

Self-Taught artist Josep Pujiula honored at International Award for Public Art ceremony in New Zealand

The Award

The International Award for Public Art (IAPA) honors excellence in the field of public art, increases visibility for public art internationally, and fosters knowledge through research, discussion, and debate. IAPA was created in 2011 by Forecast Public Art (publisher of [Public Art Review](#)) and Shanghai University's College of Fine Arts (publisher of *Public Art*) with the aim of propagating knowledge about the practice of public art globally. The Institute for Public Art was established to further the process of researching and support efforts to host the award event and related forums.

Beginning in late 2013, Forecast Public Art began accepting proposals for hundreds of noteworthy recent public art projects from around the world to consider for the 2015 award; 125 exemplary projects were ultimately nominated. The field was then narrowed by an international panel of jurors to 32 semi-finalists, and then, ultimately, to seven finalists, one from each of the global regions.

Josep Pujiula (Argelaguer, Spain) was one of the seven finalists, representing all of Europe, including the Russian Federation. He was flown to New Zealand to participate in the International Award for Public Art ceremony in Auckland on July 1, 2015, and to present information about his work. His work, along with that of all 32 semi-finalists, was featured in an exhibition and publication, hosted by the University of Auckland in partnership with China's Shandong University Academy of Art. For further information on all of the semi-finalists, see <http://forecastpublicart.org/forecast/2014/12/public-art-review-usa-public-art-china-institute-public-art-announce-finalists-2nd-international-award-public-art/>

While the ultimate winner of the 2015 IAPA award was a project focusing on sexual violence in India ("Talk to Me," 2012, by the artist collective Blank Noise from Bangalore, India), Pujiula received an award of special distinction for his 45 years of construction of the *Labyrinth and Cabins of Argelaguer*.

The Work

Josep Pujiula i Vila (b. 1937) is a self-taught artist who, driven by personal passion, created a monumental artwork that has become central to the shared public identity of his village in the province of Girona in Spain's Catalonia.

Vila received no underwriting, sponsorships, or funding besides coins dropped into an improvised donation box. Yet, working for over 45 years on three separate, massive constructions, he has ignited the passion of the villagers, who are now working actively to preserve his artwork and reclaim it as emblematic of their locale.

Pujiula, a retired factory worker without his own land, built his structures on someone else's private property. His first, straightforward architectural installation evolved into a second, more artful and expansive multilevel construction project. Created from branches found on-site, this second work of art included seven 100-foot towers, innumerable bridges, shelters, walkways, and stairwells, and a labyrinth over a mile long.

Working alone, with impressive technical prowess, he constructed soaring spires as well as graceful passageways and shelters with superficially fragile materials. He confidently adjusted to changes, opportunities, imperfections, and a lack or abundance of materials, improvising and integrating contingent elements. No formalized written plans ever existed for his elaborate constructions.

Tens of thousands of visitors passed through the site annually. Their ability to physically interact with Pujiula's constructions energized and emotionally impacted them: "Thanks for making us feel like children," read an anonymous note.

In 2002, Pujiula was forced to destroy the second iteration of his spectacular public project by the village government and state authorities, despite petitions from protesting supporters worldwide. Undaunted, Pujiula moved to a nearby site and began again. The third, monumental version (2007–2011) was elegant and extremely complex, evidence of his maturing aesthetic sense and his sharpened technical skills. To enhance durability, he also began working in stone, concrete, and steel, and soon his constructions again had become one of the world's largest art environments, comprising eight towers, a new labyrinth, and numerous kinetic sculptures and cascading fountains.

Nevertheless, in 2012 Pujiula was forced yet again to dismantle and burn all of the wooden components. Today Pujiula—along with the energized villagers and thousands of international supporters—is fighting to save and conserve what remains, and in the fall of 2014 his work was finally acknowledged by the county and municipal governments as a local heritage site. His work has become the very symbol of Argelaguer, while at the same time it has gained increasing global importance, thanks to his innovative design, the monumentality of the construction, and his formidable tenacity.

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