

The cities in the United States have been the most visible sponsors and beneficiaries of projects that place art in public places.

They have shown exceptional imagination in applying the diverse forms of contemporary art to a wide variety of purposes.

The activities observed in a number of “pioneer” cities sponsoring art in public places – a broadening exploration of public sites, an increasing awareness among both sponsors and the public of the varieties of contemporary artistic practice, and a growing public enthusiasm – are increasingly characteristic of cities across the country.

With many cities now undergoing renewed development, opportunities are continuously emerging for the inclusion of art in new or renewed public environments, including buildings, plazas, parks, and transportation facilities.

The result of these activities is a group of artworks that reflect the diversity of contemporary art and the varying character and goals of the sponsoring communities.

In sculpture, the projects range from a cartoonlike Mermaid in Miami Beach by Roy Lichtenstein to a small forest planted in New York City by Alan Sonfist.

The use of murals followed quickly upon the use of sculpture and has brought to public sites the work of artists as different as the realist Thomas Hart Benton and the Pop artist Robert Rauschenberg.

The specialized requirements of particular urban situations have further expanded the use of art in public places: in Memphis, sculptor Richard Hunt has created a monument to Martin Luther King, Jr., who was slain there; in New York, Dan Flavin and Bill Brand have contributed neon and

animation works to the enhancement of mass transit facilities.

And in numerous cities, art is being raised as a symbol of the commitment to revitalize urban areas.

By continuing to sponsor projects involving a growing body of art in public places, cities will certainly enlarge the situations in which the public encounters and grows familiar with the various forms of contemporary art.

Indeed, cities are providing artists with an opportunity to communicate with a new and broader audience.

Artists are recognizing the distinction between public and private spaces, and taking that into account when executing their public commissions.

They are working in new, often more durable media, and on an unaccustomed scale.