

Site Specific Report - How does a site dictate what work is made?

Unlike works of art in a white wall gallery, site specific art works are reliant on the space they exist in for their full context and meaning. They function as a dialogue between what the artist has created and the space the artist has been inspired by. Some sites may leave the artist a lot of freedom to experiment and respond, whereas other sites may demand a specific kind of artwork. This can be due to a host of reasons - physical, geographical, political etc. In this report I will analyse and compare two examples and consider how the site impacted what work was produced.



Figure 1

Uli Aigner created the installation “Enemy Contact” in Freud’s London home, where the lobby floor was covered in mirrors. Not being able to sustain the weight of a person, these mirrors would break underfoot - so, the viewer is forced to watch their reflection shatter from an arguably unflattering angle. This installation responds to psychoanalysis, a method of therapy of which Freud was a pioneer. Psychoanalysis uses various methods such as dream analysis and free association to try and unearth repressed feelings. For the patient this can be an uncomfortable delve into their unconscious mind, and this is what I believe the mirrors are representing. Unfortunately Camden council health and safety officers deemed the work unsafe and the installation was never open for the public. The installation was re-installed in a gallery, however it could be argued that outside of Freud’s home the mirrors only act as an artifact of the former site specific installation.



Figure 2

Erik Kessels' installations from the series "In almost every picture, #11" use found images. A couple, Fred and Valerie had been posting a long running series of images on the internet - Fred taking photographs of Valerie, clothed, in various bodies of water, such as showers, pools and fountains. The series feels playful and in some images slightly erotic although none of the photographs are overtly pornographic. Fred and Valerie describe the series as their "wet fun adventure" (Kessels, 2012). Kessels turned this series into an installation by making large prints of the images and displaying them in water.

Kessels' installations are an interesting example of a site specific work because the site doesn't necessarily dictate the work in terms of content. If we look at Aigner's installation, the work is a direct response to the site, in that the site existed beforehand and inspired the artwork. Kessels' approach is the opposite - the images came first and then the decision to display them in bodies of water. Although there is a strong dialogue between the site and the photographs when displayed, the site hasn't demanded what the artwork needs to be in the same way that Aigner's installation had to reflect something about Freud and his psychological practice. That being said, there are elements of this work that the site (or sites, as they are interchangeable) dictates. Suitability was a consideration, particularly whether the work was appropriate to be displayed in public areas. Some might argue that the erotic undertones aren't suitable for everyone to look at, yet the work was displayed in fountains outside an art gallery. There are practical demands as well - Kessels had to print these photographs on a material which wouldn't deteriorate in water. Aigner's work fell victim to practical demands, as the broken glass was deemed unsafe and couldn't function as intended. If the installation had been open to the public, the mirrors would break as people walked through around the site.

Bibliography

Kessels, E. (2012) *IN ALMOST EVERY PICTURE*, #11. Kesselskramer.

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