

Florets of Steel:
An Invisible Monument to Public Space Underneath
Hollywood and Highland

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The rush of the subway doors and the station caked with the wear and tear of daily use comes into view—floreets of steel blossom from the pillars at the center of the platform. Ribs of steel enclose the two tracks running along the platform, and the greyish-green linoleum tile reflects the whitish-orange lights overhead. The escalator at the end of the platform runs over the track that heads toward Union Station, out away from the platform, out past the turnstiles, and winding towards a final length of the escalator, one in either direction with a stair running between. Neon lights and faux studio/theater signs mark the 30-second journey on the escalator as the roof swoops towards the sky and the escalator greets the black terrazzo tile of Hollywood Boulevard. Hollywood/Highland Metro Station for the B-Line is one of the two heavy rail subway lines apart of the Los Angeles Metro mass transit system. Constructed in the late 1990s it serves Hollywood Blvd, the Walk of Fame, TCL Chinese Theater, Ovation Center, and more. It is also a monument. Not a monument or landmark in the way that the Chinese Theater or the Walk of Fame are, but as an invisible monument. Both physically placed deeply under the intersection of Hollywood/Highland, and theoretically invisible. It is a monument to public space. It is a monument not to the ideal of truly public space but to the perverse abstraction of public space constructed in a Neoliberal society.

Inspired by Hollywood, Los Angeles, and the feminine form, Shelia Klein designed a unique, sculptural, and beautiful metro stop. She worked with Dworsky Associates Architects but was the driving force behind the project. The core sculptural element of the project is titled *Underground Girl*. This name has multiple meanings and intentions, but the project's core is the relationship between the florets of steel that divide the platform and the ribs that construct the representative architectural pelvis and the broader structure of the space. Klein described the design ambition as being in reference to the mythic, fantastical, natural qualities that Hollywood connotes.¹ This was shown throughout the project, from the Hollywood/Highland Metro B Line platform to the exit onto Hollywood Boulevard, where there are three sets of escalators and two landings. On these escalators, other themes of the project represent the neon and set production of Hollywood through a series of signs and

ephemera.

Beyond the art piece and design that Klein produced, she designed a piece of public infrastructure. A piece of infrastructure underneath the cacophony of spaces along Hollywood Boulevard is, for all intents and purposes, a uterus in section, “Total environment based on an abstracted female interior, an architectural pelvis. This project makes a softscape out of a hardscape.”² It sits hidden underneath some of the most memorable spaces in Los Angeles and exists as both sculpture and infrastructure. As sculpture, it is memorable, jarring, and constructs a feeling of elegance and sanctity onto a piece of infrastructure. It allows for a reading of public transit and public space to be elevated to the importance of where all human life springs. A space of beauty and significance, that is vital to the functioning of society and deserves reverence.

Hollywood/Highland is also a piece of infrastructure, and to that end it falls short of expectations. The journey from platform to street is convoluted and long. The station's exit is onto one of the most heavily trafficked streets in Los Angeles, if not the United States, and there is almost no easement between the exit of the station and the Walk of Fame. Where the space is pleasant enough, and the sculptural elements of the space are somewhat beautiful, the architecture of the overall station could be more cohesive; there is very little through line from the entrance to the platform. From the slopped entrance towards the sky to the signs and lights that adorn the first set of escalators on the journey to the first landing. The turnstiles to tap your card are in an ample space that is somewhat awkwardly shaped with no seating and awkward lighting. Many of these critics are like Nicolai Ourousoff, who was the architecture critic for the LA Times at the turn of the millennium. Hollywood/Highland was opened as a part of the last expansion of the Red Line, now B Line, to North Hollywood. Ourouseff ripped into the already beleaguered, over-budget, mismanaged project by referring to the three newly opened stations as complete misunderstandings of Los Angeles' Civic Identity. The argument is that the stations are all designed using cheap and tired cliches that insult Los Angeles. Ourouseff deems that the Hollywood/Highland Station fails at constructing fantasy and is poorly

1 Klein, Shelia. 2000. “Underground Girl.” LA Metro Art.

2 Klein, Shelia. 2000

designed with tired artwork.³ Hollywood/Highland is undoubtedly a memorable space, and its merits and lack of merits architectural and artistic are perfect for what it represents in Los Angeles and the contemporary Neoliberal city.

Atop the black terrazzo sidewalk between the exit and the temporary structure are orange traffic cones and flat black risers with yellow accents. Past those is a polished metal chain-link fence on smallish rubber wheels rising about 8 feet off the ground. Each section of the chain link fence is attached to one another with black zip ties, 3-5 per connection, with various tightness with the zip ties' tails going in several directions. At different points, the chain-link fence appears to have spaces where sections can slide open. On the chain-link fence directly across from the exit of the metro stop is a large white sign stating, "This property / closed / to the public / no entry / without / permission," with a series of LAMC sections. The same black zip ties affix the large white sign to the chain-link fence. The zip ties loop through holes lined with a metal ring on each of the four corners of the sign. These zip ties are tidy and uniform, with no tail. Public space is the foundation of urban existence. These spaces allow everyone to gather, commune, and exist. Los Angeles has a contentious history around public space. A history that is symbolic of broader societal trends around public space in the Neoliberal society.

Mike Davis, in *Fortress LA: The Militarization of Urban Space*, examines a relationship between Los Angeles and public space that can be categorized through the wealthy and poor neighborhoods of Los Angeles. The poor neighborhoods are not just wastelands for parks and public amenities but are not "wired into the key information circuits." The wealthy neighborhood, on the other hand, is also not necessarily home to public space but instead privatized public spaces. The privatized "public" spaces are subsidized via a proletariat that directly exploits the poorer areas of Los Angeles.⁴ These privatized public spaces are constructed to reflect the idea of public space. Some on the surface appear

to blend the lines of public and private. This can be seen with the Ovation Center, which sits adjacent to the Hollywood/Highland Metro stop; it can be difficult to parse where the sidewalk ends and the mall space begins. This relationship is to muddle further the lines between public and private, "No longer conditioned by an ontology of public/private, the represents a space where the two blur completely into an otherwise homogeneous matrix in which new divisions emerge between spaces of production and reproduction."⁵ Adam engages on a theoretical level that this blending between public and private is a unique aspect of the liberal nation-state.

Adam, like Davis, engages with the blurred lines between public and private; this aims to abstract the idea and functioning of public space. Where Adam suggests that new divisions and relationships are produced and reproduced, Davis highlights that the concepts of control that are presented in the privatized public space are taken and re-adapted to public space. This is with the nodes of public transit and how they relate to the public, constructing bus shelters and benches that are directly uncomfortable. Make for vertical sitting and directly prevent lying down. The city wants to bring the aspects of regulation of the private faux public spaces to every aspect of public spaces.⁶ These lessons brought to public spaces from the faux public spaces are techniques of control. The contemporary relationship with public space is blurred and controlled. Since the individual has little understanding of whether a space is public or private, they are conditioned to assume that control in faux public spaces is the standard. The nature of control produced in the faux public to be reproduced in public space can be understood through the idea of the panopticon. Aspects of control, especially in public spaces, are directly tethered to policing and incorporating the panopticon mall, which reproduces surveillance and control of the few remaining public spaces.⁷ Faux public spaces have, by design, replaced public spaces in many contexts. Nodes of public transit are one of the few spaces that remain public space, but they exist as a public space in the context of the Neoliberal city; they are highly policed and surveilled.

3 Ouroussoff, Nicolai. June 25, 2000. "The Red Line: Architecture as Afterthought." Los Angeles Times.

4 Davis, Mike. 2008. "Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization of Urban Space." In *Cultural Criminology*, by Jeff Ferrell, Jock Young and Keith Hayward, 154-157. London, Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

5 Adam, Ross Exo. February 11, 2014. "The Burden Of The Present: On The concept of Urbanization." *Society+Space Essays*.

6 Davis, Mike. 2008. 157-167.

7 Davis, Mike. 2008. 169-175.

Public space in the context of Hollywood Boulevard along the Walk of Fame is intriguing and complex. There are questions about which spaces are public and which are private. There are questions about who is the space for. And there is an understanding that it is a public space only. Walking along Hollywood Boulevard, there is no thought it's a place to mull about. Instead, it is a space that is trying to sell you something. That something is not just knickknacks and touristy objects but also an idea. A temporary structure, at least twenty feet tall, blocks the entire view exiting the metro station. The white tarp temporary structure, built from a metal space frame, is slightly translucent. On the black terrazzo sidewalk, the structure runs down the length of the street in either direction. The temporary structure happened to be for the Oscars Red Carpet. The large structure constructed on the site is for the 900-foot red carpet. That section of Hollywood Boulevard along with the adjoining sidewalk is closed for the entirety of the week leading up to the Oscars.⁸ The work begins as the media leaves after the ceremonial role out of the carpet. The majority of the Latino workforce meticulously irons the carpet to 175 degrees to adhere to the rubber underneath it, and the two sections of the carpet are stapled together. Though the carpet is visible from the open areas of the sidewalk, only glimpses of the carpet are possible for the public. After the workers have completed the installation and days are spent in preparation, the stars, producers, and other famous and influential persons have their two hours on the carpet, and they are gone.⁹ The relationship between the working class and the space of the red carpet is representative of how Los Angeles as a city views public space. It is quickly withdrawn from the public and is happily removed from the public eye; this removal is only possible with the many armies of workers from across Los Angeles, much like a working-class subsidizes faux public spaces from a different area of Los Angeles.

Past the sign is a makeshift opening in the somewhat translucent tarp. Two black crates weigh the tarp on either side of the wide door-sized opening. The tarp's cut-out portion is tidily rolled up at the top of the opening, held up with thick white zip ties. Past the opening

8 Porcel, María. 7 Mar 2024. "The star of the Oscars is ready: Hollywood rolls out the red carpet at the entrance to of the Dolby Theater." *El País*.

9 Porcel, María. 2024.

in the tarp, the black terrazzo sidewalk extends far into the temporary structure. A solitary star is visible, affixed to the black terrazzo sidewalk, where a thick electrical cord runs over it. Past the sidewalk and star, black rubber mats rise level with the sidewalk in place of where the street should be. The Oscars red carpet is both a monument and a landmark representing Los Angeles and so is the Walk of Fame. Los Angeles is home to countless monuments and landmarks. Often, they can be benign, obvious, and invisible. Marina Mogilevich, in her essay *Monuments and Mediocrity: Landmarking Los Angeles*, engages with the idea of monuments in Los Angeles.

These monuments are seen through the banality of so much of the city. The example of the Sunset and its array of strip malls and "low-rent joints." This hazy, seemingly indistinguishable object constructs a backbone for the city, becoming a landmark. These spaces mesh into a landscape that creates an identity of a town. Mogilevich examines that the landmarks and monuments of the city can be constructed from structures like the freeway to the gas station.¹⁰ Mogilevich lays out the ways in which the physical and cultural fabrics of Los Angeles are produced and reproduced not by the grand objects of the city but instead by the banal objects of everyday existence. The city's monuments can move to cultural artifacts like the palm tree as a signifier of "paradise." Much like the landmarking of banality, there is a unique landscape of the barrage of strip malls, parking lots, and palm trees that define many communities in Los Angeles.¹¹

The idea of Los Angeles was produced, from the strip mall to the parking lot to the palm tree. Mogilevich constructs an idea of what could be attributed to an invisible monument. These monuments and landmarks have varying amounts of truth and reality, but they construct an idea of Los Angeles that exists on a societal level. When it comes down to it, the monuments that are most representative of Los Angeles are the ones that blend into the landscape of Los Angeles. These spaces and objects exist outside of what is often understood as a monument. A palm tree or a gas station is as much a monument to LA as is the Walk of Fame or

10 Mogilevich, Mariana. 2014. "Monuments and Mediocrity: Landmarking Los Angeles." *Future Anterior: Journal of Historic Preservation, History, Theory, and Criticism* 11, no. 1, 35–39.

11 Mogilevich, Mariana. 2014. 39–42.

Griffith Observatory. An invisible monument can be both hidden by its banality and physically hidden.

Hollywood/Highland Metro Station is an invisible monument. The nature of it as an architectural sculpture further represents it. In this case, it is physically hidden and represents a multitude of ideas and functions. The station's design lends itself to being further representative as a monument. The nature of the artwork of being an "architectural pelvis" sleeping underneath Hollywood represents its nature as being invisible. The artwork at times being too literal is emblematic to Los Angeles and the Neoliberal cities relationship with public space. That public space is to be caricatured and abstracted into a cliché. It is emblematic of how Los Angeles has viewed public transit; it is an infrastructure project that was, for the most part, designed by an artist.

It is a public space where there is no seating until you go through the pay-to-access gates. There are no public toilets, and the platform seating is uncomfortable, making sitting an unwanted action. The seating on the platform is to encourage abbreviated time, just being barrable enough until the next train arrives. The space is uncomfortable. It is also representative of public space in the contemporary city. An invisible monument to public space. A public space that is defined by the Neoliberal city. Hollywood/Highland is a monument to public space, but not a high-minded ideal of public space; instead, it is a public space constructed with the tools taken from the privatized public space above. A public space that is highly controlled, with a monetary barrier for entry, where any action deemed antisocial by the powers-at-be is quashed and removed.