

Installation art

Installation art describes an artistic genre of site-specific, three-dimensional works designed to transform a viewer's perception of a space. Generally, the term is applied to interior spaces, whereas exterior interventions are often called Land art; however the boundaries between these terms overlap.

History

Installation art can be either temporary or permanent. Installation artworks have been constructed in exhibition spaces such as museums and galleries, as well as public- and private spaces. The genre incorporates a very broad range of everyday and natural materials, which are often chosen for their evocative qualities, as well as new media such as video, sound, performance, immersive virtual reality and the internet. Many installations are site-specific in that they are designed to exist only in the space for which they were created. A number of institutions focusing on Installation art were created from the 1980s onwards, suggesting the need for Installation to be seen as a separate discipline. These included the Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, the Museum of Installation in London, and the Fairy Doors of Ann Arbor, MI, among others.

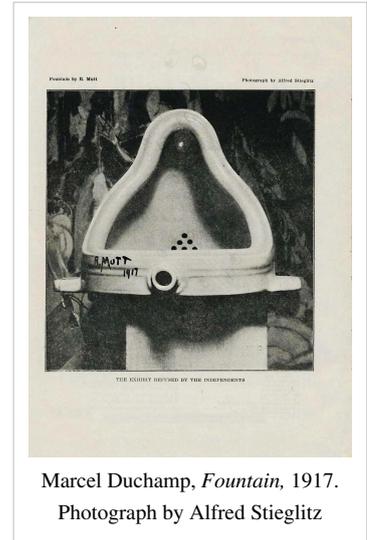
Installation art came to prominence in the 1970s but its roots can be identified in earlier artists such as Marcel Duchamp and his use of the readymade and Kurt Schwitters' *Merz* art objects, rather than more traditional craft based sculpture.

The intention of the artist is paramount in much later installation art whose roots lie in the conceptual art of the 1960s. This again is a departure from traditional sculpture which places its focus on form. Early non-Western installation art includes events staged by the Gutai group in Japan starting in 1954, which influenced American installation pioneers like Allan Kaprow.

Installation

Installation as nomenclature for a specific form of art came into use fairly recently; its first use as documented by the OED was in 1969. It was coined in this context in reference to a form of art that had arguably existed since prehistory but was not regarded as a discrete category until the mid-twentieth century. Allan Kaprow used the term "Environment" in 1958 (Kaprow 6) to describe his transformed indoor spaces; this later joined such terms as "project art" and "temporary art."

Essentially, installation/environmental art takes into account the viewer's entire sensory experience, rather than floating framed points of focus on a "neutral" wall or displaying isolated objects (literally) on a pedestal. This leaves space and time as its only dimensional constants. This implies dissolution of the line between art and life; Kaprow noted that "if we bypass 'art' and take nature itself as a model or point of departure, we may be able to devise a different kind of art... out of the sensory stuff of ordinary life" (Kaprow 12).



Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, 1917.
Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz



Rachel Whitread, *Embankment* at
Tate Modern.

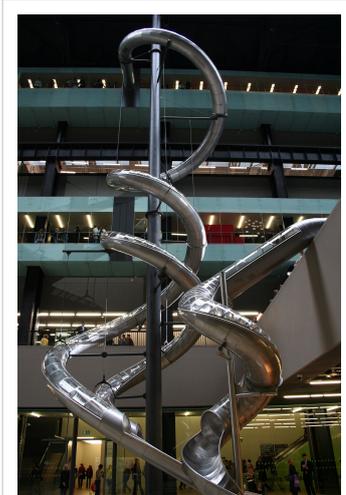
Gesamtkunstwerk

The conscious act of artistically addressing all the senses with regard to the viewer's experience in totality made a resounding debut in 1849 when Richard Wagner conceived of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or an operatic work for the stage that drew inspiration from ancient Greek theater in its inclusion of all the major art forms: painting, writing, music, etc. (Britannica) In devising operatic works to commandeer the audience's senses, Wagner left nothing unobserved: architecture, ambience, and even the audience itself were considered and manipulated in order to achieve a state of total artistic immersion. In the book "Themes in Contemporary Art", it is suggested that "installations in the 1980s and 1990s were increasingly characterized by networks of operations involving the interaction among complex architectural settings, environmental sites and extensive use of everyday objects in ordinary contexts. With the advent of video in 1965, a concurrent strand of installation evolved through the use of new and ever-changing technologies, and what had been simple video installations expanded to include complex interactive, multimedia and virtual reality environments".(Themes, 199)

Art and Objecthood

In "Art and Objecthood," Michael Fried derisively labels art that acknowledges the viewer as "theatrical" (Fried 45). There is a strong parallel between installation and theater: both play to a viewer who is expected to be at once immersed in the sensory/narrative experience that surrounds him and maintain a degree of self-identity as a viewer. The traditional theatergoer does not forget that he has come in from outside to sit and take in a created experience; a trademark of installation art has been the curious and eager viewer, still aware that he is in an exhibition setting and tentatively exploring the novel universe of the installation.

The artist and critic Ilya Kabakov mentions this essential phenomenon in the introduction to his lectures "On the "Total" Installation:" "[One] is simultaneously both a 'victim' and a viewer, who on the one hand surveys and evaluates the installation, and on the other, follows those associations, recollections which arise in him[;] he is overcome by the intense atmosphere of the total illusion" (Kabakov 256). Here installation art bestows an unprecedented importance on the observer's inclusion in that which he observes. The expectations and social habits that the viewer takes with him into the space of the installation will remain with him as he enters, to be either applied or negated once he has taken in the new environment. What is common to nearly all installation art is a consideration of the experience in toto and the problems it may present, namely the constant conflict between disinterested criticism and sympathetic involvement. Television and video offer somewhat immersive experiences, but their unrelenting control over the rhythm of passing time and the arrangement of images precludes an intimately personal viewing experience (Kabakov 257). Ultimately, the only things a viewer can be assured of when experiencing the work are his own thoughts and preconceptions and the basic rules of space and time. All else may be molded by the artist's hands.



Carsten Höller. *Test Site*, 2006, Tate Modern. Members of the public slid down as much as five stories inside tubular slides.



Allan McCollum. *The Shapes Project*, 2005/06



Jacek Tylicki. *Give if you can - Take if you have to* in the jungle Arambol, Goa, India.

The central importance of the subjective point of view when experiencing installation art, points toward a disregard for traditional Platonic image theory. In effect, the entire installation adopts the character of the simulacrum or flawed statue: it neglects any ideal form in favor of optimizing its direct appearance to the observer. Installation art operates fully within the realm of sensory perception, in a sense “installing” the viewer into an artificial system with an appeal to his subjective perception as its ultimate goal.

Interactive installations

Interactive installation is a sub-category of installation art. An interactive installation frequently involves the audience acting on the work of art or the piece responding to users' activity. There are several kinds of interactive installations that artists produce, these include web-based installations (e.g., Telegarden), gallery-based installations, digital-based installations, electronic-based installations, mobile-based installations, etc. Interactive installations were most frequently created and exhibited in the 1990s, when artists were particularly interested in using the participation of the audiences to co-author the meaning of the installation.



Neorizon, Maurice Benayoun, urban interactive art installation (eArts Festival Shanghai 2008)

Immersive Virtual Reality

With the improvement of technology over the years, artists are more able to explore outside of the boundaries that were never able to be explored by artists in the past.^[1] The media used are more experimental and bold; they are also usually cross media and may involve sensors, which plays on the reaction to the audiences' movement when looking at the installations. By using virtual Reality as a medium, immersive virtual reality art is probably the most deeply interactive form of art.^[2] At the turn of a new century, there is a trend of interactive installations using digital, video, film, sound and sculpture.



Irrational Geometrics, Pascal Dombis, 2008

Notes

[1] Joseph Nechvatal, *Immersive Ideals / Critical Distances*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing. 2009, p. 14

[2] Joseph Nechvatal, *Immersive Ideals / Critical Distances*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing. 2009, pp. 367-368

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External links

- Installation artists and art...the-artists.org (<http://the-artists.org/artistsbymovement/Installation/>)
- Installation artists (http://www.dmoz.org/Arts/Visual_Arts/Installation_Art/Artists/) at the Open Directory Project
- Sculpture Installations (http://www.dmoz.org/Arts/Visual_Arts/Sculpture/Installations/) at the Open Directory Project
- Dossier: Site-specific Installations in Germany (<http://www.goethe.de/kue/bku/dos/rid/enindex.htm>)

Contemporary installation organizations and museums

- Dia-Beacon Riggio Galleries (<http://www.diacenter.org/bindex.html>)
- The Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (<http://www.massmoca.org/>)
- The Mattress Factory Art Museum (<http://www.mattress.org/>)
- Medicine Factory (<http://www.medicinefactory.org/>)
- MuseumZeitraum Leipzig (<http://museumzeitraum.blogspot.com/>)

Installation art

- Electronic Language International Festival (<http://www.file.org.br>) Interactive art installations and New media art.

- Media art center, Karlsruhe Germany (<http://www.zkm.de>) one of the biggest center with a permanent collection of interactive installations.

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