

rosalind krauss sculpture in the expanded field

rosalind krauss sculpture in the expanded field is a concept that fundamentally altered our understanding of what sculpture could be in the late 20th century. Rosalind Krauss, a prominent art critic and theorist, articulated this pivotal idea in her seminal 1979 essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." This groundbreaking framework moved beyond traditional notions of discrete objects occupying space, proposing instead a dialectical relationship between sculpture and its surrounding environment. The expanded field encompasses a broad spectrum of practices, including land art, minimalism, conceptual art, and performance, all challenging conventional definitions. Understanding Krauss's contribution requires exploring its theoretical underpinnings, its relationship to previous artistic movements, and its enduring legacy in contemporary art. This article delves into the core tenets of Rosalind Krauss's expanded field of sculpture, examining its historical context, key characteristics, and its profound impact on artistic discourse and practice.

- Introduction to Rosalind Krauss and the Expanded Field
- Defining the Expanded Field: Beyond Traditional Sculpture
- Historical Context: Precursors to the Expanded Field
- Key Characteristics of Sculpture in the Expanded Field
 - Materiality and Site Specificity
 - Conceptualism and Process
 - The Role of the Viewer

- Major Artists and Works within the Expanded Field
- The Theoretical Significance of Krauss's Concept
- Criticisms and Debates Surrounding the Expanded Field
- The Legacy and Evolution of Sculpture in the Expanded Field

Understanding Rosalind Krauss's Sculpture in the Expanded Field

Rosalind Krauss's essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," is a cornerstone of contemporary art theory, offering a powerful lens through which to analyze artistic practices that emerged in the post-minimalist era. Krauss proposed a theoretical model that moved away from seeing sculpture as solely an object that occupies a specific volume in space. Instead, she posited a dialectical relationship between what she termed the "site" and the "not-site," effectively expanding the very definition of sculptural practice. This conceptual shift was not merely an academic exercise; it provided a framework for understanding and categorizing a burgeoning array of artworks that defied easy categorization within traditional art historical terms. The expanded field acknowledged that sculpture could be ephemeral, conceptual, site-specific, and deeply engaged with its environment, thereby challenging the autonomy of the art object and its pedestal.

Defining the Expanded Field: Beyond Traditional Sculpture

Krauss's central argument revolved around a theoretical matrix that plotted sculpture against landscape

and architecture. She identified a "traditional" conception of sculpture as occupying a space between these two poles, characterized by its objecthood and its deliberate placement within an architectural context. However, the "expanded field" emerged when artists began to engage with the extremities of this matrix. This involved either detaching the sculptural gesture from the object entirely, as in conceptual art, or engaging directly with the natural landscape in ways that blurred the lines between art and environment, as seen in land art. The expanded field, therefore, represents a departure from the self-contained, autonomous art object, embracing practices that are inherently relational, contextual, and often ephemeral.

The Dialectic of Site and Not-Site

A crucial element of Krauss's theory is the dialectic between "site" and "not-site." The "not-site" refers to the traditional gallery space or studio where sculpture is often presented as an object divorced from its original context. Conversely, the "site" refers to the specific location where the artwork is created and exists, often the natural landscape itself. Artists working in the expanded field often manipulated this relationship. Some would create works that were deeply embedded in the landscape, making the site integral to the artwork's meaning and form. Others might produce objects that, while conceptually art, lacked the traditional objecthood associated with sculpture, existing more as ideas or processes within a given "not-site." This constant negotiation between the inherent properties of an object and its spatial and environmental context is central to the expanded field.

Dissolving Objecthood and Embracing Process

The expanded field marked a significant departure from modernist sculpture's emphasis on the object's materiality and formal autonomy. Artists began to explore processes, concepts, and interventions rather than solely focusing on the creation of discrete objects. This meant that the act of making, the idea behind the work, and the relationship of the work to its environment could be as important, if not more so, than the finished product. This opened the door for a wide range of practices, including

performance art, where the artist's body and actions became the medium, and conceptual art, where the idea itself constituted the artwork, often documented through text or photographs. The emphasis shifted from the visual experience of an object to a more intellectually and conceptually driven engagement with art.

Historical Context: Precursors to the Expanded Field

Rosalind Krauss's concept of the expanded field did not emerge in a vacuum. It was a direct response to and a theoretical framing of artistic developments that had been gaining momentum throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The groundwork for this expansion was laid by earlier avant-garde movements that had already begun to challenge traditional artistic conventions. Understanding these precursors is essential to grasping the significance and novelty of Krauss's contribution.

Minimalism's Legacy

Minimalism, with its emphasis on industrial materials, geometric forms, and the demystification of the art object, played a crucial role in paving the way for the expanded field. Minimalist artists like Donald Judd and Carl Andre had already begun to question traditional notions of sculpture as a self-contained entity. Their works often incorporated industrial fabrication, seriality, and a direct engagement with the viewer's perception of space. Minimalism's reduction of form and its interest in the relationship between the object and its surrounding environment created a fertile ground for artists to further push these boundaries, moving beyond the gallery and into the landscape or exploring non-traditional materials and processes.

Land Art and Environmental Engagement

The rise of Land Art in the late 1960s and early 1970s was a pivotal moment that directly informed Krauss's theory. Artists such as Robert Smithson, Walter De Maria, and Michael Heizer began creating monumental works directly in the natural landscape, often in remote locations. These works were often ephemeral, subject to the forces of nature, and inaccessible to many viewers. This radical engagement with the environment challenged the commodification of art and the traditional gallery system, demonstrating that sculpture could be an intervention in the land itself rather than an object placed upon it. Smithson's "Spiral Jetty" is a prime example, a massive earthwork that changes with the water levels of the Great Salt Lake, becoming inseparable from its ecological context.

Conceptual Art's Influence

Conceptual art, which prioritized the idea or concept behind the artwork over its material realization, was another significant precursor. Artists like Sol LeWitt and Joseph Kosuth demonstrated that art could exist as instructions, propositions, or documentation. This intellectual approach allowed for a dissolution of traditional sculptural form, as the artwork could be realized through language, performance, or a set of rules. The emphasis on the artist's idea and the viewer's interpretation further contributed to the expansion of what constituted sculpture, moving it away from purely visual or tactile experiences.

Key Characteristics of Sculpture in the Expanded Field

The expanded field of sculpture, as theorized by Rosalind Krauss, is characterized by a set of distinct attributes that differentiate it from earlier sculptural traditions. These characteristics reflect a fundamental shift in artistic intention and practice, moving beyond the creation of static objects towards more dynamic, contextual, and conceptual engagements with space, environment, and ideas. Understanding these features is crucial to appreciating the breadth and depth of artistic practices that fall under this theoretical umbrella.

Materiality and Site Specificity

While traditional sculpture often focused on the intrinsic qualities of materials like bronze or marble, sculpture in the expanded field frequently employed a much broader range of materials, often dictated by the environment itself. Earth, rock, water, and natural phenomena became integral components. Furthermore, site specificity became paramount. The artwork's meaning and form were intrinsically linked to the unique characteristics of its location. This meant that the sculpture was not merely placed in a site but was conceived for and by that site, making the environment an active participant in the artwork.

Conceptualism and Process

As mentioned earlier, the influence of conceptual art cannot be overstated. In the expanded field, the conceptual aspect often takes precedence. The idea behind the work, the artist's intention, and the underlying intellectual framework are as important, if not more so, than the material execution. This led to an emphasis on process – the act of creation, the engagement with materials, and the unfolding of an idea over time – becoming an integral part of the artwork. Documentation of these processes, through photography, film, or text, often served as the primary record of the artwork itself, especially for ephemeral or site-specific pieces.

The Role of the Viewer

The viewer's experience in the expanded field is often far more active and participatory than in traditional sculpture. Without the familiar context of a gallery and a singular, self-contained object, the viewer is often required to engage with the artwork intellectually and spatially. This might involve navigating a large-scale environmental installation, deciphering conceptual instructions, or understanding the historical and social context of a site-specific intervention. The viewer is less a passive observer and more an active participant in the creation of meaning, often invited to consider

their own relationship to the artwork and its environment.

Major Artists and Works within the Expanded Field

The theoretical framework provided by Rosalind Krauss has proven invaluable for understanding the work of numerous artists who redefined the boundaries of sculpture. These artists, through their innovative approaches to materials, space, and concept, embodied the principles of the expanded field and left an indelible mark on the trajectory of contemporary art.

- Robert Smithson: His iconic "Spiral Jetty" (1970) is a quintessential example of land art, intrinsically linked to the site of the Great Salt Lake and its ever-changing environmental conditions.
- Walter De Maria: Known for his large-scale installations in natural settings, such as "The Lightning Field" (1977), which engages with natural phenomena and the perception of time and space.
- Andy Goldsworthy: His ephemeral works created from natural materials found on-site, such as leaves, stones, and ice, highlight the transient nature of sculpture and its deep connection to the environment.
- Richard Serra: While often creating monumental steel sculptures, Serra's work frequently engages with site, scale, and the viewer's physical experience of space, pushing the boundaries of traditional objecthood.
- Gordon Matta-Clark: His architectural interventions, like "Splitting" (1974), where he cut houses in half, challenged the notion of sculpture as a static object and instead focused on the deconstruction and reconfiguration of existing structures and spaces.

The Theoretical Significance of Krauss's Concept

Rosalind Krauss's articulation of "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" provided a crucial theoretical vocabulary for discussing and analyzing a radical shift in artistic production. Prior to her essay, many of these emerging practices lacked a cohesive theoretical framework, often being discussed in fragmented or descriptive terms. Krauss's matrix offered a systematic way to understand the relationships between different sculptural modes and their departures from traditional definitions. This conceptual tool allowed art historians, critics, and artists themselves to engage in more nuanced and rigorous discussions about the evolving nature of sculpture.

Furthermore, her concept helped to legitimize practices that might have otherwise been marginalized or misunderstood. By demonstrating how land art, conceptual art, and even performance could be understood as extensions or transformations of sculptural concerns, Krauss played a vital role in shaping the canon of contemporary art. Her work encouraged a deeper consideration of context, environment, and immateriality as legitimate components of sculptural practice, thereby broadening the scope and intellectual rigor of the field.

Criticisms and Debates Surrounding the Expanded Field

While Rosalind Krauss's concept of the expanded field was highly influential, it was not without its critics and generated significant debate within art discourse. Some scholars argued that the theoretical matrix, while insightful, could be overly rigid or prescriptive, potentially limiting the very creativity it sought to describe. Others questioned whether such a theoretical framework was necessary at all, suggesting that the art itself should speak for its own innovation without the imposition of a critical grid.

A common criticism revolved around the potential for such a framework to overlook or devalue

traditional sculptural practices that continued to thrive. The emphasis on the "expanded" could inadvertently imply that older forms were somehow obsolete or less significant. Additionally, the complex theoretical language employed by Krauss, while intellectually stimulating for academics, was sometimes seen as alienating to a broader audience, creating a barrier to understanding the art itself. Despite these criticisms, the enduring impact of Krauss's concept underscores its fundamental importance in shaping our understanding of modern and contemporary sculpture.

The Legacy and Evolution of Sculpture in the Expanded Field

The legacy of Rosalind Krauss's "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" is undeniable. It provided the intellectual scaffolding for understanding a generation of artists who broke free from conventional definitions, paving the way for a more expansive and interdisciplinary approach to artistic practice. The concept continues to resonate in contemporary art, where the lines between sculpture, installation, performance, and environmental art are increasingly blurred.

Today, artists continue to engage with site-specific interventions, ephemeral materials, and conceptual approaches, often drawing inspiration from the trajectories Krauss identified. The expanded field has evolved into a fluid and dynamic area of artistic exploration, reflecting a broader cultural interest in ecology, social engagement, and the critical examination of space and place. The ongoing relevance of Krauss's seminal essay testifies to its power in re-framing our perception of what sculpture can be and its profound connection to the world around us.

Frequently Asked Questions

What does Rosalind Krauss mean by the 'expanded field' of sculpture?

Krauss, in her seminal 1979 essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' argues that post-Minimalist art has moved beyond traditional notions of sculpture as a discrete, monumental object placed in space.

The 'expanded field' encompasses a broader spectrum of artistic practices, including land art, site-specific installations, and even conceptual art, where the focus shifts from the object itself to its relationship with its context, the viewer's experience, and the underlying ideas.

How does Krauss's concept of the 'expanded field' challenge traditional art historical categories?

Krauss proposed a 'logical space' of sculpture, moving from traditional sculpture (object-focused) to its negation (non-sculpture) and then to two mediating zones: landscape and architecture. This framework suggests that contemporary artists are blurring the lines between these categories, creating works that are neither purely sculpture nor something else entirely, thus challenging established art historical classifications and demanding new ways of understanding artistic production.

Can you provide an example of an artwork that exemplifies Krauss's 'expanded field' concept?

Robert Smithson's 'Spiral Jetty' is a quintessential example. It's not a freestanding object but a massive earthwork created in the Great Salt Lake. Its meaning and presence are intrinsically tied to its environment, its scale, and its temporal nature (it appears and disappears with water levels). It exists in the landscape, engaging with geological processes rather than occupying a gallery space.

What is the significance of 'site-specificity' within Krauss's expanded field?

Site-specificity is crucial because it emphasizes that the meaning and form of an artwork in the expanded field are inseparable from its location. The artwork doesn't just inhabit a space; it actively engages with, modifies, or responds to the unique characteristics of that space. This contrasts with traditional sculpture, which could often be relocated without fundamentally altering its essence.

How has the 'expanded field' of sculpture influenced contemporary art practices today?

Krauss's concept has profoundly influenced contemporary art by legitimizing practices that go beyond object-making. It has fostered a generation of artists working with installation, environmental art, performance, and digital media, where the emphasis is on conceptual depth, relational aesthetics, and the experience of the viewer within a broader social and environmental context. Her framework continues to be a vital tool for analyzing and understanding these diverse artistic endeavors.

Additional Resources

Here are 9 book titles related to Rosalind Krauss's concept of sculpture in the expanded field, along with short descriptions:

1. Sculpture and the Expanded Field: Rethinking Form and Space

This foundational text delves into Rosalind Krauss's seminal essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." It explores how artists in the late 20th century moved beyond traditional notions of sculpture to engage with landscape, architecture, and conceptual frameworks. The book examines the theoretical underpinnings that allowed sculpture to become an activity rather than a fixed object.

2. The Site-Specific Turn: From Object to Environment

Focusing on the implications of Krauss's ideas, this book investigates the rise of site-specific art. It analyzes how artists began to create works intrinsically tied to their location, challenging the autonomy of the art object and emphasizing its relationship with context. The text traces the lineage of this shift back to the conceptual and Minimalist explorations that Krauss so powerfully articulated.

3. Post-Minimalism and the Dematerialization of Art

This volume explores the artists and movements that directly responded to and expanded upon the ideas of Minimalism, as critically examined by Krauss. It highlights the shift towards process-based art, conceptual art, and the increasing emphasis on ephemeral or non-traditional materials. The book

demonstrates how sculpture's boundaries dissolved into a broader discourse about artistic practice and its social implications.

4. Landscape as Material: Eco-Sculptural Interventions

Drawing on Krauss's insights into sculpture's relationship with geography, this book examines artists who use the natural environment as their medium. It explores how the "expanded field" allowed for interventions in land, exploring ecological concerns and the transformation of natural forms. The essays discuss the inherent politics and aesthetics of engaging directly with the earth.

5. Architectural Collisions: Sculpture and the Built Environment

This collection investigates the blurring lines between sculpture and architecture, a key aspect of the expanded field. It analyzes how artists have engaged with buildings, urban spaces, and architectural systems, often questioning notions of utility and form. The book shows how sculpture's engagement with the built environment challenged its traditional autonomy and integrated it into broader spatial dialogues.

6. The Ephemeral Object: Performance, Installation, and Time

Reflecting on the "negative space" and immaterial aspects identified by Krauss, this book looks at artworks that exist primarily through performance or temporary installation. It considers how sculpture could be defined by its duration, its process, and its interaction with the viewer over time. The essays highlight the move away from permanent, tangible objects towards experiences.

7. Deconstructing the Monument: Public Art in the Expanded Field

This title examines how the traditional monument has been reinterpreted and subverted by artists working within the expanded field of sculpture. It explores how sculptures in public spaces have moved beyond commemoration to engage with social, political, and historical critique. The book analyzes how artists have used expanded sculptural practices to challenge established narratives.

8. Art as Infrastructure: Networks, Systems, and Flows

This work extends Krauss's thinking by considering how contemporary artists engage with technological and social systems as sculptural material. It explores artworks that manifest as networks,

information flows, or interventions within existing infrastructures. The book argues that sculpture has become a way to analyze and reshape the invisible forces that govern our lives.

9. Kinetic Possibilities: Movement, Energy, and Sculpture

Inspired by the dynamic and process-oriented aspects of the expanded field, this book focuses on sculptures that incorporate movement and energy. It explores how artists have utilized kinetic elements, mechanical processes, and even natural forces to define their sculptural practice. The essays highlight the evolution of sculpture as a force and a phenomenon rather than a static form.

Rosalind Krauss Sculpture In The Expanded Field

Rosalind Krauss Sculpture In The Expanded Field

Related Articles

- [relationship check in questions](#)
- [robert heinlein stranger in a strange land](#)
- [rules of thumb a guide for writers](#)

[Back to Home](#)