

# The



# of public art

## *Parking Plays Its Role*

By John W. Hammerschlag

**M**ENTION ART, and someone may automatically imagine a quiet museum full of priceless art pieces created by famous artists or perhaps a smaller, private gallery show to promote a new and upcoming artist's work. But public art has become a rapidly growing priority and requirement for institutions and developers. There are numerous challenges when planning new projects, including how the new addition's personality integrates with the community's identity while also establishing an identity of its own. Institutions and developers are continuously finding new ways to make buildings more alluring in the quest to attract prospective tenants and beautify communities. Turning blank concrete walls into colorful murals, adding a public art installation, or choosing a theme that embraces the spirit of the community is becoming an increasingly popular strategy for achieving this goal.

Public art takes on many diverse roles when incorporated into parking structures. Interior art serves as a navigation aid, guiding parking patrons through a confusing network of parking stalls and floors by using themed parking. It also elevates bland, dreary concrete slabs into something much more visually interesting. Externally, public art can be used to foster a sense of civic pride by highlighting the historical or cultural identity of the structure's location.

### Interior Public Art and Wayfinding

After an exhausting day filled with work or entertainment, the primary objective for parking patrons is to locate their car and exit the garage as quickly as possible. Many parking structures facilitate this goal by using themed parking. A parking facility may use a music or theater theme, complete with a singer's or production's better-known songs piped through speakers on each floor. Others may use esteemed authors or months of the year. These thematic cues serve as mnemonic devices, allowing parkers to more easily recall that they parked on the "Elvis" or "Robert Frost" level than on an easily forgotten Level 3 or 7.

The Poetry Garage in Chicago, IL, is an innovative facility that pays tribute to a variety of American poets. Captivating displays of each poet's work in the elevator lobbies and throughout each level provide floor reminders.



**The Poetry Garage | 201 W. Madison St., Chicago, IL**

COURTESY OF HAMMERSCHLAG & CO., INC.

Some locations use a combination of interior and exterior design elements to overcome the challenges of the building site. In the late 1980s, General Parking was involved in the design and construction of the South Loop Self Park on a derelict site at the corner of Federal and Van Buren Streets in Chicago. The City of Chicago wanted an attractive streetscape but due to its proximity to the federal Metropolitan Correctional Facility and Chicago Transit Authority elevated train tracks, foot traffic did not justify adding traditional retail stores at street level.



**South Loop Self Park | 318 S. Federal St., Chicago, IL**

COURTESY OF MARK MCMAHON



With the city's blessing, local Chicago area artist Mark McMahon was commissioned to create an art wall instead. Consisting of 1,500 tiles depicting lively scenes and famous Chicago landmarks, the installation wraps around the east and south walls of the garage exterior. Mr. McMahon's attention to the durability of each tile and architectural protection from the elements has ensured the art wall's endurance after being exposed to Chicago's mercurial weather for 34 years.

The theme continues inside the structure. Each floor and elevator lobby are identified by one of the tile scenes depicting Chicago landmarks from the art wall to help daily commuters and visitors locate their cars. The thoughtful integration has made another non-descript parking structure a more vibrant and engaging addition to the community.

When incorporating art into a parking facility's design, developers must consider complementing the identity of the neighborhood. Chicago's trendy River North neighborhood is a destination for lovers of art, culture, shopping, dining, and nightlife. The once-neglected area is now an attractive location for developers and residents. When Fifield Companies began development on the NEXT Apartments, a luxury apartment complex, they commissioned several notable graffiti artists to paint a unique mural on each floor, bringing the vibrancy of the neighborhood inside. Dave Monahan of All American Sign was contracted to incorporate recognizable wayfinding signage that coordinated with the garage's design aesthetic.



**NEXT Apartments | 347 W. Chestnut St., Chicago, IL**  
COURTESY OF FIFIELD COMPANIES

Each floor is meticulously color-coded with primary Pantone colors chosen to complement its mural. Elevator core interiors, exteriors, and columns on each floor were painted to give each floor its own identity. The murals add a hint of edginess to the parking structure, a nod to the neighborhood's lively atmosphere.

### Public Art on a Grand Scale

Community art in architectural design isn't limited to wayfinding and parking facility interiors. Roaming through any metropolitan community, one might find building walls covered in colorful art that not only display the talents of local and international artists but may also illustrate local history, define a neighborhood's character, or simply change an otherwise non-descript landscape into something more attractive. Using murals and other installations, institutions and developers can contribute to a neighborhood aesthetic.

A particularly distinctive project is the Museum Garage in the heart of the Miami Design District in Miami, FL. Unveiled in 2018, the garage's developers brought together five artists to put their mark on the seven-story structure to give it five distinct façades. Spearheaded by Design District developer Craig Robins and Terence Riley of K/R, the project brought together contributions from WORKac ("Ant Farm"), J. Mayer. H. ("XOX [Hugs and Kisses]"), Nicolas Buffe ("Serious Play"), Clavel Arquitectos ("Urban Jam"), and K/R ("Barricades"). This unique fusion of artistic talent transformed the Museum Garage into a multi-dimensional masterpiece.

The design methodology was based on the surrealist parlor game Exquisite Corpse. In this engaging game, an artist draws on a piece of paper and then folds it, concealing what they drew before giving it to the next guest. The unfolded paper at the end of the game reveals the collective sketches. Much like this game, the artists



**NEXT Apartments | 347 W. Chestnut St., Chicago, IL**  
COURTESY OF FIFIELD COMPANIES





**Museum Garage | 90 NE 41st St., Miami, FL**

COURTESY OF DACRA; PHOTO CREDIT: LUIS GOMEZ

did not collaborate but were each given an area and freedom to unleash their creative vision. The finished works are vastly different yet meld together to create a masterpiece that contributes to the district’s avant-garde personality.

Another example of ambitious design is the Kansas City Public Library Garage. The concept was brought to life when Kansas City added additional parking to its downtown area. In a true sense of community involvement, the city looked to residents for help in making the garage more interesting. Citizens suggested their favorite book titles, and the list was finalized by the Kansas City Public Library Board of Trustees. The final titles—22 in all—were constructed to look like books on a shelf.

The structure is titled “Community Bookshelf.” Each ‘book’ is constructed of signboard mylar over concrete, measuring approximately 25’ high and 9’ wide.

In Evanston, IL, a dramatic mural graces the alley-facing garage wall at Fifield Companies E2 Apartment at 1890 Maple Avenue. Created by local muralist Thomas

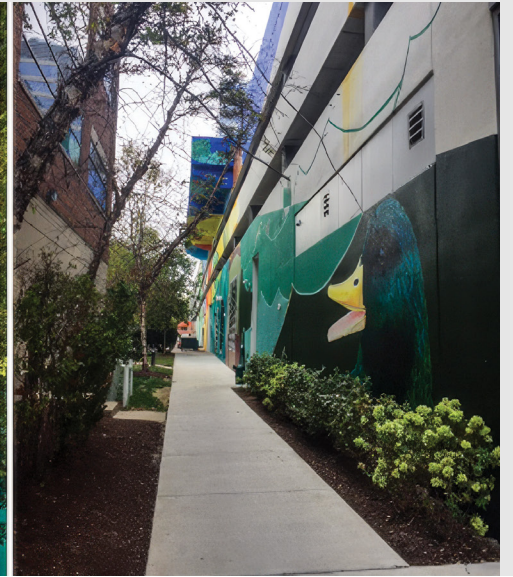


**Kansas City Public Library Central Branch | Kansas City, MO**

COURTESY OF KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY | PHOTO CREDIT: MIKE SINCLAIR

Melvin and titled *Eee-tu (What Redwing called to Drake)*, the mural is an abstract homage to Evanston’s vibrant community and natural beauty, illustrating Lake Michigan, the Grosse Point Lighthouse, the connecting El train to Chicago, and the mural’s namesakes—the redwing blackbird on one end and the drake on the





**E2 Apartments | 1890 Maple Ave, Evanston, IL**

COURTESY OF FIFIELD COMPANIES

other. The vibrant artwork gives a nod to the Evanston community, lending allure to those attending Evanston’s Farmer’s Market from May to November.

The Sinclair, a luxury development led by Fifield Companies, is located at 1201 North LaSalle Street in Chicago, IL. It occupies a high-traffic area with abundant dining, retail, and entertainment venues. The development includes retail and above-grade parking.

Drawing inspiration from neighboring Sandburg Village, The Sinclair honors renowned author Upton Sinclair. Sandburg Village, a bold 1960s urban renewal project, once consisted of individual buildings named for celebrated American authors, such as Emily

Dickinson, James Joyce, and William Faulkner. The Sinclair extends this theme by seamlessly incorporating a continuation of the neighborhood’s literary roots with the addition of a mural depicting five notable writers—Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin, Upton Sinclair, Betty Smith, and Ayn Rand. Created by native Chicago muralist Jeff Zimmerman, the mural adds a lively diversion to an otherwise dull backdrop of the parking garage.

Nestled in the foothills of the Colorado Rockies just north of Denver, Loveland, CO, has been an artistic haven since the 1970s. Known as the “Gateway to the Rockies,” Loveland shows off its artistic heritage with over 200 sculpture installations throughout town, two sculpture parks, and several major annual art shows. Loveland also boasts two of the continent’s largest foundries.

The garage—free to the public—serves a mixed-use development that includes residential, retail, restaurants, a hotel, and a five-screen luxury theater. And with Loveland’s affinity for the arts, it’s no wonder a glorious mural graces the exterior of the facility.

The City of Loveland enlisted the talents of international muralist DAAS to create the mural entitled “My Favorite Things.” The vibrant mural covers two of the garage’s exterior walls and pays homage to the region’s majestic topography and the 30 heart sculptures scattered about the city.

This addition to the Loveland cityscape has transformed an ordinary space into a public art



**The Sinclair | 1201 North LaSalle St., Chicago, IL**

COURTESY OF FIFIELD COMPANIES





**The Loveland Foundry Parking Structure | 255 E. 2nd St., Loveland, CO**

COURTESY OF WGI

masterpiece that matches the cultural identity of the city and is another example of the positive impact public art can have on structured parking facilities.

Driving through older American cities and towns, one might notice “ghost murals”—large pieces painted decades ago and faded by the relentless forces of elements and time. One such mural graces the exterior of a building at 312 2<sup>nd</sup> Street SW overlooking Gas Lot, one

of the Roanoke surface lots owned by a Hammerschlag-sponsored venture and now operated by Premium Parking.

Created in 1979, this vintage art piece is based on the 1975 pastel “Accentuated Forms in Space,” painted by acclaimed Roanoke artist Dorothy Gillespie. The 50’ X 50’ mural is one of only two created from Ms. Gillespie’s work and was the result of a collaboration between the local art community and the artist. Over time, the mural lost its vibrancy, and area residents began expressing interest in its restoration. Support from local community groups enabled the restoration of the original mural in Spring 2023 by

local artists Jack Fralin and Dana James of Best Bet Arts & Media. On May 15, 2023, the mural was rededicated, renewing a significant contribution to the city’s vibrant art community back to life.

### Public Art Funding

Some communities, like Evanston, IL, embrace the idea that public art unites communities and enhances



**“Accentuated Forms in Space” | 312 2nd St. SW, Roanoke, VA**

COURTESY OF METROPOLIS PARKING





THE IMPACTS OF PUBLIC ART

the city’s beauty while fostering a sense of inclusion. To this end, the city passed an ordinance in 1991 that states any new city building must set aside part of the cost for artwork, generally 1% of the total cost of the building. Following an extensive review of artists, the city selects a finalist to bring their creations to life. Communities adopting this method of funding public art promote their economy by attracting visitors, investors, and businesses. Thanks to this ordinance and Evanston’s general appreciation for art, public art installations will continue to have a positive impact on the community for years to come.

Two such installations are “The Encounter” and “Search and Effect.” “The Encounter,” a sculpture by internationally known artist Hubertus von der Goltz, was installed in December 2009. Two figures balanced on a steel beam high above the street at 1800 Maple Self Park in Evanston, Illinois, appear to be edging toward one another. The sculpture symbolizes people coming together, much like citizens and visitors of Evanston will meet each other around town.

A few blocks away, the Sherman Plaza Self Park has incorporated lights in the elevator lobbies to illuminate

large icons fixed on the outward-facing windows, bringing to mind a searching spotlight beam. The spotlights also cast shadows from individuals in the lobbies onto the icons, establishing a human presence. On the street below, inscriptions titled “Silhouette+Shadow” are illuminated by the lights from the descending elevators. People passing by can view the phrases, which might evoke the effects ideation and creation have upon society. Created by the Chicago based artistic team of Krivanek+Breaux/Art+Design LLC, the multimedia piece known as “Search & Effect” was installed in 2014.

Public art actively contributes to the well-being of a community while enriching the overall quality of life for residents and visitors. A parking garage may be a practical necessity, but with planning and creativity, it can be elevated to match the energy of the surrounding environment. ♦



**JOHN HAMMERSCHLAG** is President of Hammerschlag & Co., Inc. and is a member of IPMI’s Planning, Design, and Construction Committee. He can be reached at [john@hammerschlagparking.com](mailto:john@hammerschlagparking.com).



“The Encounter” | 1800 Maple Ave., Evanston, IL

COURTESY OF THE CITY OF EVANSTON



“Silhouette + Shadow” | 821 Davis St., Evanston, IL

COURTESY OF KRIVANEK + BREAUX | ART + DESIGN, LLC



“Search & Effect” | 821 Davis St., Evanston, IL

COURTESY OF KRIVANEK + BREAUX | ART + DESIGN, LLC