many gifts, including one of c.\$25million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provided support for an ingenious scheme designed by architects Weiss Manfredi. It consists of a pavilion and lookout, which connect to existing streets and also open to a series of new pedestrian paths and a park that frame sites for art. And by bridging over an existing road and railway line this new park re-connects the city to its waterfront. With fine views out over the ocean the Olympic Sculpture Park is the setting for work by Serra, Bourgeois, Oldenburg and Caro and a location for new site-specific pieces commissioned from artists Mark Dion and Teresita Fernandez.

These notable initiatives to project public art on both sides of the Atlantic have attracted inspired patrons from both the public and private sectors and assembled impressive collections of work by some of the world's leading artists. Equally as impressive, however, are the collaborations prompted through programmes like the Northern Way. By working alongside architects, city planners, engineers, acousticians, lighting specialists and landscape architects these artists have not only been able to create outstanding works of art that are resoundingly in the public domain but at the same time transform both cities and entire regions. *Brian Carter*

Brian Carter is an architect who worked with Arup in London. Currently he is Professor and Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at The State University of New York at Buffalo, USA.

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