



*Considerations for  
the selection of public art at  
Red Rocks Park & Amphitheatre*

**SUMMARY**

Capital improvements and ongoing upgrades to Red Rocks Park & Amphitheatre generate funds for new public art per the City's 1% for Public Art Ordinance DRMC [20-85, et seq.]. This document aims to provide guidelines for the inclusion of public art in and around Red Rocks Park & Amphitheatre, a venue owned by the City and County of Denver and operated by Denver Arts & Venues. This is an addendum to the Denver Public Art Policy document. For more information, click here (*link will be inserted*).

**LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

The land on which Red Rocks Amphitheatre resides is the traditional territory of the Ute, Cheyenne and Arapaho Peoples. We also recognize the 48 contemporary tribal nations that are historically tied to the lands that make up the state of Colorado. Our nation was founded upon and continues to enact exclusions and erasures of Indigenous Peoples. May this acknowledgement demonstrate a commitment to dismantling ongoing legacies of oppression and inequities, as we intentionally honor and celebrate the Indigenous communities in our city and express our gratitude for their ongoing and significant contributions. Let's not forget that this land was theirs long before we made it ours.

**RED ROCKS PARK & AMPHITHEATRE**

At 6,450 feet above sea level, Red Rocks Park is a unique transitional zone where the Great Plains meet the Rocky Mountains. The diverse environment allows visitors to observe plants and wildlife of both regions. Red Rocks Amphitheatre is a geological phenomenon – the only naturally-occurring, acoustically perfect amphitheatre in the world.

**Civic Development**

- In 1928, City of Denver officials purchased the land and pursued the development of the area as a public park.
- Construction of the five-mile scenic road system was completed in 1930. Construction was expensive and difficult, for many of the roads were blasted out of solid rock.
- The area between the two signature rocks known as "Creation Rock" and "Ship Rock" formed a natural amphitheatre for performances. George Cranmer, Manager of Parks and Improvements under Mayor Benjamin Stapleton, conceived of constructing an open-air theater after visiting the theater in Taormina, Sicily. In anticipation of major construction within the park, the Civilian Conservation Corps, a program established through President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress' New Deal during the Great Depression, established a tent settlement in 1933 with the construction of a permanent camp the same year.
- Between 1936 and 1941, Red Rocks Amphitheatre, designed by the prominent architect Burnham Hoyt, was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps. Key to the success of the original design was a strong relationship to the natural landscape through the use of locally available building materials, an unfettered view toward Denver and the plains, and wide spacing of benches providing abundant seating.

- In 2015, Red Rocks Park and the nearby Mount Morrison Civilian Conservation Corps Camp were designated a National Historic Landmark.

### **Master Plans**

Several master plans have been conducted to inform a long-term approach for the management of the park and amphitheatre and to identify appropriate types of and levels of use. Some of those recommendations as they relate to this document are as follows:

#### **1995 Red Rocks Master Plan**

- Enhance the unique natural assets of Red Rocks Park by creating a facility capable of serving the needs of the community, and of attracting broader community uses.
- Enhancing the cultural life of metropolitan Denver by maintaining Red Rocks Amphitheatre as a premier national venue.

#### **2008 Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan (page 108 – 112)**

- Work with Denver Arts & Venues (formerly Theatres & Arenas) to create funding opportunities for improvements and stewardship of Red Rocks and the other Denver mountain parks.
- Expand Red Rocks Park's role as a draw for visitors seeking historic and cultural experiences by expanding its appeal to a broader audience.
- Upgrade existing infrastructure at the Trading Post according to the 1995 Red Rocks Park Master Plan.
- Improve Morrison Park roads and park circulation including access points, internal roads, parking areas, and stream access.
- Rehabilitate and provide ongoing maintenance for the popular Trading Post Hiking Trail.
- Support the efforts of the Friends of Red Rocks in their ongoing stewardship and advocacy.

#### **2018 Long Range Plan**

In 2017, Denver Arts & Venues sought to examine long-range needs and opportunities for Red Rocks Amphitheatre. This report categorized recommendations into five key areas:

- Audience Experience – Creating the ultimate customized personal concert experience
- Artist Experience – Inspiring the ultimate show production
- Visitor Experience – Forging memories that last forever
- Environmental Experience – Preserving the park for future generations
- Community Experience – Engaging all segments of Denver

### **DENVER PUBLIC ART**

The City of Denver's Public Art Program sets aside 1% of budgeted construction costs on new capital improvement projects with budgets equal to or more than \$1 million for the inclusion of new public art. Denver Arts & Venues (DAV) is the city agency which directs the implementation of the Public Art Program. This responsibility is defined by city ordinance, [DRMC] 20-88; 20-89. Denver Public Art staff is responsible for the administration of the specific activities outlined in its policy document with oversight from DAV Division of Cultural Affairs, and its mayor-appointed advisory board, the Denver Commission on Cultural Affairs.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER FOR PUBLIC ART AT RED ROCKS

1. **Environmental Impact:** The impact on the natural environment must be a priority. Red Rocks is known for its stunning natural landscape and geological formations. Public art must be designed and located to minimize disruption to the natural environment, including flora, fauna and geological features.
2. **Cultural and Historical Sensitivity:** Red Rocks has significant cultural and historical value. Public art installations need to respect and reflect the site's origins and heritage, which includes its importance to indigenous peoples, its conception as a Depression-era public works project, and its history as a renowned performance venue.
3. **Visual Integration:** The art must complement, not detract from, the natural beauty and scenic vistas of Red Rocks. This means considering scale, color and form to ensure the artworks harmonize with the surroundings. The art locations should complement the park's natural features, avoid disruption to the landscape and align with conservation principles.
4. **Weather and Durability:** The local weather conditions, including sun exposure, temperature variations and snow, require artwork to be made of durable materials that can withstand these conditions without frequent maintenance or repair.
5. **Safety and Accessibility:** Through Denver's Public Art collection, the City strives to present a broad range of experiences to people of all ages and abilities. This means considering factors like structural stability, materials used and ease of access.
6. **Preservation of Public Use:** The artwork should not impede the recreational and educational use of the park. This includes maintaining clear paths, preserving viewpoints and ensuring the art does not overcrowd or over-commercialize the space.
7. **Inspiration from Local Ecology:** Artists should be motivated to draw upon the park's ecology and efforts to preserve/conserve/sustain it in their designs, creating pieces that reflect and celebrate the area's natural beauty and environmental significance.

## TYPES OF PUBLIC ART THAT MAY BE CONSIDERED FOR RED ROCKS

- Permanent Artworks
  - Permanent two and three-dimensional artworks are the core tenant of the Public Art Program and primary intent of the Public Art Ordinance.
- Temporary Performance, or Time-Based Art
  - While temporary installations are not eligible for bond funded projects, performance art or art that is displayed or exhibited on a temporary basis at Red Rocks is possible *if* the project produces a **permanent** work of art that is on substantially permanent display at or adjacent to the project site. Performance art might include a variety of formats and genres, including but not limited to music, dance, poetry, spoken word, magic, storytelling, etc.
- Earth Works, Land or Environmental Installations

- May be considered in order to acknowledge and honor the natural environment without or significantly altering it.
- These art installations are made directly in the natural landscape, shaping or sculpting the land itself into “earthworks” or creating works that interact with the environment using natural materials such as rocks or leaves. Often temporary or decomposable in nature, these artworks are frequently documented in its construction and its finished form by photography, film, video, or other means.
- Artworks which alternatively use natural materials that are meant to degrade may be considered as temporary artworks.

## **PUBLIC ART SITES**

The Public Art Ordinance states that "works of public art are to be located at a Capital Improvement Project site or in a facility or other complex of buildings adjacent to such a project site." It is important that public art be sited where it can best be appreciated and experienced by the site users or residents of the neighborhood in which it is situated. If a more suitable location for artwork (e.g., a neighborhood park) is located within a one-mile radius of the capital improvement site, the artwork may be installed there, if Denver Arts & Venues deems it appropriate. Additionally, funding from qualified projects within a one-mile radius of each other can be combined to better take advantage of public art funds and suitable locations for public art.

## **PUBLIC ART SITE CONSIDERATIONS FOR RED ROCKS PARK & AMPHITHEATRE**

The best examples of public art are those that connect with and honor the space they occupy, its history and its users. As such, art at Red Rocks should be sensitive to the history and natural environment of this internationally renowned site. Public art at Red Rocks may be located within its vast natural landscape as well as interior spaces including the Visitor Center, Trading Post, Civilian Conservation Corps Camp, and any other future space designed for public use.

The following are considerations for selection panels when exploring potential sites for public art, developing a request for qualifications (RFQs), and selecting an artist or artist team to create a public artwork for Red Rocks. Bringing awareness to selection panels of the broad diversity of opportunities for artists to create public art for Red Rocks can inform the community process and ultimately benefit the final decision making.

- Environmental Impact
- Wellness, Biophilic Design and Materials

### Environmental Impact

Parameters set forth by historical landmark rules, conservation areas, and sensitive resource regions should be considered when siting public art at Red Rocks.

#### i. Historic landmarks & alterations sensitivities

1. Red Rocks Parks District placed on the National Register of Historic Places on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 1990
2. Red Rocks Park designated a National Historic Landmark, 2015

3. Amphitheatre and Trading Post are Denver Historic Landmarks; alterations subject to Denver Landmark Preservation Commission review
- ii. Conservation Areas and Sensitive Resources (pg 26, 1995 Master Plan)
  1. Soil (pg 67, 1995 Master Plan)
  2. Biological Resources (pg 69, 1995 Master Plan)
- iii. Scenic Views (page 61, 1995 Master Plan)
  1. Visual resources were assessed to identify significant view sheds and viewpoints into and from the park. The identification of these views was instrumental in designating scenic wayside locations and in delineating areas of significant scenic value. The following are primary views
    - a. Panoramic views toward the plains from the geologic marker.
    - b. Scenic vista looking south toward the valley and Mt. Falcon from the walkway approaching the top of the Amphitheatre.
    - c. Panoramic views toward the plains from the Amphitheatre.
    - d. Views toward the back of the Trading Post from the interior park loop road.
    - e. View toward the CCC camp from the interior park loop road.
    - f. Scenic vista across Morrison Cemetery from the interior park loop road.
    - g. View toward the Amphitheatre from the entrance at Road 2.
- iv. Lighting (pg 35, 1995 Master Plan)
  1. To increase safety within the Amphitheatre, current lighting conditions must be improved. Additional lighting is required in the walks and stairways within and leading to the Amphitheatre.
    - a. New lighting fixtures and locations should relate harmoniously to the original fixtures.
    - b. A detailed lighting design is necessary to ensure that adequate safety for the movement of spectators is provided, while not detracting from the performance. Creating intrusive lighting that lessens the natural ambience and historic quality of the Amphitheatre is unacceptable.

#### Wellness, Biophilic Design and Materials

Biophilic Design is a design strategy to improve health and well-being in the built environment through patterns that articulate the relationships between nature, human biology and the design of the built environment so that we may experience the human benefits of biophilia in designs and artworks. Biophilia means “love of life.”

In both interior and exterior spaces, artists may use strategies to reduce stress, improve cognitive function and creativity, and improve well-being through patterns:

- a. Biomorphic Forms & Patterns
  - i. Symbolic references to contoured, patterned, textured or numerical arrangements that persist in nature.
  - ii. Example: Curvaceous shapes and fractals that make distant reference to successive florets in some flowers, spirals of seashells, and other living things that follow the Golden Ratio.
  - iii. Associated with positive emotion, mood and preferences
- b. Visual Connection with Nature

- i. A view to elements of nature, living systems and natural processes
  - ii. Example: Artwork depicting flowering springtime plants like chiming bells, calm non-threatening animals like deer, fossils, and natural flowing streams or pools.
  - iii. Associated with lowered blood pressure and heart rate, improvement mental engagement and attentiveness, positively impacts attitude and overall happiness.
- c. Materials Connected to Nature
  - i. Material and elements from nature that, through minimal processing, reflect the local ecology or geology to create a distinct sense of place.
  - ii. Example: Natural wood grains, leather, stone and rock, fossil features, bamboo, rattan, dried grasses, cork, stonework. Focuses on natural color palettes. Natural patina of materials like copper, bronze, or wood.
  - iii. Associated with decreased diastolic blood pressure and improved comfort
- d. Play with Dynamic & Diffuse Light
  - i. Leverages varying intensities of light and shadow that change over time to create conditions that occur in nature.
  - ii. Example: Firelight, Bioluminescence, reflections of light off water.
  - iii. Associated with positively impacted circadian system functioning, increased visual comfort
- e. Play with Mystery
  - i. The promise of more information achieved through partially obscured views or other sensory devices that entice the individual to travel deeper into the environment.
  - ii. Example: Auditory stimulation from an imperceptible source or the process of denial and reward, obscure and reveal.
  - iii. Associated with induced strong pleasure response.