

Field Guide to Installation Art

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Installation art predates the capitalist consumer market of portable commodity art that we know today. Expansive, site-specific work dates back as early as cave paintings, and the idea of site-specificity was vital to the architecturally-integrated work of the Greek and Roman eras through the Renaissance. As capitalism developed, so did the identity of art as a commodity, and today the stereotypical idea of “art” is exemplified in a portable, one-off framed painting on a wall or a sculpture on a pedestal. The installation genre is still explored but is not given the weight that it once was permitted. Installation work and installation artists also may find difficulties securing the necessary space or funding. These thoughts beg the question of what the role of installation art is today, the identity and interest of its audience, where it is displayed and how forward-thinking “non-traditional” artists procure funding for these often large-scale, temporary projects. I propose a field guide exploring art installation through the medium of art installation, touching upon the basic premises of the medium, the history, context and audience of installation work, as well as the theory, practice and current issues present in the genre.

The field guide will take its form as a physical, site-specific and interactive work of art. I intend to submit a proposal to the Laverne Krause Gallery for a winter term installation, possibly negotiate the use of the space there during break (just before winter classes begin) for a short length of time, or create a temporary installation elsewhere in Lawrence Hall, depending on space availability and restrictions. If I am unable to procure a space until winter term, I will develop a digital presentation of my proposal for the purposes of the assignment, and then will create the installation for the specific exhibition time I am provided. The gallery provides an ideal space because its environment allows for much more flexibility and creativity in use of the space. I am considering ways in which I can actually treat the walls rather than installing specific pieces of artwork, and how I can incorporate other physical elements of the space to fully explore my objectives. This might include interesting use of lighting, and hanging objects or material from the ceiling in order to create a new environment from the old. One of the most fascinating elements of installation art is the way in which a unique and carefully controlled environment can be created for the participant to then explore. It may be permitted for the audience to actually manipulate the work as they experience it, contributing their interpretations of the subject and any questions they may have, or their experiences with a specific installation. This could be accomplished through a digital post or through a physical written (or drawn) piece that is then incorporated into the installation by the participant. The most effective art installations are those that

change with each encounter, relying on audience participation to become even more dynamic and meaningful. This also allows the artwork to take on a much longer lifespan than a static piece of art and transforms the “consumer” into creator.

An essential part of the installation will be the use of multimedia materials. One of the elements will likely be video, either providing additional resources or information on the topic of art installations today, or further insight into specific artists and examples. It may even manifest itself in a non-objective, abstract way, not necessarily providing an additional report on the topic but serving as an interpretive prompt for further critical thinking and discussion, relating to the visual installation as a whole. Other digitally incorporated multi-media may include a slide presentation projected on a wall or individual participant contributions to a blog discussion. A blog or web page would serve as a digital version of the installation, providing the same exploration of subject but in a digital format for lasting presentation and participation. The installation will include written materials either on the wall (painted, drawn, printed or vinyl) and throughout the space. I intend to incorporate elements borrowed from specific existing installations that I would like to use as examples through which to discuss the context of installations and installation artists today. Along with these hints of specific installations that have existed in recent art history, there will be actual photographs of the installation as it existed and written information for each. Content may be explored through written material (in various mediums), objects, drawings or digital media, and all of these elements will contribute to a larger discussion of the subject through relationships of visual design, proximity and content.

The objective of the field guide is to introduce the genre of art installation, its history, context and audience as well as theory, practice and current issues through an interactive, site-specific multi-media environment. Viewers will be able to learn about art installations while experiencing one in simplified form, and they will also have the opportunity to contribute their own thoughts and responses of the presented subject through digital and physically tangible media.