

Installation: the art of creating experience

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Dating from prehistory, the practice of visual art has evolved significantly through the use of new technologies. First recognized as an artistic discipline in the 1970s, installation is loosely defined as any three-dimensional work comprised of objects arranged within a given space. However, recent installation may also incorporate new media such as video projection, sound, and even virtual reality. The 1970's marked a diversion from traditional sculpture towards a practice of curating particular experiences through the creation of spaces. As such, artists became more focused on conveying a meaning behind their work, rather than aiming for a particular aesthetic quality. Because installation is highly innovative and reliant on evolving technologies, the boundaries of what is included in this sector will continually adapt with the discipline.

Both the cultural and consumer demand for art is dependant on the sector in question, as well as the time at which the art is created. For instance, a 2008 report indicates a decreased demand for traditional art forms such as theatre, classical music, and visual art, attributing the decline to an aging population and lack of arts education in youth. While these factors are certainly contributors, the decreased demand during the 2008 recession was likely because the general population, as well as the government did not have the financial means to prioritize the support of the arts. The report also fails to consider that not all traditional art forms have evolved to meet the changing tastes of the population, and therefore, may not be as appealing to the current audience. However, a decade later, the success of the Infinity Mirrors exhibit by Yayoi Kusama demonstrates that installation art is becoming increasingly popular. By allowing viewers to photograph the

exhibit, the installation quickly took over social media, increasing demand and driving sales. Evidently, when artists harness innovative technologies, they can remain relevant in an ever-changing cultural and economic environment.

While installation artists need financial support to earn a living, institutions and organizations that generate exposure can be equally important to an artist's career. For instance, galleries provide a space for artists to display their work. However, they may also advertise the exhibit, and the resulting publicity could lead to future commissions for the artist. Similarly, public art events such as Toronto's Nuit Blanche do not provide funding for "Independent" entries; however, viewers may document the artist's work on social media, benefiting the artist long after the event. Art organizations may also present awards to artists that do not necessarily help them financially but rather, allow them to achieve the recognition they deserve in the art community. Finally, policymakers play a key role in growing demand in the sector, determining the quality of art produced and providing public access to that art, which are both necessary to sustain an artist's career.

In Canada, arts councils operate at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels to provide funding of varying capacities for individual projects, as well as awarding prizes to artists who excel in particular fields. Additionally, Toronto's Nuit Blanche often features installation work and if registered as an "Open Call" project, artists can receive funding provided their artwork is created exclusively for the event. Though they don't always offer compensation, organizations such as Artscape provide artists' residencies, and can help artists secure work spaces or offer subsidized rent. Finally,

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installation artists may work on a commission basis or under contract for a particular gallery, or a corporate or private client.

The site-specific nature of installation art can be a double-edged sword. For instance, a public art installation may draw viewers from out of town because the piece can only be seen in that particular location. Thus, it stimulates the local economy and increases the cultural demand for art. However, unlike a painting which can be transferred from gallery to gallery, installations are often designed for a specific space and can be costly to relocate. Another obstacle for Canadian installation artists is the allocation of visual arts funding by the Ontario Arts Council, where emerging artists are provided less funding than established artists. This creates a paradox where it may be more difficult to succeed as a new artist, as often, one needs funding to become established.