

Project Statement – Core Fulbright Scholars Program 2018  
Applicant: Susan Greene, Email: [susan.r.greene@gmail.com](mailto:susan.r.greene@gmail.com),  
Websites: [www.susangreene.org](http://www.susangreene.org); [www.artforces.org](http://www.artforces.org)  
Country: Palestine, Award Code: 8369 WE, Flex Award  
**Project Title: Psychologies of Public Art and Space**

## Context and Definitions

We are beset by wars and occupations, horrific expressions of social relations, which are catastrophically destructive to human life, culture, and the natural and built environment. Within these situations we also see great courage, creativity, and resilience. Specifically, my ongoing investigation **Psychologies of Public Art and Space** asks what the built environment in Palestine tells us about the production and reinforcement of such powerful social relations and vice versa. I use some of the ideas of ‘forensic architecture’ founded by Eyal Weizman, who states: "The idea is to use forensic architecture as a method that extends deep into the facts and looks at them and maps them out to see the materialization of political forces. Forensic Architecture assumes that every bit of material reality is the product of a complex force field that extends in space and time."<sup>1</sup>

I add, or perhaps emphasize, that this ‘complex force field’ includes the psyches of human subjects: memory, history, imagination, and desire. This psychological dimension is in part based on the ideas of ‘relational psychology,’ within which the nature of one’s relationships with and between one’s environment is the most formative force, giving us the ability to experience and empathize with another as a separate being, or not.

Technology adds another powerful layer to the built environment both materially and virtually. Perhaps paradoxically, the technologically facilitated increases in global connections and interactions—e.g., one in seven people are on Facebook—are accompanied by a rise in the building of walls along borders that are often contested. There are more than fifty border-wall-type constructions globally, ranging from the 600-mile barrier Saudi Arabia is constructing along its border with Iraq and Hungary’s 13-foot-high razor-wired barrier along its borders with Croatia and Serbia to Israel’s walls in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem and the US-built wall along the border with Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Political theorist Wendy Brown argues that walls are a largely illusory projection of the very power that states have lost to the ungovernable forces “unleashed by globalization and late modern colonization.”<sup>3</sup> One might say, therefore, that these walls function in part as a screen for obscured realities and have much to do with relationships to each other and to power or the lack thereof. **Psychologies of Public Art and Space** asks how this engaging with the built environment enhances the understanding of the lived experience of Palestinians in the occupied territories?

The research/public art component is in part informed by ‘relational’ and ‘socially engaged’ art practice. Relational art founder Nicholas Bourriaud states that relational art is:

*A set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.*<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Michael Hodges, “Forensic Architecture is Unraveling Conflict from Gaza to Guatemala,” *Wired Magazine*, January 25, 2016, <http://www.wired.co.uk/article/gaza-data-forensics>

<sup>2</sup> Élisabeth Vallet, ed., *Borders, Fences and Walls: State of Insecurity?* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Wendy Brown, *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty* (Zone Books, New York, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon, France: Les Presses Du Réel, 1998).

Pablo Helguara, a founder of ‘socially engaged art’ (SEA) states that

*...social interaction occupies a central and inextricable part of any socially engaged artwork. SEA is a hybrid, multi-disciplinary activity... SEA depends on actual—not imagined or hypothetical—social action.*

### **Teaching/Research Description**

**Psychologies of Public Art and Space** is an interdisciplinary teaching/research project comprised of a praxis-based academic curriculum that responds to real-life community concerns at the intersections of private and public space. My teaching style is interactive and collaborative, with students taking an active role in the mutual endeavor that is the learning process. The application of theory is integral, as it is here that the theories may come to life. This will include designing, executing, and analyzing a permanent community public art project (mural and media), located off campus.

The academic classes/workshops will offer an introduction to ‘relational’ psychological and forensic theories of space and the built environment mentioned above. The theories will then be actively explored through application in the field via participation in and analysis of community public art and mural projects informed by ‘relational’ and ‘socially engaged art’ theories, briefly defined above.

I propose to teach an intensive interdisciplinary course/workshop at several universities in Palestine’s West Bank and East Jerusalem that can be cross-listed between several possible fields of study, such as: Psychology, Community Psychology, Social Psychology, Art/Media, Peace Studies/Conflict Resolution, and Urban Studies. The first three weeks will be spent on course material, which will include theories of cultural origins, the impact of (post)colonialism on sense of self, melancholy, resilience, creativity, spatial politics, forensics of the built environment, and psychology of space. The research project aspect of the class will be comprised of a mural or several small murals and an audio/visual program linked to the images by phone apps and available online. The class will divide into different roles—including painters, documentarians, researchers, interviewers, and outreach and social mediators—and then we will start to meet with community partners to design the project together. What questions or needs, for all participants, will the project ask or address? What do participants want the walls to say, literally? Contextual information including but not limited to stories, geographical data, archival data, and interviews will be part of the research and media programming.

### **Research-Goals and Methodology**

**Psychology of Public Art and Space** uses “Action Research” to frame and develop public art projects.

*“Action Research” is defined as a problem-focused, context-specific, and future-oriented investigation that describes and interprets social situations while implementing interventions with the goal of improvement and involvement of participants. “Action Research” is a group activity based on a partnership between action researchers and participants—all of whom are involved in the change process and are part of what is being researched (Waterman, Tillen, Dickson, de Koning, Health Technology Assessment 5.23 (2001))*

The public art project will grow out of working directly with community organizations and their constituents to determine themes and concerns that the project will intervene with. Students will share with the community the theories that have resonated with them. We will form a core committee of community members, artists, media experts, and students to design, execute, document, and research the mural and media components. The design ideas will be presented to the community at large for input. All the participants will interview each other and record their reflections and observations during the mural process. In this way, the project research will be triangulated, giving us the best chance of case studies that capture what has taken place. In addition, Action Research requires the researcher to be part of the researched. We will be learning from each other and all information gathered will be shared along the way. In this way, we can alter the project direction as we notice themes and patterns. This data, including archive and historical research, will become part of the audio/visual programming that will provide a thick<sup>5</sup> context for the 2-dimensional work/mural(s). The audio/visual programming will be amplified via web, apps, and social media, taking the local to the global, raising awareness, making visible hidden and forgotten histories, offering the context of the project in an easy and accessible way, and linking to narratives/hidden histories globally. The community project/mural will facilitate an experiential understanding for all involved of the interactive role of environmental influences on experiences of self, including agency, memory, safety, and belonging.

One final component of the project will be the participation of Art Forces, an interdisciplinary, international organization I direct and founded in 2000. Art Forces will play a role, including connecting with US exhibition venues, artists, publicists, and critics.

The project will ask:

- What models of public art are useful for interrogating experiences of self and self in relation to larger society?
- How can community public art impact the psychology of space?
- How is memory facilitated (or not) in public spaces and how does public art impact memory in public spaces?
- How can public art activate dialogue and action toward social change?
- How can creation of public art be used to ‘read’ architecture and the built environment?
- What are the best practices and methodologies for creating and analyzing community public art?
- How to best capture the impact that altering the built environment is having and to determine how to make the most of it.
- How does creativity impact one’s sense of self and agency?
- How are histories created and embedded in landscape and the built environment?

## **Outcomes**

Concrete outcomes of **Psychologies of Public Art and Space** will include:

1. Video documentary of the process of creating the work and its context—historical, archival, narratives, and stories of participants, including ways the project embodies and engages with larger global issues. This will be vigorously promoted in the US and internationally at film festivals, as well as being distributed to academic institutions, community centers, and online venues.

---

<sup>5</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 3–30.

2. Websites, blogs, and social media, including linking the project to existing virtual venues to participate in discourse.
3. Exhibit of photographic and textual documentation in galleries, including locations in the US, Palestine, and online.
4. Knowledge-production in the form of a book/catalogue of the project, including critical essays and information on how to replicate the project.
5. Presentations by students and participants in conferences.
6. Interactive component in which viewers can add their narratives contributing to a people's history or archive. The aim includes linking to other projects that are dealing with similar issues in other locations, such as the US.
7. The project will take my work to a higher level, allowing greater integration and participation in academic discourse and a sustained investigation.

### **Locations and Timeline**

I am choosing the Flex option, as it will allow for reflecting on, metabolizing, and working with data between segments, as well as the opportunity to create the public art projects in spring and fall in terms of weather and academic schedules. Personally, the Flex schedule allows me to viably continue my professional activities in the US.

- I. Bir'Zeit University  
Public Art Partner: TBD  
September–October 2018  
Teach workshop and create public art project  
November 2018–January 2019
  - Team works virtually to: organize and analyze data; create website and outreach strategies; design interactive elements to encourage collaborations; plan site-specific exhibitions
 February–March 2019
  - Continue working on Ramallah project and begin to lay groundwork for next location: East Jerusalem.
  
- II. University: Al Quds University  
Public Art Partner: TBD  
April–May 2019
  - Teach workshop and create public art project
 June–July 2019
  - Team works virtually to: organize and analyze data; create website and outreach strategies; design interactive elements to encourage collaborations
 August–September 2019
  - Continue working on East Jerusalem project and begin to lay groundwork for next location: Bethlehem, West Bank.
  
- III. University: Bethlehem University  
Public Art Partner: TBD  
October–November 2019
  - Teach workshop and create public art project

December 2019–June 2020

- Team works virtually to: organize and analyze data; create website and outreach strategies; design interactive elements to encourage collaborations; consolidate, develop, plan, and execute final formats for research and for creative- and knowledge-production from the three projects.

### **Feasibility/Personal History**

My ongoing investigation into public art/murals in Palestine began in 1989 and grew out of my interest in borders, loss, memory, identity, and resilience in the intersections of public and private space. I have led more than fifty community and/or public murals internationally in a wide range of settings including projects in Palestine and Lebanon. With the advent of technological developments, I began to explore how the murals might come ‘off the wall’ via audio/visual programming. For example, in several projects one may ‘call the wall’ to access contextual and narrative information about the mural, its meaning, and its creators ([www.olympiarafahmural.org](http://www.olympiarafahmural.org)). In 2000, I earned a doctorate in clinical psychology and have been applying this training to the analysis of my body of public art and murals. The findings contribute to a growing body of knowledge in academic fields as well as to the development of my practice. For approximately fifteen years I have taught courses on a range of topics relating to resilience and creativity at the undergraduate and graduate levels at universities throughout the Bay Area. I served as a staff member directing the learning center at the San Francisco Art Institute for ten years designing and implementing an academic support program. My private psychotherapy practice opened in 2002 and is ongoing.

My years of working experience in Palestine have given me an opportunity to develop deep connections to the proposed communities. I have demonstrated a successful track record of completing large-scale murals in complex situations in a wide range of national and international locations that necessitated negotiations with municipalities, community centers, building owners, and other civic bodies. I have expertise in collaborative processes and am skilled at navigating relationships to bring people together to work collaboratively.

### **Language Requirement**

Despite my lack of Arabic language proficiency, I will be able to complete this project. This is best evidenced by the fact that I have completed many large-scale public works in the Middle East and have published research on creativity and resilience in occupied Palestine, upon which the current proposal builds. This has been possible via a combination of the English-language skills of local participants, translators, and my minimal skills in Arabic, which I am working to improve.