

The other side of the coin within the area of site-specific installation is the Rapprochement wherein the artist sees the site as an accomplice, not an enemy of the work of art. Walking off the elevator onto the fourth floor of the Whitney Museum in 1977, the viewer was at first disoriented and then enveloped by the space created by Robert Irwin (fig. 33). He had simply hung a single sheet of scrim across the room, dividing the entire space, and turned off the lights, (the "Cyclops" window provided the only illumination in the gallery). At once reticent, this work of art, nonetheless, turned the space into an otherworldly environment.

The context of this type of installation is the subject, content, and shaping influence of the work of art, as it had been with the intervention, but it is the physical context that is preeminent. With a rapprochement, the work of art often has a more formal than cultural character. So site specific is this installation, and so at one with its locale, that this kind of work may on occasion appear invisible. Such a work is simply there and present, seemingly made anonymously and without the sign of an artist's hand. If objects, *per se*, play a role, it is a minor and fully integrated part, or the objects may seem to dissolve in the space, for the art manifestation is space itself. This is the un/non-work of art: unpretentious, unobtrusive, unframed/non-iconic, non-narrative, non-allusive, non-didactic, non-objective.

There is a kind of natural quality about the viewer's experience of the rapprochement, for he or she physically cohabits with the art, living in the present and a real time and place, not in an historical, analytical, or imaginative realm. The perceptual perambulation is paramount. Along with the eye, the body is involved; physical and sensory recognitions add to our understanding of the space. One's experience of the place is joined with the aforementioned sense of oneself: Goldberg says the viewer "experiences experience,"⁴⁰ and O'Doherty describes "looking at ourselves looking."⁴¹ Because this art is so interactive, Roald Nasgaard could claim it as part of the humanist tradition: "It places man at the very center of itself."⁴² It is the ultimate in figurative art, with the human being present not by depiction or implication but by actual presence, and necessary for the completion of the work.

If enchantments are best compared to theater, rapprochements should be related to architecture. In the former, a suspension of disbelief is necessary, whereas in the latter, there is an everyday quality about the sensation.

Both architecture and site-specific installation require an unequivocally physical and perceptual engagement to achieve some degree of knowledge about the surroundings. By contrast, in theater there is a boundary separating the viewer and the art, inducing a comparatively passive response. Architecture and the site-specific installation establish a powerful sense of place—place that is large and complicated. In both, the creators formulate spatial composition by the placement of walls, doors, ceilings, and other elements. Rather than a room full of things, the room, or a larger spatial complex, is the *sine qua non* of the work. Coincidentally, throughout the history of art, artists have attempted to depict space in pictorial works, but with site-specific installation and architecture, space that is real and encompassing is the departure point.

Great architectural environments, replete with perambulatory possibilities, come to mind as the first important exemplars of the rapprochement installation. In the Temple Precinct of Queen Hatshepsut in Egypt, the visitor moved from one extraordinary situation to the next, along a ramp, through large courtyards, past vistas, and stopping places, finally concluding the journey in a small chamber in the hillside. All movement is determined by the architect, whose genius is demonstrated by the formation and manipulation of space. The viewer is the center of the creator's interest, his or her perceptual journey through space the focus of all artistic decisions. In effect, the viewer's passage is an interactive experience. That it was a sculptor/painter, Michelangelo, who created the Laurentian Library and Capitoline Hill, only reinforces the idea of a unifying vision necessary to make space a living organism for artistic exploration. Robert Morris aptly celebrated Bernini's achievement in the Piazza of Saint Peter's in Rome, saying he had turned "architecture into sculpture."⁴³ One might well add the corollary to this statement, that Bernini had turned sculpture into architecture, thus making an installation.

In Art Nouveau architecture, the effect of a rapprochement between all the arts in one seamless ensemble was extravagantly explored. A veritable *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the radiant Villa Solvay (1893) by Victor Horta, evinces an indoor-outdoor synthesis. This effect is reinforced by the fact that the walls are often broken and corners eliminated, making the interior spaces merge as well. Paintings and sculptures complete this remarkably theatrical ensemble that verges on sensory overload. It is an example of a rapprochement that is an enchanted space, too.⁴⁴

A more modernist rapprochement in architecture is Mies van der Rohe's *Barcelona Pavilion*, 1929, about which Philip Johnson said it is a place where "space is channeled rather than confined—it is never stopped

but is allowed to flow constantly.”⁴⁵ That channeling, as in Hatshepsut, makes the experience of it extraordinary; it is a space in which the viewer has the self-conscious sense of him or herself experiencing the creative aura made by van der Rohe.

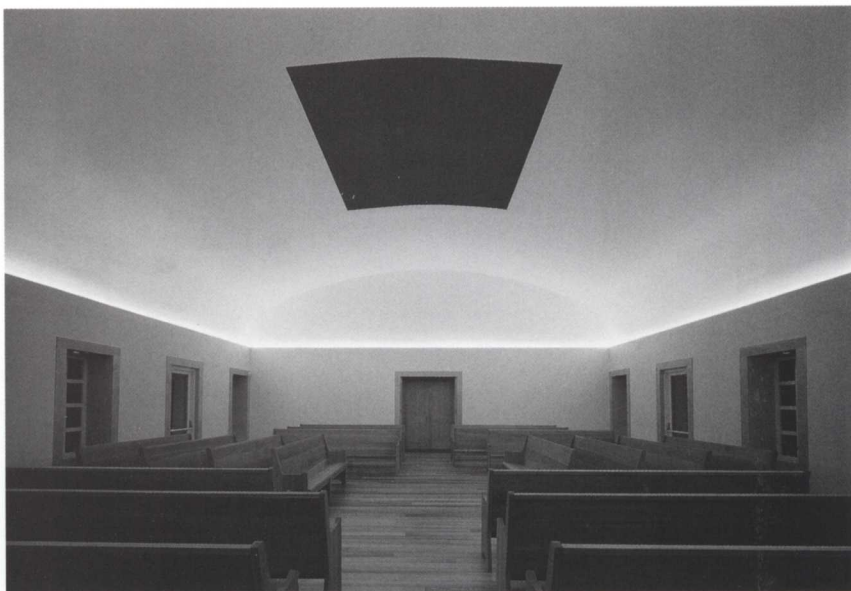
El Lissitzky's *Proun Room* (1923), is an interesting cross between an enchantment and rapprochement. This was an attempt to create a united environment in which the wall paintings carried the eye around the space as if no architectural elements were present at all.⁴⁶ The viewer could easily become disoriented and engulfed by the abstract forms.⁴⁷ In this and other examples, the works of art are subservient to larger concerns regarding space, with a new kind of decorative impulse ascendant. Indeed, at this time, décor was not a pejorative idea; rather, the overall *Gesamtkunstwerk* was the ambition.

In 1958 Yves Klein entitled his exhibition—an empty room at the Gallery Clert—*Le Vide (The Void)* (fig. 34 a, b, c, d) (unlike Michael Asher's empty room, Klein did mask the backroom). Here was not only a synthesis of space and object, of which there was none, but a declaration of content, Klein proposing that the *Void* could be experienced in a prosaic empty room. Two years later, the artist Arman cunningly filled the same space to overflowing, and called the exhibition *Le Plein*—that is, the plenitude of life. For our purposes, he, too, had made a rapprochement, taking full account of the space's physical dimensions along with its recent history. (It is interesting, too, to see two very different responses to the same space.⁴⁸) Some years later, Mark Rothko made paintings to fill a chapel designed by Philip Johnson in Houston, Texas, which opened in 1971. This assemblage of canvases might be said to have an effect similar to Klein's, namely to evoke the void, and likewise, each artist was responsible for creating an aura that totally unites all within. Yet another, more literal, void was also created in Houston, by James Turrell. His *Sky Piece* (2000) (fig. 35) at the Live Oak Friends Meeting House, is a simple rectangular opening in the curved ceiling, which introduces all that is above into the space of worship. This remarkable example of a rapprochement at once replaces the ceiling paintings of the past with a very literal, yet equally spiritual rendering.

The desire for an elevated state, which is the provenance of many abstract artists of the twentieth century, echoes in the work of certain installation artists who create a rapprochement with their surroundings. Emanations of light and presentiments of a void are the chief experiences of their purified spaces. Nevertheless, since the viewer simply experiences all this in a physically real space, much as one lives in a nonlinear fashion

35 | James Turrell, *Sky Piece*, 2000.
Installation: Live Oak Friends Meeting House, Houston.

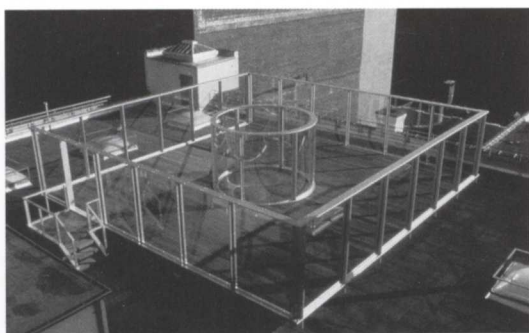
36 | Dan Graham, *Two Way Mirror Cylinder Inside Cube*
and a *Video Salon* or *Rooftop Urban Park Project*, 1981–91.
Two-way mirror, glass, steel, wood, rubber,
274.3 × 1097.3 × 1097.3 cm.
Installation: Dia Art Center, New York.

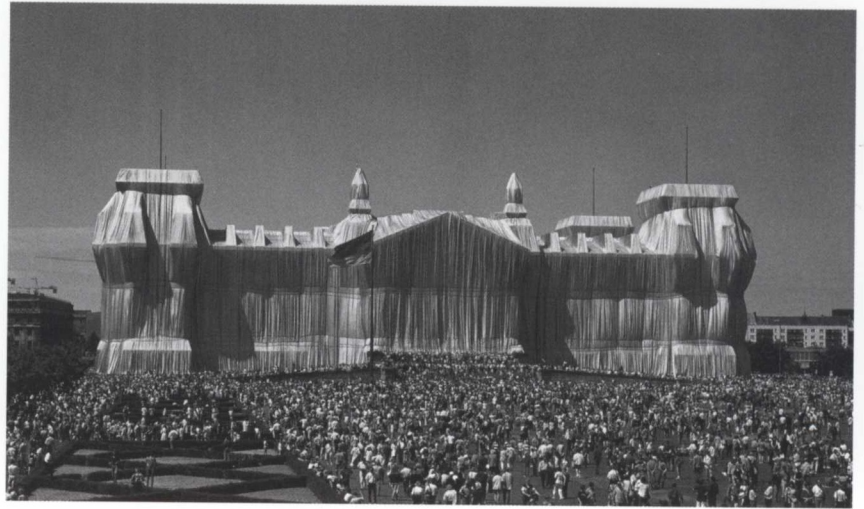


in life, with the senses piqued in all kinds of ways, there is a parallel with other life phenomena. That is, the artists do not at all seek to carry the viewer elsewhere, but to suggest that the ineffable exists in the present and the prosaic.

Along with its role in relation to the intervention, minimal art and its immediate successors should be seen in the context of the rapprochement. For example, each of Robert Smithson's portable *Corner Piece* (fig. 37) series (1968) at once takes into account the surrounding. Like Duchamp's *Large Glass* (1915–23), a photograph of one of these works will literally include a room, hence a *Corner Piece* effectively merges with its environment. Similarly, Dan Graham's enclosure on the roof of the Dia Foundation, New York, entitled *Rooftop Urban Park Project* (1991) (fig. 36), speaks directly to the surrounding space, though it, too, could be moved to a new locale.⁴⁹

In Smithson's earth works, particularly the famed *Spiral Jetty* (1970) (fig. 38), he combined interventionist and rapprochement attitudes. On the one hand, he marked the space of the lake in a dramatic, even transgressive way. On the other hand, the work is certainly integrated there, indeed, could hardly be seen or imagined anywhere else. In the second generation of earth artists, Alan Sonfist produced an installation entitled *Time Landscape* (1965) (fig. 39). Given a busy corner of Manhattan at which to make a work of art, Sonfist simply returned the northeast corner of the intersection of Houston and West Broadway to the vegetal state that had existed there thousands of years ago. The seamless aspect of this rapprochement is so perfect that few who pass realize a work of art is there, let alone grasp its ingenious and unpretentious premise.





In the career of Christo and Jeanne-Claude, these artists have drawn attention to their chosen sites in an enchanting yet detailed fashion. For instance, *Wrapped Reichstag, Berlin* (1977–95) (fig. 40), triggered close attention to every aspect of the building features; at the same time, the Reichstag gained an extraordinarily haunting character by the artists' handling of it. Their utterly deft rapprochement can be compared to the approach of Walter De Maria in *The Lightning Field* (1970–77) (fig. 41), in which a grid structure seems at first glance to have simply landed on the New Mexico desert. But upon actual inspection, the viewer detects all manner of calls and responses: between the physical site and its history for Native Americans, and the artist's formal decisions. Yet another approach can be seen in the installations of Patrick Ireland, whose rope drawings are initially a response to a given site. However, each becomes a *tour de force* of internal relationships that finally turns the viewer in on his or her own experience of the space created by the artist's ropes.

Another kind of rapprochement exists in the work of Jenny Holzer. Her installation for the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao is a wondrous and brilliant use of the space as was her earlier installation for the Guggenheim Museum in New York City (1998–99) (fig. 43). In these, her formal gestures in the spaces are profoundly at one with the architectural surrounding, but as is her custom she also offers a plethora of content in the form of her words. The result is a synthesis of the rapprochement and intervention approaches.

Janet Cardiff created an altogether different sort of traversal in her work entitled *Real Time* (fig. 42) for the Carnegie International exhibition in 1997. To start with, she spent a good deal of time investigating the site for ideas, as all site-specific artists do. Then, utilizing the technique of the

handheld, digital camera, she accompanied the viewer on a walk through the entire Carnegie Institute complex in Pittsburgh. The experience was physical, of the space, of sound,⁵⁰ and of one's perambulation. Cardiff's script was at once eerie and immediate in the headset, as one explored this fascinating complex of buildings. Though time and space were real, and this installation perfectly melded with the site, enhancing it and making it all the more fascinating, even gripping, an added, enchanted reality pertained by virtue of her soliloquy. Indeed, with sound and sight so piqued, the viewer gained a highly synesthetic experience. Cardiff suggests an interesting parallel when she observes: "Kids today can read books, watch TV and listen to a CD at the same time and get meaning out of all of them."⁵¹ Similarly, her highly layered works appeal in particular to a youthful audience or to those open to this type of contemporary experience.



41 | Walter De Maria, *The Lightning Field*, 1977.
Installation: Quemado, New Mexico.

When Germano Celant wrote his important narrative of installation in 1982, he declared that the main distinction imparted from the early part of the century was between the surrealist and constructivist type of work.⁵² But with the onrush of interest in installation in the last forty years or so, there has been a great expansion and evolution, with installation being propelled into a new stage of its development. The influence of installation is apparent everywhere. No longer content to simply install a group of discrete objects, painters and sculptors as diverse as Ellsworth Kelly and Gerhard Richter, and Matthew Barney (see fig. 44) and Damien Hirst, are making installations of their discrete works.

Andreas Huyssens described culture as always seeking a “genuine encounter with the real ... to hide the fact that the real is in agony due to the spread of simulation.”⁵³ In artists’ eternal quest toward greater realism, installation becomes the latest manifestation and achievement in that quest, offering the most profound contact yet with the real. Though it is among the oldest of art practices, recent incarnations of installation typify contemporary thinking. Many artists are demonstrating that for them discrete works of art are not adequate to express the complexities of this age, nor is the traditional, exalted object appropriate for the present time. This is not to say, yet again, that painting is dead, only that it will often be subsumed into larger contexts. And with the use of popular media, for example video and photography, and unpretentious materials, installation projects a more immediate impact on contemporary audiences than conventional media. Installation therefore represents a radical edge, blandly subsuming when not critiquing all that is conventional.

In a fascinating declaration about the current state of music, the composer Philip Glass could have been speaking to the situation in the visual arts:

For me the great event of the 20th century was not the continuation of the central European avant-garde to the last gasp. I see the great musical adventure of our time as the emergence of a world-music culture, which crosses lines of geography, race and music.⁵⁴

As with music, the practice of installation throughout the world creates an artistic cross-fertilization, one that minimizes the effect of the early twentieth-century European avant-garde on current developments and, instead, promotes hybridization of every imaginable kind. The very nature of an installation gives the artist an extraordinary opportunity by which

to accommodate complex views of time, space, cultural diversity, philosophy, imagination, and cultural criticism. That Rauschenbergian interest in the gap between art and life has been replaced by an artistic statement that contains both poles within itself. And at a time when the abstruse mysteries of some contemporary art leave general audiences uninterested if not hostile, installation art gives the opportunity for a broader sweep into the public sector, through its subjects, techniques, and effects that are completely available to the uninitiated.⁵⁵ Whereas the art of the 1960s and 1970s failed in gathering a large public, and failed in putting its arms around the cultural concerns of that period, the burgeoning and developing medium of installation goes a long way toward satisfying those goals.

A fascinating and still perhaps unanswerable question given that we do not yet have sufficient distance is what makes a successful installation? One might speak of an advance in the practice's technique by claiming an important achievement, for example, the capacity of installation to subsume more complex thematic material. But if the familiar old shibboleth called wonder is engendered in an audience still seeking such experiences, is that not a sign, too? If so engendered, perhaps artists will have taken wonder back from the lords of Disney, and reclaimed it for the art.