

! PINNING ABUUL I INE PUBLIC IN PUBLIC ART

by Tom Eccles and Tom Finkelpearl with Anne Pasternak



Who better to speak with about the joys and challenges of engaging diverse publics in art than Tom Finkelpearl and Tom Eccles? Both men have made distinct and significant contributions by commissioning and presenting public art in New York City, and are considered among the most esteemed curators and thinkers in the field. As directors of programs in public art spanning two decades, Finkelpearl and Eccles have significantly shaped the discourse on the subject of public art. By way of brief background, Tom Finkelpearl, who's presently executive director of the Queens Museum of Art, first worked in the public realm as an artist, where he realized numerous public projects, including one for Creative Time's famed *Art on the Beach* program in 1985, and later as director of New York City's Percent for Art Program. (Percent for Art was formed in 1982 as a result of a law that requires one percent of the budget for city construction projects to be spent on artwork.) His award-winning book, *Dialogues in Public Art* (2000), is a must for any student, artist, and professional interested in the subject. Tom Eccles is an esteemed curator, producer, and scholar in our field. Until recently, Eccles was the executive director of the Public Art Fund (1997–2005), New York's other major public arts presenter. During his tenure there, Eccles brought the organization to new heights with exciting and important presentations of art in landmark locations, including Central Park and Rockefeller Center. He has worked with some of the greatest artists of our day, including Jeff Koons, Pipilotti Rist, Pierre Huyghe, Paul McCarthy, Lawrence Weiner, and Rachel Whiteread. Never fearful of provocation, Eccles has contributed his insights to numerous publications, artists' books, and lectures. Due to their experience and diverse, occasionally opposing viewpoints, I invited these two acclaimed public arts parishioners to discuss their views on the notion of the public in public art. —Anne Pasternak

Pasternak: Each of us has run public arts organizations in New York City, and as colleagues I'd imagine that we share an idealism about the possibilities of a rich public life in our public spaces. But we engage with publics in different ways—from inviting direct interactions, even collaborations, with artists, to presenting artworks that intend to inspire, baffle, or even provoke the public. Meanwhile, our practices and ideologies are fraught with contradictions. For example, is the art in “public art” made for the public, with the public, or is the public intended as beneficiary or spectator? What is the artists' responsibility to the public?

Finkelpearl: A while back, during the time I was the director of New York City's Percent for Art Program, I assembled a list of common usage of the word *public*—for example, *public* housing project, *public* bathroom, *public* assistance, *public* transportation, *public* school, *public* defender. This can be contrasted with how we use the word *private*—*private* home, *private* fortune, *private* country club, *private* school. Without a doubt, a quick look at these lists shows a differentiation in status, wealth, and power. *Public* in America has strong class overtones.

Eccles: How does that definition help you when you're commissioning public artworks or thinking about art?

Finkelpearl: Well, audience surveys for art events time after time reveal that consumption of art is an upper-middle-class pursuit, right? But the consumers of public art are the larger public. That was

always in the front of my mind as I developed commissions. There are contradictions inherent in the term *public art*. The art world is elitist to a large degree and not used to addressing general audiences in the city.

Eccles: But the Percent for Art Program under your leadership and beyond, from the mid-80s into the 90s, did not have a class-driven agenda, nor a political agenda, but was very conscious of what we might call “inclusivity,” or what I think many people thought was a “race-based” agenda. *Public* was often defined in racial terms. This was the end of Mayor Dinkins's administration, which many perceived as centered on race empowerment. It was also part of the profile of a lot of the projects that came to us from artists. Do you consider this agenda as what one might call “good artistic practice”?

Finkelpearl: When you say race-based, are you saying that there was, let's say, a focus on selecting an African-American artist for a commission in an African-American community?

Eccles: Absolutely. In fact, it seemed to be almost de rigueur in the early 90s that if this were, say, a primarily Chinese community, then the work would have to come from a Chinese-American artist. At least that seemed to be the common perception within the art community and among artists.

Finkelpearl: I would definitely dispute that. There was a clear emphasis on diversity, which I think was completely appropriate in New York. I remember a statistic once during my tenure at Percent for Art that 70 percent of the artists we were working with at one time were women and artists

of color. But white men and women were still represented in proportions higher than their presence in New York and certainly considerably higher than in the particular neighborhoods where we were working. I think it is a symptom of the lack of inclusiveness of the art world that people perceived our program as you describe. Almost all of the areas we worked in were so-called majority-minority communities, and there were a variety of artists chosen who did not match the profile of the community. For example, working with a Japanese-American artist in Chinatown or a Puerto Rican artist in Dominican Washington Heights is a bridge-building exercise versus whether it's an Asian artist in an Asian community and a Latino artist in a Latino community.

Pasternak: Wasn't it part of the agenda that the content for the commissioned work would be geared toward the demographics and perceived interests of the intended community?

Finkelpearl: Yes. The idea at Percent for Art at that time was to choose the artist and then let him or her create a work for the site. This meant that artists often created works in response to the particular architectural, historical, and social settings. The artist selection panel included artists, curators, and people from the community. Often, the content of the work would come out of an interactive process with folks in that community.

Pasternak: Did you start with a mandate that the audience was the primary factor in considering the success of the commission?

Finkelpearl: Yes. I am not sure I would call it a mandate, but understanding the site in all its complexity was encouraged. In a school, for example, the only people ever to see the artworks will be the school community. While it is a “public” site, it has more limited access than a museum; you can't just walk into a school these days. So in this context the school community was the public.

Eccles: For Anne and me, the parameters were somewhat different—or at least we began to perceive that our organizations could be more effective if we moved away from the kind of thinking inherent in government programs. I was certainly more interested in what artists were actually doing in their own practice and whether the public realm offered specific opportunities beyond museums and galleries as exhibition spaces. Privileging artists over all other concerns was at the time quite radical and not uncontroversial. That didn't mean ignoring various "public" concerns, but it was important to be an advocate for artists and their work in a way that no government official would undertake.

At that time we were also dealing with two significant forces that dominated the way public art was thought of in New York and beyond. The first was the effect of the *Tilted Arc* controversy and the removal of Richard Serra's piece from Federal Plaza in 1989. That most definitely had a chilling effect on what people thought of as possible for art in public spaces and I think it engendered an unspoken timidity among administrators when thinking about the possibilities for commissioning new work. The second was the predominance of site-specificity as a paradigm for non-gallery-based work. I came to realize that site-specificity had become a kind of empty mantra and that artists were more interested in typologies of sites rather than making work that revealed something about that particular place. This was particularly the case when we were looking for sites for Rachel Whiteread's *Water Tower* (1998). Rachel wasn't interested in any particular water tower or any specific site. That came later in the process. Shifting away from "site" as the starting point for discussions with artists was a liberation.

Finkelpearl: Tom, I agree with your analysis, and would place my own orientation at that time within the post-*Tilted Arc* reanalysis of site, though I would dispute the notion that the prime result was "timidity." In some ways I think the controversy was a wake-up call to the field that the old paradigm of the city-as-museum was flawed. I remember one of the most inspiring lectures I went to around 1989–1990 was by Richard Andrews, who worked at the NEA. Back then, for the most part, there was a general category of site-specific art; nobody was talking about different kinds of site specificity, but Andrews laid out the basic categories of the "soft" and "hard" facts of a site. For example, Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* was based on site specificity related to the hard facts of the actual site: How long is it? How wide is it? What are the vertical dimensions? Where does the sun come from? What are the materials? Information you could measure with a ruler or a light meter. On the other hand, the soft facts of a site

WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT 'PEACE, LOVE, AND UNDERSTANDING'? WHY CAN'T A WORK BE SERIOUS AND POSITIVE?"

include its history, demographics, economics, et cetera. At Federal Plaza that might include the colonial history of the particular place, the residential community of artists, the presence of immigration and naturalization offices in the Federal Building, and so forth. In the late 1980s, somewhat in response to the *Tilted Arc* controversy, there was a shift from basing site-specific art on the hard facts to the soft facts. And then, in the 1990s, Mary Jane Jacob, Michael Brenson, Suzanne Lacy, and many others laid down a theory and practice of interactive site-based public art that often centered on the "users," or the public that frequents a particular place. This was a paradigm shift that produced mixed results, and I was certainly invested in a lot of these ideas.

Eccles: Yet one outcome of defining art in terms of the site was that public art took on a kind of archeological program that ultimately morphed into a kind of pedestrian historicism. It went so far that it got to the point with many public projects that nearly any historical fact of a given site was considered significant. In its second incarnation, the one you mention in terms defined by Mary Jane Jacob and Suzanne Lacy, public art was tending to take on an educational role, often with the stated aim to engender a sense of "community" or "place." While you, Tom, were developing new strategies for community participation in your public art commissions, Creative Time and Public Art Fund were

approaching the public very differently. In fact, in our choice of artists with whom to work, few, if any, would be considered "public artists." In a sense, I think we came to reject the notion of public art as a genre.

Finkelpearl: But our projects were 100 percent publicly funded, and I think that makes a big difference. Creative Time and Public Art Fund are private nonprofits. Money is power, and if you trace back to who's paying for anything, it's going to have major implications, whether it's an exhibition at a museum or a private gallery in Chelsea. In our case, the clients were taxpayers, users of the site, and for the most part these were non-Manhattan communities of color. These were our funders. If your funders consistently object to what you are doing, you will go out of business, and this is just as true for Creative Time and the Public Art Fund. But I don't want you to think that I saw this public funding as a burden. It was exciting to be working with artists I admired in Sunset Park, Brooklyn, or in the South Bronx. Isn't this a dream of many people who are a bit uneasy in the elitist confines of the museum establishment? I am still working with these ideas and could not be more pleased than to be in Queens with all of the opportunities and challenges of working with a hyper-diverse set of audiences.

Eccles: I agree about the "money is power" part, but you have to make critical decisions about how you use that power. In any case, it's not a particularly significant amount of power when you consider the forces at work in New York. I think a consciousness of what you can do, how you can make an impact, is important. In this regard we said, "Look, with the relatively small resources available, how can we make the most significant impact?" The way we answered that was to focus on the artistic community, to fund artists and push for projects that first and foremost functioned on an artistic level. It is true that one has to be very conscious of the community you produce work with. And I would use the term "with" rather than "for." "For" sounds like the kind of thing that consultants suggest when running a seminar for civil servants. But you can become paralyzed by the idea of the community, particularly when dealing with so-called representatives of the community who have their own set of agendas. At a certain point, as the curator and organizer, you have to stand up to these forces or at least maneuver around them. You have to remain doggedly focused upon why and what you're doing—which I hope is making art. The rest, quite frankly, will take care of itself. If you try to engage art as a kind of social panacea, you sink.

I've always found New York a very undemocratic city. And I find American politics kind of a strangely undemocratic system that needs oligarchs who are then supported in some format. Take, for example, New York and the immense power of the governor and the mayor. These two figures loom incredibly large in our work—building relations with them and their appointees is necessary in acquiring permissions, access to sites, and so on. And that's interesting, because the worry of offending the public is much less than offending the governor or the mayor.

Finkelpearl: That was not my experience at Percent for Art, although we had a couple of controversies there. In 1991, John Ahearn's *Bronx Bronzes* was removed—at his request—after community opposition. A year later, Governor Pataki took time out of his busy schedule to hold a news conference to let people know that he thought that Bob Rivera's sculpture *Open Voyage* on top of P.S. 279 in the Bronx was a waste of taxpayer money. It was all over the papers, but the controversy blew over and the piece is still up.

Eccles: It's worth noting that Anne and I "grew up" during Giuliani's time as mayor, which was considerably different from life under Mayor Dinkins, who was a great supporter of public art. Paradoxically, having an administration that was pretty unsupportive (or at least uninterested) was probably in hindsight a major source of our success in freeing artists from the political process.

Pasternak: It is true that this contributed to Creative Time's desire to develop projects with artists that would free them from city constraints and avoid bureaucratic obstacles. It's also worth noting that Percent for Art is officially mandated to work within these public spaces, but Creative Time and the Public Art Fund aren't mandated to do anything. That means we have to work hard to have access to the public spaces that we want to use. So having the displeasure of an elected official can backfire for future requests.

Eccles: What happened over the past decade in New York City is that traditional public spaces, and parks in particular, took on the character of private spaces—run and maintained by private organizations such as the Central Park Conservancy, the Madison Square Park Conservancy, and the Bryant Park Restoration and Development Corporation. These are extremely powerful and effective organizations and they became our primary partners in the public sphere.

On the other hand, private developers operate many of the most prominent publicly visible sites in the city. It was often more fruitful—and quite simply easier in terms of permissions and financing—to work with these real estate companies than going through the public process.

I felt that we sometimes butted up against a very real denial of the democratic nature of public space. I was once told that a sculpture we were endorsing was "off message" for a park. In the first place, you need to reject the idea that a park has a "message" or "brand," and perhaps more importantly for us was to debunk the notion that what we were doing was somehow symbolic of something else, like urban renewal, or "celebrating Brooklyn," or whatever: we had to reject the idea that the art stood for something other than itself.

Within the context of public space you really have to argue for the right of an individual to be heard, or at least to speak. Rather than expressing the activity of public art in collectivist terms—in terms of the community—I would be much more atomistic; that this is an individual artist and a specific artwork and its presentation is part of the democratic process, which is about having access to very different ways of seeing and thinking about the world, and not necessarily coming to a consensus. It's about the individual, not the communal.

Finkelpearl: Well, this certainly points to the difference in our philosophy. I feel that there is ample opportunity for individual expression in the gallery-museum system, and in the private nonprofit public art world. So I thought, and still think, that Percent for Art, as a publicly funded, governmental public art entity, is a good place to seek a more collective voice. I don't think that anyone would claim that unmediated individual expression is a prerequisite for great art. Certainly Western art before modernism (think Chartres Cathedral) produced prodigious expressive works that attempted to speak a common language to a broad audience. And we haven't even touched on non-Western traditions. But this also makes me think that we are each in the correct positions in the city, that whoever hired us made the right choices in that our philosophies match the best potential of our organizations.

Over the years I have consistently heard that the content of a lot of public art—particularly publicly funded projects—is not hard-hitting enough. There is this feeling in the art world that if the voice is positive, if there is a positive message, then it's not serious. To this I ask, "What's so funny about 'peace, love, and understanding'?" Why can't a work be serious and positive?

Eccles: I think what you are saying, Tom, would point me in a different direction—to question an established art program, one which started with a great deal of optimism, and was argued for passionately as an antidote for many of the evils of modernism and social planning, et cetera. But ultimately you end up with a genre of art called *public art* pushing positive messages. You've been to some extent quite an advocate of that—public art being a specific form of artistic practice that has different boundaries and, in fact, should have a different critical language to contemporary art.

Finkelpearl: Yes.

Eccles: Anne and I came from another direction where we were saying, "Let's not do that," partly due to a certain discomfort with it on its own artistic merits and limitations, and partly because our different missions were centered on the artists' voice.

From the outset of the 70s there was this idea of the encounter. There are two sides to it: to provide an encounter with contemporary art for the public, which comes back to your class thing, for people who don't go to museums, and secondly, to provide opportunities for artists, which was still geared around some notion that an organization could provide a freedom for them in a sphere that was contested, difficult, interesting.

Finkelpearl: I think what you're getting at is really important, which is that the whole motivation for the Percent for Art movement was not based around artistic ideals for the most part. It was born in the late 1950s, early 60s, but really flowered in the 70s. Percent for Art had a governmental impetus. It was an attempt to "humanize" cities at a moment when urban official architecture was particularly barren, and when the middle class was moving in droves to the suburbs. It's my impression that the Public Art Fund was born out of a similar impetus, and don't forget, it was a key player in the birth of the Percent for Art Program in New York. Creative Time came more out of the alternative space movement.

But the biggest difference, as Anne said, is that Percent for Art is a governmental mandate and all the sites are within newly constructed public buildings. By contrast, the Public Art Fund and Creative Time are private nonprofits working in a much wider range of sites. My vision of Creative Time is an organization that's always finding the funkiest, most interesting site and challenging artists to react to that site. *Art on the Beach* and *Art in the Anchorage* were great challenges—what could an artist do there? That's so essentially different from commissioning a permanent work for a new public school in the South Bronx.

Pasternak: As much as our goal was to give artists opportunities to create interesting new works in cool sites, beyond the gallery's white cube and the isolation of the studio, there were other goals at play. For example, we had urban agendas in using certain public sites, like seedy Times Square, before it was eventually redeveloped. We also strove to counteract a kind of visual bankruptcy and lack of public life in the city while showing the more creative possibilities of everyday life. And as artists' interests, the economy, funding, and the city itself changed, our programming necessarily changed.

Eccles: In the late 80s, early 90s, we were talking about urban issues. So what was once a quite independent organization was now starting to think in ways, and act in ways, that were very, very restrictive upon artists, ideologically and in terms of the kind of time frame it was going to take

in terms of them realizing projects. If an organization like Public Art Fund gets involved with, say, a transportation initiative bringing artists into the design process, it could take five years to reach completion.

If you did these things as an independent organization, these are black holes from which you would never resurface. There wasn't recognition of the fact that you actually did have a certain level of freedom and we should represent that freedom in some ways. It really comes down to a matter of choosing what is the most fruitful activity.

In the mid-1990s there was a complete realignment of strategies. The idea was to commission great artists and try to get a great work out in the public realm. By great I don't mean famous or necessarily established. In fact, many of our most successful projects were with emerging, younger artists.

Pasternak: Tom, it was no coincidence that our tenures began in the mid-1990s and coincided with the very public, very controversial attack on the National Endowment for the Arts. The media coverage was highly anti-artist then, so to platform artists' voices was important, even radical, though unpopular, especially when that voice might be controversial for the public.

Let's go back to this idea of the public and what makes for "successful" public projects. For example, our project *Light Cycle*, by Cai Guo-Qiang, fizzled for the public, who had expected a four-minute explosion of fireworks that would create a "halo" over Central Park. Due to torrential rains and technical glitches, Cai's dream of a monumental circle in the sky never fully materialized and thousands of people left the park disappointed. But for the artist and organization, it was a huge success, because Cai was able to share a vision and engage people in the realm of possibility in some deep and complex ways. So I think that we have to be honest about for whom we are really making the art. And maybe in the Percent for Art Program, the art was more for the constituents in those buildings who would be engaging with it day to day than what we do. This dilemma reminds me of the contradiction you were mentioning, Tom [F], about the contradictions of serving the artist or the public as your primary client. In your case, it was clearly the public. For us, we are saying we privilege the artist and her/his vision—which results in giving the public an engaging encounter, whether it's inspiring or upsetting.

Finkelpearl: When an artist got a commission from Percent for Art, they got this incredible opportunity to work in a place that was different from where they were normally used to working, but they had to recognize the difference. And if they could be creative and negotiate within that environment, they could do a fabulous piece, and if they couldn't, you'd end up with mediocre stuff. We never wanted the community to make artistic decisions. But as Malcolm Miles says, community members are experts in their own lives. The best projects let the artist be the artist but promoted dialogue with, within, and outside the community.

Eccles: For me, it has always been very important that works succeed on different levels. Both in terms of artistic issues and site, and on a personal level for the artist. At Doris Freedman Plaza, for example, you can actually see how people react, think, and examine the work. You can hear them discuss the work, see how they approach it. Even the seller at the hot dog cart could gauge the success of each project in terms of sales—a direct correlation between the work and whether people wanted to linger.

Finkelpearl: But the real successful work of public art is not just the one that gets the people to buy the hot dogs. It gets both the cab driver to pull over and buy a hot dog and talk about it, and the curator from MoMA to do the same—even if they don't agree on the quality or content of the work. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial by Maya Lin [1982] is a good example. I have seen veterans praying, crying, and taking rubbings of the names of soldiers killed in the war, while my art friends appreciated it as a piece of sculpture reminiscent of minimalist art. But everyone always comments on the communal space that the memorial creates, not just its aesthetic qualities.

Pasternak: Can a public artwork be a success on a public level but not on an artistic one?

Finkelpearl: One way to look at public art is to look from the artwork back out at the audience rather than from the audience to the artwork. So you ask, "What is the social situation or the social environment created by that artwork?" Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *The Gates* [2005], for example, was an incredible experience. It was joyous, and the entire city was talking about it. It was the most heralded piece of public art since the Statue of Liberty.

Eccles: That's all "peace, love, and understanding." While I always argued that *The Gates* should happen (and in fact the Public Art Fund fought hard, long, and ultimately successfully to realize the first projects in Central Park after an almost two-decade moratorium), I was not really a fan of the ultimate outcome. It was almost too much, too late. And, in fact, I don't particularly like this necrophiliac turn that public art has taken recently with the re-creation of unrealized projects, such as the posthumous creation of Robert Smithson's *Floating Island* [2005]. Regardless of the time between the original proposal for *The Gates* and its ultimate realization, which is important, my argument with *The Gates* comes back to something I said earlier: It was so clearly "on message," bringing thousands of people to the park in, as you say, Tom, a kind of joyous celebration. But I find it incredible that *The Gates* could happen in the very place where only a few months earlier anti-war demonstrators were denied a permit during the Republican National Convention. Now of course there are arguments about protecting the grass from marauding demonstrators, et cetera, but since when did grass seed trump democracy? It seemed to me that many of the arguments for *The Gates*—that it would bring hundreds of thousands of people to the city, occupying hotel rooms and dining in restaurants—stood equally well for a planned demonstration in Central Park. Ironically, Tom, they would probably have stood up for "peace, love, and understanding" better than *The Gates*.

In many ways, I often come back to a very traditional notion of public space in America, which is the commons, the whole prophecy that the value of public art is based upon, i.e., that the commons is where ideas are discussed and shared and debated. I realize how old-fashioned that all seems, but it is a good barometer with which to gauge what we are doing with our public spaces in New York.

It also brings us back to our strategies in terms of thinking and reaching publics and how programs have ultimately evolved over the years. In order to realize artists' ambitions and increase the impact and visibility and understanding of a work, contemporary projects are becoming very, very expensive. The sources of funding are corporations and private individuals, and there are very Manhattan-centric necessities that govern the financing of these projects. So the ideology of presenting art throughout the city has actually been cleansed by such financial determinants as where you can go and the site's visibility. And I think this goes hand in hand with the notion of spectacularization, which has also gone hand in hand with the notion of reaching these large publics. So the ambitions of both the Public Art Fund and Creative Time got larger—like Cai Guo-Qiang's *Light Cycle* project in Central Park.

Since that becomes a measure of success, and because millions of people come into Manhattan from other boroughs, I chose to locate nodal points in the city where, basically, if you grab that site, 60 percent of New Yorkers are probably going to see it or interact with it over a ten-week period.

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Pasternak: It also seems to me that we're in a moment right now that's worth recognizing—people have a different expectation of their public spaces in our city than in the past. Our public spaces have become so privatized that even our sidewalks have started to disappear. Is there still a belief anymore in the fundamental idea that a public space is about public life?

Finkelpearl: First off, I want to say that one should not pit one public use of Central Park against another. Ideally, I feel that it should have been the site for both political protest and an art event, not either/or. Yes, indeed the park, as symbolic center of the city, should be a commons, a site for collective experience and a site for debate. But public life is cyclical. Do you know the book *Bowling Alone*, by Robert Putnam? It's about the idea that most Americans used to bowl in leagues. Now you see people bowling alone, dining alone, going to movies alone, and so on. There's a decrease in public association in America, a decrease in community, in the publicness of life. We have withdrawn. It's the "fall of public man," according to Richard Sennett, or the "decline of the public sphere," according to Jürgen Habermas. But it is cyclical, and I think we're on an upswing. If you look at the kind of public spaces that were being created in the 60s, they were really low level. There were no amenities; you couldn't even sit down. A lot more thought goes into the pedestrian experience now and there are some mildly encouraging signs. Not all big cities are hemorrhaging populations—certainly New York is as vibrant as it has been in a long time. The "New Urbanism" emphasizes neighborhoods and the pedestrian experience—even some suburbs are being designed with town centers where people come together in public.

Eccles: I've got a feeling that public spaces in New York have become more and more "Victorian" in some ways. They actually look Victorian, with wrought-iron gates, grand lawns, night watchmen, and rather uncomfortable benches. A lot of the attitudes toward public space have become Victorian, as well. You find yourself moving within a changing moral framework with more, I might say, prudish approaches toward our public spaces—with the exception of commercial advertising space in the public sector. I think one of the great things of New York City was, of course, the freedom to express oneself whatever way one wants. So it is kind of interesting that, going along with this physical cleanup of our public spaces, there is kind of a moral cleanup, which also impacts on the kind of art projects that you can or can't get realized.

Concurrent with this is the idea that public art should be good for children. That seemed particularly true of the promoters of the Cow Parade—the spectacular low point in the history of public art in New York. Children are often invoked when you're being denied a permit. It always amazes me how children come to represent the public in arguments for what is or isn't appropriate and how little credence is given to the intellectual life of a child and by default "the public."

Finkelpearl: Well, finally I agree. It can be fine for people to be baffled by or misunderstand a work of public art. The biggest hurdle is to get people to embrace ambiguity, to resist pinning one specific meaning on an artwork, because most art is so layered. However, I don't necessarily buy the notion that good art will always baffle the public.

Eccles: I must admit to being baffled by a lot of what passes for public art, particularly work that I consider panders to the public. But if the work is good, strong, demands its own space, and plays to your intelligence, my experience was always that people would respond with intelligence. ■

* From "CREATIVE TIME: THE BOOK" / 82-90

