

Art crossing Hiroshima Project 2001, spring as an urban development strategy

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1) Hiroshima City, an overview

At 8:15 on August 6, 1945, the Atomic bomb exploded approximately 580 meters above the center of Hiroshima, instantly killing over one hundred forty thousands people, and leaving hundreds of thousands in agony from the aftereffects of the radiation.

Since then, the city has recovered and developed as a city that is famous for the A-bomb destruction it suffered. Known worldwide, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Ceremony is held each year to comfort the souls of victims and to pray for everlasting peace. During the ceremony, held in front of the Memorial Cenotaph in Peace Memorial Park, a Peace Declaration, i.e., a continuing appeal for the abolition of nuclear weapons and the achievement of everlasting world peace is delivered to the world, by the mayor of Hiroshima. The site for the ceremony, the Peace Memorial Park, is located in the center of the city and has a number of other features, including a large number of art monuments built in hopes of world peace, Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, in which are displayed photographs of Hiroshima taken before and after the disaster, and the A-bomb Dome, now a world heritage site.

The A-bomb-Dome was originally constructed in 1915 as the Hiroshima Commercial Exhibition Hall. It was designed by Czech architect, Jan Letzel. This bold European-style building with its oval dome and undulating walls was the symbol of the city.

The explosion of the A-bomb, instantly devastated the building, burning it in its entirety. The fire blew in from the ceiling, but because the air blast came from almost directly overhead, a portion of the wall escaped collapse, leaving a lasting symbol distinctively topped by the dome's steel frame. This ruin is the "Public Art" of Hiroshima City a symbolic memorial of the tragedy, although many public works of art, mainly sculpture have been commissioned and installed around it since the 1950's.

Though the city is known as the A-bomb city, Hiroshima has a rich cultural and historical background. About 1000 years ago, the city was already known as an important political and economic center of the mid-western region of Japan. Hiroshima Castle, a magnificent flatland castle located in the Ota River delta, was constructed in the late fifteenth century and symbolizes the rich cultural, artistic, and sociological history of the city.

The city flourished as a Center hub of the mid- western region of Japan over for 1,000 years, and it abounds in traditional Japanese cooking, craft-arts, temples and shrines. Also, a fact not well-known world wide, is that Mazda cars are manufactured in Hiroshima. The total value of manufactured products shipped by the auto-industry was about 7.5 billion \$U.S. (1997 statistical survey "Industry of Hiroshima").



2) The Revitalization Plan and City Center Development Project (Kamiya-cho Project)

Although, Hiroshima has a strong industrial, historical, and cultural background, in addition to being internationally known for its A-bomb memories, the city is worried by the diminishing creativity and vitality of the central area of the city owing to prolonged economic recession, as well as the sprawling dimensions that motorization has brought to the city center. There are several other major projects covered by the revitalization plan for the city, however, it was the Kamiya-cho Project that was the first to be undertaken.

Kamiya-cho, partly because of the traffic congestion and the general aging of the facilities, has been suffering a its decline in popularity over the past 10 years. It is and has been, however, the economic and cultural center, not mention the social hub, of the city following the Second World War, surrounded as it is by the prefectural government building, museums, and the Peace Park mentioned earlier. In addition, Kamiya-cho serves a pivotal role in public transportation (buses, street trams, and the new transportation system “Astram Line,” which is a new monorail connecting the city center with the suburbs). Astram Line turned out to be one of the major sites of the Art Crossing exhibition.

The site is located under the intersection of City Center Avenue. The budget for the construction was estimated at over 100 billion yen. The total construction of floor space amounts to 24,930?, and the underground corridors run for distance of 225m and 390m, crossing under the avenues that tun above ground. Over 90 shops are due to be housed there. The developer is the Kamiya-cho Underground Development Corporation, a jointly capitalized venture by the city government and local private sectors subsidized by the National Construction Ministry.

The construction of Kamiya-cho underground shopping center was planned in 1991 and started in 1995. The project was conceived mainly for as an economic urban development strategy for the are. Since it was located at the most prestigious place in Hiroshima area, it drew wide public attentions and expectations as the most advanced shopping mall amalgamating culture, information, and fashion. As the construction progressed, however, discussion about needs for public art arose among city officials, professors from Hiroshima City University, as well as the architects responsible for the project.

In 1992, the Public Design Committee, led by professor Ohi of Hiroshima City University, city government officials, and project architects, was formed to determine the principal concept of public art for the Kamiya-cho development. “Energy from/to Underground” was finalized as the title of the public art concept. The concept consists of three elements: the energy from above the ground, representing the vitality of the daily life of citizens; the energy from the underground, connoting layers of historical culture, art, politics and the lives of past citizens; the energy of the past and present culminating in the construction of the project.

Given the concept of the public art, a competition to designate seven professional art planners was held. Town Art Corporation in





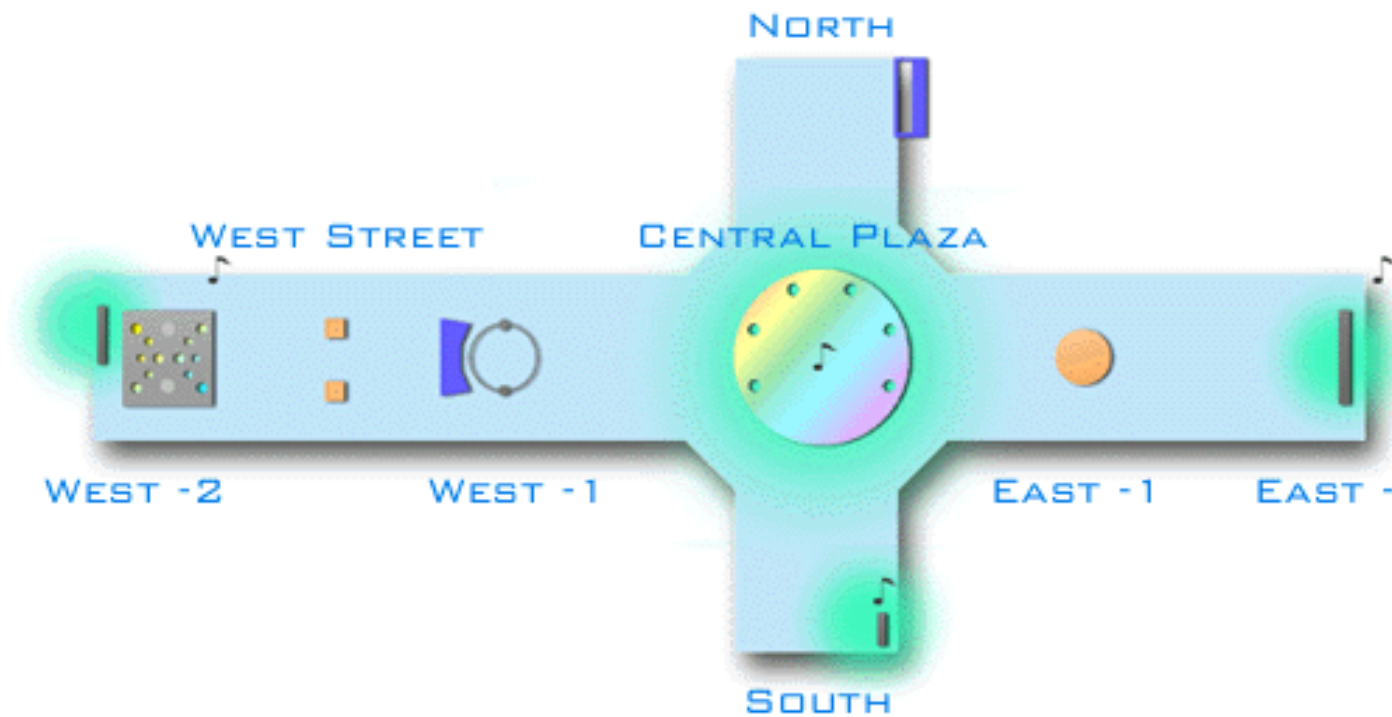
Tokyo, Japan, (Y.Kudo, A. Nishiwaki, S. Amano) was selected to undertake the task of the planning and installation of the public art project.

Discussion started within the newly formed committee consisting of professors, city government officials, the selected art planners and the project architects. The ideas underlining the concept of public art as follows:

- 1) In awareness that the existing public works of art in Hiroshima City are basically memorials relating to the A-bomb, Hiroshima's past, the public art to be installed in Kamiya-cho has to be art that opens up mind and heart of citizens to their future, i.e., the 21st century.
- 2) Artists to be chosen should be invited from not only Hiroshima or Japan but from the world over. Publicity by inviting artists from all over the world is meaningful, in that it is effective in promoting the city for an urban development purposes.
- 3) Not only permanent public art, but temporary public art is necessary to attract the attention and interest of the citizens and professional artists. This temporary public art section was later named "Hiroshima Art Crossing 2000 spring." (This case study focuses on this temporary art exhibition, Art Crossing Hiroshima as an urban development strategy.)

The ground plan of the Kamiya-cho site is shown below.

Seven sites, which are plazas of the mall, were selected. Works of art enhancing interaction and communication among citizens have been commissioned from one American artist and two Japanese artists. Five pieces by Glen Allen are in the form of video art accompanied by sound and music composed by the same artist. Stone fountain sculpture is by Akira Kowatari, and back-lit pavement art actuated by sensing the movement of pedestrians is done by T. Fujiwara. Another four mall objects built into the floor were commissioned from four graduate students at Hiroshima City University. The final works



are shown below.

During the process of commissioning art works, discussion concerning needs for the temporary art exhibition got under way among professors, the city officials, and the public art planner (Town Art Co., Ltd.).

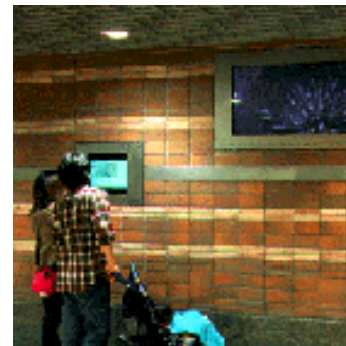
4) Concept and Realization of a Temporary Art Event, “Art Crossing Hiroshima Project 2001, Spring.”

During the process of commissioning these public art works, given the frequent argument that public art leads to further discussion of public participation, urban vitalization etc, several issues arose which were submitted to the committee.

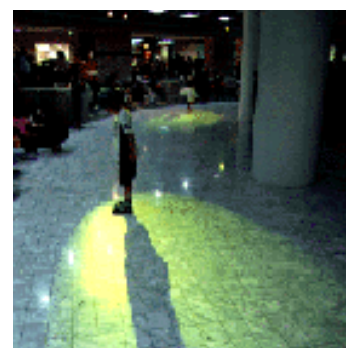
Of these, three major issues were adopted by the committee, which discussed how they could best be achieved. The three issues were:

- 1) How to preserve blocks used as temporary pavement during the construction of Kamiya-cho junction, which were to be displaced after completion.
- 2) The local artists lamented the lack of exhibition spaces for their activities. They needed and longed to find untraditional spaces for their exhibitions.
- 3) The transportation authority of the city government needed further publicity of their ten year old mono-rail line, “Astram Line,” whose terminal is Kamiya-cho junction.

The three issues described above were not related to each other



Time Scape: Glen Allen



Ripple: Akira Kowatari

but were implicitly and directly relevant to the completion of the public art at Kamiya-cho. The committee argued two alternatives: one was to incorporate the three issues in the expression of permanent public art, while the other, was to plan a temporary art event to coincide with the opening of the Kamiya-cho development. The latter seemed to have the intrinsic power to invigorate, public participation in the public activities, although this might conceivably be only transient.

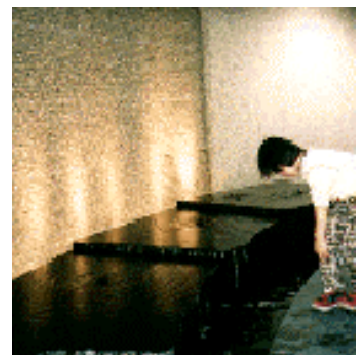
The committee discussed possible sites for the temporary art exhibition and concluded on following four sites in the city. Firstly, the committee chose the open space in Hiroshima University as the site for the preservation of the pavement blocks removed from the city center (Kamiya-cho) construction site. Professor. Kenji Ohi proposed the relocation of pavement blocks to the campus open space. His comments go broadly as follows:

Imagine you are swimming. Something at the bottom of the sea catches your eye, a glittering, sparkling but indeterminate something. You decide to bring it to the surface, to take a closer look at it. This project started with the same motivation, to pull something, something that caught people's eyes, out of the everyday life and spaces of a city (Hiroshima) and take a closer look at it. In this case, that something was a large quantity of industrial waste that was left over from the construction of a new underground shopping center in the center of Hiroshima, at Kamiya-cho junction.

Totaling more than 2000 pieces in all, each piece of waste was composed of concrete and iron one meter in length, two meters wide, 20 centimeters in thickness, and one ton in weight. This material was used, during the 10 years that it took to construct the site, lodging itself firmly into both human memory and the accompanying passage of time. Now plans are in progress to move the materials in its entirety to the campus of Hiroshima University, where it, as the former covering materials for a space in transience, can serve as a document, and expression, of city development. (Catalog of Art Crossing Hiroshima Project 2001, Spring.)

This newly created open space made by the pavement blocks in the University was decided on for the setting of the temporary art exhibition. Two professors of art from the university and three local artists were assigned to the project.

The University is located in the suburbs of the city, about a half hour's ride from the city center by Astram Line. The Astram Line was constructed and finished seven years ago. The line was planned to alleviate traffic congestion between the north-western suburbs and the city center, Kamiya-cho as well as to increase the efficiency of the transportation infrastructure of the city as a whole. Thus, the second logical step was to utilize the trams and stations of Astram Line. The city proposed that the trams and stations along the line could be utilized as interesting art exhibition sites and that the event could be an innovative publicity program for the city transportation system. The committee reacted enthusiastically to this proposal. Later, a city official further proposed using the city community bus known as "Bon-Bus" as an additional feature to a temporary bus service. The "Bon-Bus" service was to serve for two days as the transport for an artistic



Tracks: Takahiro Fujiwara

tour, during which time it would take in on its route the University, Astram Line stations, Kamiya-cho, and other public art exhibition sites.

Thirdly, the former Hiroshima branch of the Bank of Japan was selected as the exhibition site. The building was one of the few buildings to survive the A-bomb, but had long been closed to the public because it was contaminated by radiation. It was recently opened for the public use, being designated as a site of cultural and historical heritage by the city. The building had been lent free from the Bank of Japan to the city since last year and has not been renovated in any way, retaining the appearance of a bank built before the Second World War.

Naturally, the center of the art exhibition had to be the city center of Kamiya-cho where permanent public art works were to be installed by the time the development had been completed. In stark contrast to the quietness and serenity of the bank, the city center in the heart of the city is a busy area, following its recent opening. In total, work from eight artists was installed on the site, using the inside of the complex.

The committee after deciding on four sites for the temporary art exhibition, discussed and determined artistic genres and artists for each site, taking into consideration such characteristics of the site, physical spaciousness, historical element, geographic and functional properties. It also secured the agreement and obtained approval of the city. The budget of the temporary art exhibition was to be allotted a share of five percent of the total contract value of the permanent public art at Kamiya-cho.

The artistic genre decided on for Hiroshima City University was to be large sculpture in wood, stone or metal in view of the spacious dimensions of the site. Five artists were selected, two of whom are associate professors at the University, and three of whom are artists residing in Hiroshima.

The exhibition space in the stations and trams of the Astram Line is characterized as the space utilized by unspecified members of the general public. Such space is not commonly made available for temporary art exhibition in Japan. Thus, the committee believed that the most suitable genre of artists would be, emerging and experimental talent. One of two artists selected, Tsuyoshi Ozawa, viewed the Astram Line as one of the most modern section of the city life, connecting as it does the newly developed city center and currently developing suburbs. In line with this view, he utilized the site for his 3,000 stickers to be affixed on various parts of the site. The stickers used assimilated commercial stickers commonly seen in trains and buses, and are made of pictures of conventional or retrospective scenes of old Hiroshima city that the artist photographed himself.

The other artist was Yuichi Higashionna. Advertisements in trams and stations are a necessity, and the general public take them for granted. This artist adopts the same technique representing commercial advertisement, expressing his cynical insights into contemporary daily family life, and endeavoring to convey a contradictory message to the general public.



Tatsuo Ebisawa



Yoahiharu Maekawa

At the former Hiroshima branch building of the Bank of Japan, one of the A-bomb historical memorials, eighteen video works were effectively shown in many rooms, both large and small, from checking counter to branch manager's office. These rooms are divided by thick, old concrete dating from 1936. Alongside the video artists from Japan (were artists from overseas, including contributors from Spain, the USA, Thailand, the UK, and Germany). These artists from abroad imparted to "Art Crossing" a multifaceted, truly international flavor. While also serving as a very good darkened room for watching video works, the un-renovated room breathe the distinctive history and aura of the place. "Indeed, it is also worthwhile to note that although hardly any of the work included in "Art-Crossing" set out to emphasize anything from the Hiroshima region, the character of the venues created a recognizable undertone to the whole event, to such an extent that often it seemed as if they were telling an elaborate story about the region," said Motoaki Hori, curator of Kanagawa Modern Museum of Japan.

Satomu Saki(Japan) with her work "Shinjuku Passage," places nine TV monitors in the old bank checking counter on the first floor. She depicts from three different angles, a ball being kicked around quite unconsciously by passers-by in a crowded Shinjuku underground passage. Homeless people used to live in this underground passage but recently they were evicted as a result of complaints of passers-by. Through this video, she tried to convey the cynical reality of modern urban life.

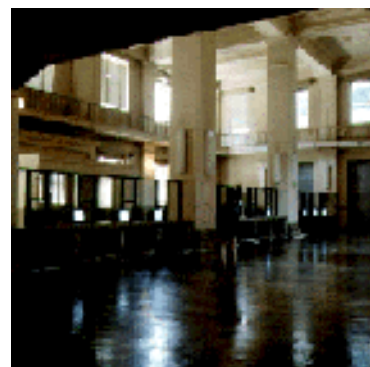
In the underground vault of the bank, Maniel Saiz (Spain) projected on the wall the scene of voluminous vapor being emitted from the top of a nuclear energy plant and then being sucked back, connoting a space with no exit and timeless time scale. "Brake-in-theater," an omnibus, was directed by Masato Wakabayashi(Japan) and Satomu Saki(Japan), and participants were Jeroen Offerman(Holland), Oliver Zwink(Germany), O'lof" Bjo" rnsdo'ttir(Iceland), and Kenny Macleod(U.K/Scotland)

Michael Shaowanasai(Thailand) used the changing room of the female bank clerks to exhibit his video work called "Adventure of Iron Pussy." This work in the form of short dramatic movies, tells a story of a hero who fights against the Japanese Mafia to rescue a go-go-boy working in a red-light district. His sense of black humor lends his video work a satiric edge in its depiction of social problems in Thailand. Kristin Lucas(USA) displayed her "Involuntary Reception," while Ryoko Aoki&Zon Ito(Japan) presented their "Nen Sha."

Another seven artists joined the video exhibition to bring the total number of artists to 18. Hiroshi Kasahara, lecturer at Hiroshima City University, exhibited his "P-attention" and did the overall organization and direction of the video art exhibition staged at the Hiroshima Branch building of the Bank of Japan.



The Little Match irls Project: Yuichi Higashionna



Shinjuku Passage: Satomu Saki



Sticker Project: Tsuyoshi Ozawa

1) Conclusion

Dr. Kenji Ohi comments “We proposed and completed this project hoping that citizens would be able to explore what it is to express themselves in the city against its cultural and historical background. At the same time, we hoped that the project would function as an incubating device for creativity, stimulating further creativity in the city.” The project “Art Crossing Hiroshima Project 2001, Spring” has clearly fulfilled the purpose that Dr. Kenji Ohi mentioned above. This project connected three event sites, and one city center development site: Kamiya-cho (the city’s hub), the Hiroshima City University (a place of education), Astram Line (the city’s major public transportation system connecting its city center and suburbs), and the former Branch of the Bank of Japan. This project allowed these four sites, strategically important for city urban development, resonate with one another through the temporary art event. “Art Crossing Hiroshima Project 2001, Spring” was participated in by 33 artists.

The hearts of professionals and art lovers, ordinary citizens, city officials alike were moved by a common experience and shared emotion. This result as a whole was very encouraging. Although “Art Crossing Hiroshima” was planned as an artistic and cultural strategy to assist with the opening of Kamiya-cho Shopping Center, the planning team came to see the potential power of the art event as effective means of revitalizing Hiroshima. With an eye to future development, this team is currently at the planning stage of a project to turn “Art Crossing” into “International Art Crossing Hiroshima,” in which artists worldwide will be invited to participate in an international competition. Not only this, but it also hoped to expand the event so as to include not just visual art, but also performing art and music.

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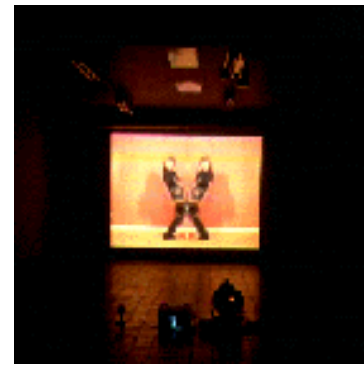
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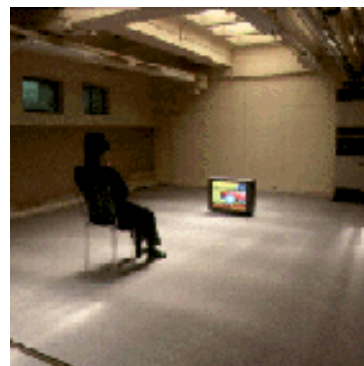
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Brake-in-theater: Wakabayashi&Saki



Involuntary Reception: Kristin Lucas



Nen Sha: Aoki&Zon



P-attention: Hiroshi Kasahara