

Research in Context

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

Space is the medium in which ideas are visually phrased. Installation is both presentation and commentary, documentation and interpretation. Galleries are paragraphs, the walls and formal subdivisions of the floors are sentences, clusters of works are clauses, and individual works, in varying degree, operate as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and often as more than one of these functions according to their context.

(STORR, Robert; Show and tell in MARINCOLA, Paula; What makes a great exhibition? Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2006, p. 23)

Can space influence our perception of the exhibited artworks and can artworks somehow change our perception of the gallery space? Primarily a gallery, especially the “White Cube” concept of a gallery, is destined to be a clean and clear space, excluded from the outer world for presented artworks, providing a neutral surrounding for perception and interpretation. Gallery spaces create such environment like the medieval churches did back in the 5th to 15th century. It is said in “*A History of The Medieval Church 590-1500*” (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2005) that not only the architecture of the church but every single little thing from inside the space destined for Christian worship, was strategically placed to make civilians feel a certain way.

In this kind of church, a person would look so small compared to the huge scales, and it will let people think of this sacred space as being imposing. The relation between humans and the divine, would be far more distant, and people will feel small, fragile, and afraid

whilst facing God. Brian O'Doherty (1976) also says in *"Inside the White Cube, the Ideology of the Gallery Space"*, that the primary premise behind these restrictions is that "the outside world must not enter", therefore windows are typically closed, and the lighting is artificial. The space of the gallery is neutral, so the art is free to "take its own life", as the adage goes. The goal of such a setting is like that of religious buildings: the artworks, like religious verities, should appear unaffected by time and its vagaries. The fact that the work appears out of time, or beyond time, means that it already belongs to posterity. It is a guarantee of a profitable investment.



Figure 1. Hendrick Van Steenwijck , "Interior of a Medieval Church"(1585)

With the idea of medieval churches imposing a certain feeling of inferiority whilst facing the divine, I am trying to highlight that created space can, in fact, influence our thought process and feelings about certain things, specifically artworks inside the gallery spaces, in the topic that I will follow in this essay.

Hegel, with characteristic profundity, spoke of beautiful art as the Idea given sensuous embodiment. As a start, this gives us the rudiments of a Philosophical concept of art, and a first stab at a theory of criticism: the critic must identify the idea embodied in the work and assess the adequacy of its embodiment.

(Arthur C. Danto, quoted in 'Writing About Visual Art' by David Carrier, 2003, p. 7)

Art shouldn't be defined by a space. Of course, galleries as an exhibition place are without question an essential part of presenting individual artworks, but today we have become so chaotic that the first thing that attracts our attention when speaking of exhibitions, isn't the artwork but the gallery space itself.

First, what is the white cube exactly? Regarding "*Whether and how the gallery space and exhibited artworks affect each other?*" by Jana Stejskalova (2015-2016, p. 4) not so long ago the statement about the "end of the museum" appeared in the "*Journal of Aesthetic Education*", written by GOODMAN. It is said that this term has evolved from 1976 when the phrase "white cube museum" was coined as a sarcastic and critical term, the situation has progressed. Meaning that such a museum is solely for exclusive art chosen based on a certain aesthetic criterion, and that this is true of all such museums. However, the appearance of gallery spaces hasn't changed much since the 1970's and the

white cube look is still widely accepted today. As a result, the evolution of the white cube exhibition space and our perception of it can be related to the history of modern art. Because of this power and impact gallery spaces have, artworks that are not included in them, may not be acknowledged as art. Similarly, simple objects placed in the white cube become art due to its aesthetical potential. It's like an enclosed universe where nothing gets in from the outer world, there are usually no windows, the walls are painted white, the ceiling serves as a source of light, and there is no need for any furniture. This creates an environment where even the custodian's chair in the corner of a room or the fire extinguisher on the wall, might become virtually sacrosanct. This defines the white cube gallery, a white, clean, artificial, and shadow-free space.



Figure 2. Ana Mendieta “Siluetas” series (1973-78)

Existential space is a lived space, space infused with our racial and gender identities. It is a symbol of our very existence.

Space is very important in Ana Mendieta's work, Cuban-born artist, best known for her "earth-body" artwork. Her work has a high level of rituals and ceremonial elements. As a result, not only the utilization of material-blood, fire, soil – but also the movement of the body is crucial. Mendieta has always been a prolific artist who delights in making audiences uncomfortable with her work. It was part of who she was, and she loved it. According to The Art History (2021), in the 1970s, Mendieta's "*Siluetas*" (1973-78) series ("silhouette") established her as one of the first artists to experiment with the burgeoning genres of Land art, Body art, and Performance art. Her "earth-body" series, which included pieces that were among the first in the art world to blur the lines between performance, cinema, and photography, positioned her at the vanguard of exploration.

Ana Mendieta's work has been critiqued for supporting the traditional alignment of woman and nature, which is seen as based on essentialist assumptions about female identity. Mendieta's work has recently been defended against the allegation of essentialism by viewing it through the prism of Judith Butler's concept of gender as performance.



Figure 3. Ana Mendieta “Mirage” (1974-film still)

Mendieta’s “*Siluetas*” (1973-78) have a strong connection with the space they are created in. The silhouettes have an imprint into the nature, a particular connection. Being exiled from Cuba, Mendieta felt connected in some way to her homeland while being cast from the “womb” of nature. To “get one with the earth” she exploited her body to converse with sand, ice, and clay, among other natural mediums. The “*Siluetas*” (1973-1978) were Mendieta’s continual ritualistic interaction with the land. Each work like a spell, a continuous incantation that was not really a finished piece but let purposely to degrade but a way and a means of establishing her emotional ties with nature. Her work was meant so that each piece would dissipate, to be reclaimed by the power she admired to become closer to it.

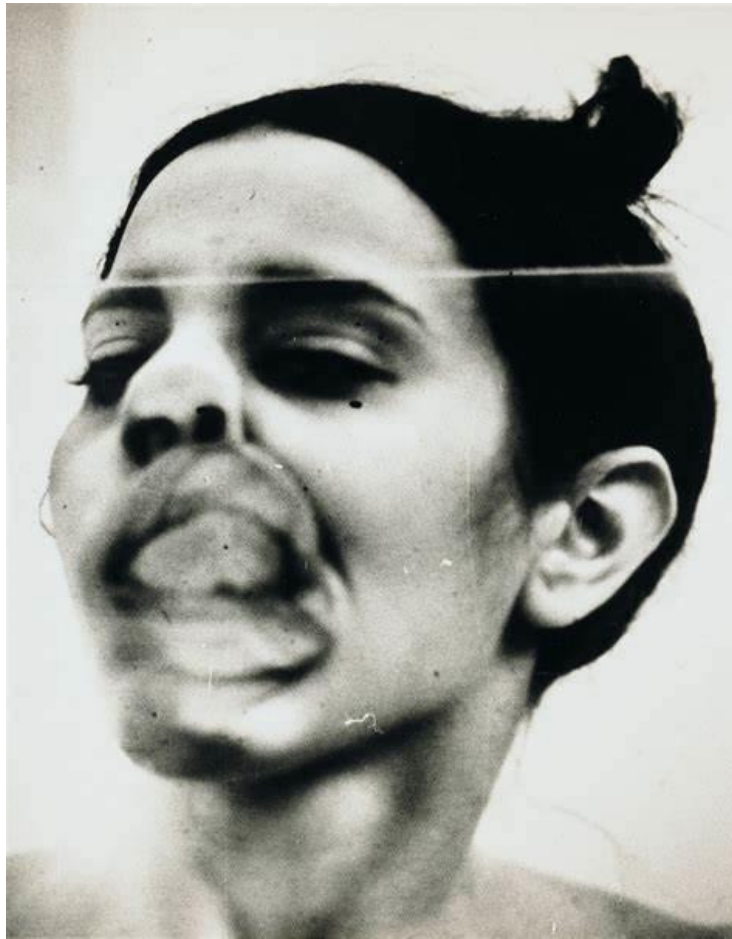


Figure 4. Ana Mendieta” Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints-Face)” 1972

For the Cuban artist space has a meaningful role in expressing her intentions of the work. Therefore, putting such works as “Silueta” series, the “Rape Scene” (1973) or the “Blood + Feathers” film still (1974), in a neutral created space without original meaning or form her unique ideas would be shattered, and the entire ritual that space had established around her work would be meaningless.



Figure 5. Ana Mendieta "Creek" (1974)

According to *"The Art Story"* in the 1960s and 1970s, land art was part of a larger conceptual art trend. Robert Smithson's "Spiral Jetty", an earthwork built out into the Great Salt in the United States, is the most famous land artwork. Though some artists, such as Smithson, used motorized earth-moving equipment to create their works, others, like Richard Long, merely walked up and down until he had created a mark in the ground, made limited and ephemeral intrusions in the landscape.

Born in Clifton, a Bristol suburb, Richard Long was an English sculptor and one of the best-known British land artists. He spent his childhood playing alone in the nearby slopes and rich surroundings of the Avon Gorge. He frequently returned home after long journeys in which he became immersed in the natural world. Thanks to his use of walks in art, Richard Long's excursions into nature and minimally invasive markings on the

landscape have broadened the parameters of sculpture to include performance and conceptual art. While his work is often intellectual and hermetic, he situates his actions in a larger global and historical context, saying that “going for a walk means echoing the entire history of mankind”. Even sculpture meant for a gallery or museum are constructed of natural materials like stone, twigs, and muds, or simply photographic or textual recordings of his experiences, just to bring the nature element into the gallery. Long’s art has influenced generations of Land artists, shifting the focus of art away from the material and onto the concept of permanence.



Figure 6. Richard Long portrait

Long created this pivotal piece on one of his travels to St Martin’s from his home in Bristol. He stopped in a field in Wiltshire between hitchhiking lifts and walked backwards

and forwards until the flattened turf caught the light and became apparent as a line. He documented his physical interventions in the terrain by photographing them. Although this work downplays the artist's physical presence; it foreshadows an increasing interest in performing art. Richard Long had already discovered a visual vocabulary for his lifelong concerns with impermanence, mobility, and relativity within this piece.

As said in "Richard Long: Walking the Line" (Richard Long, 2005, p. 8) some of the artist's sculptures were created while travelling through various settings around the world, while others incorporate natural materials such as stones, boulders, driftwood, clay, and mud into museums, galleries, houses, and gardens. These pieces appeal to the senses, while the texts and photographs recordings feed the imagination. His walks are used both as a medium and measure, and his works act as a direct response to the environment in which he creates. This method of working allows him to create sculpture anywhere and at any time, without the limitations that come with traditional art production. Long leaves a mark or a pattern inside an ever-shifting elemental landscape, which imposes its own set of rules on the final product. This is his way of communicating concepts about time and place, as well as what it means to be human in the context of modern existence. As Ana Mendieta's work, Long's practice belongs outside the gallery space, in the environment. Their work is meant to be ephemeral and exposed to change until it disappears back where it came from, that's the beauty of their ideas and lives.



Figure 7. Richard Long “A Line Made by Walking” (1967)

Like Ana Mendieta and Richard Long, Nils-Udo is a very important artist who needs to be highlighted in this essay. Nils-Udo is a German artist from Bavaria who according to Wikipedia (2018), since the 1960s, when he turned away from painting in the studio and he began to work with nature, he has been creating environmental art. He began as a classic surface painter in Paris, then moved to his native region of Bavaria and began to plant works in nature, allowing them to flourish and eventually disappear. He would spend

days examining a location, attempting to see the surroundings, the animals, the many plants, the shadow and light, the weather...before gathering local materials and starting to construct something. He enjoys experimenting with various experimenting with various landscapes.



Figure 8. Nils-Udo (1993)

Nature, he says in an article on “*Art for the Environment*” (2016), is already art, and the artist is merely a participant in it. He frequently employs the image of a nest because it serves as a reminder of Mother Nature and the Earth as our haven. He still believes that

his art has an environmental impact, that the works he creates, the “injuries” are touching “the virginity of nature”. The artist doesn’t have a utopian view of art, and he doesn’t think it is disconnected from reality.

Art always deals with reality. Those who shut their eyes to reality are liars and deprive themselves of any meaningful possibility of acting in society and (in the history of) art. What we are working for, if not for man, for society? Despite clear-sighted pessimism – we must hope in order to live. What counts for me is that my actions, Utopia-like, fuse life and art into each other.

(Nils-Udo interview with John Grande, 2011, ” *Nils-Udo: Nature Vision*” ,in the Ecological Art)



Figure 9. “Pre-Cambrian Sanctuary” (2003)

Unlike the Minimalist-inspired land artist Robert Smithson, Nils-Udo’s work is more sensitive to site and living elements. Nature constructions, plantings, and arrangements of

found elements by the artist, demonstrate a desire to seize tactile environmental reality and create a language out of it.

Nils-Udo seeks to establish a connection between the natural environment, his life, and himself being there in that moment. The drawn line between nature and human culture is a bit hazy. The patterns and structures in Udo's creations incorporate and exist in the natural environment, yet the presence and references to human intervention are there too. The line between nature and art does not particularly interest the artist. More importantly to him is that his creations, his actions, "fuse life and art into each other." His reactions to events and to the environment shape his existence; he is connected to his creations and to nature.

Nature has long inspired artists, but in the last few centuries, it has increasingly become a subject to be appropriated or contained in a work of art, even if the artist's ultimate intent was spreading awareness, or we are talking about activist works, a spiritual message or simply aesthetic. Even though nature is the raw material or source of these expressions, art has been considered separate from nature. This schism about identifying with nature has been present in the hearth of our civilization for centuries. Nature isn't just a concept or a generalization; it's all around us. It is always present, whether as climate, vegetation, topography, or specific life forms. But not only those, evidence of our relationship with nature can be found everywhere, not just the environment itself but in every man-made thing, through raw materials that nature provides us with.

In my opinion, gallery spaces can influence artworks and a certain atmosphere the creator wanted to present originally. Galleries with a specific exhibition space have had the greatest impact on art. For example, exhibitions created in previous locations with completely different purposes that have no connection to art at all, like former factory buildings, because of the large scales they come with and it's much easier to transform them into neutral spaces. There is a big difference between those spaces and the "white cube" galleries concept, because artists are forced to comply with the specific exhibition space, so the gallery has a direct impact on the works that are displayed there.

Environmental artists, land artists and simply artists who chose to present and create their artworks in nature, feel inspired and linked to the environment. The artists have dialogues with nature their actions shape their existence and their connection with earth through creations. As for the artist's art pieces that I highlighted in my essay, they are in touch with nature and have dialogues with it, and their actions shape their existence. They frequently expose their work to the environment in order to observe how time changes the work until it eventually disappears.

Putting this kind of works in a created gallery with specific allocated spaces, everything being neutral and dull, these pieces of art would most likely take away a lot from their original meaning and intentions.

FIGURES LIST

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<https://endlesspaintings.blogspot.com/2015/01/interior-of-gothic-church-hendrick-van-steenwyck-ii.html>

FIGURE 2. Ana Mendieta “*Siluetas*” series (1973-78) <https://wsimag.com/museum-of-contemporary-art-chicago/artworks/37600>

FIGURE 3. Ana Mendieta “*Mirage*” (1974-film still) <https://hirshhorn.si.edu/event/online-ana-mendieta-on-the-body-and-landscape/>

FIGURE 4. Ana Mendieta” Untitled (Glass on Body Imprints-Face)” 1972
<https://paw.princeton.edu/article/body-art>

FIGURE 5. Ana Mendieta “Creek” (1974) <https://leseditionsdufaune.com/2019/04/23/etude-dune-exposition-et-de-son-catalogue-ana-mendieta-le-temps-et-lhistoire-me-recouvrent-ou-la-parole-de-la-deesse/>

FIGURE 6. Richard Long portrait https://www.sculpturenature.com/expo-art-sortir-mai2018-sculpture-nature/long_photobyjameswainman/

FIGURE 7. Richard Long “A Line Made by Walking”(1967)
<https://artuk.org/discover/stories/walking-works>

FIGURE 8. Nils-Udo (1993) <https://ecoartseurope.wordpress.com/2016/06/01/nils-udo/>

FIGURE 9. Nils-Udo “Pre-Cambrain Sanctuary”(2003) <http://www.nils-udo.com/kunst-in-der-natur/>

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David Carrier, “*Writing about visual art*” (2003)