

Panel 24

Art, Performance, and Writing

Narratives in Process: Installation Art and Art Writing

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This essay explores installation art as a form of narrative in process: open-ended, situated across multiple temporalities, and constantly interpreted and recreated through viewers' engagement. Large-scale installations, in particular, immerse viewers in constructed situations and offer embodied experiences. The meaning of the artworks is never fixed, but rather continuously shaped by viewers' interactive experiences. A key example is *Elmgreen & Dragset: Spaces* (2024), an exhibition of the artist duo's installation works at the Amorepacific Museum of Art in Seoul, South Korea, featuring lifelike environments populated by human-like figures. By analysing the interplay between human and non-human, passive and active bodies, this essay highlights how viewers co-create the meaning of installation artworks through their subjective experiences.

This analysis draws on several theoretical frameworks. First, Roland Barthes's concept of the "writerly text" – literary texts that are open-ended, fragmented, and invite the readers to actively participate in constructing meaning – serves as a model for understanding installation art as an open text that provides space for exploration and interpretation for the viewers. Second, the evolving concept of ekphrasis allows for a re-examination of the relationship between text and image, language and visual art. Understanding how ekphrasis is used in both fiction and nonfiction illuminates how writing can respond to, reflect on, and even participate in the artwork's effects. Finally, drawing inspiration from autotheorists such as Maggie Nelson and Lauren Fournier, who merge personal narrative with critical theory, this paper adopts a subjective mode of writing and explores how such an approach can serve as a productive mode of meaning-making. Through these frameworks, this paper argues that installation art embraces fragmentation and resists closure in its narrative, thereby demanding and inviting more open and subjective forms of interpretation and writing.

Biography

Zhang Yifei is a MA student in Art History at Nanyang Technological University. Her research focuses on narrative construction in literary and artistic mediums such as installation art and video games, exploring how viewers/players co-create meaning through embodied engagement. She is also interested in alternative approaches to art historical writing, including autotheory and other approaches that foreground subjectivity and personal experience.