

Contextual transformation in installation art: The influence of the museum space on the meaning of the artwork

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Abstract

The art of installation emerged as a form of expression that transcended the boundaries of modernist aesthetic understanding from the 1960s onwards, transforming space into an active component of art production. This transformation, ranging from Duchamp's ready-made objects to site-specific approaches, demonstrated that the meaning of a work of art is directly related to the context in which it is exhibited. Brian O'Doherty's critique of the "white cube" and Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura" provide important theoretical frameworks that explain the decisive role of the museum space in the perception of the work. This study examines the relationship that installation art establishes with context through contemporary art institutions in Turkey. The purposeful sample of the research consists of institutions such as OMM Modern Museum, Istanbul Modern, Arter, Pera Museum, and Elgiz Museum. The transformation of the production and experience areas of installation art, as reflected in the architectural qualities, exhibition strategies, and site-specific practices of these museums, is analyzed through case studies. These institutions were selected because they use site-specific productions extensively in their current exhibition practices, have distinct architectures, and include examples that make the experiential dimension of installation art visible. The works examined establish a direct relationship with the spatial structure of each institution, are suitable for contextual reading, and constitute a field of discussion in the literature on the interaction between space and work. The findings show that the museum space is not merely a display surface but a dynamic structure that reconfigures the meaning of the work. According to this article, installation art develops spatial strategies that differ according to institutional structures in Turkey, and museum architecture directly influences the artist's production language. Furthermore, the study shows that space functions not only as a physical environment but also as an active subject that constructs the artwork's meaning. The innovative aspect of the research is that it is the first to comprehensively evaluate, within a theoretical framework, the interaction between contemporary museum architecture and site-specific art production in Turkey.

Keywords: Installation art, site-specificity, context transformation, white cube, contemporary art, museum space

Extended Abstract

The art of installation emerged in the 1960s as a form of expression that transcended the boundaries of modernist aesthetic understanding, enabling a new approach in which space became an active component of art production. This transformation, ranging from Duchamp's ready-made objects to site-specific applications, has shown that the meaning of a work of art derives not only from its form but also from the context in which it is exhibited. In this regard, Brian O'Doherty's critique of the "white cube" and Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura" provide important theoretical frameworks that explain the decisive role of space in the perception of a work. This study examines the relationship between installation art and context through the architectural features, exhibition policies, and site-specific practices of contemporary art institutions in Turkey. The purposefully selected samples, OMM, Istanbul Modern, Arter, Pera Museum, and Elgiz Museum, constitute rich examples for the research in terms of their intensive use of site-specific productions in current exhibition practices, their different architectural structures, and their visibility of the experiential aspect of installation art.

Qualitative analysis was adopted as the research method, and the relationship between each institution's architectural structure and the works it exhibits was evaluated through case studies. The examined examples analyzed how the works were placed within the spatial structure, the extent to which they transformed the space, and how they interacted with the context. This study reveals that installation art has developed distinct spatial strategies in response to institutional structures in Turkey.

The findings show that the museum space is not a passive backdrop but a dynamic element that reconfigures the artwork's meaning. Arter's architecture offers a flexible space where artists can directly intervene, allowing the architectural order to be redefined in each exhibition. At Arter, space exists as a "creative space" open to the artist's use, shaping works. In contrast, Istanbul Modern's new structure offers a more institutional and organized approach to exhibitions; the space often functions as a framework that defines the work's organizational boundaries. Both models frame the relationship between installation art and space differently yet both reveal the importance of context in

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shaping the work's meaning.

Geographically located outside the city, Baksı Museum defines space not only as an architectural framework but also as a cultural and topographical context. The installation works in this institution are read together with the silence, isolation, and landscape of the geography they inhabit; thus, space becomes an integral part of the work. Elgiz Museum, on the other hand, creates its context through urban density, given its location among the city center's dense plazas. The museum's terrace area establishes a unique dialogue between Maslak's vertical architecture and the sculptures and installations. The rhythmic repetition of skyscrapers creates spatial tension by contrasting with the organic or fluid forms of the works on the terrace. In this case, space ceases to be merely a surface on which the works are displayed and becomes one of the constituent elements of meaning. Many of the works on the terrace have been selected or produced specifically to relate to this context. Thus, the terrace creates a "threshold space" between urban architecture and contemporary art, offering an important alternative exhibition model, especially given that large-scale works struggle to find a place in Turkey.

Overall, the research shows that contemporary museum practices in Turkey have undergone a transformation that reveals the spatial potential of installation art. These institutions are redefining space not merely as a technical exhibition surface but as an active actor in the process of meaning production, thereby strengthening the institutional visibility of installation art. The innovative aspect of the research lies in being the first study to comprehensively evaluate, within a theoretical framework, the relationship between contemporary museum architecture and site-specific art production in Turkey.

In conclusion, this study asserts that the meaning of installation art in Turkey is inseparable from the spatial and institutional context provided by museums. Expanding this framework to include biennials, independent spaces, and public art will further substantiate the argument that context is foundational to the production and perception of installation art.

Introduction

This article argues that installation art, emerging in the 1960s, shifts the definition and function of art through its inherent reliance on space and context. By foregrounding spatial experience and the viewer's active participation, installation art challenges object-centered modernist aesthetics, thereby supporting the article's main argument about the centrality of context in shaping meaning. At the heart of this article is the claim that site-specificity, as a defining feature of installation art, necessarily links the work's meaning to its context. Citing Krauss and Kwon, the text asserts that the museum, as context and institution, actively constructs meaning and mediates the viewer's understanding. Thus, the research reaffirms the main argument: spatial and institutional factors are fundamental to the significance of installation art.

The museum space is also an important arena for discussion of this transformation. Brian O'Doherty's critique of the "white cube" reveals that the modern gallery's seemingly neutral, timeless, and sterile approach to exhibition actually provides an ideological framework (O'Doherty, 1986, pp. 14-16). The transformation of meaning as the work changes context -from public space to a museum, from the street to a white cube- opens the door to contemporary interpretations of Walter Benjamin's concept of "aura." Thus, the museum becomes not merely an institution that exhibits works, but a spatial apparatus that reproduces meaning. Benjamin's concept of "aura" is based on the debate about uniqueness lost with modern reproduction techniques (Benjamin, 1969, pp. 220-221). Installation art, on the contrary, creates a kind of "new aura" through its structure, which cannot be reproduced and only gains meaning within the space it occupies. The museum becomes a context in which this aura is reconstructed.

This study aims to examine the relationship that installation art establishes with its spatial context through contemporary art institutions in Turkey. Various institutions, from OMM Modern Museum to Istanbul Modern, Arter, and Pera Museum, make unique contributions to installation art through their distinct architectural structures,

exhibition strategies, and cultural positions. These spaces host installations that sometimes transform natural light, spatial arrangements, and circulation patterns, while at other times blend the historical structure with contemporary productions, immersing the viewer in a physical and auditory experience.

Therefore, this research examines both the historical and theoretical foundations of installation art and how museum spaces in Turkey transform the meaning of the work in a comparative manner. The aim of the research is to demonstrate that space is not a passive display surface but an active producer of meaning and to make visible the role that contemporary art institutions play in this transformation.

From object placement to new artistic design: Installation art

The art of installation emerged in the 1960s and has become an important part of modern art. It signifies a major shift, particularly in the American art scene. Various movements such as pop art, op art, minimalism, conceptual art, environmental art, Arte Povera, Fluxus, and performative formations have transformed the rigid boundaries of modernist aesthetics, reintroducing themes such as figures, objects, representation, and everyday life into the realm of art. This transformation not only meant abandoning aesthetic norms but also blurred the distinction between “art-life” and “high-popular culture,” bringing the two fields closer together. This process of transformation has also directly affected the figure of the artist, leading to the dissolution of the artist’s privileged, sanctified position in society. Thus, the understanding that creative action is not solely in the hands of the artist but that every individual in society can participate in the artistic production process to a certain extent has gradually gained acceptance (Kaya, 2017, p. 169).

Installation art is an artistic approach that can be applied both indoors and outdoors, in which simple, ordinary objects are placed and arranged within a space. Also referred to as installation, this term centers on the foundations of meaning and perception established by objects within a space (Toluyağ, 2020, p. 103). Installation art is a form of expression that has developed since the 1960s and has made space an active component of art production. Although they emerged at the same time, these two approaches differ. While Land Art is a practice that uses nature directly as material and was often developed in opposition to the gallery system, installation art focuses on spatial arrangements that center the viewer's experience in both indoor and outdoor spaces (Özkan Bilgiç, 2024, pp. 34-35).

The 20th century is considered a period of rupture in art history, when traditional aesthetic expectations and established ways of seeing were fundamentally shaken. One of the most influential figures at the center of this transformation was Marcel Duchamp. Duchamp’s ready-made objects invalidated the classical understanding that limited art production to specific materials, leading to the question “what is art?” being raised again. Thus, art expanded beyond the confines of museums and galleries to encompass a broader field that includes the natural environment, everyday living spaces, and public spaces (Kaya, 2017, p. 169).

The concept of site-specificity

In site-specific art production, the process begins with an analysis of the location's physical characteristics, historical background, and cultural context. The architectural structure, topography, social fabric, and even the site’s political history become decisive factors that guide the artist’s creative process. Thus, the space becomes not just a place where the work is exhibited, but an active element that shapes the meaning of the work. Therefore, the resulting work is evaluated in

conjunction with the memory, culture, and physical characteristics of its location. In line with this approach, examples can be examined of how different artists transform the memory and physical data of a place in their site-specific works.

Since the late 1960s, outdoor sculptures have begun to establish stronger relationships with the public environments in which they are placed, giving rise to new discussions about the functions, memories, and user experiences of public space. Many works produced during this period aimed to rebuild the sociality that was gradually disappearing in public spaces, treating the space not only as an exhibition area but also as a platform that encourages social interaction. In this context, while some artists focused on spatial arrangements that enhance social communication, other works aimed to make the viewer an active part of the process (Yilmaz, 2011, pp. 2-5).

Rosalind Krauss states that space is not a passive vessel in artistic production, but an active component that constructs the meaning of the work; therefore, when a site-specific work is removed from its location, it loses its conceptual integrity. Miwon Kwon argues that art in public spaces is determined by political decision-making processes and social dynamics, and therefore public space installations cannot be fully autonomous (Alfred & Marie, 2016; Levine, 2002, p. 52; Tokdil, 2023, pp. 140-141).

The museum space and the critique of the “white cube”

American art critic Brian O’Doherty writes in his 1970s writings that an empty museum or gallery is not a neutral space in itself, but rather that every space offers a structure that reconfigures a specific idea, ideology, and understanding of art. In this context, space assumes a transformative role, elevating the artwork from an everyday object to one of artistic status. O’Doherty’s “white cube” approach, which has become one of the most prominent models of contemporary exhibition practices, is considered the fundamental aesthetic symbol of modern gallerism. Founded in 1929, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York is one of the earliest and most influential examples of this exhibition ideology, which has guided the spatial arrangements of modern museums and served as a model for many institutions (Şahin, 2024, p. 29). In his work *Inside the White Cube* (1976), Brian O’Doherty argues that the modern museum and gallery space is not merely a neutral exhibition area, but rather an ideological construct that determines how art should be perceived. This space, referred to as the “white cube,” with its white walls, homogeneous lighting, and invisible architectural interventions, detaches the artwork from its historical, social, and spatial context and places it in a supposedly “timeless” space. Thus, while appearing neutral, the space actually produces a powerful framework that positions the artwork within its own aesthetic and economic order.

This ideological structure is fundamentally at odds with the principles of installation art. Installation art constructs the meaning of the work precisely through its physical environment, materials, light, circulation, and spatial relationships. Therefore, when detached from its context and placed in a sterile “white cube,” the work’s spatial dependency is compromised. While installation art makes the space part of the work, the white cube seeks to separate the work from the space and turn it into an “autonomous” object. For this reason, the white cube embodies a structural contradiction with the context-sensitivity of installation art.

This debate becomes even clearer in light of Walter Benjamin’s concept of aura. According to Benjamin, the “aura” of a work derives from its unique time-space location, that is, its “here and now” existence. The sterile, context-free space of the

white cube erases the work's unique spatial connection and establishes an artificial unity that attempts to reproduce the aura. In contrast, installation art strengthens the aura by firmly anchoring it to the work's specific context. Therefore, there is not only an aesthetic but also an ontological conflict between the white cube space and the site-specific nature of installation art. While one aims to timelessize the work by disregarding context, the other makes context the work's fundamental source of meaning (Ertuğrul-Tomsuk & Yücel, 2021, pp. 243-249).

The concept of context transformation

Walter Benjamin's concept of aura, central to modern art discourse, is closely linked to the artwork's historical position and its unique connection to space. According to Benjamin, the uniqueness of a work of art is determined not only by its material existence but also by its traditional context, that is, the historicity of its location. In this respect, "aura" expresses the state of being closely tied to the original location of the work.

The technical means of reproduction that emerged in the modern era accelerated the detachment of the work of art from its historical and spatial context. According to Benjamin, technological reproduction processes eliminate the unique spatial presence of a work, freeing it from its original location and transforming it into an object independent of space that can circulate anywhere. Therefore, "aura" is not merely an aesthetic feature but also a spatial quality that represents the unique bond between the work and its space, a bond weakened by modern reproduction techniques. The loss of the work's "here and now" state leads the viewer to experience it not within its historical context, but as an image that can be consumed anywhere. This change creates a rupture that manifests in two ways. First, the artwork loses its traditional position in the past, thus weakening its uniqueness. Second, the viewer's relationship with the work is established not through space but through technical media such as cinema or television. Such media produce an artificial "aura" in place of the work's original spatial connection and offer the viewer a false sense of intimacy.

Benjamin's concept of "aura" points not only to the aesthetic consequences of technical reproduction but also to the transformation of the spatial identity of the work of art by modernization. When the work's quality of being "here and now" disappears, both the historical weight of the space and the original relationship established with the viewer are lost. Thus, art is pushed into a different position in the social context and becomes a commodified cultural product. Benjamin's discussion of "aura" is therefore a powerful critique of the severing of modern art's connection to space (Sevim, 2010, pp. 510-512).

On the art of installation in Turkey

OMM Modern Museum

OMM, designed by Kengo Kuma & Associates, integrates modern architecture with the region's cultural fabric through a layered massing system inspired by the timber-framed construction technique of traditional Odunpazarı houses. The exterior façade, composed of wooden slats (Figure 1), allows light to be controlled while enabling the museum to offer a permeable spatial experience from the outside in. Circulation within the interior is established through interconnected voids at different levels, allowing visitors to establish a constantly changing visual relationship with the exhibition space (Omm.art, 2025).

This architectural approach departs from the white cube's concept of a completely

independent and neutralized space, making architecture an active component of the exhibition. Natural light, wood texture, spatial fluidity, and the rhythmic arrangement of masses form a foundation that strengthens the relationship between installation art and space.



Figure 1. Odunpazarı
Modern Museum,
Eskişehir, Turkey
(Architect: Kengo
Kuma & Associates)

OMM does not offer a neutral space designed solely with the “white cube” concept in mind; instead, it uses a hybrid exhibition model that creates a modern yet warm atmosphere. The walls and surfaces are not entirely white; the wooden structural elements give the space a natural, warm tone. Therefore, the space is not completely sterile, as in traditional galleries. Lighting is also different at OMM. Unlike most museums, it does not rely solely on artificial light; instead, the architecture allows daylight to enter in a controlled manner. This allows the works to establish a stronger relationship with their surroundings. The exhibition areas are designed with high ceilings, varied volumes, layered structures, and open and closed spaces. Therefore, visitors do not follow a straight route. As they move through the space, they experience something different at every point. The works are not simply hung on walls; the spaces, architectural structure, and lighting play an active role in their display. This approach is consistent with the logic of installation art, because it produces meaning in conjunction with the space. OMM’s architecture and exhibition format reinforce the site-specific nature of these works, allowing them to create new meanings in conjunction with their location.

One notable example of spatial installation exhibited at OMM is the site-specific work by Japanese bamboo master Tanabe Chikuunsai IV (Figure 2). Belonging to one of Japan’s long-established families of bamboo masters, Chikuunsai IV learned this craft as a child from his father, who was also his teacher. After graduating from the sculpture department of Tokyo University of the Arts in 1999, the artist continued his work in Osaka, following a path that both preserves and advances the bamboo craftsmanship his family has continued for generations with his own interpretation. The innovative approach characteristic of the family tradition has been decisive in Chikuunsai IV’s large-scale site-specific installations, which have brought international visibility to bamboo art (Omm.art, 2025). The artist states that he drew inspiration from the four fundamental elements of nature (fire, water, earth, and air)

when conceptualizing his work, and that he embraced the concept of “emptiness” as a fifth element. The artwork is positioned in a specially designated, spacious area within the museum, creating an impressive atmosphere that envelops the viewer. Instead of artificial lighting, natural light filtering into the space from outside is preferred, thus making the texture and form of the bamboo material more visible. The arrangement also provides sufficient circulation space, allowing visitors to view the work from different angles.



Figure 2. Tanabe
Chikuunsai,
Connection, 2019,
Odunpazarı Modern
Museum (OMM),
Eskişehir, Turkey

Istanbul Museum of Modern Art: Institutional visibility of contemporary art

Istanbul Modern, which plays a significant role in raising the visibility of contemporary art on an institutional scale in Turkey, has actively incorporated installation art into its collection, exhibitions, and program content since its inception. The museum's international exhibition policy, extensive spatial capabilities, and particularly its experience-focused areas provide an infrastructure suitable for realizing large-scale installations. Istanbul Modern approaches

installation art not merely as an objective field of production but as a multi-layered practice that also encompasses the viewer's spatial experience, playing a decisive role in the development of this art form in Turkey (İstanbulmodern, n.d.).



Figure 3. Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, Istanbul, Turkey (Architect: Renzo Piano)

Located in Tophane, the museum is Turkey's first institution dedicated to modern and contemporary art, bringing interdisciplinary art productions to audiences through permanent and temporary exhibitions. Founded under the leadership of Dr. Nejat F. Eczacıbaşı, Istanbul Modern aims to foster a sustainable cultural environment by organizing educational programs, workshops, and artistic events for people of all ages. The museum's collection encompasses a wide range of art, including painting, sculpture, installation, photography, video, and new media, and the works of international contemporary artists form a dynamic part of the exhibition program (Şahin, 2024, pp. 36-37).

Istanbul Modern's new building, designed by *Renzo Piano Architecture Studio* (Figure 3), reflects current understandings of modern museology through its simple geometry, façade arrangement that conveys a sense of lightness, and structural design that prioritizes transparency. The building is designed to support the public use of the Galataport waterfront, adopting a permeable architectural approach that visually connects the interior with the exterior through large glass surfaces. Thus, the museum has transformed from a closed structure solely for exhibiting artworks into a public experience space in constant interaction with its surroundings. These qualities create a flexible ground suitable for site-specific art production. High-volume exhibition halls, modular wall systems, and a roof structure that optimizes natural light create a production and exhibition environment that strengthens the artist's relationship with the space. The architectural structure becomes an integral element where artworks are not only exhibited but also redefined in relation to the space (İstanbulmodern, n.d.).

İstanbul Modern's exhibition approach is based on presenting modern and contemporary art practices from an interdisciplinary perspective. A thematic rather than chronological arrangement is preferred in the permanent collection, opening up an interpretive reading space for the viewer. Temporary exhibitions mostly feature installations that are sensitive to the space, experience-oriented, and turn the viewer

into an active subject. The museum's exhibition strategy, with its wide circulation areas, high ceilings, and fluid layout, enhances the visibility of large-scale installations and allows visitors to walk around the artwork from multiple perspectives. In this respect, Istanbul Modern embraces exhibition designs that transform the space from a “visual frame” into a direct component of art production.



Figure 4. Selma Gürbüz, 2020, *This Place We Call World*, Istanbul Modern, İstanbul, Turkey

İstanbul Modern hosted the exhibition titled *A Place Called World* (Figure 4) in 2020, bringing together Selma Gürbüz's over thirty-five years of artistic practice as part of its programs aimed at increasing the visibility of female artists in Turkey. The exhibition, which includes paintings, drawings, sculptures, installations, videos, and digital productions presented to the audience for the first time, presents Gürbüz's world, constructed with her unique imagery, within a thematic unity. Gürbüz's works, which carry traces of Eastern narrative traditions such as Iranian, Indian, and Turkish miniatures and Western painting, explore themes of human-animal relationships, the cycle of life and death, and inner journeys within a fictional universe. The artist's works, inspired by his experiences in Africa, interpret the interaction between nature and humans through a multi-layered narrative. Emphasizing the importance of the exhibition for the museum, Oya Eczacıbaşı, Chair of the Board of Directors of Istanbul Modern, noted that one of Gürbüz's works had been acquired for the museum's collection through the Women Artists Fund, adding that the exhibition was significant in bringing together over a hundred works from different periods of the artist's career. Curator Öykü Özsoy described the exhibition as a “visual encyclopedia” that brings together the visual lexicon that Gürbüz has developed over the years. Held with precautions appropriate to Covid-19 conditions, the exhibition marks a turning point in the artist's personal production. In Gürbüz's words, every exhibition is a confrontation with the past and a new intellectual beginning (İstanbulmodern, n.d.).

Another of Istanbul Modern's iconic installations, which debuted in 2024, is Chiharu Shiota's *Between Worlds* (Figure 5). Structurally, the installation transforms the physical space into a temporal and existential concept, conceptualizing the space as a “transition zone.” The viewer finds themselves suspended between two worlds. The artist's dense network of threads transforms the hall's neutral architecture into a vehicle for themes of personal memory, loss, connection, and existence. Thus, the space ceases to be a neutral exhibition container and becomes a shell carrying emotional weight. *Between Worlds* takes shape around the invisible bonds of human beings, the state of transition between life and death, and the patterns of memory,

which are fundamental issues in Shiota's work.

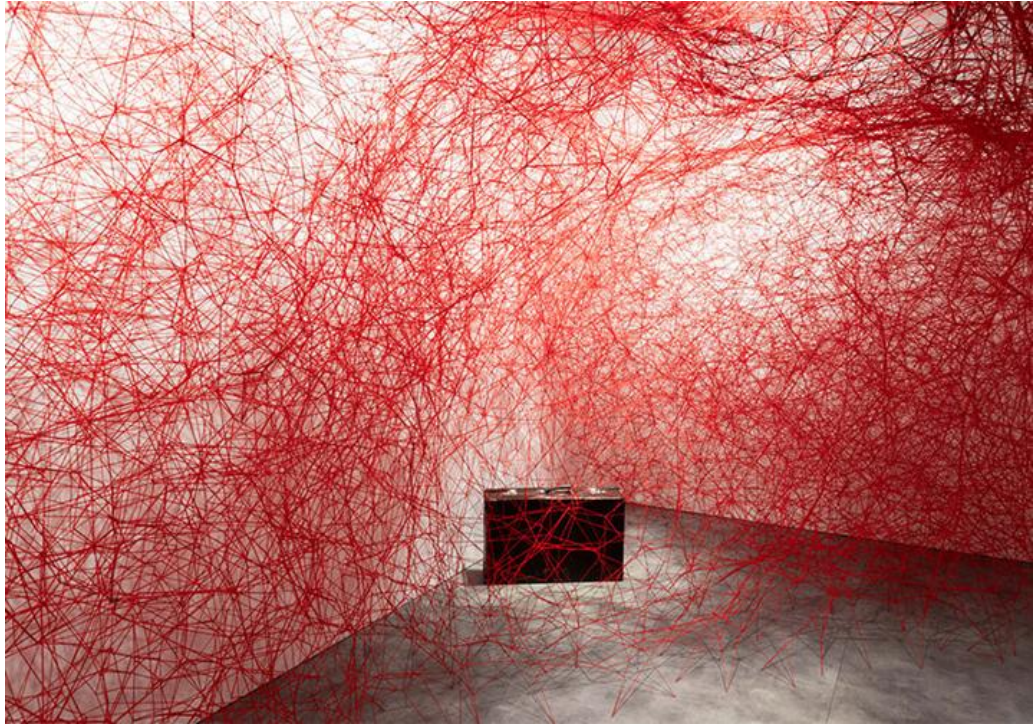


Figure 5. Between Worlds, Istanbul Modern Art Museum, September 6, 2024-January 25, 2026, Istanbul, Turkey (Curator: Öykü Özsoy)

The installation's intervention in the space reinforces this meaning. The red threads evoke metaphors of blood, energy, connection, and path, while also solidifying the invisible network of relationships by clinging to every surface in the space. The viewer's physical movement, the act of finding direction among the weaves, transforms the work's idea of "in-between-ness" into a physical experience. The integration of the work and the space transforms Istanbul Modern's high-ceilinged, spacious exhibition hall into a ritualistic void. It demands not only that the viewer look, but also that they participate.

Installation art and site-specific approaches at Arter

Arter is one of the most important institutions within the Vehbi Koç Foundation's institutional structure in the field of contemporary art, where installation art has gained visibility in both its production and exhibition dimensions. The spacious gallery spaces, high ceilings, and flexible layout of the new museum building in Dolapdere, adaptable to different disciplines, provide an infrastructure that particularly enhances the site-specific nature of contemporary installations. Curatorial actors such as René Block and Melih Fereli, who have been influential in shaping the collection, have supported the use of the space not merely as an exhibition surface but as a component that generates meaning (Özdoğan-Türkyılmaz, 2022, p. 152).

The numerous sound, light, video, and new media installations featured in Arter's program are productions that directly create, transform, or experientially redefine the space's physical characteristics. The relationship between sound, vibration, movement, and objects, particularly in the works of artists from the Fluxus tradition, transforms Arter's gallery spaces into an installation environment that can be

“heard,” “walked through,” and “navigated.” This approach aligns with Miwon Kwon’s concept of “situational site-specificity,” establishing the meaning of the work not only in the object itself but within the space-time-viewer relationship. The museum’s technical infrastructure contributes to transforming the works into a “physical experience” within the space by enabling sound art and large-scale media installations. In this context, the installations at Arter become structures that are not added to the space but exist with it, transform it, and change with the viewer’s movement. The institution’s exhibition strategy, which supports this practice, positions Arter as a central actor in the development of site-specific installation art in Turkey (Özdoğan-Türkyılmaz, 2022, pp. 160-162).



Figure 6. Arter Museum, İstanbul, Türkiye (Architect: Grimshaw Architects)

The flexible gallery layout of the Dolapdere building, designed by *Grimshaw Architects* (Figure 6), its high volumes, and its plan scheme that allows for interdisciplinary use facilitate the integration of sound, light, and video-based installations with the space. The modular structure of the galleries, the repositionability of the walls, and the presence of large-scale voids allow the space to be reconfigured for each exhibition. This enables the space to transform from a “fixed frame” into a surface that can be transformed by the artist. The high volumes required for video projections, multi-channel sound installations, and large-scale installations are a distinctive feature of Arter’s space. These structural characteristics create opportunities not only for the space to host works but also to be redefined alongside them. Dark room setups, multi-directional acoustic arrangements, moving light systems, and cinema/performance halls demonstrate that the space has a structure that integrates auditory, visual, and spatial experiences. These features transform the architecture from a passive ground into a constitutive element of meaning. Thus, Arter’s physical structure creates a suitable context for site-specific installation production (Arkitektuel, 2019).



Figure 7. (Left) Cevdet Ereğ, *Bergama Stereotype*, 2020, Arter Museum, Istanbul, Turkey



Figure 8. (Top Right) Cevdet Ereğ, *Bergama Stereo*, 2020, Hamburger Bahnhof Museum, Berlin, Germany

Figure 9. (Right) Full-scale model (wood, plaster, paper) showing the reconstruction design of the Pergamon Altar of Zeus at the Pergamon Museum, January 28, 1926, Architekturmuseum TU Berlin, Germany



Cevdet Ereğ's installation *Bergama Stereotyp*, which opened at Arter in 2020, is a unique example of the artist's reimagining of space as an "auditory architecture" (Figure 7). Curated by Selen Ansen, the exhibition draws on the historical Bergama Altar and the cultural circulation process that led to its relocation to Berlin in the 19th century. This installation, a continuation of Ereğ's earlier work *Bergama Stereo* (Figure 8), presented at the Ruhrtriennale and Hamburger Bahnhof, reinterprets historical layers by transforming them into a contemporary space. The fundamental feature of the installation is that, rather than directly representing the marble friezes of the ancient altar, it transforms them into a wooden construction of speaker cabinets. In this way, Cevdet Ereğ converts a visual architectural model into a sound-based frieze. The function of visual movement in the mythological battle scenes of the ancient altar is now echoed by rhythmic, delayed, and multiplying sounds that circulate within the space. Thus, sound becomes a tool that reconfigures both the spatial organization of a historical structure and its journey within cultural memory. Arter's gallery plays a decisive role in the conceptual structure of the work. Acoustic properties produce auditory experiences that change as the viewer moves through the space. Rather than directing the viewer to a fixed viewpoint, the installation

invites them to continually move and perceive the space through their bodies. This strengthens the installation's specificity to the space, removing Ereğ's work from being merely an interpretation of a historical work. The space becomes an active component where a historical metaphor is sensually reconstituted (Ereğ, 2020).

The artist has established a new architectural order by transforming the gallery into a modular rhythmic structure (Figure 7). The structure redefines the viewer's orientation, movement, and perceptual experience within the space by altering its geometry. The multi-channel sound system creates an acoustic landscape that changes as one moves through the space. This turns the viewer's body into an "interactive element" of the space. Ereğ's work exemplifies Kwon's concept of "situational spatiality" because it gains meaning through the space-time-viewer relationship. As the viewer walks through the space, the work transforms both sensually and conceptually. This example concretely demonstrates how Arter's architectural and curatorial structure enables site-specific installations.

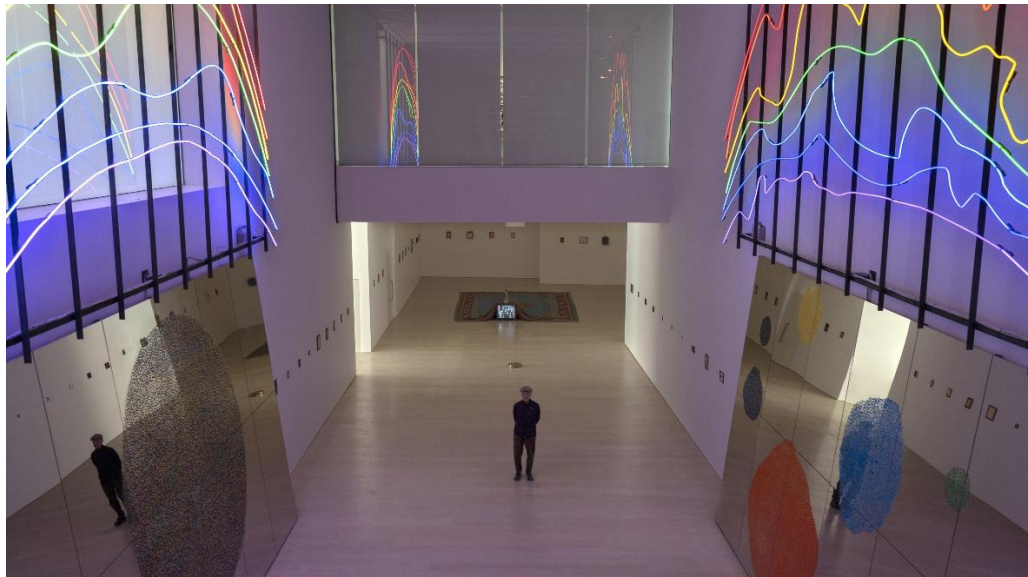


Figure 10. Sarkis,
Infinite, 2023, Arter
Museum, Istanbul
(Curator: Emre Baykal)

Sarkis's exhibition *Infinite*, created by bringing together selected works from the Arter Collection, stands out for recontextualizing pieces from different periods of the artist's production within a single spatial framework. Curated by Emre Baykal, the exhibition presents selections spanning a broad timeframe, from the 1980s to the *Respiro* installation produced for the 2015 Venice Biennale. The relationship to space, characteristic of Sarkis' practice, is one of the exhibition's fundamental elements. The artist reinterprets the memory of each work within the architecture of Arter by establishing a spatial dialogue among his works, produced with light, color, sound, mirrors, and various materials (Figure 10). *Respiro*'s neon and mirrors, along with works such as *Istanbul Icons*, *Elle Danse*, and *Transflammation*, bring together memories from different times and contexts within a new arrangement created in the space, uniting them into a shared whole.

The exhibition creates an auditory atmosphere, with compositions by Bach, Shostakovich, and Baboni-Schilingi accompanying the works placed at both ends of the space, transforming the installation into an experience as much auditory as visual. Sarkis' dialogue with other artists also becomes part of the spatial arrangement, reinforcing the exhibition's multi-layered structure. In this context,

Infinite presents an example that reveals the transformative nature of installation art in relation to space by integrating the physical characteristics of the Arter space with the artist's approach to memory, light, leaving traces, and the concept of time (Artfulliving, 2023).

Pera Museum: Bridges between historical memory and contemporary installation art

Pera Museum holds an important place in Istanbul's cultural memory with both its historical collections and contemporary art exhibitions, presenting examples that highlight the relationship between installation art and space. The building that houses the museum is a neo-classical architectural example, preserved with its original exterior, and was repurposed from the Bristol Hotel, which dates back to 1893. While the building's historical fabric has been preserved, the interior has been completely transformed into a modern exhibition infrastructure (Pera Museum, n.d.). This architectural transformation distinguishes the Pera Museum from more neutral and flexible contemporary art spaces such as Arter, positioning it as a contemporary museum housed within a historical shell. Architectural elements such as narrow corridors, a gallery layout divided into floors, a central stairwell, and focused exhibition areas become active components that determine parameters such as scale, orientation, viewer movement, and historical context in installation art. Thus, the museum's physical design directly shapes the conceptual reading of the installations.

Installation art relies on the relationships objects establish with the space they occupy and on the active role of the viewer within these relationships. For this reason, not only the physical location of the work but also the museum's spatial organization becomes part of meaning production. As emphasized in the literature, space is not merely a presentation surface in installation art, but an active element that shapes the work's conceptual, perceptual, and experiential dimensions (Toluyağ, 2020; Tokdil, 2023). Therefore, the architectural structure of the Pera Museum, which combines historical architecture with contemporary exhibition practices, provides a unique exhibition space that embodies the concept of site-specificity in installation art.

The exhibition titled *What Is This Byzantinism* in Istanbul, hosted by the Pera Museum between 2021 and 2022 (Figure 11), is one example of how the museum uses its architectural structure not merely as a display surface but as an active spatial component that reinforces the thematic narrative. Curated by Emir Alışık, the exhibition addressed popular representations of Byzantine culture, inviting viewers to a multi-layered experience navigating between history, belief, and contemporary visual culture through its installation arrangements. One of the most striking aspects of the spatial strategies employed in the exhibition was the reinterpretation of the dome form, a reference to Byzantine architecture, through a neon skeleton structure. This installation not only created an intriguing visual focal point but also offered a unique example of how Byzantine aesthetics can be translated into a contemporary language. The schematic form of the dome, elevated above the floor, brings the viewer closer to the feeling of passing through history, while also pointing to the practices of reproduction and transformation in popular culture. This spatial construction supports the principle of "integration with space" in installation art. As Miwon Kwon states in her concept of site-specificity, contemporary installations produce meaning by relating to the physical characteristics of the space, allowing the work to be read not only through its content but also through the space-time-viewer relationship. The neon dome used in the exhibition both reconfigures the architectural references of the Pera Museum's enclosed gallery space and functions

as a frame that determines viewer movement. Thus, the space becomes a staging area that presents a contemporary representation of historical motifs.



Figure 11. What's This Byzantinism in Istanbul, Byzantium in Popular Culture, November 23, 2021-March 13, 2022, Pera Museum, Istanbul, Turkey (Curator: Emir Alişık)

The arrangement of various contemporary interpretations of Byzantine iconography immediately below the installation creates a vertical reading line. This positioning establishes a layered visual hierarchy, directing the viewer's gaze first to the structure's architectural form and then to the visual material in the lower section. Presenting the works within the same composition as the neon structure creates a contextualization that emphasizes the relationship between historical images and popular culture. The overall layout of the exhibition also reveals Pera Museum's capacity to transform the modernized interior of a historical building into a flexible exhibition space. The combined use of neon lights, video projections, and iconographic images demonstrates the museum's infrastructure suitable for multidisciplinary installations. In this context, the exhibition *What Is This Byzantinism in Istanbul?* serves as a powerful example of how the architectural features of the Pera Museum can be harmoniously reimagined alongside contemporary art productions (Pera Museum, 2021).

An analytical examination of architectural design, exhibition strategies, and installation art of the Elgiz Museum

The Elgiz Museum is one of the pioneering institutions that transformed the tradition of private contemporary art collecting in Turkey into a public museum structure. Unlike many private or public museums in Turkey, the Elgiz Museum is housed in a converted contemporary office-plaza building rather than a traditional museum building. Founded in 2001 by collectors Can Elgiz and Sevda Elgiz, the museum is an initiative born of the inadequacy of state or foundation museums focused on contemporary or modern art in Turkey at the time. The Elgiz Museum spans approximately 2,000 m² of exhibition space. Within this space, there are main halls displaying works from the collection, project rooms dedicated to young artists and contemporary exhibitions, an archive room open to the public, and a conference and event hall. In addition, the building is located in a high-rise plaza area, and its terrace provides an alternative space for open-air sculpture exhibitions and "land art-

outdoor” works. Open-air events organized under the name “Terrace Exhibitions” offer opportunities to produce sculptures and spatial works (Elgiz Museum, n.d.).

The museum’s terrace section, in particular, is one of the rare architectural structures that allows for the production and exhibition of outdoor installations. The terrace’s location, surrounded by tall buildings and exposed to different light conditions throughout the day, creates a natural environmental element that directly transforms the spatial perception of outdoor installations. In this respect, the architectural program of the Elgiz Museum can be considered an infrastructure designed not only to display artworks but also to physically prepare the site for site-sensitive installation projects.



Figure 12. Elgiz Museum, İstanbul, Turkey (Architect: Can Elgiz)

Located in Maslak, one of Istanbul’s high-density business centers, the Elgiz Museum offers a unique spatial design that places the practice of exhibiting the physical characteristics of the urban environment at its core. In this area surrounded by skyscrapers, the museum’s roof has been transformed into an open-air exhibition space for large-scale sculptures, expanding the movement space of sculptures, which is limited in closed gallery spaces, and enabling the redefinition of the relationship between space and artwork. As emphasized by the collection owners, the limited availability of suitable exhibition spaces for large-scale contemporary sculptures in Turkey has paved the way for the conscious transformation of the terrace area. Thus, the roof becomes not only a physical supporting surface but also an “intermediate space” that enables a dialogue between the city’s vertical architecture and the sculpture. In this context, the terrace of the Elgiz Museum has become a concrete example of an exhibition strategy that supports the integration of the artwork with its environmental context, in line with the fundamental principles of installation art. The density of the urban fabric, the perspective between tall buildings, and the visual relationship established with the open sky transform the conceptual perception of the productions, demonstrating that the space is not only a display function but also a meaning-creating element involved in the process.



Figure 13. Arif Yıldız,
Within the Flow of Time,
2021, Elgiz Museum,
Istanbul, Turkey

Arif Yıldız's work titled *Within the Flow of Time* is a significant piece that, positioned right in the middle of Maslak's vertical architecture, both establishes a visual parallelism with the surrounding skyscraper silhouettes and creates a contrast with them (Figure 13). The void of the terrace, rising towards the open sky, becomes a backdrop that reinforces the work's thematic connotations of "confinement-compression-density." The structure, which could have a more sculptural character in a closed space, produces sociocultural meanings thanks to its relationship with the city in the open space. The void surrounding the work, the granular texture of the terrace floor, and the reflections of the skyscrapers offer the viewer a simultaneous visual experience with both the vertical structure at the center and the horizontal-vertical axes in the surroundings. This situation demonstrates, in line with Miwon Kwon's understanding of "situational spatial specificity," that the meaning of the work arises not only from its form but also from its relationship with variables such as place, time, weather conditions, and viewer movement. Being outdoors allows the viewer to move freely around the work, experiencing its formal intensity and the sense of movement within the cage from different vantage points. The viewer's physical engagement with the space to perceive the work is a process that completes the conceptual integrity of the installation (Elgiz Museum, n.d.).

Conclusion

This study reveals how contemporary art museums in Turkey transform the production and experience of installation art through their architectural character, exhibition strategies, and site-specific applications. The institutions examined -OMM, Istanbul Modern, Arter, Pera Museum, and Elgiz Museum- converge on a common point despite their distinct architectural identities, institutional historical backgrounds, and exhibition policies.

Installation art transforms the space from an aesthetic backdrop into a fundamental component that shapes the work's meaning. This study has shown how contemporary art institutions in Turkey have responded to this transformation. Arter's architecture allows exhibition spaces to be transformed according to the artwork, while Istanbul Modern's new structure offers a more institutional, more organized exhibition concept. At Arter, architectural space exists as a flexible area open to the artist's use, while at Istanbul Modern, space often functions as the frame and organizational boundary of the artwork. Baksı Museum defines its context as a geographical and cultural "place" given its location outside the city. Elgiz, on the other hand, is located in a high-density area of the city center, and its context is shaped by the architecture and urban density. The terrace area of the Elgiz Museum creates an encounter space between Maslak's vertical architecture and installation art. The rhythmic repetition of skyscrapers creates a spatial tension by contrasting with the organic, often fluid forms of the sculptures. The space not only exhibits the work but also becomes part of its meaning. Most of the works on the terrace have been selected or produced to relate to this context. Thus, the terrace produces both a public circulation area and a "threshold space" between urban architecture and art. This space offers an alternative model for the production and exhibition of site-specific contemporary art, especially considering the difficulty large-scale works face in finding a place in Turkey. In short, Arter offers a space open to artistic intervention with its flexible architecture, while Istanbul Modern produces context through institutional exhibition arrangements. Baksı Museum presents a model that emphasizes geographical context, while Elgiz Museum creates a unique spatial interface between the urban fabric and art. These findings show that installation art gains meaning not only from the work's form but also from its ideology, architecture, and the space's context.

In conclusion, contemporary museum practice in Turkey is undergoing a transformation that reveals the spatial potential of installation art, places it at the center of institutional identity, and redefines space as an area of meaning production. By comparing the architectural, theoretical, and experiential dimensions of this transformation, this study has provided a comprehensive framework for the institutional visibility of installation art in Turkey. It is anticipated that future research, expanded to include biennials, independent art spaces, and public space applications, will provide an opportunity to evaluate the socio-cultural impacts of site-specific productions more holistically.

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