MUSEUM ENVIRONMENTS AND INSTALLATION DESIGN

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Abstract:

Installation is a widespread art form, as well as a design concept and strategy, with its origins rooted in Avant-Garde Art. Installation manifests in museum environments in a variety of ways. In this context, installation serves both as an artistic expression and as a display strategy with a unique aesthetic within the museum environment. Installation design in museums sometimes incorporates typographic elements and creates an intense and interactive viewing experience. The aim of this study is to examine the phenomenon of installation both as an art form and a design strategy, to reveal the meaning and significance of installation design within the museum environment, and to analyze and define the subject through its components and examples. Accordingly, the research methodology includes site-specific analysis methods involving on-site observation and analysis in 33 globally recognized museums, as well as literature review and descriptive methods.

Keywords: installation art, installation design in museums, avant-garde approaches, Marcel Duchamp, exhibition techniques

1. Introduction

> *"Museum is the place where the Muses dwell."*
> (Claude Clemens, quoted in Findlen, 1989, p. 59)

Installation, etymologically, is a term of Latin and French origin. In its literal sense, it refers to the act of setting up, placing, or arranging a system or mechanism in a specific location and making it ready for use (Britannica Dictionary, 2025). In postmodern creative strategies, the term installation is used in the sense of 'placement,' 'arrangement,' or 'order,' emphasizing the relationship between space and object, or space and human

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(Kozak, 2022, p. 68). "*The word 'installation' has now expanded to describe any arrangement of objects in any given space, to the point where it can happily be applied even to a conventional display of paintings on a wall*" (Bishop, 2005:6). Today, installation stands out as both a form of contemporary art and a design strategy, widely recognized and extensively practiced. Especially in contemporary exhibition practices, installation has evolved beyond a mere method of production into an approach that redefines space and establishes an experiential relationship between the viewer and the artwork. It is a design form realized in museums, exhibitions, galleries, and various other public spaces, both open and enclosed.

In contemporary times, museum environments have evolved beyond being mere spaces for exhibiting artworks; they have become interdisciplinary fields of experience where knowledge, cultural transmission, and social representations are spatially embodied. Installation design plays a key role in this transformation - reshaping the traditional museum experience by turning the viewer into an integral part of the artwork and redefining spatial perception. According to Bishop (2005, p. 11), the artwork is no longer simply an object to be "viewed" but has transformed into a structure to be "experienced", where physical and conceptual space are interwoven.

On the other hand, the gradual transformation of museum spaces into large-scale "shopping malls" or "entertainment venues" has led to criticism regarding the commodification of artistic value and cultural transmission. Within the framework of the cultural tourism economy, the drive to increase visitor numbers has reshaped museums according to commercial strategies - an issue that has sparked debates about their public function and critical role. The proliferation of performances, dance shows, and concerts that engage visitors with art has accelerated the evolution of museums into "spectacle spaces" or "event venues." In this context, contemporary museum policies are increasingly being transformed into environments of production and consumption. Indeed, during my museum research at the Brooklyn Museum in 2020, coincidentally attending a concert allowed me to vividly observe this transformation. This shift has become visible through various practices that push beyond the classical museum experience. For instance, the Design Store section of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York attracts almost as much attention as the museum itself, becoming a frequent destination not only for art enthusiasts but also for tourists. A considerable portion of visitors head directly to the retail area instead of exploring the museum's collections, purchasing design products before leaving the space. This phenomenon reduces the museum from a site of cultural experience to one of consumption. Similarly, in many Viennese museums, cafés located in the center of exhibition halls draw attention; it is often observed that visitors are more motivated by the prospect of socializing over pasta or coffee than by engaging with art. Practices such as dining, shopping, or acquiring souvenirs within the museum space have rendered the classical notion of "being alone with the artwork" secondary. In this context, it can be argued that the identity of museums is increasingly shifting toward the logic of a "shopping mall."

Hal Foster (2015, p. 6) criticizes the perception of museums as neutral and objective spaces of presentation, emphasizing that these environments offer ideologically

constructed representations. According to him, installation art intervenes in such modes of representation, transforming the museum space into a site of both physical and critical inquiry. Therefore, spatial transformation must be analyzed not only on aesthetic and experiential levels but also through its social, ideological, and political dimensions.

The transformation within the museum environment began to be subjected to criticism and processes of change as early as the beginning of the twentieth century. In the Futurist Manifesto (1909), the declaration *"We want to demolish museums and libraries..."* expressed Marinetti and his contemporaries' opposition to the static nature of cultural heritage. They regarded museums as institutions trapped in the past and proposed their destruction as a prerequisite for progress and renewal. Marcel Duchamp's experimental exhibition techniques and Kurt Schwitters' Merzbau (1923–1937) blurred the boundaries between the exhibition space and the artwork itself, constructing a "space within a space" that invited the viewer into an immersive experience. Such avant-garde approaches offered alternatives to the traditional museum order and laid the conceptual foundations of installation.

Today, museums have evolved from institutions that merely display cultural heritage into centers of consumption, interaction, and experience. In this transformation, installation practices play a critical role due to their capacity to engage viewers intensively and their potential to transform space through design. However, current debates focus on how installation functions as a design strategy within the museum environment, and how it affects spatial organization, visitor experience, and exhibition practices. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to explore the meaning and potential of installation as a design strategy, particularly within the context of museum environments. Within the scope of the research, installation designs, spatial arrangements, and typographic strategies in museum settings have been comparatively analyzed, revealing the functional and aesthetic role of installation in this context. In this regard, the study aims to offer both conceptual and practical contributions to the literature.

2. Methodology

In this study, qualitative research methods were employed. Museum research was planned and conducted within the 2017–2025 period. The research was based on fieldwork, on-site observation, documentation, spatial analysis, and photographic recording techniques carried out across 33 different classical, modern, and contemporary art museums and galleries in various countries. The collected data were evaluated using a descriptive approach. In addition, content and contextual analyses were applied to texts and visual arrangements related to museum exhibitions. The findings were developed through comparative observations and case studies. Within this framework, the surveys and analyses conducted in museums provide comparative data on installation design. The study focuses on installation design and exhibition techniques in classical, modern, and contemporary art museums, examining how artworks interact with and relate to space, and how these interactions contribute to spatial transformation.

2.1 Research Model

Within the scope of the study, Table 1 presents information on the timeline and methods applied in this research, while Table 2 provides details on the museums included in the fieldwork, their types, and the content and method analyses conducted. Information regarding the field research carried out in various cities across countries such as the United States, Italy, Spain, Germany, Poland, Austria, and France is also presented in Table 2.

Although the research primarily focused on classical, modern, and contemporary art museums, encompassing 33 institutions, approximately 60 museums, galleries, and similar spaces were also visited, including exhibitions, biennials, and museums with thematic collections, where diverse exhibition practices could be observed. The selection criteria for the museums included in this study were that the institutions prominently and intensively featured installation practices.

Table 1: Chronological distribution of the 2017-2025 research
process and activities in terms of year, location, method, and content

Year	Research Activity	Location / Institution	Content / Method	Notes
2017-2018	Initial Observations and Literature Review	Turkey - Southern Europe	Literature review, museum visits	Establishing the conceptual framework of field research and determining the research methodology
2019-2020	International Research, Observation, and Documentation	USA - Yale University, New Haven	On-site observation in art and other museums, museum research, examination of digital and special archives, and photographic documentation	Extensive museum visits, investigation of installation practices, and on-site observation studies
2021	On-site Field Research	Europe, Turkey	Exhibition and spatial analysis, photographic documentation	Documenting current exhibition techniques and investigating examples of contemporary installation practices
2022	Field Research and Conceptual Deepening	Europe	Museum research, on-site analysis, text analysis, and conceptualization	Researching and documenting digitalization and installation art in museum environments
2023	On-site Field Research and Monitoring of Current Exhibitions	Central and Western Europe	Museum research, comparative analysis, and on-site observation	Examining and comparing contemporary museum practices in different cities
2024-2025	Deepening Field Research	Central, Eastern, and	Museum research, photographic documentation, and sample selection	Collecting field research data, analyzing, comparing,

		Northern Europe		and interpreting the findings

Methods for interpreting artwork placement strategies supported museum research. Additionally, the reciprocal influences between museum architectures from different periods and regions and installation practices were evaluated comparatively, with content and contextual analyses presented in the findings section.

In this context, the museums listed in Table 2 are institutions that provide comparative observational data specifically in terms of installation design and visitor experience. These data encompass both the analysis of physical space and the monitoring of the increasingly digitalized museum experience. Therefore, this research is structured based on both original observations and a broad academic framework.

Table 2: Art museums surveyed and the observation process (2017–2025)

Museum Name	Country- City	Type	Type of Observation
Harvard Art Museums	USA - Cambridge	Academic Collection Museum (Mixed Classical–Modern)	Installation practice, Exhibition Techniques
Yale University Art Gallery	USA - New Haven	University Museum (Classical & Modern)	Spatial arrangement, Observation
Yale Center for British Art	USA - New Haven	Thematic University Museum (British Art)	Spatial arrangement, Observation
Brooklyn Museum	USA - New York	Modern & Contemporary	Digital Placement, Installation Design, Interactive Exhibition
Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum	USA - New York	Modern & Contemporary	Spatial Analysis, Structure-Space Relationship, Installation Design and Exhibition
MoMA- The Museum of Modern Art	USA - New York	Modern	Artwork–Space Relationship, Installation Practice, Digital Media
MoMA PS1	USA - New York	Contemporary	Artwork–Space Relationship, Installation Design, Digital Placement
The MET-The Metropolitan Museum of Art	USA - New York	Encyclopedic Art Museum	Encyclopedic Sectioning, Placement Methods
Whitney Museum of American Art	USA - New York	Modern & Contemporary	Exhibition Strategies, Placement Methods
New York Sculpture Center	USA - New York	Contemporary Sculpture and Installation	Installation Practice, Placement Methods
Philadelphia Museum of Art (PMA)	USA - Philadelphia	Classical & Modern	Encyclopedic Sectioning, Placement Methods
Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM)	USA – Washington DC	American Art Museum	Installation Practice, Digital Placement, Exhibition Techniques
Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA)	Spain - Barcelona	Contemporary	Digital Installations, Exhibition Techniques, Spatial Arrangement

Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB)	Spain - Barcelona	Digital & Experimental Art Center	Digital Installations, Exhibition Techniques, Spatial Arrangement
Le Gallerie degli Uffizi	Italy - Florence	Renaissance-Focused Classical Art Museum	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationship
Galleria dell'Accademia di Firenze	Italy - Florence	Classical	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationship
Gallerie dell'Accademia di Venezia	Italy - Venice	Classical	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationship
Museo Monumento al Deportato di Carpi	Italy - Carpi	Memory Museum	Site-Specific Installation, Holistic Installation Analysis
Vatican Museums	Vatican - Rome	Classical	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationship
Galleria Borghese	Italy - Rome	Classical	Comparative Analysis of Artwork–Space Relationship
Palazzo Barberini - Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica	Italy - Rome	Ancient & Classical	Comparative Analysis of Artwork–Space Relationship
Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea	Italy - Rome	Modern & Contemporary	Installation Practice, Placement Methods
MAXXI - Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo	Italy - Rome	21st-Century Contemporary Art and Architecture Museum	Site Analysis, Structure-Space Relationship, Installation Design, Digital Placement, Exhibition Techniques
Museo d'Arte Contemporanea di Roma (MACRO)	Italy - Rome	Contemporary	Site Analysis, Installation Design, Digital Placement, Exhibition Techniques
Chiostro del Bramante	Italy - Rome	Historical Exhibition Space Focused on Temporary Exhibitions	Spatial Design, Installation Design, Site-Specific Installation, Digital Placement, Exhibition Techniques
Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej w Warszawie (MSN)	Poland - Warsaw	Modern & Contemporary	Artwork-Space Thematic Exhibition Observations, Installation Design, Digital Installations
Muzeum Sztuki Współczesnej w Krakowie (MOCAK)	Poland - Krakow	Contemporary	Artwork-Space Thematic Exhibition Observations, Installation Design, Digital Installations
Österreichische Galerie Belvedere	Austria - Vienna	Classical	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationships
Hamburger Kunsthalle	Germany - Hamburg	Classical & Modern	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationships, Installation Practice, Spatial Design
Musée Picasso (Antibes)	France - Antibes	Thematic Museum Dedicated to Picasso	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationships
Musée Matisse de Nice	France - Nice	Matisse Collection	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationships

Marc Chagall National Museum	France - Nice	Marc Chagall Collection	Comparative Analysis of Artwork-Space Relationships and Exhibition Techniques
Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain (MAMAC)	France - Nice	Modern & Contemporary	Site Analysis, Structure-Space Relationship, Installation Design, Digital Placement, Exhibition Techniques

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Museums and Museum Environments

Museums are spaces for the preservation of historical, artistic, scientific, and cultural heritage, as well as sites of representation and discourse. This representation and discourse are continuously reproduced through engagement with the public gaze. In these institutions, where social and cultural memory is materialized in spatial terms, a non-linear relationality exists between the past, present, and future. Consequently, a museum is not merely a place where objects are displayed; it is also an epistemological space in which new connections emerge through the engagement with these objects.

Museums are cultural spaces. As collective and social memory acquires a spatial dimension, these sites become intersections for cultural interaction and pedagogical processes. According to Halbwachs (2023, p.105-174),

"History is a record of changes. All forms of collective memory occur within a spatial framework. Were it not for the preservation of the material environment surrounding us, our impressions would chase one another, and nothing would remain in our minds."

In this context, a museum functions not only to preserve the accumulation of the past but also as an interface between historical collective consciousness and contemporary intellectual and sensory experiences. Accordingly, museums embody a multidimensional and dynamic structure where cultural values are debated, and interdisciplinary perspectives intersect to generate new layers of meaning. Indeed, taking this dynamic nature into account, the International Council of Museums (ICOM) introduced a new definition of the museum at its Extraordinary General Assembly held in Prague in 2022.

According to ICOM (2025),

"A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing."

The earliest form of the museum concept is derived from the ancient Greek term Mouseion, meaning "temple of the sciences" or "temple of the Muses." In Ancient Greece, museums were not merely spaces for displaying objects but functioned as intellectual centers where science, art, and philosophy flourished. The Mouseion was a sacred space dedicated to the Mousai (the Muses) in Greek mythology, who represented the domains of art, science, and culture, and it served as a focal point for learning, research, and creative thought (Findlen, 1989, p. 60). Specifically, the Mouseion of Alexandria (the Library of Alexandria) functioned not only as a site for scientific research but also as a space for observational practices and intellectual debates, serving as a hub for knowledge production. As part of a larger library complex, this institution points to the conceptual origins of the modern museum, since the term Mouseion, referencing the Muses, embodies the inseparable relationship between inspiration and knowledge (Azab, 2019; Listri, 2024; Crystalinks, 2025).
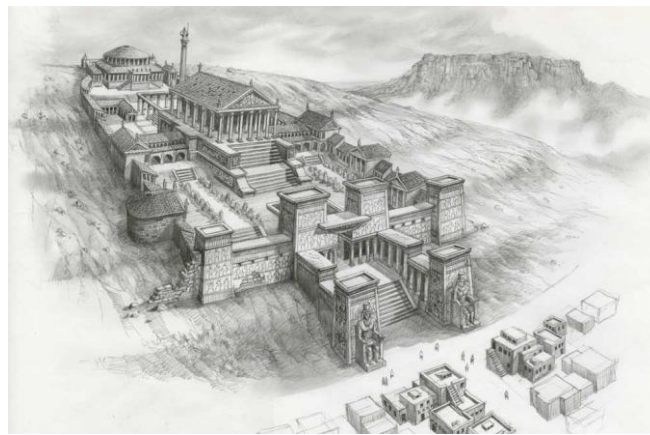
Figure 1: The Lost Architecture of Ancient Alexandria
http://www.crystalinks.com/libraryofalexandria.html

The intellectual legacy of the Library of Alexandria gradually transformed this spatial concept, eventually evolving into the notion of the "temple of museums."

"The first art museums began to emerge in the early nineteenth century and, throughout that century, became institutionalized as a result of revolutions, wars, imperial conquests, and the plundering of non-European cultures. All kinds of "beautiful" functional objects - once used in various religious rituals, adorning the rooms of those in power, or signifying personal wealth - were collected and compiled, and then displayed as works of art: autonomous objects stripped of their original functionality, designed to provoke profound contemplation in the viewer" (Groys, 2022, p. 64).

Nowadays, this situation has somewhat shifted, and the museum has evolved from being merely an institution that preserves the heritage of the past into a multifunctional, interdisciplinary, interactive, educational, entertaining, communicative, and inspiring environment. It has become a public space where cultural, artistic, collective, and scientific interactions are dynamically enacted.

Walter Benjamin's concept of *aura* helps to interpret the museum environment within this framework, particularly in terms of authenticity, originality, time, and space. Through the notion of aura, Benjamin refers to the historical existence and spatial context of an original work of art. In this sense, objects, artworks, installations, events, and human interactions within the museum's atmosphere (aura) acquire distinct meanings and manifest in various forms. In Benjamin's assessment of aura, he states:

"For the first time - and this is the consequence brought about by cinema - man is confronted with the necessity of acting in full personality, yet without the unique atmosphere of that personality (Aura). This is because the said atmosphere is bound to man's 'here and now.' It is impossible for a copy of this atmosphere to exist" (2020, p. 64).

In this context, from a Benjaminian perspective, the works exhibited in museums offer visitors a unique experience through their "here and now" presence and auratic qualities; this experience often influences the visitor's perception of time and space. However, modern display methods, digitalization, and reproducibility can alter or erode this aura.

In the twenty-first century, the museum environment has undergone - and continues to undergo - a transformation in line with the spirit of the times, functioning as an "other space" in terms of its operational structure and the nature of the works and activities it hosts. In a multifunctional contemporary museum setting, elements such as education, experience, community engagement, curiosity, entertainment, awareness, inspiration, and creativity come to the forefront, while curatorial practices are presented through an open, dynamic, and interactive language. Art and design frequently intersect and interact; at times, the museum itself even becomes an installation.

3.2 Installation Performance in the Museum

The act of "hanging" in the museum space, or "placing" artworks in the exhibition area, or the "installation" of a work, fundamentally refers to a practice of arrangement, curation, and spatial organization. It is the act of revealing the work's own mode of existence and creating a place for it within the space. This action often carries a curatorial and choreographic character. The distribution of objects in the space, and their relationship with the viewer, is not merely a physical placement but also a conceptual and aesthetic compositional process. Installing a work in a space does not simply determine its location; it stages its presence and creates a worldly horizon of meaning for the audience. In this way, the act of placement inherent in the object emerges as an intrinsic element of the museum, transforming into a placement (installation) performance.

Here, the notion of installation performance transforms the object from a passive display into a relational arrangement that shapes the visitor's participation, movement, and experience. Consequently, not only the physical presence of the artwork but also the encounters it generates and the new dialogues it fosters come to the fore. Furthermore, this installation performance in the museum allows the space to be redefined not merely

as a surface on which works are hung or placed on walls, but as a holistic and 360-degree environment to be experienced dynamically. Installation design, graphic design, exhibition techniques, and all other site-specific design elements create an interactive narrative layer that supports the conceptual framework of this performance.

Hal Foster argues that museums have become experiential, pluralistic, and interpretive spaces. Although he criticizes contemporary museums for attempting to create a "new cultural tourism economy," noting that the grandeur of museum architectures can overshadow the artworks, leaving them like an "overture," and that artists can respond to this only through installation practice, he also contends:

"İf designed and programmed intelligently, museums can allow for both entertainment and contemplation, and promote some understanding along the way. That is, they can be spaces where artworks reveal their 'promiscuity' with other moments of production and reception" (Foster, 2015, p.11).

In addition, he discusses the potential of museums to alter human perception, thinking, and the sense of time and space:

"A central role of the museum is to operate as a spacetime machine in this way, to transport us to different periods and cultures - diverse ways of perceiving, thinking, depicting and being - so that we might test them in relation to our own and vice versa, and perhaps be transformed a little in the process. In the end, if museums aren't places where different constellations of past and present are crystallised, why have them at all?" (Foster, 2015, p. 11).

3.3 Avant-Garde Approach and Installation Design

The concept of space and spatial perception was profoundly influenced in the early 20th century by avant-garde movements - particularly the experimental and interdisciplinary approaches of Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, which transformed the understanding of spatial experience. With these movements, the idea emerged that art is not merely an object but an experience and a spatial phenomenon. Marcel Duchamp and his contemporaries created examples that transformed the museum environment from a passive field of spectatorship into an active space of experience.

"Although Duchamp's artistic practice has long been thoroughly known and, especially over the past thirty or forty years, has been used as one of the fundamental reference points for contemporary art - or at least for contemporary Western art - it is still possible to make theoretical inferences about it" (Groys, 2020, p. 77).

The artist's radically innovative vision not only changed the course of art history but also profoundly influenced approaches to redefining space within an artistic context. In the mid-20th century, modernist museums and galleries sought to present the artwork within a neutral context - an approach that gave rise to the notion of the "white cube."

However, the avant-garde conception of art challenged these traditional exhibition practices, rejecting the "white cube" gallery space altogether.

Duchamp's spatial interventions were pioneering in terms of 20th-century exhibition design and installation practice. The artist's first example revealing his experimental relationship with space, was realized in 1938 within the framework of the Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme held at the Galerie Beaux-Arts in Paris.

"The exhibition was organized by André Breton and Paul Éluard, with Marcel Duchamp serving as the general director, and Salvador Dalí and Max Ernst as technical advisors. Man Ray was credited as the lighting designer" (Schneede, 2014, p. 2).

The exhibition consisted of three different sections. Duchamp hung 1,200 coal sacks from the ceiling of the main hall, covered parts of the floor with straw, and kept the lighting deliberately dim.

"In the main section and in Duchamp's Revolving Doors, paintings, collages, photographs, and graphics were hung under dim lighting. In addition, a variety of objects were placed on all kinds of pedestals. The space itself, filled with fragments gathered from nature and civilized life, took on a dark and absurd atmosphere — resembling more a cave or a womb than an exhibition hall" (Schneede, 2014, p. 5).

The vaulted ceiling of Duchamp's gallery design, covered with 1,200 coal sacks hanging side by side, resembled a vast underground cavern; the dim lighting, which required visitors to navigate the exhibition space with flashlights, created an immersive and holistic spatial experience.

Designing the conventional exhibition space in a comprehensive and inclusive manner from multiple perspectives enabled visitors to be guided through the space in unconventional ways, transforming the act of display into not only a physical but also a sensory and psychological experience. In this context,

"Let us also mention the ceiling from which the coal sacks were hung. For the first time in the history of exhibitions, the ceiling of a gallery space was emphasized in such a way - imbued, at the same time, with a psychic effect. By suspending coal sacks from the ceiling and placing the only source of illumination - an electric brazier - on the floor, Duchamp effectively inverted the positions of above and below. Duchamp would later reveal the secret: the sacks were indeed real coal sacks, which he had obtained from Villette and then stuffed with paper and newspaper scraps to give them a certain volume. Naturally, for the sake of visual effect, a bit of coal dust was added as well" (Schneede, 2014, p. 16-17).

This physical intervention integrated the exhibition space with conceptual thinking and design practice, becoming a precursor to early installation design.

Figure 2: Marcel Duchamp, 1200 Sacks of Coal, the International Exhibition of Surrealism, Galerie Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1938. Installation views, the images also show visitors examining the exhibited paintings with flashlights

By intervening in the physical structure of the space and altering the functional value of the exhibition area, other avant-garde examples can be found in:

"...*two exhibitions that opened in New York a week apart in October 1942; both addressed surrealism in exile and represented some of the most significant breakthroughs of the avant-garde in installation art. The first to open was First Papers of Surrealism, organized by André Breton. It featured a labyrinthine string installation designed by Marcel Duchamp, who had arrived in New York from Marseille in June seilles in June of year. The tangled web of cords -randomly stretched across the walls, display panels, and the gallery chandelier - created a dizzying barrier that interfered with the viewing of the paintings*" (Demos, 2001, p. 91).

In this exhibition, Duchamp transformed the entire gallery space into a kind of network by weaving approximately 1,600 meters of string throughout the area (Figure 3.). As seen in the exhibition photographs, the overall appearance of the space resembled a spider's web. In this context, it is evident that this intervention physically restricted the movement of the viewers within the exhibition space, while simultaneously making direct engagement with the artworks more difficult. This condition turned the act of exhibition into an unexpected, unconventional, and surreal field of experience. The site-specific, holistic installation created through the use of strings radically affected how the viewers navigated the space, as well as their habitual sense of distance and interaction with the artworks. In this exhibition, Duchamp intervened in the space both physically and conceptually, deliberately creating a sense of discomfort for the viewer. This installation can also be regarded as a precursor to contemporary exhibition design practices that question the space not merely as a surface for display, but as an

environment that interrogates participatory experience, visual accessibility, and bodily orientation. Therefore,

"The innovation strategy implemented by Duchamp is universal, independent of the specific artistic goals pursued by the artist himself, and influences every innovative movement" (Groys, 2020, p. 77).
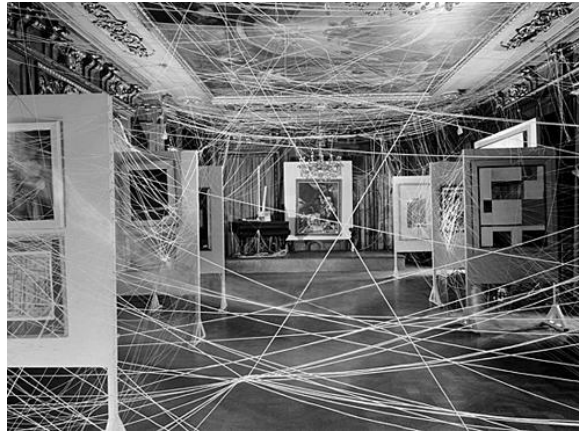
Figure 3: Marcel Duchamp, First Papers of Surrealism Exhibition
(Whitelaw Reid Mansion, New York, 1942)

The second exhibition, which opened in New York in 1942, was the inaugural show designed by Frederick Kiesler for Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century Gallery. The exhibition stands among the most significant examples that deepened the avant-garde display practices of its time. Two of the four main sections within the gallery - the Surrealist Gallery and the Abstract Gallery - were directly shaped by Kiesler's experimental approach to spatial design, presenting a curatorial vision that challenged the conceptual boundaries of the exhibition space. In the Surrealist Salon, the frames of the paintings were removed to prevent any interference between the viewer and the artwork. The walls were rendered concave, and the paintings were affixed to wooden extensions mounted on the wall, creating the illusion that they were floating (Figure 4.). To darken the atmosphere, Kiesler painted the background and ceiling black and the floor turquoise blue; the two sides of the space were illuminated alternately for two minutes, followed by a few seconds of complete darkness. In the Surrealist Gallery, each artwork was briefly illuminated only when the viewer pressed a button, imbuing the act of viewing with a dramatic and theatrical rhythm. The amorphous and curved surfaces of the walls transformed the exhibition space into a kind of physical representation of the unconscious (Waldman, 1993; Blessing, 1993; Demos, 2001; Rylands, 2004).
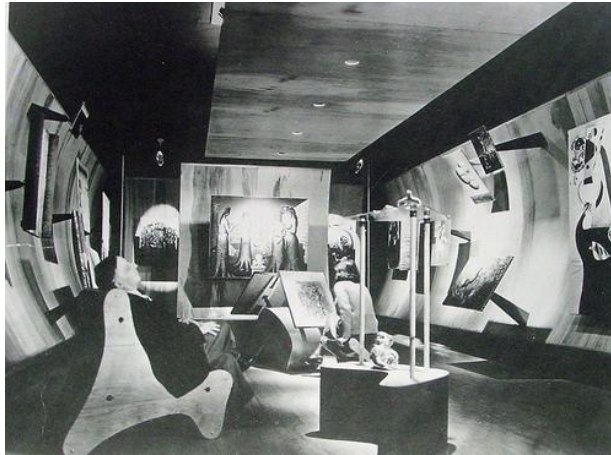
Figure 4: Frederick Kiesler, Surrealist Gallery, Art of This Century Gallery,
New York, 1942 (Peggy Guggenheim Collection)

The Abstract Gallery, on the other hand, departed entirely from traditional modes of display, aligning both formally and conceptually with the intrinsic nature of abstract art.

"In the Abstract Gallery, works by artists such as Kandinsky, Arp, and Mondrian were hung in midair with string. Interactive and mobile, they could be variously tilted and suspended at any height" (Demos, 2001, p. 92).

Suspended in midair - frameless and detached from the wall - these works interacted with the viewer's movement within the space. Thus, Kiesler's intervention translated the rhythmic, volumetric, and dynamic nature of abstract art into the structural qualities of the exhibition environment, establishing a pioneering configuration that questioned the conventional modes of presenting modernist art (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Frederick Kiesler, Abstract Gallery, Art of This Century Gallery,
New York, 1942 (Peggy Guggenheim Collection)

Kiesler's designs can be interpreted as holistic installations that compel a reconsideration not only of modes of viewing but also of the boundaries between graphic design, spatial arrangement, and exhibition design. In contrast to Duchamp's spatial

encounters structured around the body and orientation, Kiesler's works draw the viewer into a perceptual game, dramatizing the relationships among space, artwork, and spectator. In this context, the exhibition designs of both pioneers constitute foundational examples - not only historically but also theoretically - for contemporary installation design and display practices.

4. Findings

4.1 Installation Design in the Museum Environment

Based on field research, exhibition experiences, and observations conducted within museum environments, it would be accurate to state that the site-specific mode of thinking inherent in installation design is directly related to the museum environment. As noted above, from a historical perspective, this relationship began with avant-garde movements that challenged conventional modes of art presentation and has since evolved in a multifaceted manner up to the present day.

Today, considering both the examples discussed in the literature and current exhibition practices, it can be stated that the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum remains one of the foremost institutional structures that strengthen the relationship between installation art and space. Based on observations and analyses, it is evident that the museum supports the connection between installation practice and the museum environment/architecture on both spatial and conceptual levels. Designed by Frank Lloyd Wright (1867–1959) and opened in 1959 in New York, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum is not merely a building that displays works of art but an iconic form that transforms the act of viewing into a spatial experience. The museum's spiral ramp and the circular movement path revolving around the central void create a sense of fluidity that guides the visitor along both the horizontal and vertical axes. The physical structure, ingeniously designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, allows the exhibition space to be conceived as an active narrative medium and enables unrestricted spatial interventions. Indeed, the exhibition Countryside, The Future (2020-2021), observed on-site during the research process, employed an installation-based language that utilized the architectural potential of the Guggenheim Museum, transforming the museum environment into a conceptual site-specific installation (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Countryside, The Future, exhibition view, Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York, 2020-2021, (Photograph, the Author, (March 1, 2020))

Countryside, The Future was an exhibition that addressed urgent environmental, political, and socioeconomic issues through the vision of Rem Koolhaas and Samir Bantal, Director of AMO. The curatorial framework of the exhibition integrated this spatial movement into its narrative structure without disrupting the intrinsic rhythm and dynamism of the architecture. The installation-based exhibition design - through the visual, auditory, and textual stimuli encountered by the viewer while ascending the spiral - transformed the display from a presentation of discrete objects into a multilayered installation. Each level of the museum represented a different context related to the notion of the countryside, while these themes were articulated through a cohesive design of graphic panels, screens, documents, textual installations, and objects that transformed the interior of the Guggenheim into an immersive environment (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Countryside, The Future, exhibition view, Solomon R. Guggenheim
Museum, New York, 2020-2021 (Photograph, the Author, (March 1, 2020))

In this context, Countryside, The Future aligns not only with its curatorial content but also with the iconic architecture of the Guggenheim Museum. Moreover, through the

use of graphic panels, digital screens, textual installations, and various objects, the exhibition revealed the potential of typography and visual communication design to permeate space, transforming the museum environment into an installation-based narrative ground (Figure 8.) In this sense, the approach bears a meaningful parallel to Jenny Holzer's 1989 exhibition at the museum, which is regarded as pioneering for its typographic interventions. Holzer's LED texts, wrapping around the spiral ramp, translated the building's helical form into a conceptual language while demonstrating how public discourse could be rearticulated within the museum context. The Light Line exhibition, reinterpreted in 2024, further advanced this typographic language by integrating it with contemporary digital technologies, creating both a historical resonance and a contemporary intervention within the space (Guggenheim, 2024). Unlike Holzer's practice, which centers on direct discourse and intervention, Countryside, The Future engages with the viewer primarily through typography employed in data visualizations, research-based graphic arrangements, and documentary elements. In this regard, while both exhibitions underscore the transformative power of art, design, graphics, and typography within the Guggenheim's interior space, they define installation-based exhibition design through distinct approaches - one through a poetic and political gesture, the other through an analytical and research-oriented method. Large-scale typographic elements are prominently integrated both on the spiral architectural surfaces and within the exhibition components themselves.


Figure 8: Countryside, The Future, exhibition view, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, 2020–2021 (Photograph, the Author, (March 1, 2020))

Similarly, many contemporary art museums today adopt curatorial approaches that emphasize the permeability and reciprocal interaction between installation design and spatial context. In this regard, institutions such as MAXXI - Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo in Rome, the Modern Art section of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, the

Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain (MAMAC) in Nice, and both MoMA and MoMA PS1 in New York stand out not only for their collections but also for the architectural organization of their exhibition spaces and the dialogue established between this architecture and artistic production. In particular, the transformation of circulation areas - such as staircases, ramps, halls, and gallery transitions - into sites of visual and conceptual intervention demonstrates that installation practices do not merely serve a display function; rather, they transform architecture itself into an active component of experience, revealing installation art as an adaptable and transformative practice applicable to any kind of spatial setting.

For instance, the MAXXI Museum, designed by Zaha Hadid, generates an installation-like effect in itself through its organic and fluid forms, while the expansive ramps, towering voids, and intricate stair configurations within the interior offer opportunities for large-scale installations. However, in certain cases, this architectural excess can overshadow the legibility of the exhibited works, physically extending the distance between the artwork and the viewer. Nevertheless, the building remains one of the rare examples that supports the notion of the exhibition space not as a "neutral box," but as an experiential surface (Figure 9).
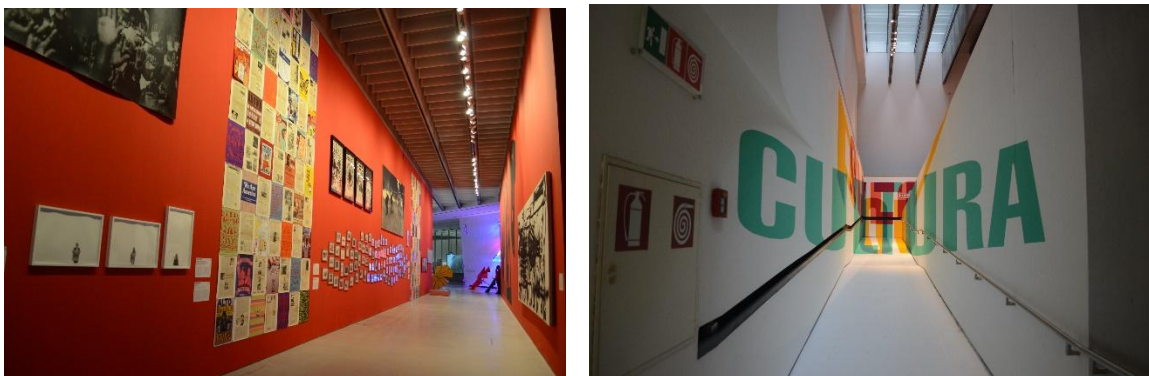

Figure 9: MAXXI - Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo,
museum views, Rome (Photograph, the Author, (May 1, 2019))

Similarly, in the Modern Art section of the Kunsthalle Hamburg, installations positioned within areas where the historical structure intersects with contemporary interventions—particularly within the stairwell spaces—draw significant attention. However, in some instances, the relationship established between certain installations and the architecture appears limited, giving the impression of a decorative contribution rather than a spatially integrated experience. Conversely, in several curatorial arrangements, these staircases have been effectively utilized for multilayered installations that can be viewed from both above and below, enhancing the viewer's spatial engagement.

For exmaple, MAMAC in Nice adopts an approach that intervenes in space through both permanent and temporary installations, particularly within its inner courtyard and stair structures. The museum's distinctive geometric architecture functions as a guiding element for exhibition practice, allowing architectural surfaces to

become meaning-bearing layers - especially in works based on typography or text-installation relationships. However, it can be observed that the static design of certain areas limits the potential for establishing a more experiential interaction with the space (Figure 10.).
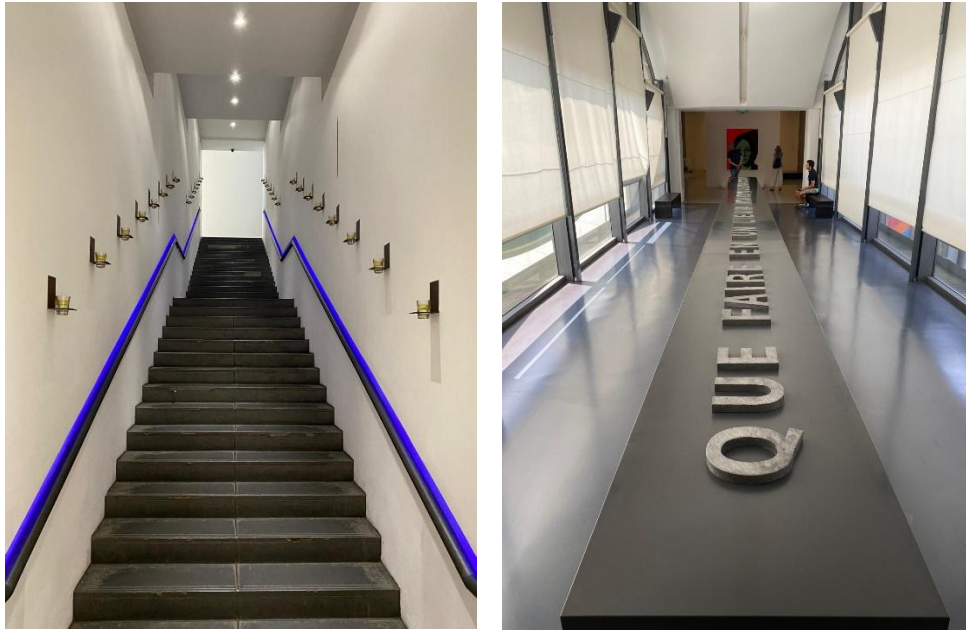
Figure 10: MAMAC - Musée d'Art Moderne et d'Art Contemporain, museum views, Nice (Photograph, the Author, (July 22, 2023))

MoMA in New York, and particularly its alternative exhibition space MoMA PS1, occupy distinct positions in relation to installation practice. While MoMA represents the institutional framework of modern art, its stairways, elevator surroundings, and transitional areas are occasionally integrated into holistic exhibition strategies by curators. Text-based installations, typographic panels, and wall interventions in these areas demonstrate that such spaces are conceived as integral components of the overall exhibition. In contrast, MoMA PS1 hosts more experimental and interdisciplinary installations, where even stairwells and basement levels are employed as parts of the curatorial narrative. Architecturally characterized by a more "raw" and industrial aesthetic, PS1 allows for greater spatial intervention and physically compels the viewer to engage directly with the artwork.

In all these examples, a common theme emerges: museum architecture has ceased to function merely as a display surface and has instead become an active environment in which art is produced, interpreted, and reconstructed. Particularly, the structural elements once regarded as transitional components of the space are now conceptualized as curatorial zones within these institutions. Consequently, these spaces have evolved from places where artworks or designs are simply "seen" into environments where they are "encountered." This shift reveals both the transformative capacity of installation design in redefining physical space and the intricate relationship established between typography, graphic design elements, and spatial experience.

4.2 Museum Experience and Digital Multimedia

With the advancement of digital technologies and their integration into creative fields, the museum experience today has evolved into a multisensory and participatory structure intertwined with digitalization. The use of digital multimedia radically transforms both the modes of presenting artworks and the nature of the relationship established with the audience. This transformation is particularly evident in the growing prevalence of immersive art experiences, interactive installations, and digital environments, which allow viewers to engage not only visually but also physically and emotionally. In this context, high-tech museum environments - equipped with interactive installations responsive to physical movement, as well as sound and light elements addressing multiple senses - create dynamic spaces where the viewer becomes an active participant rather than a passive observer. Although these experiences often foreground playfulness, interaction, curiosity, and the desire for exploration, many of them also encompass deeper layers that interrogate complex social and political issues. Within the scope of this study, field research and on-site observations demonstrate that the ways in which different museum institutions in both Europe and the United States respond to this digital transformation are shaped by their institutional structures, collection policies, broader global demands and trends, and local cultural perspectives.

For example, the Brooklyn Museum in New York, in addition to its extensive permanent collection, stands out as one of the pioneering institutions in integrating digital media and interactive technologies into its exhibition strategies. This approach, which enables visitors to engage directly with artworks through digital interfaces, aligns seamlessly with the museum's public and participatory character. The use of video installations and digital environments not only enhances visual diversity but also invites the audience on an intellectual journey. During field research, the interactive projection installation encountered in the museum's main hall clearly illustrated how digital and spatial technologies integrate with public cultural spaces and actively transform them (Figure 11). Through colored light projections that create dynamic visual layers across the floor and walls, the installation redefines the static museum architecture with a temporary yet striking visual atmosphere, while the accompanying sound installation extends this experience into a multisensory dimension. Particularly through the active engagement of child audiences, the installation demonstrates how the museum shifts away from a passive mode of viewing toward an experience rooted in embodiment, movement, and play. In this sense, the installational structure positions the viewer as an active subject, constructing a field of experience that stimulates curiosity, interaction, joy, and the desire for exploration. On the other hand, more focused and technologically sophisticated digital installations reconfigure the act of viewing by directing attention through perceptual layers such as light, color, and reflection. Similarly, the digital installation shown in Figure 12 at the Brooklyn Museum, which creates an illusion of depth through colored light strips placed on glass surfaces, particularly attracts the attention of younger audiences and encourages them to physically approach and engage with the work.

Figure 11. Brooklyn Museum,
Main Hall, New York.
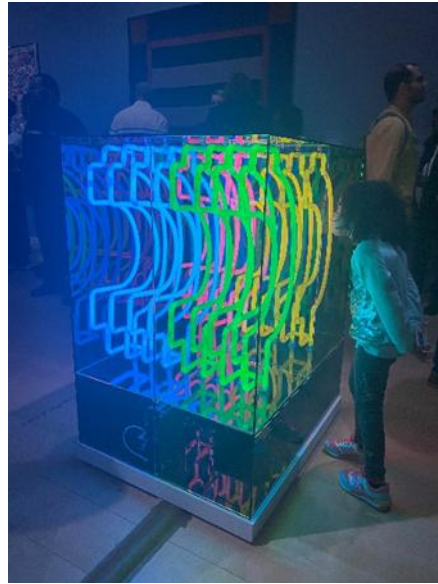
Figure 12. Brooklyn Museum, Digital Installation
(Photograph, the Author, (February 2, 2020))

In contrast, the Smithsonian institutions in Washington, D.C. prominently foreground digital exhibition practices centered on technology and education. Within these institutions, speculative designs envisioning the future, data visualizations, and augmented reality applications collectively create an environment that enhances visitors' intellectual engagement. Here, digital media functions not merely as a visual tool but as a medium intrinsically linked to the practice of critical thinking.

In Europe, on the other hand, one encounters immersive art examples that are more emotionally and experientially driven. The Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam, alongside its traditional classical museum structure, hosts a series of immersive exhibitions that reinterpret the artist's works through digital reproductions and 360-degree projection techniques. A similar version of this experience was observed in an exhibition in Budapest. Although this exhibition took place in a gallery rather than a museum space, the simultaneity of sound, light, and imagery surrounding the viewer created a powerful effect, transforming the space itself into an integral component of the art experience.

Similarly, the CCCB - Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona adopts an approach that foregrounds the conceptual potential of digital media, situating video art and digital installations within theoretical frameworks. Here, digital tools are not merely technological instruments but are considered extensions of artistic and design thinking. Furthermore, the institution curates space for experimental and high-tech practices, including bio-art, artificial intelligence, and data-driven art (Figure13).

Figure 13: CCCB - Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, Interior Views
of Video Installations (Photograph, the Author, (December 17, 2017))

Nowadays, museums are evolving into multilayered experiential spaces shaped by digital technologies. This diversity - ranging from interactive screens and augmented reality to site-specific video projections and fully immersive installations experienced with the entire body - transforms the museum visit into an experience, an act of participation, and even a form of play, made possible through digital installations.

5. Conclusion

Today, the museum environment is no longer merely a structure that preserves the aesthetic heritage of the past; it has transformed into a multilayered experiential space that engages the viewer, making them an active part of both the space and the narrative. Research indicates that, particularly in modern and contemporary art museums, installation design plays a crucial role in this transformation, actively contributing to the reconfiguration of space both physically and conceptually.

During the research process, it was observed that installation practice allows for a significant rupture in the conventional relationship between the artwork and the viewer. As a result, the museum environment becomes an experiential structure, where the viewer encounters not just an aesthetic object but a whole in which the object exists. Accordingly, installation design creates a universe in which the viewer does not merely look, but inhabits, steps into, touches, reads, orients within, and even becomes immersed in the work. Observations indicate that this transformation is gradually extending beyond large-scale modern and contemporary art museums to also impact classical institutions housing historical collections. Installation design and digital media tools emerge as effective instruments in redefining the museum environment, both in terms of content and form. In this context, it was noted that institutions in the United States tend to construct educational and informative digital environments, whereas European institutions emphasize immersive experiences that appeal to the senses and generate high emotional intensity. This distinction arises not only from technological preferences but also from the historical and cultural positioning of the institutions. However, these observations should not be considered fixed; they are part of an ongoing and evolving process.

In conclusion, installation design enables the reconstruction of museum environments on formal, conceptual, and emotional levels, while simultaneously advancing the contemporary museum experience into a multidimensional, participatory, and critically engaged domain.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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