

Title:

Question 2: Exploring art outside the Gallery space discusses how artists have developed art practice utilising space and or place. Focus on more than one example of practitioners and or thinkers.

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In this essay I will be analysing the development of practice outside the gallery space surrounding artists Ana Mendieta, Richard Long and Rachel Whiteread. I will be applying the thinker Gaston Bachelard's philosophies on space within their work and the significance of open space works. Gaston Bachelard was a French philosopher who was born in 1884 and died in 1964. He had extensive knowledge of maths, science, psychology and philosophy, this is made evident in his writing, "A psychoanalyst should, therefore, turn his attention to this simple localization of our memories. I would like to give the name of topoanalysis to this auxiliary of psychoanalysis. Topoanalysis, then, would be the systematic psychological study of the sites of our intimate lives." where he turns his attention to terms given to aspects of memories and space, 'poetics of space'. Within this literature/philosophy he discusses that a house is a space in which memories are created and flourish. A house isn't a physical or exact place but a space of nostalgia, where memories are placed in different parts. This is where you don't remember the time of the memory, you remember the space you were in, according to Bachelard's philosophy. In relation to this I believe that artist Rachel Whiteread's use of space in 'house' (1993) is very complimentary to Bachelard's philosophy on this house of memories and gives a literal physicality to that house.



Rachel whitereads 'house' 1993

Rachel Whiteread born in 1953, is an English artist that works primarily on sculptural objects using casts. She was the first woman to win the Turner prize in 1993 for her most well known piece 'house'. In her architectural piece 'house' (1993) on Grove Road, Mile End, in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets she made a concrete cast of the inside of an east terest house. She began to consider the piece in 1991 with the assistance of James Lingwood, where they looked at several houses to cast but found no success, eventually she designed her own. What's interesting is that the exterior of the house is the previous interior, bringing you inside the house visually. She demonstrated an inordinate use of space using the surroundings to the work's benefit. She creates a scene of entrapped memories in a form recognisable to all due to the surroundings, it's surrounded by a field, there are houses in the background, in any other context it might not have been recognisable as to what it is. An interesting addition to this was the influence of the space around it made it a seminal piece of work as it was only up for a few months and got demolished due to the *"Tower Hamlets council's plan to create a Green Corridor, unifying the broken line of parkland between the Isle of Dogs and the established lung of Victoria Park."* - *Roman Road London paper (September 2015)*. The ephemerality of this piece makes the economical and historical context more impactful and thus creating a relationship with the poetic house Bachelard discussed, *"Of course, thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated."* 'Poetics of Space'.

Whiteread's 'house' also has an essence of Plato's allegory of the cave, one of the most famous allegories in philosophy. Plato's allegory is told as a story, which begins with people in a cave who have never seen the light outside of the cave. The story is that amongst the darkness the people in the cave see shadows of objects and creatures and conspire about what they are, convinced that they know and are right. One day one of the cave dwellers finds a way out of the cave and witnesses the light and outside world, stunned by the light, they head back into the cave, but because they have not adjusted to the light, they trip and fall inside the cave. The other cave dwellers assume the person has gone mad and is wrong about what they saw, thus ending in the cave dwellers killing the enlightened person. The conclusion to this allegory is that there is a need for open mindedness, the nature of belief over knowledge. What we see here with the house, is the inside exposed from the outside, a

format of the house we have never seen before, we only know the inside of the house once we have stepped in it. To see this from the outside perspective is unusual, making Rachel Whitereads cast the outside of the cave, enlightening those who see it creating a conflict between our knowledge and our sight. The house exposes us to comprehend the true nature of the reality of the piece, through observation.

Another artist I feel has a relevant and unique use of space is Ana Mendieta. Who utilises the nature around her as a space to perform her works in. Ana Mendieta was a Cuban American, sculptural artist born in 1948 and died in 1985. She was known for her interaction with nature within her works and the embrace of her surroundings. I will be analysing pieces from her *silueta* series. I decided to compare this artist with Rachel Whiteread due to the contrast in style and the external and internal link. Whitereads house brings the inside outside, whereas Mendieta leaves an imprint. Another contrast is the use of surroundings, whereas Whiteread used the land and scenery for impact, Mendieta actually incorporates the natural surroundings and uses them in the piece. This makes the surroundings act as a frame for this imprint of self, as if a painting would be framed in a gallery. The impression of the imprint would be entirely different if placed in a gallery, it would lack natural support, instead there would be an artificial, dephaning white background.

Her works create an intimate relationship with nature, leaving imprints in sand or mud of her body, showing the feminine bond with nature. "Through my earth/body sculptures, I become one with the earth ... I become an extension of nature and nature becomes an extension of my body. This obsessive act of reasserting my ties with the earth is really the reactivation of primeval beliefs ..." (Ana Mendieta). She was very passionate about this work and conducted herself directly to the female body through social and societal views.

Art historian Kabanis quoted *"her body was the subject/ object of her work, revealing the society conditions by which the female body is colonised as the object of male desire and roughed under masculine aggression."*



Untitled - Silueta series (1973 - 1978)

In this piece (*untitled from the silueta series 1976*) we see how the space interacts with the piece. She would typically use her naked body for pieces like this, stripping away of inessentials creating direct intimacy with nature, exploring and connecting. There's an imprint of her body in the sand next to the sea, and as the tide comes in the imprint of herself in the sand fills up with the water, and the bubbles and foam create patterns and give the imprint life. What I admire about this piece is the relevance of the interaction between the bubbles and foam to the intent and how it carries out a dialogue of the human body and landscape surrounding it.

The piece expresses femininity and the foam creates a spiral at the stomach area, as if there's life there, signifying women creating life, to my interpretation. The water also creates an additional elegance to the piece as if she's wearing a flowy dress, emphasizing traditional femininity. The piece uses the space by creating an indexical mark, an index someone was there, demonstrating a mechanism of natural movement.

In this series of works there is an ephemeral element, like Whiteread's house, only they aren't demolished by people, it's by nature. This sand piece was washed away over time making it in a way more impactful due to it only being witnessed by Ana Mendieta herself, and the photo is what everyone else witnesses.



Alma Silueta en Fuego / Soul Silueta on fire 1975

In his piece Mendieta demonstrates a different natural element, fire. The fire represents Mendieta's rage against the treatment of women during the 1970s and the patriarchy, ahead of her time for this form of social statement. The piece of work is an impression of her body in the ground with a flammable material placed within it, the actual piece shown is a video that captures the flames burning until they eventually fizzle out, leaving ashes. Through the fire there is an aura of violence associated with it, applying the theory of Evidently the use of space was a key element for this piece, as it is something that couldn't be safely done in a gallery, but also the piece is natural, it shows the natural element of fire and it was only fitting for the piece to be in a natural habitat. As the literal interpretation with Whiteread's house and Bachelard's philosophy of a house, here we see a literal interpretation of Plato's allegory in the cave. This fire brings light to the eyes of its viewers, exposing the truth within the patriarchy and the mistreatment of women, but those unwilling to learn about it remain ignorant to it, like the cave dwellers.