

Speaking on ArtPrize

Summary

Ms. Hixson, professor at the School of the Art Institute in Chicago, presented many aspects of the ArtPrize contest and compared it to other international shows. She gave a brief history of public art in the U.S. and showed a few examples from Chicago along some photos of a few ArtPrize entries. Her general attitude seemed skeptical about the validity and professionalism of the contest in its entirety.

Key Concepts

- What is ArtPrize? Is it a revolution to topple the art elite? Is it about money and power?
- Craze for public art started in the late sixties with the first NEA funded piece, the Picasso at the Daley Center in Chicago.
- The Calder sculpture in Grand Rapids has become the icon for the city
- High culture has been transformed into urban signage
- Elements of ArtPrize
 - Sponsor
 - Government/city services
 - Business and media
 - Cultural institutions
 - Educational institutions
 - Artists
 - Public
- The art! Size and location matters and it often appeals to children
- Form, shape, color, design, craft connection to content, artist's intention, does it make a difference in my life? These are all important aspects of a successful piece. i.e. work by, Beili Liu, "Lure/Forest"
- Opinions – Professional or amateur, what's better?
- Should the life of the artist influence our decision on their art?
- Venice Biennale, Documenta in Germany and Whitney Biennale are all significant in contemporary art
- ArtPrize top 10 could be fixed: there is a responsibility to art professionals, educators and the public.
- Big concern is, "It's all about the money".
- No nudity in show is because the artists have self-censored their work for the popular vote
- Suggestions – curate the show, spend more time on preparing for it and showing it, it shouldn't be a spectacle, placement and location problems need to be addressed

Response/Reflection

I think that Kathryn's observations and viewpoints were interesting and timely. Her criticisms were lessened somewhat by the acknowledgment of contest being only 2 years old. I was curious why there was no mention of the new to this year, juried prizes. Did she know about them? Her lecture was based on the public vote only. As a participant in the ArtPrize event in both years, I personally feel that it most certainly is a positive move for the arts and cultural movement in Grand Rapids and southwest Michigan.

There are so many factors to consider when viewing the 2010 ArtPrize and it's 1,700 plus entries. The main purpose of the contest is to market Grand Rapids as a destination city and bring the city into the national light. Did it accomplish the mission? YES. Maybe it's not typical, but effective. The response by the art elite is not the same as the general public, but in the end, the community benefits and is more open to new ideas and we will be more engaged. It has sparked many conversations and will induce many more in the future. The real prize is the heightened awareness for all people to hopefully, identify and realize that art does matter and should always remain in our standard school curriculum.