

Installation art practice

Installation art comes about from a variety of initiatives and innovations developed over a number of years. Different installations may have involve different practices or have different clusters of function. Different practices could involve drawing, painting and sculpture, they can be interactive with or even include performance art or music or poetry. Art by definition demands the predominance of aesthetic function, but many arts, including installation art, can coordinate many other functions, we might name them social or political or decorative. Any one installation can therefore be a challenge to respond to.

At White Cube last November Anselm Kiefer filled the large gallery spaces in Bermondsey with very large paintings and art in wall-hung vitrines.¹ The whole was planned to be site-specific for the White Cube gallery spaces and demonstrated a clear coherence of theme using notions from the physics of string theory and from Norse mythology the ‘Norns’. The work also included examples of runes, the myth of the ‘Gordian Knot’ and descriptions of land forms and trees, tree-felling axes and wires, mathematical formulae and poetic texts. The disciplines included drawing, painting, assemblage and relief sculpture.

In 1985 Joseph Beuys simultaneously factured three installations. In the Royal Academy London he selected and grouped a number of his sculptures, some of these were factured in the 1950s, others in the 1970s, others for the 1985 occasion. In the Anthony d’Offay gallery also in London he installed *Plight* specific to the two spaces of the first floor gallery. The installation used rolls of felt, a grand piano, a blackboard and a thermometer. Simultaneously, in Naples, he installed *Palazzo Royale (Royal Palace)*. This work consisted of two brass and glass vitrines equipped with objects and seven varnished brass plates covered with gold dust. Some of the objects were already part of Beuys’ *oeuvre* such as the cymbals from his 1969 performance of *Iphigenia/Titus Andronicus* and a cast of the head from his 1976 *Tram Stop*.

All of these installations by Kiefer and Beuys rely on patterns of connectedness, patterns engendered by the different understandings each element provides. These elements can include a history of the objects as much as an apparent new experience. In Kiefer there is the new relationship of elements drawn together in his exhibition title *Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot* along with his characteristic assemblage and painting practice. This is where Kiefer is the curator selecting from existing artwork and the artist facturing new work to provide for the new context.

With a view to hinting at the potential variety of backgrounds in the facture of installation art I have drawn from art history a small number of exemplary works that could assist close-viewing of particular installations by Rebecca Horn. The variety proposes attentions to the early conceptual

¹ Anselm Kiefer *Superstrings, Runes, The Norns, Gordian Knot* at White Cube, Bermondsey, 15 November 2019 – 26 January 2020: https://whitecube.com/exhibitions/exhibition/anselm_kiefer_bermondsey_2019

and poetic art practice of Marcel Duchamp,² the early introduction of ‘installed rooms’ in art practice in the work of Duchamp and Kurt Schwitters, in the subsequent involvement of performance art in the work of the *Fluxus* groups and the *happenings* of Allan Kaprow, Claes Oldenburg and Carolee Schneemann,³ and in the installations of Edward Kienholtz and Ilya Kablov. These varieties have drawn from comparatively traditional practices in painting and sculpture for example in works by Anthony Caro and Gerhard Richter, they also interact with new uses of machines and mechanical apparatuses. We can see these machines in the early work of Jean Tinguely and the later work of Christian Boltanski.

Rebecca Horn’s installation work also shows close affinities to contemporary installations, architecture and drawing; to installations by Cornelia Parker and Jessica Stockholder, to architectural practices demonstrated by Daniel Libeskind, Tadashi Kawamata and Frank Gehry and to drawings by Joseph Beuys, such as his ferric chloride and graphite drawings and the performance-drawings, the *Live Transmissions*, of Morgan O’Hara.

Horn factures allusions to painting and drawing in her works *Measure Box*, *Pencil Mask*, *The Little Painting School* and *Les Amants* ⁴, these juxtapose to her performance work in *Unicorn*, *Finger Gloves* and *Scratching Both Walls at Once*. Both the drawing and the performative as much as the sculptural and architectural contribute to comprehending her quieter, but sometimes alarming installations: the quiet of *Black Bath and Pendulum*, *The Hybrid*, *The Hydra-Forest* and *Missing Full Moon*, in contrast to the abrupt hammers and balancing funnels in *The Ballet of the Woodpeckers* and *An Art Circus*, or the noisy hilarity of *Buster’s Bedroom* and *Concert for Anarchy*. In Horn’s work the viewer is dealing with a range and a complexity of practices inspired by the development of different art practices, then presented in complex but singular installations.

Allen Fisher, 2020

² Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler. ‘The dematerialization of art’, *Art International*, 12:2 (February 1968), pp. 31-36 (a pdf appears on allenfisher.edublogs.org) and Ursula Meyer. *Conceptual Art*, New York: Dutton, 1972. An interesting reappraisal of conceptual art can be found in Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (eds.) *After Conceptual Art*, Cambridge, Mass. and London: The MIT Press, 2006.

³ Al Hanson. *A Primer of Happenings & Time/Space Art*, New York &c.: Something Else Press, 1965; Michael Kirby. *Happenings, an illustrated anthology*, New York: Dutton, 1965; H. Sohm. *Happening and Fluxus*, Cologne: Koelnischer Kunstverein, 1971.

⁴ Horn’s use of drawing machines has particular precedents in the Renaissance devices designed to facture correct perspective, in the nineteenth century eccentricity for cumbersome drawing aids such as Carl Augustus Schmalcalder’s *Profile Machine* in 1806, but more particularly in the devices promoted in more recent times, demonstrated in the work of Fernando Drellana, James Nolan Gandy, Joseph Griffiths, Harvey Moon, Jon Ralph and Eske Rex who all use machines to facture work of complex geometrical lines and shapes but with a prevalent attention to decorative effect.