ENTRIES BY VIRGINIA MAKSYMOWICZ IN VOLUME TWO:
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INSTALLATION
Installation is one of the more difficult artistic genres to define because it encompasses such a wide range of approaches. Most basically, it is an art form, usually three-dimensional, that has a close relationship with its exhibition space. It might be completely site-specific, that is, created especially for one fixed location, or it might be adaptable to a variety of different environments. It might be a self-contained unit with its own walls or boundaries. It might interact with a particular
situation purely on a formal level or generate meaning from historical or conceptual relationships. It might incorporate found objects, make use of text or technological elements, or include sound, smell, or movement. It might present itself as a tableau or diorama, or it might require the viewer to move through it, physically interact with it, or perform a specific activity. It might be highly ephemeral or permanent. What Installation definitely is not, however, is an art of the singular, finely crafted object.

Installation probably began with the Bauhaus’s (1919–33) emphasis on the interrelationship of space, form, and function and grew out of the explorations of the Italian Futurists, the Russian Constructivists, the Dutch De Stijl artists, the German Dadaists, and the Surrealists. Contemporary Installation artists and art historians often view Kurt Schwitters’s Merzbau as a seminal work. He completed several versions during the 1930s and 1940s, constructing the first, which grew out of a column that the artist had begun in 1919, in his own home. The result was room-size structures that dominated their spaces.

Undoubtedly, Marcel Duchamp also exerted a strong influence on what we now term Installation art. A combination Surrealist, Cubist, Futurist, and proto-Conceptualist, he first created controversy with Nude Descending a Staircase, a groundbreaking painting exhibited at the 1914 Armory Show in New York City. He later gained notoriety through his use of found objects as sculpture, artworks that he termed readymades. Duchamp also took part in the transformation of specific exhibition spaces. For a 1938 show of Surrealist painting at the Galerie Beaux Arts in Paris, he designed the large, central hall to include four large beds along with live grass, a pool, and 1200 sacks of coal suspended from the ceiling. During the opening reception the aroma of roasting coffee wafted throughout the hall, German marching-band music played, and a dancer performed around the pool. Four years later, for a Surrealist exhibition in New York City, he strung the gallery with a crisscrossing of twine. A 1947 exhibition in Paris included a room with water falling like rain onto artificial grass.

Duchamp’s final artwork, Given: 1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas (Étant donnés: 1° la chute d’eau. 2° le gaz d’éclairage) (1946–66), permanently displayed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, Pennsylvania, also engages its location and its audience. Located at the far end of the room, it first seems to be nothing more than a wall-like barrier made of rough wood. Upon approaching closely, however, viewers are enticed to peer through a set of peepholes in order to see the diorama behind it.

American artist Allan Kaprow has suggested that Abstract Expressionist painting freed artists to experi-

ment with assemblage and, eventually, three-dimensional space. Kaprow came to call these spatial explorations Environments. These Environments involved transforming spaces as well as designing activities to incorporate the spectator’s participation. An Apple Shrine (1960), an Environment at Judson Gallery in New York City, required visitors to wind their way through a newspaper-strewn labyrinth. Yard (1961) demanded that the audience climb over piles of tires in the backyard of New York’s Martha Jackson Gallery. In 1962 and again in 1963 Kaprow presented Words, which involved participants turning on record players, rotating rollers, and adding their own words. The action-oriented aspects of these Environments came to be called Happenings.

Other American artists during the 1960s, such as Jim Dine, Claes Oldenburg, and Carolee Schneemann, espoused Environments and Happenings as well. Oldenburg, for example, set up The Store (1961–62) in the form of a functional retail business in the front of his storefront studio; the “merchandise” for sale consisted of his funky, mixed-media sculptures of food and everyday objects.

Simultaneously in Europe artists such as Joseph Beuys were conducting their own spatial and experiential experiments. Beuys became known for setting up exhibition spaces with piles of felt, fat, and found objects. His I Like America and America Likes Me (1974) at the New York City branch of Rene Block’s Berlin gallery used his own body wrapped in felt and a live coyote as “sculptural” elements.

The works of American sculptors George Segal, Red Grooms, Robert Morris, and Carl Andre also show an interest in the interaction of the physical space with the viewer. Segal became known for his stagelike dioramas of ghostly white, life-size figures, made of plastered gauze, positioned amid real objects such as Coca-Cola vending machines and theater marqueses. Grooms’s cartoonish constructions out of papier mâché and mixed media often required walking around or through the work. His Ruckus Manhattan (1975–76) included a full-scale subway car complete with a crowd of New Yorkers and a rocking floor, which caused those who entered to sway unsteadily from side to side.

Morris and Andre, along with Americans Donald Judd and Dan Flavin, were part of what came to be known as Minimalism. While the visual style of Minimalist sculpture seemed to be the antithesis of the makeshift, often messy, aesthetic of Environments, Minimalist sculptors nonetheless modified their exhibition spaces by involving some sort of viewer interaction. Morris’s geometric sculptures and Flavin’s colored fluorescent lights, for example, were installed in ways that relied on both the architecture of the room
and the movement of the gallery goers. André’s floor pieces, made of metal tiles, were meant to be walked upon.

During the 1970s American artists such as Yoko Ono, Lucas Samaras, and Yayoi Kusama constructed mirrored- and glass-paneled rooms that were meant to be entered. In Los Angeles Miriam Schapiro and Judy Chicago, together with other female artists, took over an entire building and created Womanhouse (1972). They structured each room to address space and content according to a newly emerging feminist consciousness. On the East Coast Gordon Matta-Clarke was literally splitting houses in half. Subsequently, San Francisco artist David Ireland turned his own house on Capp Street into a self-contained environment. A decade later English artist Rachel Whiteread created Untitled (House) (1993), casting the interior of a house in concrete and afterward removing its outside walls.

Earthwork artists such as Americans Michael Heizer and Robert Smithson and British Richard Long expanded their ideas about spatial alteration to include the landscape. They used bulldozers, ditchdiggers, and dump trucks to sculpt the outdoor environment. The public has to journey to, walk along, and climb on Smithson’s Spiral Jetty (1970; Great Salt Lake, Utah) and Amarillo Ramp (1973; Stanley Marsh Ranch, Texas) in order to fully experience them. The same is true for James Turrell’s long-term work Roden Crater in Arizona’s Painted Desert, begun in 1972, which transforms a natural cinder crater into an environment that relates to the surrounding sky and land through the medium of light. The outdoor works of the team of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, such as Valley Curtain (1970–72; Rifle, Colorado), Running Fence (1972–76; Sonoma and Marin counties, California), and Surrounded Islands (1980–83; Biscayne Bay, Florida), also require viewers to take extraordinary means to experience them.

The term Installation as its own category did not appear in the Art Index until 1993, although it appeared earlier in general reference books. Installation began to assume its present form during the 1980s and has become an accepted form of contemporary art. The genre is so prevalent in London that Installation artists are now being awarded the Tate Gallery’s prestigious Turner prize. Young artists from Korea and Japan are well versed in the art form, and Installation artists can be found working everywhere from Canada to Mexico to Australia.

Contemporary Installation is often more calculated than the Environments of the 1960s. Even when found objects are used, such as in the case of the American-Canadian artist Jessica Stockholder, French artist Annette Messager, or Russian artist Ilya Kabakov, they are arranged in ways that look premeditated. In addition, many large-scale installations, such as Judy Chicago’s The Dinner Party (1979), have required the expertise and handiwork of others. American artists such as Ann Hamilton, Liza Lou, and Sandy Skoglund regularly rely on assistants to put together their labor-intensive pieces. Hamilton’s privation and excesses (1989) involved the positioning of 750,000 pennies into a bed of honey; Lou’s Kitchen (1991–95) and Backyard (1995–97) entailed the stringing of millions of glass beads. Thousands of individually blown-out eggshells carpeted the floor of Skoglund’s Walking on Eggshells (1996–97).

Photography, film, video, and computer technologies also play a large part in contemporary Installation art. Korean artist Nam June Paik, who can be considered the “father” of video installation, was among the first to exploit the “objectness” of both the television sets and the images on their screens. American artists such as Bill Viola, Gary Hill, and Tony Oursler have used film, video, and CD-ROMS in conjunction with roomlike constructions and unconventional projection surfaces. The evocative power of French artist Christian Boltanski’s installations is based in his use of black-and-white photographs, each illuminated by a single, bare, incandescent bulb.

Installations first developed and were exhibited in a milieu separate from the commercial art market. Any consideration of the genre’s development would be incomplete without considering the impact of university art departments and government arts funding programs. For example, Kappor, Samaras, and Segal all had teaching positions at Rutgers University in New Jersey, and Beuys taught at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art in Germany. During the 1970s and 1980s public funding programs in the United States provided needed monies for research and development. Alternative galleries that encouraged unconventional art forms flourished in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and many smaller U.S. cities. In Canada the government-supported Parallel Galleries provided similar venues throughout its provinces. Sheltered somewhat from the normal constraints of the marketplace, artists were encouraged to experiment in the realm of form and idea. The result has been a type of art that cannot easily be packaged.

The acceptance of Installation in the mainstream art world, ironically, has coincided with the dwindling of public funding and diminishing opportunities for university teaching in the United States and Canada. Artists have had more difficulty finding support for the kind of freewheeling experimentation that gave birth to the genre. Often, museums—sometimes those not devoted to exhibiting fine art—have opened their doors to avant-garde endeavors. In 1992–93 the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore invited Fred Wilson to
rearrange the objects in its own collection as an artistic “installation” that would shed new light on how history is viewed. A number of other cultural institutions then adopted Wilson’s Mining the Museum project. Notably, a few philanthropic organizations have begun to fund art of this sort. For example, Artangel, based in London, sponsored Whiteread’s House. In addition, the Dia Center for the Arts in New York City has preserved some of the most important Installation artworks of the late 20th century, including Walter de Maria’s Earth Room (1977) and Broken Kilometer (1979), both in New York City, and his Lightning Field in New Mexico. The center has also sponsored retrospective re-creations of the work of Beuys and has commissioned new works by Flavin, Hamilton, and Robert Irwin.

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See also Andre, Carl; Beuys, Joseph; Bourgeois, Louise; Christo and Jeanne-Claude; De Maria, Walter; Dine, James Lewis; Judd, Donald; Long, Richard; Morris, Robert; Oldenburg, Claes; Segal, George; Smithson, Robert; Turrell, James

Further Reading

Avalanche (fall 1970–summer 1976) (journal of installation and performance art); see especially the special issue on Robert Smithson (summer–fall 1973)


Kaprow, Allan, “The Legacy of Jackson Pollock,” Art News 57/6 (October 1958)


Kirby, Michael (editor), Happenings, New York: Dutton, and London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1965


Reiss, Julie H., From Margin to Center: The Spaces of Installation Art, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999

Singerman, Howard, Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999

Smith, Roberta, “In Installation Art, a Bit of the Spoiled Brat,” The New York Times (3 January 1993)
ANTONY GORMLEY 1950—  British

Born in London of German and Irish descent, British sculptor Antony Gormley is best known for his figurative sculptures in lead cast from molds made of his own body. Additionally, he has worked in a variety of other materials, including clay, steel, iron, concrete, and fiberglass, and in a variety of sizes ranging from the minuscule (the tiny figures of his Field series measure 8 to 26 centimeters in height) to the monumental (Angel of the North stands 20 meters high).

Gormley studied archaeology, anthropology, and art history at Trinity College in Cambridge. He traveled for the next three years through Turkey, Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and Iran, and studied a form of Buddhist meditation called Vipassana in India and Sri Lanka. Upon his return to London in 1974, Gormley spent a year at the Central School of Art, followed by two years at the Goldsmiths School of Art and another two years of postgraduate study at the Slade School of Fine Art.

By his own account, Gormley credits his travels abroad, his involvement with Vipassana, and his upbringing in Roman Catholicism with exerting an immense influence upon his art. His preoccupation lies with body and spirit, with their unity, and with the tensions between them. The lead figures of the 1980s were intentionally cast hollow, with their internally trapped pockets of air acting as an additional sculptural element. Forming a kind of body “container” akin to ancient Egyptian mummy cases and medieval European reliquaries, they suggest a spirit within.

Gormley’s sculptural process begins with his studio assistants taking a plaster and burlap mold, made in sections, directly from his own, plastic-covered body. The negative mold is then cast in its final material: lead, iron, fiberglass, and plaster, or welded steel bars. Unlike George Segal (whose figures, although not usually identifiable as individuals, are anchored in historical time and place by their clothing and environment) or Duane Hanson (whose polyester resin and mixed-media forms are hyperreal portraits of his models), Gormley’s sculptures are lifelike but featureless. With only the barest essentials of the body represented, they seem strangely solitary, even when engulfed in a crowd. In this sense, his work bears a relationship to the faceless personages of Polish sculptor Magdalena Abakanowicz.

Part of the power of Gormley’s work comes from his choice of materials. His use of lead—a metal that is heavy but soft, poisonous if ingested but life-preserving if used as a shield against radiation—creates multiple layers of meaning when combined with the human body. In other instances, solid cast iron acts as metaphor. In the case of Another Place—where 100 life-size figures were placed standing in the sea off the shores of Cuxhaven, Germany, and Stavanger, Norway—the rust resulting from the interaction of salt and metal, along with the flowing and ebbing of the tides, suggests the inevitability of aging and the passage of time. The various versions of the Field series exploited the tendency of clay to pick up and preserve the fingerprints of those who modeled it. In order to produce 35,000 hand-size terracotta figures, Gormley worked with the Texca family in Cholula, Mexico (brick makers by trade) and residents of St. Helen’s, Merseyside (for the Field for the British Isles). Their participation remains visible as subtle traces on the surface.

Angel of the North is perhaps Gormley’s most notorious work: It is a mammoth figure 20 meters high with a wingspan of 54 meters made of Cor-ten (self-rusting) steel. It is visible from a distance of 48 kilometers and can be seen from both the A1 highway and the main London-to-Edinburgh railway line. Located in the northeastern part of England in Gateshead, an area plagued by unemployment, this commission was controversial from its outset. A number of local residents protested its £800,000 cost, demanding that the money be used instead for social programs. More than 4500 people signed a “Stop the Statue” petition. However, Angel of the North was paid for by a national lottery, whose funds are earmarked specifically for the arts and, therefore, may not be diverted to other projects.

Proof
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Controversy was sparked again with Gormley’s design of a stamp for the Royal Mail’s special millennium series. Along with other notable English-born artists such as Bridget Riley and David Hockney, he was invited to create a 63-pence stamp based on a tale of achievement in British medicine. He chose the first successful in vitro fertilization procedure and designed *Test-Tube Baby/ Patients’ Tale*, using an image of a curled-up, sleeping infant modeled after his own daughter at six days old. However, a number of Roman Catholic and pro-life groups claimed it resembled a dead fetus and unsuccessfully tried to prevent the stamp’s publication.

Despite these controversies, Gormley has continued to accept public commissions. *Quantum Cloud* was created to coincide with the opening of London’s Millennium Dome. It stands at the edge of the Thames River on an old pier just outside the dome. Made of crisscrossing segments of stainless steel bar and designed with the help of computer technology, it incorporates a shadowy presence of a figure within.

**Virginia Marksmowicz**

**Biography**


**Selected Works**

1981  *Natural Selection*; lead; Tate Gallery, London, England
1984  *Proof*; lead, fiberglass, plaster, air; collection of the artist
1986  *Sound II*; lead, fiberglass, water; collection of Winchester Cathedral, Hampshire, England
1993  *European Field*; terracotta (temporary installation); Malmö Konsthall, Sweden
1997  *Another Place*; cast iron (temporary installation); Cuxhaven, Germany, and Stavanger, Norway
1998  *Angel of the North*; reinforced steel; Gateshead, Tyne and Wear, England
2000  *Quantum Cloud*; stainless steel bar; Millennium Dome, London, England

**Further Reading**