

This project is inspired by living on a campus that loses the functionality of much of its public space during the winter.



Winter Park 1.0 was first installed in the lobby of the Richmond Center for Visual Arts March 13–14. The park is now up for a second run with the same materials in the Annual Gwen Frostic School of Art Student Show, where it won Second Place.

Responding to (a loss of) Public Space

AS SNOW COVERS CAMPUS, students stay indoors, retreating towards white interiors, screens, and private spaces. This creates a disconnect between students and the natural environment in public space. But what if there existed sustainable, indoor spaces that offered the same opportunities for diverse interaction during the winter that parks offer during warmer months? This intervention, a temporary “Winter Park,” was a first look at the form that this kind of space might take on Western Michigan University’s campus.

Methodology, Design, & Materiality

This project employs *tactical urbanism*¹ as a method for making change, intervening in the public space of campus by placing a public park inside a building. The goal: provide public space to

- 1) connect students to the natural environment during winter
- 2) allow for diverse interactions among visitors to the park
- 3) act as a first-order connection to the campus culture of sustainability, potentially through future design changes

A LOCATION WAS CHOSEN based on its status as underutilized, highly visible, and feasible for install this semester—the lobby of the Richmond Center for Visual Arts was the final choice.

THE PARK’S MATERIALS WERE CHOSEN to be low-cost, reusable and applicable in multiple spaces—pallets were selected for their optimal size² and because they could be saved from destruction at the dump and put to good use as seating. To provide greenery, low-cost carpeting (cheap turf) and live plants were bought using funding³ from the School of Art and placed in the park during the installation.

THE SPACE WAS DESIGNED to be multiple use and to encourage dialogue and interaction between visitors. Pallets were set up in opposing modules of varying heights to create a rhythm that promoted movement through the space.

QUICK INFORMATION

1. TACTICAL URBANISM

“the use of modest or temporary revisions to urban space to seed structural environmental change.”

2. PALLET SIZING

Pallets were used for their size (40 x 48 x 6) and their potential to be used as a modular system; intervals of 3 pallets are an ideal seating height of around 18 inches high, making modules of 3, 6, and 9 easily rearrangeable park seating elements.

3. FUNDING

The pilot project was funded thanks to the award of a Gwen Frostic School of Art Student Enrichment Grant

CONTACTS

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Data was collected in two ways: time-lapse photography during the pilot project and an online survey distributed to WMU students.

Survey Responses

Questions provided four categories of information: Demographics, Usage, Student Perspectives, and Repetition.

DEMOGRAPHICS & OVERVIEW

73 people responded to the survey. Of the collected survey respondents, 65.8% saw the park while it was installed. Gender was an optional response; academic status data for respondents is as follows:



PERSPECTIVES & REPETITION (SURVEY QUESTIONS 4–11)

Respondents were asked to respond to (3) statements to gauge connection with public space and the built environment and (4) statements about the repetition this kind of project.

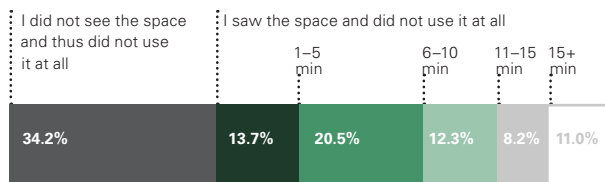
- The built environment influences me daily.
- The natural environment influences me daily.
- “We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.”
—Winston Churchill. Can the same be said of campus?
- The addition of more vibrant, sustainable outdoor green spaces on campus would improve my quality of life.
- The Winter Park installation could work if tried outdoors.
- The addition of more vibrant, sustainable indoor green spaces on WMU’s campus would improve my quality of life.
- This installation should be repeated in the Richmond Center.
- This installation should be repeated at other indoor locations.

Response	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11
1—Strongly Agree	27.1	44.3	44.3	52.9	22.1	58.8	54.4	51.5
2—Agree	40	37.1	37.1	41.2	32.4	27.9	27.9	36.8
3—Neutral	21.4	12.9	12.9	5.9	27.9	13.2	14.7	8.8
4—Disagree	7.1	4.3	4.3	0.0	13.2	0.0	0.0	0.0
5—Strongly Disagree	4.3	1.4	1.4	0.0	4.4	0.0	2.9	2.9

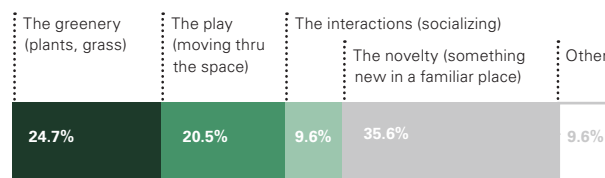
USAGE & ENGAGEMENT

Survey respondents were asked (3) questions about the space’s engagement and visibility. Recall that 65.8% of respondents saw the space. The rest answered based on images included with the survey.

1) For how much time did you engage with & explore the space?



2) Which factor of the installation was the most compelling?



Time-Lapse Photography

PHOTOS WERE TAKEN by a camera overlooking the RCVA lobby every ten seconds during the installation’s duration in order to track the effects of the intervention into the space and to document usage. The following observations can be made:

- most users gravitated towards the lowest modules, but a consistent hot spot was the furthest module’s chair, a high point reached only by climbing
- single users stayed in the space longer while groups were more likely to explore
- morning saw higher numbers of visitors, but visitors in the evening tended to stay longer

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

People want this kind of space. The feedback from the survey and personal feedback indicate that these spaces would both benefit campus and the students themselves. My recommendation is to repeat this project, looking at new form languages, new sustainable

materials, alternate locations, and new interactive possibilities. The use of tactical urbanism has the potential to provide beneficial public space year-round and to generate change regarding awareness of the campus culture of sustainability. It should be used to do so.