



Public Art: The Unlikely Player Changing the Face of DOOH Advertising

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Defining public art according to [Americans For The Arts](#): Public art is art in public spaces. It can take a wide range of forms, sizes, and scales, and it can be temporary or permanent. It is often site-specific—created in response to the place and community in which it resides—and it is free and accessible to everyone.

In the world of DOOH advertising, public art is quickly becoming a surprising yet lucrative partner. While making a significant investment in digital, non-commercial content may seem counter-intuitive, this approach is garnering attention. And there is plenty of research to explain why.

Coming to Terms with a Digital-Loving Audience

To understand why public art and the OOH world succeed as partners, we first need to examine and recognize the relationship between people and technology.

Smartphone ownership has skyrocketed since 2011, with [nearly 80%](#) of adults in the U.S. owning a mobile device. This number probably doesn't come as a surprise, but it's an important one for OOH advertisers to understand. While mobile and OOH can—and do—work together harmoniously, growing digital landscapes are changing consumer behaviors. There is even a name for this phenomenon: [Digital Darwinism](#).



Short attention span, the need for instant information, and dependency on smartphone technology have molded consumers like a quasi Dr. Frankenstein piecing together a new creature. OOH advertisers are challenged with meeting the expectations of this new creature we call the Modern Consumer. We can do this effectively by indulging the attributes of human nature that are immune to digital Darwinism, while also utilizing tools that garner focused attention.

Applying Human Nature

At the root of innovation is the ability to understand human nature—tapping into what people truly desire and need. When trying to make a lasting connection with consumers in a very short time span, there are two aspects of human nature we must keep front and center: people are largely *visual* and *emotional* creatures.

Times Square exploits these attributes with incredible success. Millions of people flock to this digital billboard-laden advertising mecca every year. And what do they do? They look up. They look around. They take photos. Consumers are clamoring to look at advertisements, oftentimes taking and sharing photos of those ads on social media. The behemoth size and scope of the displays—and the overall sense of wonderment they foster—draws massive crowds on a daily basis. Times Square succeeds because it gives consumers information the way they want to receive it: *visually* and *emotionally*.

Science Matters

Science explains, “[The human brain processes images 60,000 times faster than text.](#)” In essence, we like pictures. The fact that people prefer visual marketing isn’t a new discovery. Marketing professionals have long understood that every second of consumer attention matters, and images are an easy way to grab eyes.

The real dilemma for OOH professionals is how to make the most of every visual impression, and keep consumer eyes attentive. This is where emotional psychology comes in.

Not only do OOH strategies have to be visually stunning to *capture* attention, they need to connect with consumers on an emotional level to *keep* their attention. [Content designed to evoke emotion performs twice as well](#) as rational content. This explains the phenomenon of the viral video. People share viral videos because the content makes them *feel* deeply. Whether it’s joy, disgust, compassion, or anger, emotion is the catalyst for action.

What better way to connect emotionally with an audience than through a medium people have used to convey emotion and tell stories since the beginning of time?

The Curious Case of Public Art

While Times Square advertisers do a fantastic job at garnering attention, the flashy digital smorgasbord scenario isn’t possible, or even desirable, in most cities across the globe. However, it is possible to gather consumers to look at, connect with, and *enjoy* DOOH advertising in a similar way, and it can be done virtually anywhere.

When something is worth looking at, people will look, and often *pay* to look. In some cases it’s the dark curiosity of Picasso’s *Guernica*. Other times it’s the tranquil splendor of a Monet that draws paying crowds from around the world. In both cases the stunning visuals—whether curiously macabre or classically beautiful—attract and demand attention.

Why? Because human brains are hardwired to appreciate visual art. We can’t help it. According to cognitive neuroscientist Oshin Vartanian, “[areas of the brain involved in processing emotion and those that activate our pleasure and reward systems](#)” are engaged when people casually view art. In the case of public art, it provides aesthetic beauty without an entry fee; it [creates economic value, brings in cultural tourism, and fosters a dynamic cultural energy within a community](#). This is why businesses should have a vested interest in non-commercial public art. It serves the community, and it generates economic value that can directly benefit businesses in the area.

However, there is a drawback to traditional public art installations: they are, generally speaking, static. Once an art piece is installed, it stays put. While some installations are temporary, and replaced seasonally, even this doesn’t meet the needs of modern digital-loving audiences—they desire and expect new visual stimulation on a near constant basis.

The Marriage of Tech, Public Architectural Art, and Advertising

Combining public art and DOOH creates a seamless, captivating, and effective way to get consumer eyes focused on brand messaging. It curates content for consumers the way they are hardwired to consume it: visually and emotionally.

How it works

- **The tech**

A large-scale digital display—like the one at the Marriott in downtown Los Angeles—acts as a billboard, flawlessly and beautifully integrating the existing architecture of a building with full-motion screens. This creates a massive canvas inviting the attention of anyone in the vicinity, both pedestrian and vehicular traffic.

- **The art**

The digital canvas rotates through a dazzling showcase of artwork created by local artists, specifically catering to the unique personality of the city in which it resides. The digital capabilities of this type of public art make

presenting new art pieces incredibly easy. The artwork can change throughout the day, week, and month. It's designed to be contextually relevant, reflecting hyper-geocentric traditions and culture, as well as seasons, current weather, and time of day.

- **The advertisers**

Ads are interspersed between the art displays. While consumers enjoy the free public art, they are attentive—and emotionally connected—when ads are placed in rotation. In this state they are primed for lasting brand impressions.

Benefits

A community service

Incorporating public art into DOOH advertising respects the local community, and it offers consumers something worthy of their time. The artwork itself provides a stunning and intriguing visual for consumers to latch onto, much as they do in Times Square. But rather than being a jarring conglomeration of digital billboards, the display is curated to compliment the community in which it is located.

A display in downtown L.A., for example, will have a different look and feel than a display in Kansas City. The digital canvas is an authentic, heartfelt piece of artwork the city can be proud of. It's important to note that this type of architectural digital public art is not appropriate for every locale. The success of the piece is dependent on choosing an appropriate location for deployment.

Increased ad impact

Brands receive the benefit of focused audience attention. The full-motion display installed at the L.A. Marriott has over 5 million impressions per month and is the highest revenue generating street-side digital display in all of Los Angeles. The artwork demands to be noticed, and it provides a novel way for consumers to receive and digest visual information.

Working together

Art tells a story, and public art tells the story of its community. It's an investment in economics, culture, and citizens. When combined with OOH, it results in a harmonious relationship between business and consumer.