

installation

A term that can be applied very generally to the disposition of objects in an exhibition (the hanging of paintings, the arrangement of sculptures, and so on), but which also has the more specific meaning of a one-off work (often a large-scale assemblage) conceived for and usually more or less filling a specific interior (generally that of a gallery). This type of work has various precedents. The tradition of 'site-specific' work has indeed been traced back to prehistoric cave paintings, but there are closer analogies in some of the elaborate Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930s, with their fun-fair-like atmospheres, in the room-filling Merz construction of Kurt Schwitters, and in Yves Klein's exhibition of an empty room, *The Void*, in 1958 (this is sometimes considered the earliest example of an installation in the sense in which the term is now understood). However, it was not until the 1970s that the term came into common use and not until the 1980s that certain artists started to specialize in this kind of work, creating a genre of 'Installation art'. In 1990 a Museum of Installation Art was opened in London and in 1994 there was published a book entitled *Installation Art* (by Nicolas de Oliveira, Nicola Oxley, and Michael Petry), the jacket blurb of which claimed that this was 'arguably the most original, vigorous and fertile form of art today'.

In the 1970s installations were often impermanent and could be seen as part of the movement against the collectable art 'object' that was so fashionable at the time (see Post Minimalism). However, many installations are now intended for permanent display, and even some of the most unlikely works have proved collectable. The best-known example is *20:50* (1987) by the British sculptor Richard Wilson (1953-), which consists of a room filled with used sump oil; this was created for the Matt's Gallery, London, but it was subsequently resisted at the Royal Scottish Academy, Edinburgh, and it is now in the Saatchi Collection, London. An example of a more 'traditional' installation is *The Reign of Narcissism* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1989) by the American artist Barbara Bloom (1951-). Edward Lucie-Smith writes of this that 'perhaps in reaction to the self-promotion of certain feminists...[it is]...a gentle satire on female self-love and self-preoccupation—a bland Neoclassical salon filled with busts and cameos reproducing her own image, plus imitation LouisXVI chairs upholstered in a pattern showing the artist's

signature' (Visual Arts in the 20th Century,1996).

Ian Chilvers, "Oxford Dictionary of 20th Century Art", NY, 1998. p295f