

Architecture as Installation: from the Organic to the Anti-Architectural Expression – Cesar Cornejo

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 Cesar Cornejo, Siempre la Misma Historia (The Same Old Story), 2004. Mixed Media, 500 x 500 x 200cm.
Courtesy of the artist.

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As an artist, my approach to installation art is rational and intuitive at the same time. In this article, I have tried to briefly explain how certain ideas have developed from object-based architectural works to installation works with narrative qualities.

The relationship between installation and architecture can be illuminated through consideration of two cases: when installation is contained in architectural spaces and when architecture is contained in installations themselves, as in the example of Christo or Kawamata's works. The former represents an interior experience in which architecture plays the role of conditioning and informing the work. The latter is an exterior and primarily urban-scale experience in which architecture becomes the work, in and of itself. In both cases, hopefully, architecture and installation sustain harmonic relations.

But, what happens when we explore the possibilities of architecture as an expression of installation art? As a trained architect myself, I have extensively explored the functional and symbolic aspects of architecture. I even initially did so with an interest in creating a space that would become a temple for humankind. My interest in vernacular architecture and organic shapes led me to create a series of works in ceramic—downscale versions of larger projects never realized until today. Even these, however, were not functional. They were instead architectural in essence, as representations of what Herbert Read defined as "The Monument," the unit through which architecture and sculpture find their common origin.

This approach proved sterile without the possibility of building a real-scale sculpture, however. After a period of exploring architectural concepts through means of abstract sculpture, I went back to my

search for an architectural expression, this time applying it to installation. The first project in which I explored this concept was the piece Labyrinth, a large-scale interactive sculpture. This work was a curved wooden labyrinth structure made of horizontal elements, which allowed for interaction with the viewers who entered it. It was inspired by concepts of Zen architecture. The work was the first of a series of works I made in exploring the relationship between design and sculpture from this same philosophical perspective.

Later, I became interested in communication as a priority in my sculpture and installation work. I decided to use my knowledge of architecture in order to stress the role of architecture as an enforcer of the “social order,” turning it into a negation of itself. This didn’t produce an architecture made for man, but against him, and by way of the representation of the relationship between society and the individual, which, in turn, allows for new perceptions of the relationship between society and its built environment. This alternative reality is organized based on an underlying text that refers to a particular event or aspect of society, whether of political, public or private domain. The whole work then relies on the narrative structure. The elements of the installation become words and the piece, in itself, is explore-able from a strictly literary perspective. Yet, the space generated expresses a negation of its architectural origin. There is an invisible counter-reality that expresses beyond its shape, stating the impossibility of knowing reality. And, there are two levels in which the work connects with the visitors: the first is the symbolic, based on the narratives, and the second is related to the metaphysical.

In this search for an anti-architectural expression, there are no additions to existing buildings, but the building itself or its representation becomes the raw material for its own negative version.

