

# Chapter 4

## Installation ArtWorks

**Abstract** Installation artworks are normally major works which act in a stand-alone capacity either inside or outside a building. They occupy a dedicated art space and focus an observer's attention on particular aspects related to the work or its relationship to the environment in which it is set or a combination of these two aspects. Examples of installation art are reviewed, including those uncovered by archaeological excavations and also those that are current. The extent to which modern technology may be utilized to enhance the viewer's experience is examined. This includes interactive capability and the use of audio and video. Virtual reality technology offers the viewer a more immersive experience and the opportunity to explore the artwork in more detail if it is physically inaccessible to the viewer. The relationship between art installation and theater are explored, and the extent to which the viewer's self-identity is maintained is discussed.

**Keywords** Dedicated art space • Story enactment • Time and culture • Real-time technologies • Multimedia

### 4.1 Introduction and History

Installation art [1, 2] is a major project which is normally implemented as a stand-alone exhibit. It is normally indoors, but it can also be outdoors. They have been constructed in dedicated art spaces such as galleries and museums, and also in private companies and public spaces. It differs from traditional art or sculpture by being one unified whole rather than a collection of different artworks. It may be designed to be viewed from the periphery of the installation, or with pathways through it so that observers can explore it close up. Sometimes such installations are specific to the site in which they are constructed and have some kind of symbiotic relationship to the space of which they are a part. Most are currently static, but some are interactive. Some also use modern technology, such as multimedia, or virtual reality, in order to provide a more immersive and interactive experience for viewers.

Art installation and theater have some parallels. In both cases, the viewer enters from the external world and observes a presentation and enactment of an implicit story. The art installation is observed by the viewer who is expected to consider and react to what is displayed whilst at the same time maintaining their self-identity as a viewer. A similar situation pertains in a production where an artistic work (e.g., a play) is presented by actors to an audience in a theater. The degree to which the viewer suspends belief of the real world may depend to some degree on the effectiveness of the art installation.

If there is interaction of the viewer with the art installation, then the viewer may be able to generate their own story and perception of the artwork using the installation as a backdrop. Interaction may be supported by allowing the viewer to physically explore the components of the installation, or it may support a virtual reality experience, where the viewer interacts with a virtual reality implementation of the installation.

## 4.2 Qin Tombs

The Qin Tombs near Xian in China contain terracotta warriors and may be considered as a historical art installation though its purpose was to protect the mausoleum of the emperor. First investigated by archaeologists in 1974, the excavations cover an area of 20,000 m<sup>2</sup> and have uncovered over 8000 statues of terracotta warriors and horses and a hundred wooden battle chariots and weapons [3]. They date from approximately the third century BCE. Figure 4.1 shows pit no 1 in the museum of Xian with the terracotta warriors. Figure 4.2 shows a terracotta soldier and his horse. Figures are in the public domain courtesy of Robin Chen.

There are many similar archaeological excavations being performed at many sites around the world and many of them contain art exhibits or collection of artworks for particular purposes.

## 4.3 Installation Art and Infrastructure

The boundary between installation art and other displays and infrastructure which may be used in art galleries and museums to support or portray exhibits may be blurred and difficult to define. For example, a natural history museum may utilize artificial environments to create an artist's impression of the natural world they are seeking to portray. Similarly, many shops have display windows which create artificial environments to display their products to best advantage. High-end restaurants create physical environments which seek to add positively to the dining experience within them. Computer games contain virtual environments which seek to add value to the experience of gameplay.



**Fig. 4.1** General view of the pit no 1 in the museum of Xi'an (courtesy of Robin Chen). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mausoleum\\_of\\_the\\_First\\_Qin\\_Emperor#/media/File:Xian\\_museum.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mausoleum_of_the_First_Qin_Emperor#/media/File:Xian_museum.jpg)

## 4.4 Art Installations

### 4.4.1 *The Mattress Factory*

The Mattress Factory in Pittsburgh, USA, exhibits room-sized installation art [4]. It derives its name from its previous commercial use, and the name is not related to its new purpose or the various installations now within it. It also offers artists space for research and development. It supports various forms of new media [5] and has a YouTube channel [6]. It was one of the first museums in the USA to utilize QR codes, and these are used to provide information to visitors [7].

Its mission statement is stated as follows [8]:

*The Mattress Factory is a research and development lab for artists. As a museum of contemporary art, it commissions new site-specific works, presents them to the widest possible audience and maintains selected individual installations in a growing - and distinctive - permanent collection. The Mattress Factory's physical and organizational environments have developed out of and responded to a central focus in the creative process.*

Installation artworks from the following artists are on permanent display in the Mattress Factory—James Turrell, Bill Woodrow, Allan Wexler, William Anastasi, Dove Bradshaw, Jene Highstein, Rolf Julius, Yayoi Kusama, Winifred Lutz, Greer Lankton, Vanessa Sica & Chris Kasabach, Monica M., Bock, Mary Carlisle,

**Fig. 4.2** A terracotta soldier with his horse (courtesy of Robin Chen). [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terracotta\\_Army#/media/File:Soldier\\_Horse.JPG](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Terracotta_Army#/media/File:Soldier_Horse.JPG)



Cathy Lynn Gasser, Melissa Goldstein, Sandrine Sheon, and Catherine Smith (collaboration) [8, 9].

#### ***4.4.2 The Museum of Installation, London***

Nico de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, and Michael Petry opened this museum in 1990. It was dedicated to art installation [10].

#### ***4.4.3 The Fairy Doors of Ann Arbor***

A more specialized, unconventional, form of installation art is the series of small doors [11, 12] found in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA. They have generated a cult following and appear to be mainly for children. New doors appear in new venues from time to time [13].

### 4.4.4 *Yayoi Kusama*

Yayoi Kusama's installation art impacts on the boundaries of space. Videos illustrate this [14].

## 4.5 Utilization of New Technology

The rise of the digital age has enabled static art installations to utilize video and audio and other digital functions and facilities. For dynamic installations, they can include facilities for interaction by the viewer by means of wireless links (e.g., from a mobile phone). This has enabled art installations to move to a new level of artistic power, complexity, and impact for those artists wishing to utilize the digital facilities now generally available.

Digital technology not only provides new functions, but can also have an effect on traditional understandings of space, time, and culture [15, 16]. Real-time technologies can involve the processing of large amounts of data not previously possible and real-time responses in interaction. Thus, galleries and museums can face new opportunities and possibilities particularly in the areas of communication, dissemination, and interaction.

## 4.6 Conclusions

The nature of installation art has been reviewed. A number of venues with installation art have been examined. The relationship of the installation art to its setting immediate environment has been reviewed. Digital technology is making an increasing impact on installation art. It offers possibilities for audio and video and also interaction with the artwork, which increases the range of user experiences. Virtual reality technology also offers the viewer a more immersive experience.

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