IUPUI launches unique global project to save world's public art

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This is the Herron Arch I by James Wille Faust (2005). Credit: Photo by Katie Chattin (IUPUI Museum Studies graduate student)

Students and faculty from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) have developed and launched the nation's first organized effort to document public art information in Wikipedia.

Wikipedia Saves Public Art (WSPA), a growing collection of articles prepared for the online open access encyclopedia, makes monuments and outdoor sculpture - from the famous to the overlooked - accessible to all. It is a unique and major step toward sharing and preserving an

often underappreciated segment of the world's [cultural heritage](#).

"No other university, museum or municipality has created a public art collection within [Wikipedia](#)—this is a first, even though Wikipedia has been around for almost a decade and now has over 3 million articles. Our effort is also unusual because we have included [global positioning system](#) (GPS) coordinates in all of our articles, which allows linkages via location-based computer applications like [Google](#) Maps," said Jennifer Geigel Mikulay, Ph.D., assistant professor and public scholar of visual culture at IUPUI, who has spearheaded the project.

Even before the pharaohs built the pyramids, public art has engaged and enriched its audience - the individuals who view it. In the 21st century the potential audience for public art - sculptures, monuments, and other works in [public spaces](#), some tourist destinations and others long forgotten or barely noticed by passersby - can extend far beyond those viewed from a sidewalk. Through the Internet, the audience can expand to anyone with Web access, provided information about the piece is shared online.

That's where IUPUI students and faculty from the School of Liberal Arts and Herron School of Art and Design come in. They are researching, cataloguing, photographing and writing articles on public art pieces in Indianapolis with the hope that the movement will expand exponentially across the nation and around the world. Dozens of Indianapolis public sculptures, many from the IUPUI campus (see [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IUPUI_Public_Art_Collection](#)), have been documented through WSPA. Already, representatives from Milwaukee have shown interest in following this model to represent their city's public art collection in Wikipedia. Mikulay and Richard McCoy of the Indianapolis Museum of Art, who co-conceived WSPA, report that they are hearing a buzz of excitement about the concept at international meetings they attend.

"As we write Wikipedia articles on public art works from Indianapolis, a metropolitan area which local cultural organizations rank second only to Washington, D.C. in its number of monuments and outdoor sculpture, we are creating a working model to show people how to preserve public art in the 21st century. Public art is one of the most accessible art forms, and Wikipedia is one of the most accessible forums for information, so they make a perfect match," said Mikulay, whose own research focuses on public art's civic role.

"Wikipedia is open to covering all kinds of topics, including art, all the time, but this is the first coordinated effort to get public art information into Wikipiedia. This is truly making public art available to much wider publics," she added.

Mikulay and McCoy came up with the name Wikipedia Saves Public Art as a way to demonstrate the project's linkage to the burgeoning open access computer movement, with its promise of enlisting large groups of people to contribute information about public art anywhere in the world, and to harken back to Save Outdoor Sculpture! (SOS!), a joint project of the Smithsonian American Art Museum and Heritage Preservation.

The full value and potential of social media as an educational resource has not been tapped, according to Mikulay, in part because students are not taught how to link this new technology to research interests. She believes that if students and others can become more critical users of Wikipedia and other digital media, they will be in the position to utilize it for the preservation of cultural heritage.

As the IUPUI students and faculty generate and share information about the outdoor sculpture and monuments around them through WSPA, they are showing the way for others down the street, across the nation, or around the world to see and save the public art around them.

More information: WSPA is located at: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedi … dia_Saves_Public_Art

Provided by Indiana University School of Medicine

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