

MIA's Pop-Up Park
by Beth K. Karon

Thursday, January 19, 2012—Sunday, April 15, 2012
General Mills Lobby
Free Exhibition

There are two parts to this OOM: the first has to do with current issues of Pop-Up Art, and the second part is a brief overview of the history of Pop-Ups and the art movements leading up to this phenomenon.

WHAT IS A POP-UP

1. A pop up is online advertising found on many websites. It will normally advertise a particular type of goods or service.
2. The pop-up scenes of childrens' books.
3. Temporary pop-up stores, galleries, and even parks that have begun to appear increasingly in public spaces. The term "pop-up" suggests their temporary nature - here one day, gone the next.

FAQ'S OF THE MIA POP-UP PARK

The MIA's Pop-up Park was designed and built by two MIA employees: artist Shawn McCann (<http://studiomccann.blogspot.com/2012/01/popup-park-at-minneapolis-institute-of.html>) and fabricator Al Silberstein.

The park was constructed at the MIA, and then put together in the lobby. Materials used include plasticene, plywood, chicken wire, polar fleece, fiberglass, resin, to name a few. The entire process from start to finish was photo-documented, which is playing in the back hall (towards the old elevator).

The mural on the wall adjacent to the park is a photograph of a well-known painting upstairs to add to the tropical ambiance of the lobby, and also add to the fun by allowing people to be photographed in front of it. However, the foliage in the park was not selected to be accurate to what might be found in the Tahiti of the painting, but to simply look tropical.

Some of the furniture may be recognizable to you from the EdoPop exhibit, and indeed was bought with both EdoPop and the Pop-up Park in mind.

The slopes of the "planters" are strong enough for folks to lean against them, but not for climbing (as children tend to do).

If you walk through the park and think you are hearing birds, you are: motion-sensitive birdies!

POP-UP PARKS AND BUSINESSES

Pop-up stores, galleries, and even parks have begun to appear increasingly in public spaces since the start of the recent recession. The term "pop-up" suggests their temporary nature - here one day, gone the next. Pop-up shops have become a recognized part of the fashion industry, and seasonal retailers often use them as temporary sites for holiday goods, from Halloween costumes to Christmas trees. More recently, pop-up parks have begun to spring up, especially in urban spaces where they

can offer a sense of respite for those looking to escape without leaving their environs. During Minnesota's cold winter months, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts will be host to a new pop-up park, which will transform the museum's cool, white lobby into a relaxing, tropical oasis with grass, palm trees, and other South Seas amenities. - MIA statement for its Pop-Up Park.

Pop-ups are not just parks or retail establishments: pop-up restaurants and eateries are gaining just as much popularity.

Pop-Up Parks intend to reinvigorate marginal and vacant land within urban areas, focusing specifically on the interim use of demolition land for projects of public benefit. They seek to improve aesthetic and productive value prior to redevelopment through minimal physical intervention.

In some cities, vacant storefronts have plagued downtown areas, such as Oakland, California. Suddenly, six small businesses popped up: part of an experiment by two entrepreneurs with the backing of the city of Oakland in the hopes of starting a revival of commerce.

Then there is Annual Park(ing) Day: begun in San Francisco in 2005 when art and design studio Rebar converted one parking space into a temporary public park. Since then the event has grown into an international phenomenon with participants around the world. This event challenges the concept of public space and reclaims lots reserved for parked cars in favor of parks that foster community. To demonstrate the range reached of this 6-7 year old project, the official numbers of PARK(ing) Day 2011 include 955 Parks, 161 cities, 35 Countries, 6 Continents!

Many pop-up projects are aimed at not just commerce revitalization or seasonal respites, but at matters of ecology, with rules that include the use of sustainable materials and/or avoiding forbidden materials. An example would be one organization in California that forbids the use of tropical hardwood so as not to contribute to the deforesting of the rainforest.

Is there another Pop-Up being planned at the MIA? Only time will tell....

ROOTS OF POP-UP PARKS

(Pun unintended)

One can make a case for tracing the pop-up park back to the ancients with their mosaics and frescoes of outdoor themes placed inside homes, or maybe even partly to Guiseppe Arcimboldo's fruit and vegetable based portraits, not to mention roots in three-dimensional art in sculpture. Today's story starts much more recently, finding roots to this 21st Century phenomenon in the 20th Century.

This story starts with the 1917 Russian Revolution, in which radical socialist Bolsheviks took Russia out of the World War, to turn to winning an internal civil war that lasted until 1920. Most of the Russian avant-garde enthusiastically supported the Bolsheviks, who in turn supported them, one of the main players being Aleksandr Rodchenko. Rodchenko initially used drafting tools to make abstract drawings, and eventually

renounced painting as basically selfish and condemned self-expression as socially irresponsible. In 1921, he helped launch the **Constructivists**, committed to quitting studio art and going “into the factory, where the real body of life is made.”

Now, instead of artists expressing themselves or aesthetic issues, there were politically committed artists creating useful objects and promoting the aims of society. Not all Russian Modernists were willing to give up traditional art forms. El Lissitzky tried to fit the formalism into a new imperative that art be useful in the social order. By 1919, he was using supermatist vocabulary for propoganda posters and a new type of art called the **Proun** (pronounced “pro-oon”). Most of **Proun** art were paintings or prints, but a few were spaces qualifying as early **installation art**. That is, art/artwork created for a specific site, especially gallery or outdoor area to create a total environment.

Post WWII architects looking for fresh solutions to the persistent challenge of urban housing engaged pioneers of the **International Style (Le Corbusier)**. Desire for economy led to interest in use of standard, prefabricated elements for construction in houses and apartment buildings.

Jump ahead to the 1950’s when artists were now looking for new ways to link their art to the real world. This generation of artists saw growing waves of material posterity at the time the western world healed from war’s destruction. This led to art that was less serious and at times even downright playful. The movements resulting were **Assemblage, Happenings, and Pop Art**.

Assemblage uses found objects, some that may be mass-produced. **Robert Rauschenberg** was one notable, and precocious student of this trend. He began finding ways to “work in the gap between art and life.” One of his exhibitions consisted of the viewers’ shadows on blank canvasses in 1951, later leading to his “Combines” of 1955-60 combining painting and sculpture, creating works of art that was to some extent out of his control, cheerfully accepting the chaos and unpredictability of the modern urban experience.

John Cage, Jasper Johns, and Rauschenberg collaborated on several **theatrical events** in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s that may be the most perfect assemblages. These events included dancers from Merce Cunningham Dance Company which specialized in making dance out of everyday actions. No one involved had prior knowledge of what any of the other contributors were planning before the actual event, therefore the result was a multimedia event of legendary unpredictability.

Happenings (not the commonly thought of 1960’s Happenings of a different type) were essentially scripted events that took place over a predetermined time period, such as Jackson Pollock’s physical enactment of making his art.

Between 1955 and 1965, some artists made the move into the real world by “borrowing” mass-produced imagery and techniques: **Pop Art**.

The **Minimalist** Donald Judd in the 1960’s searched for the maximun simplicity and clarity created by actual shapes. He arranged such shapes in rows, having used industrial materials and technique. Some minimalists struggled with the idea of banishing all personal meaning from their work and grappling with it created even more innovative pieces.

Then there was the Tokyo-based **Fluxus** (Greek for “flowing”) group of the early 1960’s that included John Cage, Yoko Ono, and Nam June Paik. The American Cage, mentioned earlier in the discussion on performance art, was not only a composer, but also a performer, aesthetician, Neo-Dadist, and student of Daoism and Zen Buddhism. He was a huge influence on the members of the international group called Fluxus. Fluxus attempted to promote living art and to counter the separation of art and life.

Conceptual and **Performance Art** took art to new limits, but always within the confines of a gallery or museum. In the early 1970’s, some artists began considering what art could do if removed from these traditional settings. There was already one precedent in the world of public murals. But what about using the earth as a medium and showcase? Could earth be a medium? Could one shape a site or do something on it? Acting in part on political impulse of getting away from the art market and in part on the modern impulse to throw out conventions - and, no doubt influenced by the emerging ecological concerns of the era - many sculptors began working outdoors with raw earth-found materials. This new category of art making called **Earthworks** pioneered a site-specific sculpture designed for specific places often outdoors. Examples include Robert Smithson’s 1969-70 “Spiral Jetty” in Great Salt Lake, Utah, and Christo and Jeanne-Claude’s 1972-76 “Running Fence” in California’s Sonoma and Marin counties.

The conceptual and site-specific art now signaled an end of an era: avant-garde lost its distinctiveness as a source of innovation. Just as Modern Art arrived with transition to an industrial society, Post-Modern is heralded by a post-industrial society.

Post modern sculptures have gradually reinvested work with the resonances of 3-D art, working in any medium that can be shaped into a 3-D piece, such as thrown away plastic bottles and aluminum cans.

One socially-minded artist is David Hammons (born 1943). He is critical of the gallery system and feels that there is a lack of challenging content in art shows, believing that only street art is uncontaminated by commerce and therefore can still jolt people awake.

Landscape design entered the postmodern phase via the work of Ken Smith in 2005 when, during MOMA’s expansion, he was asked to landscape gardens on the museum roof spaces. The caveat: these spaces were not planned to be accessible from inside the building; therefore the garden had to be maintenance-free. The goal was to decorate the roof so it was less unsightly to those in adjacent, overlooking buildings.

This has been a super quick (and hopefully not too incomplete) overview of the 20th Century art movements leading to one of the latest art forms: the Pop-Up Park.

To get this to you without even more delay, I’ve purposefully left out images. However, the vast majority of this information - and subsequently associated images - are from Stokstad, Vol. 6.

Other resources included [Art Beyond the West](#), Michael Kampen O’Riley; [Art on the Cutting Edge](#), Lea Vergine; and a variety of websites.

The End