Marilyn Monroe Visits Chicago: Crowd Pleaser or Crowd Teaser?

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Abstract: “Forever Marilyn” is a controversial sculpture portraying actress Marilyn Monroe in her famous subway grate pose from Billy Wilder’s landmark 1955 film, *The Seven Year Itch*. Designed by artist Seward Johnson, the statue was unveiled at Pioneer Court along Chicago’s busy Magnificent Mile on July 15, 2011. It remained there on display until May 7, 2012. The artwork features spike-heeled Marilyn in her ivory-colored windblown dress, exposing her laced underwear and whipping up a storm among Chicago’s art community, art critics, and feminists. This article examines the “Forever Marilyn” sculpture in light of gender issues in design, comparing reactions of critics with interviews and behavioral observations of visitors. The vast majority of the 216 visitors surveyed had a highly favorable reaction to Forever Marilyn. Behavioral observations revealed that many visitors unleashed both their masculinity and femininity while posing for photos with Marilyn.

Keywords: Marilyn Monroe, Chicago

WHAT CAN WE learn from the controversy surrounding “Forever Marilyn?” This risqué 26’ tall, 17-ton sculpture portrays actress Marilyn Monroe in her famous subway grate pose from Billy Wilder’s landmark 1955 film, *The Seven Year Itch*. 
Designed by artist Seward Johnson, the statue was unveiled at Pioneer Court along Chicago’s busy Magnificent Mile on July 15, 2011. It remained there on display until May 7, 2012. It has since relocated to Palm Springs, California where it will remain until June 2013.
The artwork features spike-heeled Marilyn in her ivory-colored windblown dress, exposing her laced underwear and whipping up a storm among Chicago’s art community, art critics, and feminists. Yet it became an instant tourist attraction, with crowds of visitors posing for Chicago’s hottest photo op.

This article examines the sculpture in light of gender issues in design, comparing reactions of critics with interviews and behavioral observations of visitors.

The Social and Cultural Context of Forever Marilyn’s Arrival in Chicago: A Comparison with Millennium Park

Ever since Marilyn made her debut on Chicago’s premier shopping boulevard, Michigan Avenue, admiring crowds rivaled those at the city’s most popular work of public art, artist Anish Kapoor’s 110-ton Cloudgate, just a few blocks to the south in Millennium Park. Cloudgate provides a contextual framework in which to interpret Marilyn’s landing in Chicago.

Cloudgate, locally nicknamed as The Bean due to its kidney bean shape, was unveiled almost exactly seven years earlier in July 2004. It sits along Michigan Avenue on an elevated platform set back from the street, just west of Frank Gehry’s Pritzker Pavilion and just north of Jaume Plensa’s Crown Fountain. Millennium Park covers an unsightly railroad yard and underground parking garage. Early critics dismissed the park due to its high cost overruns and opening delays. Some called it “a theme park for adults, a sculpture garden on steroids.”

In fact, the critics were only partially right, at least about its cost. Millennium Park was due to open in 2000 at a cost of $150 million, but it took four more years for the completed design to open at more than triple the cost. Yet years later, it has become far more than a theme park for adults.

It has become the 21st century icon for Chicago and a mecca for locals and tourists of all ages. It remains one of the most outstanding legacies of former Mayor Richard Daley who, together with John Bryan, former Chief Executive Officer of the Sara Lee Corporation, led a vast fundraising effort from private donors and business leaders. Together they transformed a city.

The public instantly embraced The Bean at Millennium Park. Its stainless steel surface reflects the surrounding cityscape—skyscrapers, clouds, trees, and visitors—in a kaleidoscopic, panoramic view, and its underside resembles a mirrored church dome. It has become the city’s most popular spot to visit, photograph, and touch, a magnet for people of all ethnic backgrounds and all ages. Wedding parties pose for professional photographs, kilted Celtic dancers perform, and holiday choral groups sing by candlelight even on the coldest winter nights.

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Chicago Tribune’s architecture critic, Blair Kamin, compared the success of The Bean and 24.5 acre Millennium Park to that of Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain. As he reflected on the park’s first anniversary in 2005:

“A new catch phrase was in the air after Frank Gehry’s shimmering Guggenheim Museum made its spectacular debut eight years ago in the tattered shipbuilding city of Bilbao, Spain: “the Bilbao effect.” The term, which sounded like weather forecasting jargon, spoke to the way a dazzling avant-garde work of architecture could instantly warm a city’s artistic and business climates, attracting tourists by the planeload and turning a forgotten industrial outpost into a world cultural mecca.

“Now, as Millennium Park approaches its first birthday on July 16, Chicago has a fresh variation on that theme: “The Millennium Park effect.”

In their relatively short history, Cloudgate and Millennium Park have become among the world’s best examples of a 21st century constructed environment. The ensemble at Millennium Park, including Cloudgate, Crown Fountain, the Lurie Gardens, and the Pritzker Pavilion, have enriched the quality of downtown Chicago, adding social value to the life of the city.

So what about Forever Marilyn? In contrast to Cloudgate and Crown Fountain, permanent public art installations, Marilyn was only temporary. In that sense, she can also be viewed within the context of Chicago’s temporary streetscape installations, such as the popular Cows on Parade exhibit (1999), and Suite Home Chicago (2001), an international exhibition of urban street furniture.

Compared to these small-scale installations dispersed along Michigan Avenue, Marilyn stood alone, a towering statue dominating one of the city’s most prominent urban plazas overlooking the Michigan Avenue Bridge and the Chicago River. And like the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, she produced her own “Marilyn effect”.

Critics’ Reactions to Forever Marilyn

Despite her temporary status, Forever Marilyn ignited the ire of critics in a series of venomous attacks. Jeff Huebner of Chicago Art Magazine, wrote:

“The issue isn’t just whether Forever Marilyn—that new 26-foot-tall fiberglass Seven-Year-Itch-subway-grate-billowing-skirt statue on the Mag Mile is in bad taste, exploitative, kitsch, or morally or aesthetically offensive. It may be all of those things, and more.

“The issue is what this latest in a series of Seward Johnson sculptures on Pioneer Court reveals about the state of public art in Chicago, the ongoing outsourcing and privatization

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4 Kamin, “The Millennium Park effect.”
of art in the public sphere, and the increasing interrelation among tourism, art, populism, and power.

“If visitors and residents want to get a kick from gazing at a big pair of panties and snapping pictures—as long as they spend money, too—what’s the Big Deal? This is not the first time in America—and it won’t be the last—that visual art has spread its thighs on the altar of commerce (cf., Jeff Koons).

“Still, what should be more offensive is the fact that the art foundation that has a deal with a realty company to install art in its plaza year after year just happened to have been founded by the sculptor himself. Convenient, eh? Johnson may live in New Jersey, but he sure knows the Chicago Way…

“Think of Chicago’s most popular (or at least attention-getting) public artworks, both permanent and temporary, that have been sited in prominent central locations the last several years or so: We Will (2005), by Richard Hunt; Cloud Gate (aka, “the Bean”), by Anish Kapoor (2006); EYE, by Tony Tasset (2010); and so on. They’ve been paid for by corporate, foundation, or business-league money, with little or no public input or audience involvement. They have not been commissioned by government percent-for-art or public art programs—federal, state, or municipal—which mandate public accountability and oversight…

“Ever since the “Cows on Parade” project in 1999—which boosted the local economy by about $200 million, according to city officials—public art in suburbanized, postindustrial Chicago has become more about revenue enhancement and economic impact and fun interaction than an engagement with place, history, critical issues, and ideas. Where has all the content gone? Celebrated public works like Kapoor’s “Bean” represent the ultimate triumph of spectacle—and commerce—over substance, of circus over bread.”

Although it appears to be, Pioneer Court, the plaza adjacent to the Tribune Tower, is not technically a “public” plaza. It is a private space owned by the Zeller Realty Group, which entered into an agreement with an organization called The Sculpture Foundation (TSF) to program the space with public art. The founder of The Sculpture Foundation was John Seward Johnson, Jr., heir to the Johnson & Johnson Company fortune, an artist known for his lifelike painted bronze, foam and fiberglass sculptures of people engaged in everyday activities. Two of Johnson’s prior works, King Lear (2008) and God Bless America (2008), depicting Grant Wood’s American Gothic painting, were also installed in Pioneer Court. Forever Marilyn (2011) is the third in a trilogy of oversized artwork by the same artist in the exact same location.

Chicago artists were upset about Marilyn for many reasons. Chief among them, they believed that the process of public art installation in the city had been undermined.

The City of Chicago’s Public Art Program is subject to a city ordinance that mandates 1.33% of construction or renovation costs for public buildings be devoted to art. For years the program included project advisory panels and a public art committee composed of community members, artists, and city officials. But in 2007 an ordinance from then-Mayor Daley abolished these groups and granted final decision-making authority to cultural staffers. According to Huebner, The Public Art Program continues its mundane work filling spaces
of public buildings such as libraries, police stations, senior centers and airports with art. Yet prime public spaces have been outsourced to private and corporate sectors.

And with the increased popularity of populist blockbuster art like The Bean and Forever Marilyn, local Chicago artists felt left out. Furthermore, the connection to the social and cultural context of Chicago was missing. Johnson resided in New Jersey. The famous movie scene depicted by Forever Marilyn was set in New York. Huebner argues, “Forever Marilyn—and Johnson’s continued incursions into the heart of the city—represent an insult to Chicagoland’s astonishingly numerous, talented, and diverse sculpture community.”

And what about Marilyn’s sexy stance? While sculptures of nude women have filled museums, streetscapes and sidewalks around the world, Marilyn is one of the first fully clothed women in statuesque form to fully put her panties on display. What was the artist’s justification for selecting this iconic pose? And what did some critics have to say about that?

Artist Seward Johnson wanted people to “easily come close and actually touch” the statue... “There is something about her pose; the exuberance for life without inhibition, which is quintessentially American. It expresses an uninhibited sense of our own vibrancy.”

Bren Ortega Murphy, a faculty member and an expert in gender construction and mass media at Loyola University, found the statue out of place in Chicago, arguing that it sent a negative message about women as purely sex symbols. “This is disturbing to me. It’s not that feminists don’t have a sense of humor or any sense of aesthetic. But there are whole bachelor parties taking their pictures underneath her. All the shots are underneath her.”

Hannah Higgins, faculty member in art history at the University of Illinois at Chicago, described Marilyn’s statue as “art in the direction of billboards and kitsch and films—it has no edifying value....It certainly has a right to exist. The contrast would be something like The Bean (formally known as Cloud Gate), that would be the counter to it. I think The Bean can cause people to look at a lot of things differently, including the crowds and each other and the city they live in.”

In an article entitled “Giant Marilyn Monroe is Creepy, Sexist,” in Chicago Art Blog, Abraham Ritchie condemned the sculpture.

“It’s creepy schlock from a fifth-rate sculptor that blights a first-rate public art collection.

“This sculpture caters to cheap titillation, titillation that is in itself pathetic. By making Monroe’s panties visible, Johnson encourages voyeurism. When I visited it recently there were no less than three men taking pictures of Monroe’s rear. If a clumsily rendered giantess puts wind in your sails, you have issues.

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7 Huebner, “Forever Marilyn.”
9 Huppke, “Marilyn attracts smiles, scorn and skirt chasers.”
10 Huppke, “Marilyn attracts smiles, scorn and skirt chasers.”
“Monroe is presented as an object for male consumption (though females may certainly participate), as a transitory moment is creepily frozen in time. The eroticism of the actual scene in the movie is drained out as the moment lasts eternally.

“In artspeak, this piece reifies (makes real) the male gaze (dudes scoping out women).

“Sadly, the reduction of Monroe to a mere sexual object is exactly what may have contributed to her suicide. Johnson seems not to realize this.”

**Visitors’ Reactions to Forever Marilyn**

Amidst this flurry of criticism from scholars, journalists, and art critics, we set out to observe how the public behaved around this controversial, colossal work of public art, and to understand what they thought of it.

The first author’s initial visit to Marilyn Monroe’s sculpture was on a weekend in August 2011. As an architectural educator who teaches how spaces and places affect people, the constant crowds around Marilyn intrigued her. From her hotel window she could see snapping camera flashes all night long. Why had this provocative piece of art suddenly become a tourist mecca, an overnight sensation? What drew so many people here, and how did they react?

Our research team, two graduate students and a faculty member, returned to the plaza during Labor Day weekend 2011 to study the plaza in more detail. We observed Pioneer Court nonstop for six hours from 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. We shot videos of the crowd during nine-minute segments every hour.

The weather was sunny, extremely hot and humid, with temperatures in the mid-90’s. Near the end of our observation period it started to rain.
We returned in October as part of a class field trip. We visited Forever Marilyn again on several occasions both day and night, weekday and weekend, and under vastly different weather conditions throughout fall, winter, and spring.

**Behavioral Observations**

So what did we see? During just about every visit, large crowds were gathered around the plaza, discussing the statue and shooting photos with her. Double-decker tourist buses pulled over while passengers darted out for photo ops. Limousines stopped for brides and grooms to pose. Crowds of visitors lined up directly north and south of the statue, taking turns to pose for photos underneath Marilyn.

We observed people of all ages in several types of photographic poses with Marilyn. Most posed directly underneath the statue, leaning towards one leg or the other. Many visitors clung to her ankles. Several centered themselves directly underneath both her legs, pointing straight up. Many stood directly behind Marilyn while pointing up at her lacy white panties.

What kinds of gender patterns did we observe? How did men and women, boys and girls behave while visiting Marilyn? Some men stood directly behind Marilyn’s right leg with their hands cupped pretending to hold up her rear end. Another man stood in front of her with hands cupped pretending to hold her breasts. Some men kissed her leg. So did some boys.

A number of men placed themselves squarely with one foot on the ground and the other raised upon the platform, as if making a conquest. Several men stood directly underneath Marilyn, pointing straight up her skirt.
Several women hugged Marilyn’s leg while others looked up her skirt. Two young Marilyn look-alikes posed side by side, each holding a different leg. Many women assumed exuberant poses, flaunting their sexuality. Some older women posed more conservatively, leaning on Marilyn’s leg to keep their balance.
Little girls wearing Hawaiian leis draped them around Marilyn’s spike-heeled shoes. Some girls imitated Marilyn’s exact pose while standing directly underneath her.

Several children imitated their parents by pointing up Marilyn’s skirt or tilting their heads back to look up her skirt. The reverse was also true: one boy showed his mother how to pose
pointing and looking up her skirt. Other children played on Marilyn’s feet and started climbing up her leg.

A couple posed next to her right leg while kissing each other. Many couples posed for romantic shots. Several families posed underneath Marilyn for group portraits. Large bridal parties exited their limousines to pose with Marilyn.
As we walked by the statue throughout the Labor Day holiday weekend, the crowd was steady even well into the evening hours. Camera flashes went off continuously throughout the night. Even during a rainstorm, visitors sheltered themselves under Marilyn’s skirt, using it as a large umbrella. We observed similar behavior patterns throughout fall, winter and spring.

Interviews

During our visit on Labor Day weekend, we interviewed a total of 216 individuals using a short survey of 13 items. We sampled 57% females and 42% males. Visitors interviewed ranged in age from 13 to 85 with an average age of 39. The racial breakdown was 71% white, 13% Asian, 10% African-American, and 5% Latino/a. Over half, 54%, came from a US state other than Illinois, and 20% were from abroad, 13% were from Chicago, 10% Chicago suburbs, and 2% elsewhere in Illinois. Visitors came from as far away as Brazil, Canada, China, Cuba, France, Germany, India, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Slovakia, Sweden, the U.K., and Ukraine.

Over half (52%) learned about the statue from just walking by, followed by 16% from family or friends, 12% from TV, 5% from websites, 4% from newspapers, 4% from local tourist information, and 1% from social networking sites like Facebook.

When asked “Who is Marilyn?” and given a list of multiple choice questions, the vast majority (95%) guessed correctly that Marilyn was a movie actress, singer and dancer from the past. When asked about the last name of the subject of the sculpture, 94% guessed correctly Monroe, while 1% thought her name was Rogers, 1% Smith, and 1% Astaire.
Do You Love It or Hate It?

When asked to rate the statue on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was “really hate it” and 10 was “really love it”, the average response of our 216 respondents was 7.8. One-third (34%) rated it a 10, and only 1% rated it a 1. An overwhelming majority of visitors had very favorable opinions about Marilyn’s statue, with almost two-thirds (64%) rating it an 8, 9, or 10. Only 6% rated it a 1, 2, or 3.

Those who were less favorable about the statue tended to be residents of Chicago or the greater Chicagoland area, although most Chicagoans still liked it. Marilyn Monroe film buffs tended to be mixed about the statue; while some were thrilled to see their favorite film star on display, others felt that the artist’s rendition of her face was inaccurate. Some Marilyn fans also believed that because the film scene was set in New York City, it was out of place in Chicago.

What about the role of gender and age of our respondents in assessing Marilyn on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 was “really hate it” and 10 was “really love it”? How did men vs. women, older vs. younger visitors compare? As these two graphs show, the overwhelming majority of men and women—and people of all ages—had highly favorable opinions about her.
What is your reaction to this sculpture, Forever Marilyn?
Rate on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is REALLY HATE IT and 10 is REALLY LOVE IT

Breakdown by Gender
(n=216)

What is your reaction to this sculpture, Forever Marilyn?
Rate on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is REALLY HATE IT and 10 is REALLY LOVE IT

Breakdown by Age
(n=216)
When asked to explain why, and what about the statue made them feel that way, here is a sample of the responses:

_Sample of those who rated it a “10”– “really love it”_

**Men...from youngest to oldest:**

“I feel happy.” (Latino male, age 28, visiting from California, #167)

“She’s an iconic figure, it’s cool to bring her back, expose her to young ladies.” (white male, age 37, visiting from Battle Creek, MI, #91)

“I saw many films about her. She was very beautiful. She made me feel what I want.” (Asian male, age 47, visiting from Beijing, China, #90)

“It’s from a different time (Marilyn’s time)-it’s fun–classic” (white male, age 50’s, visiting from Ontario, Canada, #5)

“I’ve been a fan of Marilyn Monroe, loads of pictures, have a piece of her dress (not the real thing), always liked her-very feminine.” (male, age 52, visiting from Gothenburg, Sweden, #210)

“It’s something different, unique-brings a piece of Hollywood here.” (white male, age 55, #80)

“I love her.” (Cuban-American male, age 57, visiting from Miami, FL, #117)

“I have a room dedicated for her at home.” (Cuban-American male, age 62, visiting from Miami, FL, #118)

_Sample of those who rated it a “10”– “really love it”_

**Women...from youngest to oldest:**

“It’s really big. It’s Marilyn Monroe’s famous pose.” (white female, age 19, visiting from Grand Rapids, MI, #89)

“It fits the Hollywood scene and image of the USA.” (white female, age 25, visiting from Germany, #27)

“It’s cool-it attracts lots of people-it lights up the city-it’s big, vibrant” (Asian female, age 40, visiting from Toronto, Canada, #58)

“I love Marilyn Monroe, it’s an honor.” (African-American female, age 40–45, visiting from Minneapolis, MN, #33)

“It’s amazing.” (white female, age 40+, visiting from Brazil, #37)

“She was an icon from her time.” (white female, age 42, visiting from Ohio, #147)
“Because of the scale, it depicts her spirit, you feel pleasure, you’re in the windy city.”
(white female, age 49, visiting from Boulder, CO, #9)

“It’s different, fun to take pictures, good Christmas card material”
(white female, age 49, #79)

“It’s really true to the actual moment it captures. I can almost feel the wind coming up from the grate, it’s very realistic.”
(African-American female, age 54, visiting from Houston, TX, #104)

“It just hits you out of nowhere, she’s an icon.”
(white female, age 57, Washington, DC and Toronto, Canada, #188)

“… I thought she was a sweet lady-I like her movie.”
(white female, age 65+, visiting from Trenton, NY, #69)

Sample of those who rated it a “1”–“really hate it”

The only man:

“It’s a distraction.”
(white male, age 20+, from Chicago, IL, #163)

Sample of those who rated it a “1”–“really hate it”

The only women:

“It’s offensive, her butt is showing…”
(white female, age 24, visiting from Lombard, IL, #35)

“It has no importance to me, women in our society should not be looking at Marilyn Monroe as a role model. This status is actually degrading. It shows that being “sexy” is something that women should try to inspire to be, which is why our society is messed up.”
(white female, age 24, visiting from Chicago suburbs, #129)

Did repeated exposure to the statue influence visitors’ opinions? While the vast majority (77%) of our survey respondents were visiting for the first time, a few had seen Forever Marilyn many times. Those who had seen it most often included tour bus operators and ticket takers stationed directly west of the plaza. One respondent had seen it over 100 times. Others who had seen it repeatedly worked nearby. Of the 50 respondents who had seen it more than once, 26% gave it a 10, signifying that they “really like it a lot more”, 30% felt the same about it.

When we asked respondents from outside Chicago if they could picture this sculpture in the middle of their downtown, 61% said no, while 36% said yes. When asked why or why not, here are some of their responses.
No, It Would Not Fit

Most attributed conservatism, urban size/scale, or the relevance/controversial nature of the subject matter as reasons why Marilyn would not fit in their neighborhoods.

“Fidel Castro won’t allow it.” (white female, age 35, visiting from Cuba)

“The skirt is pulled up, it’s not appropriate for kids, the scale is for a big city.” (African-American male, age 30, visiting from Indiana)

“No fun allowed in DC.” (white male, age 28, visiting from Washington, DC)

“Feminists would get upset.” (white female, age 37, visiting from San Francisco, CA)

“We’re in the Bible Belt.” (white female, age 49, visiting from Tulsa, OK)

Yes, It Would Fit

People who could envision Marilyn in their downtowns saw the piece as beautiful and fit for progressive communities that appreciate art.

“Our city is progressive, we’re used to having art installations for public viewing.” (African-Canadian female, age 41, visiting from Canada)

Conclusion

So what does it all mean? Forever Marilyn’s visit to Chicago raises some fascinating issues that question the role of public art in prominent urban locales. Among these are the role of city streets and sexual geography, feminist politics and claiming public space, and the role of triangulation in social urban spaces.

Marilyn’s relevance to the role of city streets and sexual geography can be viewed from the perspective of architectural educator Leslie Weisman in her landmark book, Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment.

“Few women, whether they like it or not, escape the silent eyes, ‘friendly’ comments, blown kisses, clucks, whistles, and obscene gestures men presume they can impose upon any woman passing by. Such invasive male behavior violates a woman’s self/other boundary, leaving her enraged, startled, humiliated, and unable to control her own privacy.”

Marilyn’s presence on Pioneer Court, as a stationary object unable to move or protect herself, allowed men to freely express themselves by kissing her legs, wrapping their arms around them, and standing underneath her to take a peek at her panties. The artwork became a platform through which men could express their masculinity, giving them license to exploit Marilyn Monroe’s femininity.

As Weisman put it, “If the fear of sexual harassment on the street causes women stress, the fear of rape keeps women off the streets at night... Eventually women come to understand that the public streets and parks belong to men.”

Ironically, Marilyn’s presence on Pioneer Court and the constant crowds surrounding her helped make the plaza safer for women, especially throughout the wee hours of the night. Might the observed male behavior be a masculine attempt to take back the public space in Pioneer Court that she claimed for her own?

Regarding feminist politics and claiming public space, according to Weisman, “city streets operate as theaters of social action in which women and others without social power are cast as marginalized ‘social deviants.’”

One might claim that Forever Marilyn negotiated public space for women on Pioneer Court, providing an identifiable area within the public realm for women to unleash their femininity, often in flamboyant ways.

As Weisman explains, “The denial of women’s rights as citizens to equal access to public space—and of the psychological and physical freedom to use it in safety—has made public space, not infrequently, the testing ground of challenges to male authority and power.”

We observed scores of men posing as if they were groping Marilyn’s breasts and buttocks. Careful framing of photos allowed their hands to appear to touch her from afar, subtle ways in which males expressed their authority and power. Several men assumed other masculine poses that expressed dominance and authority over the sculpture, such as putting one knee up on the platform and crossing their arms with confidence.

As Weisman further argues: “Feminism, in its fullest meaning, enjoins the human race to establish zones of liberation, and literally to reshape the territorial definition of our patriarchal world, along with the social identities and injustices that those boundaries have defined for all of us.”

What Marilyn’s sculpture represented by reshaping and redefining the space around her, and by encouraging dialogue and self-expression of various social identities of men and women, boys and girls who visited Pioneer Court, may have been a small feminist step toward breaking down the patriarchal world and public space.

From yet another perspective, according to sociologist William Whyte’s classic book, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces, Forever Marilyn became a superb example of triangulation: the social phenomenon that occurs when an object becomes a center of attention in a public space, something for others to discuss and ponder.

Forever Marilyn also underscores the social power of the constructed environment. She enlivened Pioneer Court in a way that it had never been before, drawing constant crowds both day and night, in all four seasons, from blazing heat to freezing ice and snow. Take her away and the space remains little more than a large outdoor corridor.

As our research demonstrates, artist Seward Johnson’s goals for his statue were achieved. People came close and touched the statue. Just as Marilyn’s pose expressed exuberance for life without inhibition, so did the poses of so many who visited her. She unleashed a torrent

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13 Weisman, Discrimination by Design, 69.
14 Weisman, Discrimination by Design, 78–79.
15 Weisman, Discrimination by Design, 79.
16 Weisman, Discrimination by Design, 84.
of public displays of affection, admiration, and sexuality, or, as Johnson put it, “an uninhibited sense of our own vibrancy.”\(^{18}\)

Perhaps Carol Kuht Brewer put it best when she pondered Marilyn’s imminent departure in *Chicagonow.com*:\(^{19}\)

“A variety of emotions are arising with the scheduled departure of Chicago’s loved/hated controversial display of public art featuring the iconic Marilyn Monroe pose taken from the 1955 film, ‘The Seven Year Itch’…”

“Why this statue has caused such outrage and controversy is somewhat of a mystery to me. But it has and still is creating a loud buzz as it creeps some people out while it pulls other people in.”

“Marilyn, it seems, never stands alone as gawkers, tourists and returning visitors take pictures, peer up her skirt and generally just hang around her.”

“Although, I will miss Marilyn, I think it is time for her to go. She still brings a smile to my face. But I think we are ready for something new…”

For over nine months, Marilyn’s overwhelming presence—panties and all—served as the backdrop for thousands of photographs and videos from tourists around the world, no doubt appearing on their holiday cards, digital slide shows, photo albums, and other souvenirs of visits to Chicago. And even though Forever Marilyn is gone forever, her memory remains.

So now that she has left Chicago, will Pioneer Court ever be the same?

**Acknowledgements**

The authors acknowledge the critical research contributions of former graduate student Toshea Drew who provided key assistance with detailed on-site data collection and analysis of our behavior observations captured on video as well as our interviews. Richard Langlois offered valuable assistance and training with the use of video equipment.

This paper is based on two presentations by the first author, an invited plenary address at the International Conference on the Constructed Environment in Chicago, Illinois, October 29, 2011, and a presentation at the national conference of the Environmental Design Research Association (EDRA) in Seattle, Washington, June 2, 2012. She thanks Professor William Cope and the staff at Common Ground Publishing for their invitation to speak at the Chicago conference. She is also grateful to her conference audiences and her graduate seminar students for their valuable feedback on this research.

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\(^{18}\) Huppke, “Marilyn attracts smiles, scorn and skirt chasers.”

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The black and white photo of Marilyn Monroe’s skirt scene from The Seven Year Itch: “The Seven Year Itch,” copyright 1955, 20th Century Fox. All other photos courtesy of Kathryn H. Anthony, Mae Al-Ansari, and Toshea Drew.

About the Authors

Prof. Kathryn H. Anthony
Kathryn H. Anthony, Ph.D. is a Professor in the School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and its longest serving female faculty member. She holds the lifetime title of the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture (ACSA) Distinguished Professor. She is the author of three books, Design Juries on Trial: The Renaissance of the Design Studio; Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession; Running for Our Lives: An Odyssey with Cancer, and over 100 publications. Marilyn Monroe’s famous film, The Seven Year Itch, plays an important role in Professor Anthony’s personal history. Her parents, Harry and Anne Anthony, were watching this film at a New York City movie theater when her mother first experienced sharp labor pains. Kathryn was born the next day.

Mae Al-Ansari
Mae Al-Ansari received her B.Arch with Honors from Kuwait University in 2006. She was a Project Architect in the Design Department of the Construction Projects Sector at the Ministry of Public Works in Kuwait from 2006 to 2009. With a graduate scholarship from Kuwait University, she went on to earn the M.S.Arch from the University of Cincinnati in 2011, and was briefly a graduate student in Architecture at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign where she was awarded the 2012 Natalie Alpert Prize for best paper. She is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in Architecture at the University of Cincinnati’s School of Architecture and Interior Design. Ms. Al-Ansari is interested in the intersections of architecture, gender, tectonics, and materiality.
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The Constructed Environment Community
This knowledge community is brought together around a common shared interest in the role of the Constructed Environment. The community interacts through an innovative, annual face-to-face conference, as well as year-round virtual relationships in a weblog, peer reviewed journal and book series—exploring the affordances of the new digital media.

Conference
Members of the Constructed Environment Community meet at The International Conference on the Constructed Environment, held annually in different locations around the world. The Conference was held in Venice, Italy in 2010 and the University Center in Chicago, USA in 2011. In 2012, the Conference will be held at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Our community members and first time attendees come from all corners of the globe. The Conference is a site of critical reflection, both by leaders in the field and emerging scholars and teachers. Those unable to attend the Conference may opt for virtual participation in which community members can submit a video and/or slide presentation with voice-over, or simply submit a paper for peer review and possible publication in the Journal.

Online presentations can be viewed on YouTube.

Publishing
The Constructed Environment Community enables members to publish through three mediums. First by participating in the Constructed Environment Conference, community members can enter a world of journal publication unlike the traditional academic publishing forums—a result of the responsive, non-hierarchical and constructive nature of the peer review process. The International Journal of the Constructed Environment provides a framework for double-blind peer review, enabling authors to publish into an academic journal of the highest standard.

The second publication medium is through the book series The Constructed Environment, publishing cutting edge books in print and electronic formats. Publication proposal and manuscript submissions are welcome.

The third major publishing medium is our news blog, constantly publishing short news updates from the Constructed Environment Community, as well as major developments in the various disciplines of the constructed environment. You can also join this conversation at Facebook and Twitter or subscribe to our email Newsletter.
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