

The Role of Sculpture and Public Art in Estate Management: A Value-Based Perspective

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Abstract

The intersection of sculpture (and public art) and estate management is increasingly important in contemporary real-estate development and property- management. This paper explores how sculptural installations and other forms of public art contribute to aesthetic enhancement, place-making, community identity, and economic value in managed estates. Drawing on empirical research and industry reports, the study examines the mechanisms by which art influences property value, tenant/occupant behavior, and long-term asset performance. The implications for estate managers include strategic integration of art into site planning, maintenance regimes, budgeting, and stakeholder engagement. The paper concludes by proffering the adoption of a strategic approach in integrating sculpture and public art as well as promoting stakeholder engagement for enhancement of ownership, inclusiveness and long-term sustainability.

Keywords: Sculpture, Public art, Estate management, Real-estate value, Community engagement

Introduction

Estate management traditionally comprises the planning, operation, maintenance, and optimization of land and built-assets. In recent decades, however, the role of aesthetic, cultural and social factors has grown in significance. One such factor is sculpture and other forms of public art, which find increasing use as part of the built environment in commercial, residential and mixed-use estates. This paper investigates the relationships between sculpture/public art and estate management: how such art contributes to value (economic, social, cultural), how it is managed within estate operations, and what implications arise for practitioners.

Literature Review

Public art has been defined as artworks that are situated in public spaces or accessible spaces and that engage with the community, the site, or the urban environment (UAP, 2021). These works often perform beyond purely decorative roles: they may contribute to “placemaking” (creating a sense of place), social cohesion, cultural identity, as well as economic value.

From the real-estate/asset-pricing side, aesthetic and design features are increasingly recognised in pricing models. For instance, architectural design features such as curvature or setbacks have been shown to lead to price differentials of up to +15.9% for certain buildings. Further, externalities and public goods (which include aesthetic and cultural amenities) are acknowledged in real-estate value models, though measurement remains complex.

Empirical research on public art and property value is emerging. For example, in a study of pre-war shophouses in George Town, Malaysia, it was found that each additional sculpture within 100 m could raise transaction price by 8.32 % (though murals did not show a significant effect). Industry sources also argue that public art (including sculptures) enhances property values, tenant demand, and occupancy rates (e.g., “murals boost real estate profitability” claim of 15-20 % uplift).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptualisation of the relationship between sculpture/public art and estate management can be viewed through six interrelated domains. These domains illustrate how public art functions as both a cultural asset and a strategic estate-management tool that enhances value, stakeholder experience, and long-term asset performance.

Aesthetic and Environmental Enhancement

Public art contributes to the visual and spatial quality of the built environment. Sculptures can serve as focal points, enhance landscaping, frame entrances or pathways, and establish distinctive visual rhythms across public spaces. These elements improve the environmental character and liveability of estates by:

- Enhancing curb appeal and aesthetic value for residents, visitors, and prospective tenants;
- Softening or humanising the built environment, thereby improving psychological comfort and spatial attractiveness;

- Supporting landscape architecture through integration with greenery, water features, lighting, and public seating.

For estate managers, this domain underscores the importance of visual harmony, spatial coherence, and strategic placement of artworks.

Place-Making and Community Identity

Sculpture and public art play a key role in shaping the cultural identity and social fabric of an estate. They foster a sense of belonging, pride, and community cohesion by:

- Creating recognisable landmarks that strengthen the estate's brand and identity;
- Providing public gathering spaces that encourage social interaction and community engagement;
- Reflecting local culture, heritage, or contemporary themes relevant to the residents' collective experience.

In estate-management terms, this domain highlights how public art contributes to intangible value creation by improving the community atmosphere and shaping behavioural and emotional connection to place.

Economic and Investment Value

Public art installations increasingly influence real-estate performance indicators. They function not only as environmental amenities but also as value-generating assets that can:

- Enhance market value and property appreciation by increasing desirability of the location;
- Command premium rents and reduce vacancy rates due to enhanced image and lifestyle appeal;
- Shorten marketing and leasing cycles, thereby improving occupancy turnaround time;
- Support tourism and foot-traffic in mixed-use or commercial estates, generating indirect economic benefits for surrounding businesses.

From an estate investment perspective, art is considered a *value-add strategy*, aligning with placemaking economics and cultural-capital theory.

Functional Integration and Asset Management

Art within estates is not merely decorative—it requires systematic integration within the estate management lifecycle. This includes planning, design, installation, maintenance, and risk management:

- **Planning and Design:** Site suitability analysis, load-bearing capacity, accessibility, visibility lines, safety standards, and integration with infrastructure (e.g., lighting, surveillance, pedestrian flow).
- **Maintenance and Conservation:** Ongoing care, repairs, surface treatment, climate-related degradation control, and conservation of materials.
- **Risk, Insurance, and Budgeting:** Costing, insurance of installations, vandalism/theft risk, depreciation, and lifecycle budgeting.

This domain emphasises the managerial responsibility of estate managers to treat public

Stakeholder and Community Engagement

Effective integration of art in estates relies on multi-stakeholder collaboration. Key actors include artists, residents, estate-owners, cultural organisations, municipal authorities, and private developers. Engagement includes:

- Participatory design and public consultation with residents to ensure relevance and acceptance;
- Partnerships with local artists and cultural bodies to promote cultural authenticity;
- Coordination with government agencies for compliance, approvals, and urban-development policies.

This domain stresses that public art is a social process embedded in stakeholder relations and community building, not just an aesthetic intervention.

Sustainability and Legacy Development

Public art must contribute to long-term estate sustainability and legacy-building. Sculptures and installations that endure over time become part of the estate's cultural heritage and brand capital. Sustainable public art involves:

- Use of durable, weather-resistant, and low-maintenance materials;

- Environmentally responsible design, potentially incorporating recycled materials or renewable energy features;
- Flexibility or adaptive reuse potential to remain relevant across generations;
- Legacy planning to ensure artworks remain meaningful, functional, and historically valued over time.

This domain positions public art as a sustainable cultural asset capable of reinforcing estate identity and value across decades.

Discussion / Analysis

From the estate manager's perspective, the inclusion of sculpture and public art presents both opportunities and responsibilities. On the opportunity side:

Asset differentiation: In competitive property markets, having distinctive sculptural features can differentiate an estate from others, making it more desirable. Industry commentary notes that public art is “becoming an essential element in real-estate development... transforming commercial and residential spaces into vibrant, engaging communities.”

Value uplift: As noted above, empirical work suggests measurable uplift in property value – e.g., the George Town study showing +8.32% premium when sculptures are present within 100 m. This suggests a tangible economic benefit beyond mere aesthetics.

Place-making and community benefits: Art fosters a sense of place, which is increasingly valued especially in mixed-use or residential estates aiming for lifestyle branding. For example, local artistry in commercial real-estate is argued to “foster community connection” and enrich the cultural identity of developments.

On the responsibilities side:

Planning and Budgeting: Estate managers must incorporate the cost of art (commissioning, installation, infrastructure, lighting, site integration) into their budget and schedule. If art is treated as an afterthought, it may suffer poor integration, undermining both aesthetics and value. For example, a proposition noted that “art, architecture, and landscape need to work together... and start early in the development process.”

Maintenance and Risk Management: Sculptures exposed to weather, vandalism or public interaction require maintenance, conservation, and insurance. Estate managers must plan for lifecycle costs, not just upfront installation.

Community Engagement & Stakeholder Alignment: Integrating art effectively often means engaging local artists, residents, or cultural institutions to ensure the art resonates with the context and avoids alienating stakeholders. This ties into social sustainability and mitigates risk of art being perceived as irrelevant.

Measurement and Performance: While anecdotal evidence exists, quantifying the ROI of art in estate management remains challenging. Estate managers must work towards defining metrics (foot traffic, lease velocity, rent premiums, tenant retention, brand value) to support art-led investments. The ULI webinar reported that “research shows ... integrating art into real estate has a significant positive return on investment.”

Implications for Estate Management Practice

Given the evidence and conceptual framework above, estate managers can enhance value creation by adopting the following strategies:

Early Integration in Project Lifecycle

Engaging art and design consultants at the early stages of estate development—during site planning, architecture, and landscape integration—is critical to achieving coherent and high-impact outcomes. Early integration ensures that public art is harmonised with the physical and social fabric of the estate rather than being an afterthought (Madden & Schwartz, 2020; Hall & Miles, 2023). Studies indicate that projects where art is integrated from inception tend to deliver higher aesthetic, social, and economic returns (Markusen & Nicodemus, 2017).

Align Art with Brand and Place Strategy

Selecting sculptures or other public artworks that align with the estate’s brand identity, target demographics, and local cultural and environmental context increases relevance and appeal. Art that resonates with local history, culture, or environmental themes strengthens place identity and

fosters community pride (Douglas & Kara, 2021; Stevenson & Parsfield, 2019). Misaligned art, conversely, can be perceived as alien or superficial, undermining both social and economic value.

Budgeting for Lifecycle Costs

Estate managers should account for the total lifecycle costs of public art. This includes commissioning, installation, structural mounting, lighting, maintenance access, conservation, periodic refurbishment, and insurance (Public Art Network, 2022; Lorente, 2022). Research emphasises that ignoring lifecycle costs can result in rapid deterioration, increased liability, and loss of asset value. Allocating approximately 5–10% of the commissioning budget annually for maintenance is recommended for sustainability.

Maintenance and Asset Management

Public art should be treated as part of the estate's tangible assets. Estate managers are advised to include artworks in asset registers, schedule regular inspections, define maintenance regimes, and plan contingencies for vandalism, weather-related damage, or eventual removal (Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2021; Zebracki, 2017). This systematic approach prolongs the lifespan of artworks, preserves aesthetic quality, and protects the estate's investment.

Monitoring and Metrics

To evaluate the effectiveness of public art investments, managers should implement measurable performance indicators. Metrics may include changes in occupancy rates, lease-up times, rental premiums, foot traffic in communal spaces, social media engagement, or community satisfaction surveys (Hall & Miles, 2023; Balfour, 2018). Quantifying both economic and social impacts helps justify ongoing investment in public art and supports evidence-based estate management strategies.

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

Engaging local artists, cultural institutions, residents, and other key stakeholders in the planning, commissioning, and implementation of public art fosters a sense of ownership and belonging. Participatory processes ensure that artworks resonate culturally and socially with the community, increasing usage of public spaces, activating communal areas, and improving perceived safety (Douglas & Kara, 2021; Stevenson & Parsfield, 2019). Research shows that community-engaged

art projects reduce resistance to change and promote long-term social sustainability by embedding cultural relevance into the estate's identity (Balfour, 2018; Zebracki, 2017).

Conservation and Long-Term Value

High-quality sculptures and other public art installations should be treated as strategic long-term assets rather than ephemeral decorations. This requires selecting durable materials, designing for low maintenance, and ensuring that the artwork maintains cultural and aesthetic relevance over time (Lorente, 2022; Hall & Miles, 2023). Conservation planning—including preventive maintenance, risk management, and insurance—protects the estate's investment and enhances both cultural and economic value. Artworks that are thoughtfully maintained and culturally aligned can become iconic landmarks, reinforcing the estate's brand and legacy (Markusen & Nicodemus, 2017; Public Art Network, 2022).

Risk Considerations

Although public art enhances aesthetic, social, and economic value, estate managers must account for potential risks. Artworks may become outdated, fail to engage all users, or incur unexpected costs for maintenance, insurance, or refurbishment (Markusen & Nicodemus, 2017; Lorente, 2022; Public Art Network, 2022). Exposure to weather, vandalism, or redevelopment may also threaten their longevity and investment value (Sharp, Pollock, & Paddison, 2021; Hall & Miles, 2023; Zebracki, 2017). To mitigate these risks, managers should implement flexible planning, periodic reviews, and adaptive maintenance strategies that preserve both the cultural and economic value of public art (Balfour, 2018; Stevenson & Parsfield, 2019).

Conclusion

The relationship between sculpture/public art and estate management is symbiotic. For estate management, sculpture is not merely decoration but a strategic component of asset enhancement, place-making, and brand differentiation. For artwork, managed estate environments provide settings where artworks acquire visibility and economic significance. Empirical research and industry commentary suggest that art can contribute to measurable value uplift in real estate assets, although quantification remains evolving. Estate managers who recognize art's strategic role and integrate it from project inception, align it with brand and community, budget for lifecycle costs, and measure its performance, will be better positioned to harness the full potential of art-driven estate environments.

Recommendation

Findings from the study recommend that estate managers adopt a strategic approach to integrating sculpture and public art into estate development plans, ensuring that artworks align with community identity and estate branding. It is further advised that regular maintenance frameworks be established for public art to sustain value, and that stakeholder engagement particularly residents and local artists be prioritized to promote ownership, inclusiveness, and long-term sustainability.

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