

THE NEW RULES OF
PUBLIC ART

SITUATIONS

Rule no. 01

IT DOESN'T HAVE TO
LOOK LIKE PUBLIC ART.

The days of bronze heroes and roundabout baubles are numbered. Public art can take any form or mode of encounter – from a floating Arctic island to a boat oven – be prepared to be surprised, delighted, even unnerved.



Futurefarmers, Flatbread Society, Oslo, 2013.
Photo: Max McClure

Rule no. 02

IT'S NOT FOREVER.

From the here-today-gone-tomorrow of a “one day sculpture” to the growth of a future library over 100 years, artists are shaking up the life expectancy of public artworks. Places don't remain still and unchanged, so why should public art?



*BC System, New Works Forever, Bristol, 2013.
Photo: Georgina Bolton*

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Rule no. 03

CREATE SPACE FOR THE UNPLANNED.

Commissioning public art is not a simple design-and-build process. Artworks arrive through a series of accidents, failures and experiments. Moments of uncertainty and rethinking are the points at which the artwork comes into focus. Let responses to the artwork unfold over time and be open to the potential for unforeseen things to happen.

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Rule no. 04

DON'T MAKE IT FOR A COMMUNITY.
CREATE A COMMUNITY.

Be wary of predefining an audience. Community is rarely born out of geography, but rather out of common purpose - whether that be a Flatbread Society of farmers, bakers and activists building a bakehouse or 23,000 citizens across 135 countries writing a constitution for a new nation. As Brian Eno once said, “sometimes the strongest single importance of a work of art is the celebration of some kind of temporary community.”



Alex Hartley, Nowhereisland, Mevagissey, 2012.
Photo: Max McClure

Rule no. 05

WITHDRAW FROM THE
CULTURAL ARMS RACE.

Town and cities across the world are locked into a one-size-fits all style of public art. In a culture of globalised brands and clone towns, we hanker after authentic, distinctive places. If we are place-making, then let's make unusual places.

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Rule no. 06

DEMAND MORE THAN
FIREWORKS.

Believe in the quiet, unexpected encounter as much as the magic of the mass spectacle. It's often in the silence of a solitary moment, rather than the exhilaration of whizzes and bangs, that transformation occurs.



Wrights & Sites, Everything You Need to Build a Town is Here, Weston-super-Mare, 2010. Photo: Max McClure

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Rule no. 07

DON'T EMBELLISH,
INTERRUPT.

We need smart urban design, uplifting street lighting and landmark buildings, but public art can do so much more than decorate. Interruptions to our surroundings or everyday activities can open our eyes to new possibilities beyond artistic embellishment.



Overleaf: Heather & Ivan Morison, The Black Cloud, Bristol, 2009. Photo: Claire Doherty

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Heather & Ivan Morison, Journée des Barricades, Wellington, 2008. Photo: Steven Rowe

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Rule no. 08

SHARE OWNERSHIP FREELY,
BUT AUTHORSHIP WISELY.

Public art is *of the people* and made *with the people*, but not always *by the people*. Artists are skilled creative thinkers as well as makers. They are the charismatic agents who arrive with curious ideas - a black pavilion could be barnraised in a Bristol park, a graveyard could be built to commemorate the Enrons and West India Companies of our fallen economy, the sounds of a church organ might bleed out across the city through a mobile app. Trust the artist's judgment, follow their lead and invest in their process.

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Rule no. 09

WELCOME OUTSIDERS.

Outsiders challenge our assumptions about what we believe to be true of a place. Embrace the opportunity to see through an outsider's eyes.



Nowhereisland Ambassador, Weymouth, 2012
Photo: Max McClure

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Rule no. 10

DON'T WASTE TIME ON DEFINITIONS.

Is it sculpture? Is it visual art? Is it performance? Who cares! There are more important questions to ask. Does it move you? Does it shake up your perceptions of the world around you, or your backyard? Do you want to tell someone else about it? Does it make you curious to see more?

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Rule no. 11

SUSPEND YOUR DISBELIEF.

Art gives us the chance to imagine alternative ways of living, to disappear down rabbit holes, to live for a moment in a different world. Local specifics might have been the stepping off point – but public art is not a history lesson. Be prepared that it might not always tell the truth.



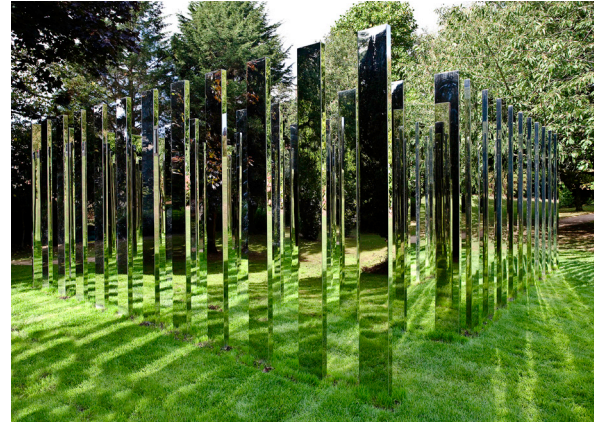
Tony White, Missorts, Bristol, 2012. Photo: Max McClure

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Rule no. 12

GET LOST

Public art is neither a destination nor a way-finder. Artists encourage us to follow them down unexpected paths as a work unfolds. Surrender the guidebook, get off the art trail, enter the labyrinth and lose yourself in unfamiliar territory.



*Jeppe Hein, Follow Me, Bristol, 2009. Photo: Jamie Woodley-
Courtesy University of Bristol*

Situations opens up the potential for artists to make extraordinary ideas happen in inspirational and surprising places through which audiences and participants are encouraged to explore new horizons.

We choose to work with artists who want to connect directly with people's lives, creating space for them to take risks, to test limits and cross boundaries. Since 2002, artists have led us and thousands of others into uncharted territories, brought us together to build, bake, grow and marvel, transformed familiar surroundings, provoked us to ask ourselves challenging questions and told us tall tales of the future.

We reimagine what public art can be and where and when it can take place and we like to think and reflect on what happens when the spark of an idea is lit. We test out new ways in which to share those ideas through events, interviews, blogs and books – just like this.

www.situations.org.uk

THE NEW RULES OF PUBLIC ART

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Join the conversation:

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