

# **Can't you see it is mine?**

**A consideration of the appropriation of space through the use of building materials (earth, clay and bricks) in art making.**

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## Declaration

**I, David Hofmeyr Gush, hereby declare that:**

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other University.
3. This thesis does not contain other person's data, pictures, graphs or other information unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons writing unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where the written sources of been quoted then:
  5. their words have been rewritten but the general information attributed to them has been referenced;
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### Supervisor's Names and Signatures

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Dr Jessica Draper



## **Acknowledgements**

1. This dissertation is submitted contemporaneously with the installation and will be submitted with a digital record of the installation.
2. The digital record that is submitted with this dissertation contains photographs of the installation and its construction. The pictures were photographed by Simon Gush.
3. Apart from the above, the source of each illustration is acknowledged in the text and in the list of illustrations, Chapter 7.

## Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to consider the extent to which the materiality of an artist's art making materials can demonstrate an appropriation of the space in which the work is exhibited. The specific medium I have considered is the use of earth, clay and/or bricks. The dissertation concentrates on artworks that are exhibited as installations.

The research into this question considers particularly in what ways might artists appropriate the space purely through the use of their choice of materials. Is the appropriation dependent only upon the nature of the work, or does the materiality of the medium constitute an overt appropriation of a gallery space in which the artwork is exhibited?

The dissertation examines and explores these issues through the application of research-led methodology and the consequential influence and application of the results of the practice-led research on my own work.

In the course of considering this influence, this dissertation explores specific works by Dineo Bopape, Antony Gormley's *Field Series*, Walter de Maria's *New York Earth Room*, Jorge Mendez Blake's *The Castle* and Charles Simonds' *New York Dwellings*, all of whom have used earth, clay and/or bricks in their work.

The dissertation includes a series of photographs and a video of the installation entitled *somewhere between heaven and hell* which forms the practical offering of this project.

I conclude that while the materials contribute to the environment, it is the overall effect (the environment and atmosphere) of the installation that creates an appropriation for the viewer.

### KEY WORDS

Practice-led research.

Appropriation

Space

Materiality: the use of earth, clay and/or bricks in art making



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# 1. Introduction

I have spent my formal working life in the law: 30 years as a practising attorney and 12 years as a judge. During this time, I have also practised as an artist. The combination and the influence of these disciplines is the basis for and the background to my research. For a number of years I have, in my art making, primarily used unglazed terracotta clay and/or earth and bricks as an art medium.

Building materials comprising earth, clay and bricks have from time immemorial constituted the fundamental elements of construction. As is pointed out on the website set up for civil engineers on the topic of construction, clay, earth and bricks are the most basic natural building materials (The Constructor n.d.).

This dissertation will examine whether the use of these building materials when used as an art making medium is significant, and specifically if and what the implications are for the artwork where it takes the form of an installation. I consider the spacial implications that result from the artist's use of earth, clay and bricks as art making materials and whether this has consequences for: the artworks themselves; the viewer; and the space in which the work is exhibited. In particular, I will explore the extent to which the use of these materials serves to appropriate the space in which the work is exhibited. In general terms: In what ways does the specific material or the medium used by the artist demonstrate an appropriation of the gallery space, particularly when used in an art installation?

The key issue and my research question is: To what extent can the materiality of the artist's medium namely building materials in the form of earth, bricks or clay, when used in an installation demonstrate an appropriation of the space in which it is exhibited? To focus my research and exploration of this research question, I will address the following sub-questions:

- In what ways might the artists appropriate the space purely through the use of building materials in the form of earth, clay and bricks as an art material or is the appropriation dependent only upon the nature of the work? and

- How might the nature and the materiality of the medium constitute an overt appropriation of a gallery space in which the artwork is exhibited

I use the word appropriate in a legal context (as I will elaborate on in Chapter 2), to mean that the artists have claimed the space for their own use as distinct from recognising the space as belonging to a gallery. It is not intended to convey a sense of ownership but a taking control of the space within which the work is shown, thereby avoiding any engagement with the space.

At the heart of my research is a consideration of specific contemporary installations by Dineo Bopape (b 1981), Antony Gormley (b 1950), Walter De Maria (b 1935 d 2013), Jorge Méndez Blake (b 1974) and Charles Simonds (b 1945) in order to explore the extent to which the nature of the materials they have used have an effect on the art work, exhibition space and the viewer, specifically whether the materials assume control over any influence that the gallery space may exert on the work. I explore whether the materials these artists have used is a reason for a potential distinction between installations that are reliant upon the gallery space, or are site-specific, and those that appropriate the space. In the same way, I will question whether in my practice the use of earth clay and bricks as art making materials takes the work beyond the subservient or reliant occupation of the gallery space and whether these building materials when used in art making appropriate and claim the space in a way that seemingly other materials do not.

In exploring this hypothesis and my research questions I consider, in relation to my own practice, the following installations:

- South African artist Dineo Bopape installations:
  - *mabu/mubu/mm*, (2017),
  - *Lerole: footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting*, (2018), - *in. the light of this"* (2017),
  - *sa ke lerole*, (*sa lerole ke* ), (2016) and
  - (*That which is of is dust, (that which is of dust is* ), (2017);
- English sculptor Antony Gormley: (b 1950) *Field Series*;
- American artist Walter De Maria (b 1935 d 2013): *New York Earth Room*;
- Mexican artist Jorge Méndez Blake (b 1974) *The Castle*; and

- American Artist Charles Simonds: *New York Dwellings*.

I examine the consequences of their chosen material (namely clay, earth or bricks) on the space in which they are exhibited and the concomitant effect on the viewer. In 2016 the author Bob Lansroth<sup>1</sup> wrote in an article entitled ‘What Is Installation Art and How Does It Transform Our Perception?’ that:

Installation art effectively inverts the principles of sculpture where the piece is designed to be viewed from the outside, experienced as a self-contained arrangement of elements ... **installation art is created with the focus on the viewer**, where he/she becomes almost the main subject of the artwork, taking into account the spectator’s involvement and interaction with the art piece. The ... piece [is] waiting for the [viewer] to take in both the creation and its environment ...” (Authors emphasis) (Lansroth 2016).

What all these installation art works have in common is the medium the artist has used in the creation thereof. Bopape uses earth and bricks in her installations as does Blake in his piece, *The Castle*. De Maria’s installation is an earth filled apartment in New York; Gormley’s *Field Series* comprises a myriad of hand formed small terracotta clay figures and Simonds created tiny clay brick dwellings in derelict buildings in areas of New York.

I suggest that each of the artists: Bopape, Gormley, De Maria and Blake, not only physically dominate their space and occupy the space in which their work is exhibited but they have used their building materials to create a sense of appropriation.

In contradistinction to the work of Bopape, Gormley, De Maria and Blake referred to above, is the work of the American artist Charles Simonds. While Simonds also uses clay and bricks as his medium of expression in creating his *New York Dwellings*, the bricks are very small and his installations are little dwellings constructed in alcoves of buildings. Simonds describes his building of “dwellings” as “building homes for the Little People” (Simonds 2015a: 22). The dwellings he has created while small and often in a shared space are rooted in his carefully considered use of land, scale and situation. He has achieved an appropriation of a far greater space than the space the dwellings actually occupy (Simonds 2015a: 23).

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Lansroth is the pen name of Pavle Ivanovic an art critic who writes for Widewalls magazine.

As with Bopape, Gormley, De Maria and Blake, Simonds' work, I suggest, by the use of the materials appropriates or claims the space. Accordingly, that the viewers "involvement and interaction" is allowed the opportunity and freedom to consider the works in a neutral context absent of any outside influence from the space in which they are exhibited.<sup>2</sup>

The essence of my theoretical research and the development of my practice, as recorded in this dissertation, is the exploration of whether the use of building materials namely earth, clay or bricks renders the contextual specificity of any space irrelevant thereby allowing the work to be read in the same way regardless of the space in which it is installed.

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<sup>2</sup> See also Lansroth. 2016

## **2. Theory and Method**

In this chapter I address the method, theory, and basis of the guiding principles that I have applied to my research. The chapter is divided into sections each of which I suggest is an essential part of my research and serves to give context and content to my research questions. This chapter serves as the foundation of and background to my research and the consideration of the artists whose work I have explored and ultimately the basis from which I have examined my practice.

In the first section I consider and discuss the methodology I have applied to my research. The following sections dealing with space, materiality and installation art. They provide my research with the context or lens through which I consider my installation and my practice. In the final section on Art vs Law, I consider as a background to my hypothesis, the anomalies of appropriation when viewed from the perspective of the law and contrast this with an appropriation of space by art installations.

### **2.1 Methodology**

It is important that I set out the methodology I used in my research in order to clarify how I went about my examination of my hypothesis and the excavation of my research questions. My research recorded in this paper is not an end in itself but a means to an end. That end, the excavation of the above questions, must of necessity not involve merely a critique of the methodology. The primary consideration of the methodology used by the researcher is to determine whether it is an appropriate means to examine the research questions, the research itself the theory and my practice.

Research is described by Mertens as “one of many different ways of knowing or understanding ... [It is] a process of systematic inquiry designed to collect, analyse, interpret and use data” (2019: 4). I found Mertens description of research, although very wide, as being a systematic exercise to be particularly apposite to practice-led research.

The research questions listed above have arisen from not only my use of the materials (earth, clay and bricks) in my practice; but in addition, my theoretical research has influenced my practice flowing specifically from the use of such materials. The influences that arise from my use of these materials must of necessity include as background, consideration of my training and practice as a lawyer and also the principles of law applicable to appropriation. My experience in the law has provided a lens or theoretical framework (or indeed a contrast) through which I view appropriation. While this provides some background the pursuit of this research arises mainly from the perspective of my artistic practice.

Extrapolating this principle in an art context the issue with which my research is concerned is the examination of whether the materials used in an installation, may suggest for the viewer an appropriation of the space in which the art-work is exhibited. As is dealt with in detail below, appropriation has in law a specific meaning. It is one of the basic elements in the acquisition of ownership of property. (Knobel 2012: 78; Snyman 2021: 483).

The principal underlying the rationale that I have applied to my research, through this paper and for the development of my practice, is that prescribed by practice-led research. While it is true that practice-led research or practice-based research falls under the general mantle of qualitative research, it is a discrete methodology. However, the nature and subject of my research requires the application of further elements of qualitative research, particularly in respect of the theories surrounding the use of gallery space and with regard to the artists whose work I examine as part of this research.

I am aware of Niewenhuis's proposition that there is no single, accepted way of doing qualitative research (Niewenhuis 2016: 50) An integral part of qualitative research, requires data gathering and the analysis of the information gathered. I regard this as an essential and supplementary aspect of practice-led research. If I am to understand the concept of appropriation and its relevance in neutralising or overriding the context of the gallery space, it is necessary to consider the nature of the legal concept of appropriation as well, as I explore the work of the artists dealt with below and analyse their work, not only in this context, but also in relation to my practice.

Brad Haseman and Daniel Mafe in their introduction to their chapter entitled 'Acquiring Know-How: Research Training for Practice -Led Researchers' (*Practice-led Research, Research and Practice in the Creative Arts*: Edited Smith and Dean) they suggest that:

traditional research approaches are made up of protocols and conventions which are hardly congenial to the working practices and methods favoured by artists and practitioners. These newcomers to the world of research feel deep and unresolved tensions, for traditional research approaches seem too linear, too predictable and too ordered to capture the messiness and dynamism of the process of inquiry which lies at the heart of their creative production. (Haseman and Mafe 2009: 211)

They argue that the difficulty artists find in applying the "well established paradigms" of qualitative research to practice-led research is recognised and that qualitative research "can seem unsympathetic and dismissive" of the artist's contribution (Haseman and Mafe 2009: 212). It is, I suggest, precisely this tension between these two elements (practice-led research and qualitative and research) that requires reconciliation, which will result in more comprehensive and meaningful research.

It is also, I suggest, precisely that contribution (by the artist) that constitutes the "practice" that leads the research. The function of the research includes exploring the complementary influence of theoretical research and practical application have had on the development my practice. It is important, I believe to examine the effect they have had on my practice, and to meaningfully reflect on this process and its outcomes as reflected in my work.

In the application of practice led research a further challenge confronts the artist. Of necessity, and semantically, the term "practice-led research" means that the artist's practice "leads" the research. It is so that central to practice led research is the understanding that practice generates a particular kind of knowledge which accordingly foreshadows practice. Additionally, it is important to practice led research that the research questions must arise from the practice. It can therefore be assumed that the artist logically has commenced with the "practice" in order to appropriately apply the elements of qualitative research.

Nimkulrat in describing the 'Role of Documentation in Practice-led Research' suggests that research is a process of examining problems and challenges that arise



from practice (Nimkulrat, 2007: 212). This I suggest is in essence the function of research.

Consequently, as is required by the discipline, I examine, as part of the requirements of the degree, the extent to which my work has been influenced by the qualitative research into installations and the specific artists. My understanding of practice-led research corresponds with that described by Smith and Dean in their book *Practice-led, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* and Barrett and Bolt in their book *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry* that it comprises three distinct but not necessarily separate phases (Smith and Dean 2009: 23; Barret and Bolt 2007: 160).

In the first phase it is through the practice that the research questions arise and are clarified. The second phase involves exploring the research questions through the theoretical examination of the nature of installation art, selected artists and their work (in order to clarify their approach thereby contextualising my practice), thus allowing the further consideration of the research questions. The third phase involves applying the results of the research to my practice in an endeavour to answer the research questions. This overlapping is a constant element of the research.

In the practical application of practice-led research the dilemma my experience has revealed is that practice and theoretical research are often mutually exclusive: when I am making art, I find research difficult and when reading and researching, making art is difficult. My experience is that research leads to practice, practice leads to research and so on in lockstep. I posit that the mixed methodologies of practice led research and qualitative research are supplementary and complementary and address this dilemma by providing the foundation for the examination of the questions I have set out above. Qualitative Methodology in its application is supplemented and complimented by practice led research. It is this that has provides the foundation for the examination of my research questions.

In their book *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice in the Creative Arts* the authors suggest, in defence of practice-led research that:

Creative work in itself is a form of research and generates detectable research outputs ... creative practice ... and the processes [creative practitioners] engage in

when they are making art – can lead to specialised research insights which can then be generalised and written up as research (Smith and Dean 2009: 5).

Practice-led research is however a subset of qualitative research. It is therefore necessary in addition, to apply the basic principles of qualitative research in order to give content to and properly understand the “output” of my creative practice.

In order to give content to the theoretical aspects of my research I have examined and documented the literature to which I have referred directly under the heading Bibliography.

From a practical perspective I have recorded the process (and the progress) of my practice through practical journaling consisting of not only scribbled notes and ideas but also templates and moulds. The installation that I will exhibit in conjunction with this paper is a requirement of the degree and will be photographically documented. I anticipate that this installation will demonstrate the beneficial and complementary roles that my research has had on my practice.

My research and this paper are thus grounded in a theoretical consideration of the concepts of appropriation and materiality in art making and specifically installation art. I therefore examine, both in this paper and in my exhibition, the validity of the proposition that the nature of the material used in art making, specifically earth, bricks and/or clay, can serve as a fundamental purpose of appropriating the space in which the work is exhibited.

My overarching intentions through this process is to better understand the concept of installation art, the consequences of building materials when used as art materials, and to develop my practice. This exercise involves exploring the impact this understanding has had on my work and has culminated in the exhibition of my work. As my exhibition will comprise an installation, a record of this will of necessity, involve as an annexure to this paper a photographic record of the installation and the component pieces. Only once the installation is completed will I be able to assess the validity of my hypothesis not only from a general standpoint but with particular reference to my installation. These conclusions will form part of the final chapter of this paper.

The foundation of my research into materiality is not that it is or represents, as Mills describes it, “a relic of the artist’s process of investigation into the nature of things”, nor that it is a simple transformation of the materials (Mills, 2009: 2). I am concerned specifically whether, and the extent to which, the use of the medium, together with the materiality of the medium, can appropriate the space in which the artwork is displayed. In addition, thereto an examination of the relationship between the materials the artist uses and the effect on space in which it is exhibited is undertaken. To test and examine this proposition, I have explored the work of Bopape, Gormley, De Maria, Blake and Simonds. Can their installations in which they use building materials be said to appropriate “its space”?

This necessarily involves a consideration of the post-modern contemporary debate over the nature and use of gallery space; specifically: what is the effect of a so-called neutral space on an art work? Is a site-specific art installation antithetical to the notion of the so-called neutral gallery space? In order for a site-specific installation to appropriate the space is it a requirement that the space be neutralised?

In particular I wish to consider whether the artist’s use of materials can denote such an appropriation of the space in which the work is exhibited. Can the artwork transcend the gallery space to the extent that the nature of the space becomes irrelevant to the meaning of the artwork?

## **2.2 The Space**

In order to consider the effect of the gallery on an installation it is essential to examine what constitutes a gallery space and the role it plays for the viewer. Likewise, I believe, it is equally important to consider what role if any is expected of the viewer.

In describing the ideal gallery O’Doherty suggests that it “isolates the artwork from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself” and suggests that the gallery should include “some of the sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom and the mystique of the experimental laboratory” (O’Doherty 1986: 14).

The gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off.

Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floors are polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes have at the wall. (sic) The art is free, as the saying used to go, 'to take on its own life'. (O'Doherty 1986: 15)

There is an inherent contradiction in the above quote. The overtly so-called neutrality of the white cube does not, I suggest, allow the art "to take on its own life". In an article written in the on-line journal 'e-flux' in 2009, the curator and critic Simon Sheikh, in an article entitled 'Positively White Cube Revisited' considers O'Doherty's theory regarding the "white cube". He suggests that O'Doherty's point is that the basis of the white cube is that modernism developed for the gallery space cannot be separated from the artworks exhibited within it. "Indeed, the white cube not only conditions, but also overpowers the artworks themselves in its shift from placing content *within* a context to making the context *itself* the content" (Authors emphasis) (Sheikh 2009).

If one is to accept O'Doherty's description of an ideal gallery it is apparent that he sees the gallery space as being a so-called overtly "neutral" space within which the artwork can be contemplated by the viewer but the artwork is "subject to" that space. The effect however of this supposed overt neutrality is that the viewer is always conscious of the fact that he/she stands in a gallery and is viewing an artwork that is situated within that gallery in order for it to be viewed. O'Doherty's so-called neutrality is a nuanced and loaded "neutrality" in line with the modernist idiom. As such it begs the question: Is it in fact really a neutral space or is the viewer's view determined inexorably by whether the viewer is conscious of being in a gallery space or not? (O'Doherty 1986: 15)

Sheikh refers to this apparent neutrality by suggesting that the gallery by allowing the artworks to be shown "outside of daily life and politics that the works within the white cube can appear to be self-contained" (Sheikh 2009). Sheikh also suggests that the space is therefore the ideal form of the white cube that modernism developed for the gallery space and is inseparable from the artworks exhibited inside it.

The role of the viewer I suggest becomes very important in considering whether the "white cube ... not only conditions, [and] overpowers the artworks themselves" (Sheikh 2009).

In a paper entitled 'The Role of the Viewer in the Gallery Space' Meghan Berliner suggests that not only does the viewer play a role in defining the meaning of the artwork but agrees to take on the role of viewer when entering the gallery space (Berliner 2009: 7).

This role must, it would seem, be important in the viewer's consciousness. One of the questions that arises is: can or is the viewer able to escape the reality of being a visitor to the gallery to view the work within that gallery without an overt intervention by the artist, such as the artist's choice of materials? That recognition or awareness is at the heart of my research. Do the materials used by the artist have any influence on the viewer's acknowledgement of the space?

Space, according to O'Doherty is "not just where things happen; things make space happen". O'Doherty deals with Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau*<sup>3</sup> at length but as a piece situated within a defined space or gallery. He quotes Schwitters as saying of his *Merzbau* "as the structure grows bigger and bigger, valleys, hollows, caves appear and these lead to a life of their own within the overall structure" (O'Doherty 1986: 44).

The *Merzbau* no longer exists. The work has been described by MoMA Archivist Elisabeth Thomas:

It was a whole process, philosophy, and lifestyle, which he called *merz*—a nonsense word that became his kind of personal brand. He was a *merz*-artist who made *merz*-paintings and *merz*-drawings, and naturally, the place where he *merzed*—his studio and family home—was his *merz*-building, or *Merzbau*. (Thomas 2012)

Kurt Schwitters's artwork existed in a defined space. It did not appropriate the space but it existed expressly in his (the artists) space): his studio and his family home. O'Doherty (1986: 49) suggests that it is that gallery space (or studio) makes the artwork.

In their anthology *Thinking about Exhibitions* the editors have published a collection of essays by artists, curators and art writers dealing with the "exhibition" (Ferguson, Greenberg and Narine 1996: 1). As the editors point out in their introduction the

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<sup>3</sup> Schwitters' *Merzbau* was created between 1923 and 1937 and destroyed during World War two in 1943. See Thomas (2012).

exhibition is the primary medium by which art becomes known. How it is exhibited therefore, I believe, becomes important in the manner in which the viewer will interpret it.

In many galleries when that gallery exhibits art works from its own collection or in the case of a group exhibition, works collected and collated by the curator, the exhibition is no more than a reflection of the director or curator's taxonomy of the work displayed. The power of the curator to determine how and in what combinations the work is displayed serves, it appears simply, to direct the viewer. Debora Meijers, in her essay entitled 'The museum and the historical exhibition' comments on the power of the curator and museum when arranging works of art to determine the significance of each piece (Meijers 1996). I postulate that the curator in such circumstances to a large extent determines the vantage point. Where the works that are being exhibited have been acquired by the gallery or sourced for that exhibition, Jean-Marc Poinot, in his essay 'Large exhibitions' posits that the curator's power is understandable and defensible (Poinot 1996).

Although the role of the curator is distinguished from that of the director as per Lawrence Alloway in his essay 'The great curatorial dim-out' 1996:159 - 165), I do not rely on this distinction. For the purposes of my dissertation, I use the term curator in a more general sense: meaning the person responsible for the selection and display of the works of art on exhibition. Alloway recognises further that this role of the curator can cause difficulties for the artist. He refers to the complexity of the artist's position vis a vis the curator in that the work that the artist produces is often "a task of absolute control and personal satisfaction" (Alloway 1996: 161).

I consider that it is not only the influence of the curator that the artist may seek to avoid through the use of building materials but through the use of such materials may serve to overcome the overt influence of the white cube, the gallery and the curator. I believe that the use of these materials may be important in allowing the artist to address this issue. To what extent can the use of building materials serve to appropriate the space and thereby possibly allow the viewer the freedom to contemplate the art work without outside influence?

In context therefore I examine in this study how my use of building materials: earth, clay and bricks may serve to overcome the influence of what O'Doherty has described as the "white cube" and by creating a sense of appropriation in the same way that building on another's land in law does (O'Doherty 1986: 15).

This is despite the fact that in the strictly legal sense the building accedes to the land; and that accession is of a permanent nature as opposed to a temporary appropriation of the space by the artist. In both instances I conclude that the fact of an appropriation is clear.

In these circumstances and for these reasons, I suggest, that the distinction between the permanent claiming of space to the exclusion of others (the strictly legal definition of appropriation and the legal principle of accession) and the temporary claiming of space for the purpose of the work being viewed and appreciated is merely illusory. It seems that for the viewer whether the appropriation is permanent or temporary is of no consequence. I suggest that the effect of an appropriation may be to engage the viewer and the artwork in a contractual relationship that is not dependent upon the nature or identity of the space, nor is it dependent on nor does it rely upon the appropriation of the space being permanent.

## **2.3 Materiality**

In considering whether an artwork has appropriated a space, I explore whether it is the materiality of the chosen medium that enables, creates or commences the process of the viewers engagement with an art installation. Christina Mills, in her paper 'Materiality as the Basis for the Aesthetic Experience in Contemporary Art' (2009), discusses the contemporary relevance of materiality, suggesting that materiality is how art's material qualities are sensed, interpreted and understood. Mills writes that materiality in artworks "... extend[s] beyond the simple fact of physical matter... [it includes] all relevant information related to the work's physical existence... its history and condition and the artist's personal history." (Mills 2009: 1)

Mills asserts that this is relevant to the aesthetic experience. In these circumstances aesthetic considerations of the material must I believe become relevant in an appropriation of the exhibition space. Lucy Lippard and John Chandler have

expressed the view that “the medium need not be the message” (Lippard and Chandler 1968: 49).

The use of building materials and the concomitant appropriation of the space may not necessarily be, or affect, the prime message of the work. It may well be that the appropriation performs only a subsidiary function for the installation and the artist so as to ensure that the viewer’s contemplation is undistracted by the gallery and the influence of O’Doherty’s white cube and its overwhelming neutrality.

Although this raises the issue of content versus subject versus context, that is a topic that falls outside the ambit of this research. I do not intend to deal with this issue in this paper. It is a subject deserving of its own research. What is important here is the understanding that materials have the ability not only to convey meaning. I suggest that the materiality of building materials when used as art making materials contributes to the artwork’s ability to convey a sense of appropriation of the space in a legal sense. This I believe is particularly relevant in installation art and the environment it creates.

## **2.4. Installation Art**

As my research and the excavation of my research questions are concerned primarily with installation art and as my exhibition will take the form of an installation it is necessary for me to expand my understanding of what constitutes installation art. In order therefore that the term installation art be placed in context, it is important to record at the outset what is generally understood by the term “art installation” and the context in which I use the term.

At the 2020 4th International Conference on Art Studies: Science, Experience Education, Dr. Alexandra Orlova of the Russian State University for the Humanities, Cinema and Contemporary Art presented a paper entitled ‘Installation as a ‘featured’ form of art.’ In her paper Orlova quotes the Russian philosopher Oleg Krivtsun’s definition of an installation: “Three-dimensional expressive construction which is made from specific materials or found objects and is intended to create a special emotional and sense atmosphere of a peculiar environmental effect...” (Orlova 2020: 100)



Orlova emphasises the atmosphere (specifically referred to by Krivtsun) that the installation creates:

In fact, we can say that the perception of a spectator who has interacted with the piece personally gains an "affected" subjectivity because the eye-witness viewer had a contact not only with the piece itself, but also with the atmosphere the artist created in the space where the artwork had been installed and in some situations was a part of that piece (Orlova 2020: 100).

My practice and research explore whether occupation and appropriation of the space by an installation can be achieved by the creation of the specific environment the installation creates irrespective of any connection the artist may have with the space itself. While the installation may be an installation in a gallery, does the particular use of building materials namely earth, clay and bricks as art materials in creation of the installation, through the atmosphere it creates, represent an appropriation of that space? I suggest that the atmosphere created by the building materials may well transcend the effect of the "white cube" or gallery space and in addition could allow the installation to stand apart from any extraneous connection the artist may have with the space.

The nature of an installation has also been described by the artist David Fox as "... a three-dimensional visual artwork, ... designed to change the perception of [the] space" (Fox 2022). Accepting that an installation creates an environment and within this environment, an atmosphere, I believe the nature of the materials used in the installation are therefore an important element of that installation. I accordingly venture to suggest for, the viewer, if an installation creates a sense or perception of appropriation that this sense or perception is a function of or is created by the nature of the materials used.

The common thread that appears to run through the various definitions or descriptions of installations are that they create their own environment and atmosphere. This suggests that, importantly, the installation is not dependent upon the gallery or its so-called neutrality for meaning or impact.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Installation artworks are explained by the Tate Guide to Modern Art Terms: "Installation also described as an environment, the term is used to describe mixed-media constructions or assemblages usually designed for a specific place and for a temporary period of time. Works often occupy an entire room or gallery space that the

This assertion must of course must exclude site-specific installations where the artist expressly relies on the site for meaning or impact because “a site-specific work of art is designed for a specific location, if removed from that location it loses all or a substantial part of its meaning” (Tate 2022).

While an installation artwork generally consists of many component parts, I believe that the viewer views and interacts with the artwork as a whole and not as a collection of individual parts. This I suggest, together with the materiality of the medium, is what creates the installation’s atmosphere and environment. My research questions whether using building materials in particular in installation art suggests an appropriation of the space in which the work is shown.

I recognise that installations are generally temporary. The transient or temporary nature of an installation has been acknowledged by Arthur van Mourik, the Collections Manager of the Central Museum in Utrecht:

When installation artworks are exhibited, it is as if a book is opened and the viewer is able to read the artwork. Before it is installed, the artwork does not exist in its intended form. An installation artwork comes to life when it is installed in an exhibition (Van Mourik 2019).

I suggest that because of the transient nature of an installation, specifically because the artwork does not exist in its intended form prior to installation nor does it exist in that form when it has been dismantled or destroyed, the atmosphere and environment it creates is important. The only record of it may be drawings or photographs. An example, once again, is O’Doherty discussion of Kurt Schwitter’s (b 20 June 1887 – d 8 January 1948) *Merzbau* (O’Doherty 1986). The work was destroyed in 1943 during the second world war. All that ‘remains’ is a photographic record of part of Schwitter’s installation.

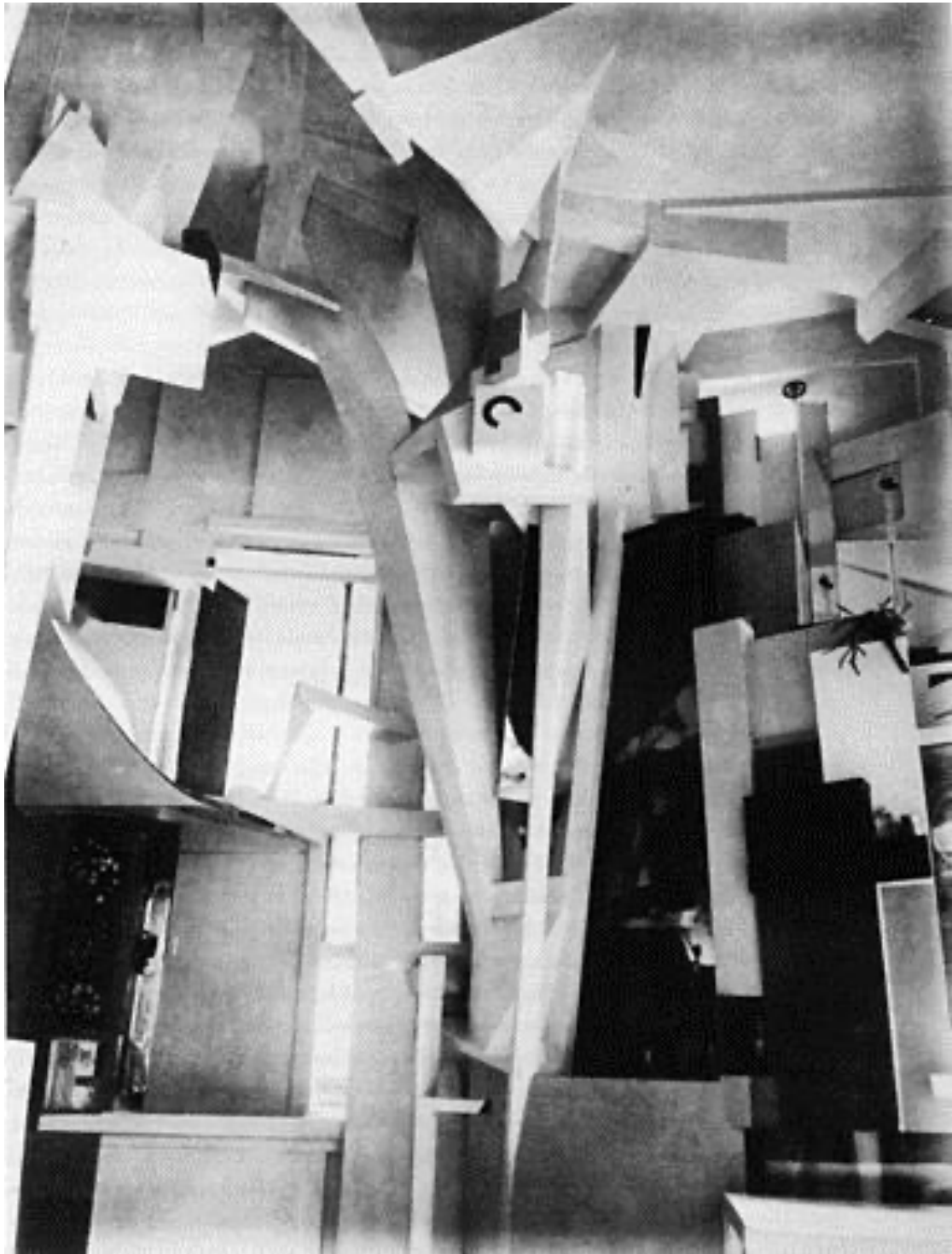
I suggest therefore that given its transient nature the art installation should at least embrace and draw the viewer into the atmosphere and environment it creates before

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spectator invariably has to walk through in order to engage fully with the work of art. Some installations, however, are designed simply to be walked around and contemplated, or are so fragile that they can only be viewed from a doorway, or an end of a room" (Tate 2022).

it has gone. Other than any photographic record all the viewer may be left with is the experience or the atmosphere.

The issue with which my research and practice is concerned is the extent to which the use of the material can lead the viewer to at best ignore that the work is in a gallery or at least become oblivious to that fact. This might not be a generally accepted proposition: the counter view being that the artist uses the space itself to render it less dominant. This latter point of view is in contrast with the notion expressed by Simon Sheikh that, (in agreement with O'Doherty), "the white cube not only conditions, but also overpowers the artworks themselves in its shift from placing content *within* a context to making the context *itself* the content" (Sheikh 2009).



*Merzbau* (1943) (Agudo-Martínez 2016). (Figure 1)

Bob Lansroth, the critic in the Online journal *Widewalls*, suggests that installation art engages the viewer on many levels and leaves a lasting impression despite the fact that the installation is more often than not, temporary. To the extent that that lasting

impression is dependent upon the work being discrete I suggest that this could well be dependent upon the work standing apart from the gallery or space in which it is shown. This is what I suggest in turn may facilitate an installation or installation art becoming “mesmerising and [for] the viewer [to] become part of the artwork” (Lansroth 2016).

Lansroth also suggests that installation art is either site-specific (“designed to exist and ‘function’ only in the location for which they were created, making them part of the surroundings”) or do not depend upon their environment (Lansroth 2016). The relevant issue, however, is whether in the latter instance, that installation is perceived by the viewer to be exhibited in a gallery space or whether the gallery space is irrelevant to the work. I suggest that for an installation to depend on its own atmosphere or environment and not to depend on the space in which it is exhibited the viewer should be able to distance themselves from the gallery space.

The importance of the viewer in installation art has been stressed by the Russian conceptual artist Ilya Iosifovich Kabakov (b 1933) who suggests that an installation is addressed at and intended for the viewer (cited in Tate 2022).

While it is difficult to imagine any art work that is not intended for, or addressed at, the viewer the importance of the viewer in an installation cannot be gainsaid. By its very nature, a viewer should be engulfed in an installation, even if site specific, to the exclusion of all else. The environment created by the artist draws the viewer into the work. My hypothesis is that where the materials used by the artist are building materials it may lead to a consequential sense of appropriation of the gallery space to the extent that, for the viewer, the work transcends that gallery space.

An installation that is simply a scattering of random objects in a space is just that: “random objects in a space”. The artist Allan Kaprow (b 1927 d 2006) in an interview said that in creating his first installation or environment that he simply filled up the whole gallery with a variety of materials (Smithsonian 1968). It is however questionable whether the “random” filling of a gallery with “random” objects in any way comprises in Kaprow’s own words anything other than “random objects in a space” let alone an environment.

By contrast, I suggest, where the artist uses building materials such as earth, clay or bricks, the materiality of those materials may serve to claim the space in which the work is installed through the creation of an environment and atmosphere discrete from the gallery space in which the work is exhibited. The distinction is between that which recognises and acknowledges the space, either through a subservience to the space or reliance upon the space and that which is indifferent to the space. I suggest the distinction may lie in the artist's choice of materials. My hypothesis involves a consideration of whether the material used by the artist can create a peculiar environment and atmosphere that is independent of and indifferent to the gallery

This distinction between installations is particularly relevant and important where the exhibition space is an active participant in the artistic process of meaning making. The most obvious examples are site specific installations where the artist's work relies on the specific site.

The difference between installations that appropriate the gallery space and those that rely on or depend upon a neutral space or white cube site, I suggest, lies essentially where the space is appropriated by the installation, absent of any reliance on the site or on O'Doherty's nuanced so-called neutrality of a gallery space (O'Doherty 1986: 15).

My hypothesis that I explore in this dissertation is that where the artist uses building materials the installation is allowed an independence from if not an indifference to the space in which it is exhibited. It is the use of these materials that allows the identity of the space to be transcended and that space to be appropriated. The opposite applies to a site-specific installation or one that is placed within and is subservient to and acknowledges space in which the work is shown. O'Doherty uses the example of the frame of a painting it either becomes part of the picture or simply acts as its boundary or limits (O'Doherty 1986).

In Chapter 3 when dealing with the artists I have listed above I will demonstrate how Bopape's installations, Gormley's *Field Series*, De Maria's *New York Earth Room*, Blake's *Castle* and Simonds's *Dwellings* are particularly graphic illustrations of work that is indifferent to the space. It has been exhibited in many different spaces and retains its integrity irrespective of the space in which it is exhibited. So too De

Maria's *New York Earth Room* and Dineo Bopape's installations. I suggest that none of these works is defined by the space in which they are shown and that the viewer is left free to contemplate the work itself absent of any outside influence from the gallery space.

In order to illustrate examples of installations where the artist clearly does not in any way claim ownership of the space, I refer to Joseph Beuys' (b 1921 d 1986): *The End of the Twentieth Century* and *The Pack*.

As can be seen from the illustrations below Beuys's two installations when exhibited at the Tate Modern Gallery were installed in a neutral white room with all the characteristics of O'Doherty's white cube. Both of Beuys's pieces rely on the neutrality of the space in which they are exhibited. The viewer is left in no doubt that he/she stands in a gallery observing the installation.

Neither installation serves to create a sense of appropriation nor is such an appropriation necessary for either piece. I suggest that the strength of the work is enhanced by the overt nuanced neutrality of the gallery space.



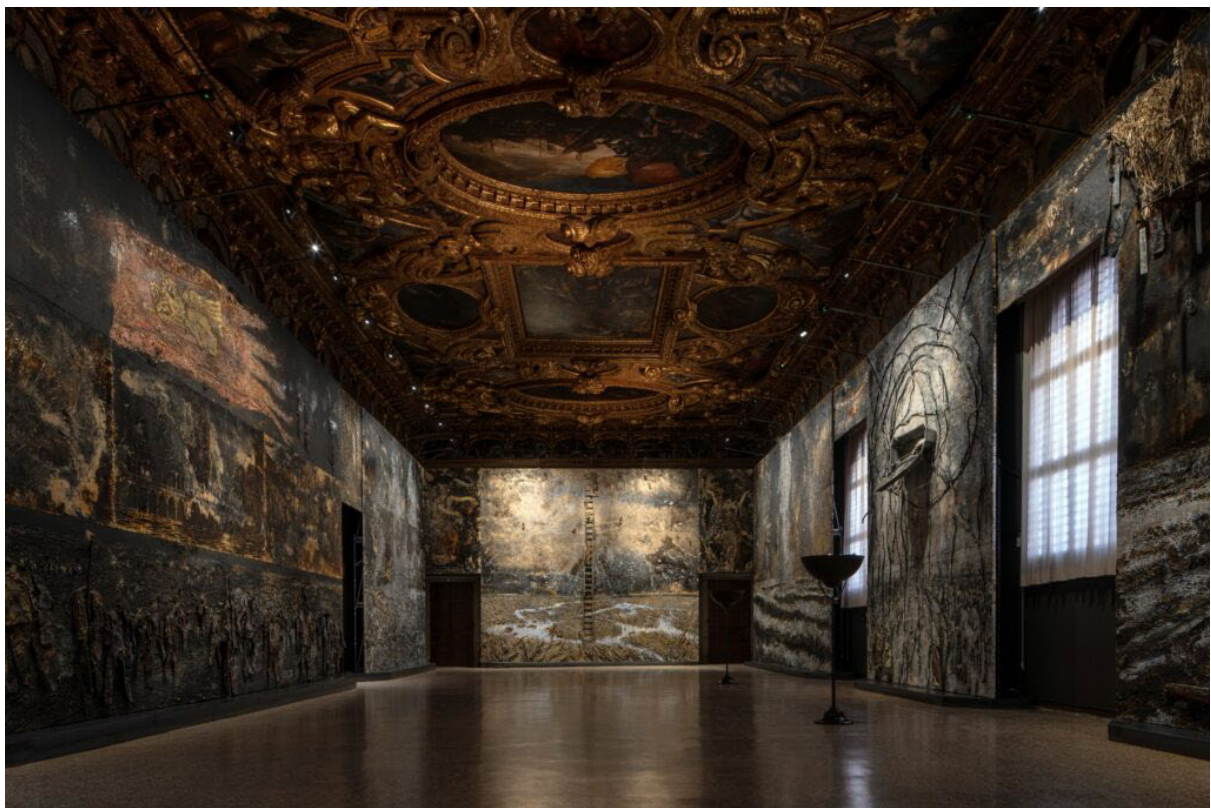
*The End of the Twentieth Century* (Tate 2005) (Figure 2)



*The Pack* (Tate 2005) (Figure 3)



By contrast, site specific installations recognise the space for what it is and acknowledge that space. Perhaps the most striking recent example of an artist recognising and acknowledging the gallery space is Anselm Kiefer's (b 1945) installation: *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce*. (*These writings, when burned, will finally cast a little light*). This work is being exhibited in the Sala dello Scrutinio and the Sala della Quarantia Civil Nova at the Palazzo Ducale (Doge's Palace) in Venice in 2022 (until 29 October 2022) as part of the Venice Biennale (Fadmagazine 2022).



*Detail Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce. (These writings, when burned, will finally cast a little light)* (Fadmagazine 2022) (Figure 4)



Detail: *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po' di luce.* (These writings, when burned, will finally cast a little light) (DSCENE 2022) (Figure 5)

In this site-specific installation Kiefer has made no attempt whatsoever to conceal or appropriate the space in which the installation is exhibited. He has in fact expressly referenced the Doge's Palace and its relevance to his installation. He describes his installation as having been exhibited in dialogue with one of the most important spaces of the Doges Palace the Sala Dello Scrutinio and with the history of Venice. Acknowledging the space in describing the nature of his installation Kiefer said:

Sometimes it happens that there is a convergence between past and present moments, and when they meet one's experiences something similar to immobility in the hollow of the wave that is about to break. Having originated in the past but belonging to something deep down, more than it these moments are as much of the present as of the past, and what they generate is very important (Artsupp 2022).

Using the work of work of Beuys and Kiefer as examples, I suggest that in both instances the artists have overtly relied on the gallery space or as O'Doherty describes it, the white cube. The impact of both works is clearly and overtly reliant upon the gallery in which they are exhibited. In Beuys's case the work is dependent upon the gallery's neutrality of the space. In Kiefer's installation it relies directly on that specific space; the relevance of Doge Palace and its existing artworks. That particular space is an integral part of, and is essential to his work. In Beuys's case it cannot be said his work subsumes the gallery space. Kiefer on the other hand relies overtly on that particular space. Both artists respectively require and recognise the neutrality or the nature of the space to enhance or emphasise the meaning of their work for the viewer's benefit.

My hypothesis is where the artist uses building materials such as earth, bricks and clay as art making materials in creating an installation the artwork does not demand that the identity of the space be recognised due in no small measure to the materials denoting the artist's appropriation of the space in which the work is shown. It appears to me to be clear that in such instances the installation artwork neither depends or relies upon nor requires any interaction with space or O'Doherty's neutrality. The work exists and is exhibited in the space despite, or irrespective of, the nature or physical properties of the gallery space.

## **2.5. Art vs Law: the legal principles of accession and appropriation**

Together with the insights afforded by a consideration of space, viewership and materiality, my background and experience in the law has provided me with an additional lens through which to view the precepts of appropriation. I believe that the examination and exploration of legal principles that govern the appropriation of land and the consequential anomalies that arise when juxtaposed with art practice and the possibility of artists appropriating space serve to provide a contrast, background and context to my research questions. The basic anomaly lies in the fact that in law the general principle is that what is built on the land accedes to the land, whereas my research concerns whether the use of building materials in an art installation, (that



which is built), can appropriate the space in which the installation is exhibited (the land).<sup>5</sup>

Law Professor Ina Knobel in an article dealing with the concept of acquiring ownership explains how through the legal principle of accession “movable things which are attached to land permanently become part of the land and therefore the property of the owner of the land” (Knobel 2012: 78). Despite the legal principles of ownership through accession, building materials, specifically earth, clay and bricks, by their very nature not only suggest construction, but when used as such physically appropriate the land on which the construction takes place. I am not concerned with ownership in the legal sense but simply the physical appropriation of space.

Aside from mining, which in itself I suggest constitutes an appropriation, building on the land is probably the most extreme appropriation of land. Implicit in the construction of dwellings is the unavoidable sense that the land on which a dwelling is constructed is appropriated for that dwelling. I suggest that whether the land is owned by the occupier or not is not of practical relevance. The occupier does not of necessity require title but does require possession, this in turn conveys a sense of appropriation.

Extrapolating and contrasting this principle in an art context, the issue with which my research is concerned, is whether and if so, the extent to which materials used in an installation simply by using them may suggest, for the viewer, an appropriation of the space in which the art-work is exhibited. The examination of the anomaly between art and law, specifically for the purpose of this dissertation, is rooted in the excavation and interrogation of the effect the choice of the material may have on the appropriation of the space in contrast with a legal appropriation of land.

At the outset it is important to stress that for the purposes of this paper, I use the concept and interpretation in the legal sense of appropriation in the sense of acquiring; and not in its commonly held art or art history sense as is, for example, defined by the Tate Gallery, i.e. ... the practice of artists using “pre-existing objects

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<sup>5</sup> In an article published in *The Comparative and International Law Journal of South Africa*, Vol. 45 No. 1 (2012) “Accession of Movables to Land, South African Law and Dutch Law” Professor Ina Knobel describes in detail the principles of law applicable to accession and the method of acquisition of property known as *inaedificatio*.

or images in their art with little transformation of the original” (Tate 2022). I also do not intend to explore appropriation as described by Jessica Meiselman “Inherent in our understanding of appropriation is a concept that the new work recontextualizes whatever it borrows to create new work” (Meiselman 2017).

The question that stands at the core of my research is an examination and consideration of a possible appropriation of the exhibition space by the artist’s use of specific materials. As I have recorded in my research question: How might the nature and the materiality of the medium constitute an overt appropriation of the gallery space in which the artwork is exhibited? In the process of examining whether the artists appropriate the space in that sense, and in order to clarify that appropriation I recognise the contrast with how it differs from the strictly legal methods of appropriation.

I am very conscious of the debate surrounding the colonial dispossession of land in South Africa that to some extent defines South Africa, the effects of the Natives Land Act of 1913 and the attempts by the state to address this issue.<sup>6</sup> The response to the current and historical land issues and how they have and are being addressed by South African artists (such as Kemang Wa Lehulere (b 1984) and the late Santu Mofokeng (b October 19, 1956 – d January 26, 2020) is a subject that I intend addressing in future research. These rich and complex debates are beyond the scope of this paper.

Much of the debate regarding appropriation falls within the realms of the study of postcolonialism. This too, however, does not fall within the remit of this research. Accordingly, it is important to stress again, that in this paper, the basis of the appropriation I examine is based on appropriation from a legal perspective.<sup>7</sup>

From the outset, it is appropriate to clarify what I interpret to be the legal nature of appropriation. I set out below the basic common law legal definition of appropriation.

A person ... intentionally appropriates moveable, corporeal property which

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<sup>6</sup> See Ngcukaitobi (2018; 2021) and Cousins and Walker (2015).

<sup>7</sup> The issues surrounding colonial appropriation and post-colonial appropriation and the legal and the social implications thereof are discussed in detail; in, *inter alia*, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (2000) and Ashley (2002).

- (a) belongs to, and is in the possession of, another;
- (b) belongs to another but is in the perpetrator's own possession; or
- (c) belongs to the perpetrator but is in another's possession and such other person has a right to possess it which legally prevails against the perpetrator's own right of possession

provided that the intention to appropriate the property includes ... to deprive the person entitled to the possession of the property, of such property (Snyman 2021: 483).

and

The action of taking something, especially when you have no right to take it ... [an] assumption by a person of the rights of an owner ... include[ing] where he has come by the property (innocently or not) without stealing it, or in that the assumption of a right to it by keeping it and dealing with it as owner. (Black 1995)

As referred to above, Law Professor Ina Knobel in her journal article describes the legal principle of accession in South African law, as an original method of acquisition of ownership governed by the maxim *superficies solo cedit* which, loosely translated, means: any building built on the land becomes the property of the owner of that land (Knobel 2012: 79).

The anomaly that I have referred to above that arises between appropriation in the law and appropriation in art lies in the contradiction between the essence and nature of the appropriation. In the law appropriation (of land) is governed by the legal principle *superficies solo cedit* and by contrast in art (the subject of my research) involves whether the use of specific materials results in an apparent appropriation, for the viewer, of the space. Generally, this refers to the gallery space. The fact that in the law the building (the materials) accedes to the land, whereas, in an art context, by contrast and, for the purposes of this discussion, I postulate whether it is the materials namely earth, clay or bricks that have the function of or the power to appropriate. It is this exploration of that proposition that lies at the heart of my research.

A further anomaly lies in the nature of the appropriation. While in law appropriation of another's property often amounts to theft, in art terms, I argue that the function of the artists' appropriation is to allow the viewer the opportunity to view the work freely and unencumbered or influenced by the gallery or the gallery space.

There is a further element to this in that in law the appropriation or accession is essentially a permanent acquisition. The owner of the land acquires ownership of that built on the land (using earth/clay/bricks). The artist, by contrast, when using any of these materials, appropriates the space temporarily for the purpose of the work being viewed.

The question that has arisen from my practice and which forms the basis of my research is whether, and to what extent, is it the materiality of earth, bricks or clay when used in art making that serve to demonstrate and suggest an appropriation of the space. I believe that the examination and exploration of the legal precepts that govern the appropriation of land and the consequential anomalies that arise when juxtaposed with art and possibility of the artist's appropriation of space serve to provide a contrast, background and context to my research questions.

### 3. The Artists

The fundamental purpose behind the consideration and exploration of the specific works by Bopape, Gormley, De Maria, Blake and Simonds is to examine what influence they have on my practice and explore and excavate in this context my hypothesis that the use of the building materials earth, bricks and clay in installation art serves to claim or appropriate the space in which the work is shown. Despite what O'Doherty describes as the gallery, the white cube, that has the "sanctity of the church, the formality of the courtroom, the mystique of the experimental laboratory" and is ... constructed ... [so that] the outside world must not come in ... white painted walls ...", do the materials that these artists use overcome this loaded neutrality (O'Doherty 1986: 14, 15). In O'Doherty's gallery the viewer is in no doubt that the work is in a gallery.

I am not persuaded that in the installations I have considered, the gallery space is the dominant feature. In the examples that I deal with below I will examine the ways in which the installation assumes greater importance than the gallery space in which it is exhibited. Their artworks are neither reliant upon or defined by the gallery space for their existence or meaning. The materials that the artists have used transcend any such dependence on the gallery. The nature of the materials used by the artist, the earth, clay and bricks suggest, depict not only an occupation of the space but an appropriation of that space. In these cases, material used by the artists in creating the installation transcend the gallery space by conveying an appropriation of the space.

Integral to my research is the examination of particular artworks by Dineo Seshee Bopape, Antony Gormley, Walter de Maria, and the Mexican artist Jorge Mendez Blake (b 1974). I explore each artist's chosen medium and the installations' consequential relationship with the space. My approach to these works considers the effect of the building materials earth, bricks and clay when used as an art medium. I have focussed on their usage of installation art.

In reflecting on the work of these artists I consider whether the method and the material used by them demonstrates an appropriation of the space and the gallery,



and the extent to which their use of these materials in their art making overcomes the gallery's conscious and overt so-called neutrality. My research lies in questioning whether the work overcomes that overt "gallery neutrality", as contemplated by O'Doherty, and appropriates the space through the use of the materials. I do not attempt to critique or examine their work from the perspective of the meaning or the artists' intention but only whether their choice of materials serves to liberate the work from the gallery space, and whether this appropriation of that space facilitates or allows the viewer to contemplate the work unencumbered by and regardless of gallery space or the site of the installation.

### **3.1 Dineo Seshee Bopape**

Dineo Seshee Bopape is a South African artist who was born in Polokwane. She currently lives and works in Johannesburg.<sup>8</sup> Bopape makes extensive use of wood, soil and building materials, often in combination with electronic equipment and found objects in creating her heavy, earthy installations (Jeffs 2022)

The works I will explore are a selection of her installations that utilise earth and bricks as a primary art making material.

Tess Thackara, a New York based "culture and art writer", who interviewed Bopape in an article entitled 'Why Shamanic Practices are Making a Comeback', describes Bopape's work as:

...moving installations composed of earth and symbolically loaded objects like rocks, feathers, and candles both summon the violent colonial battles and regimes waged over land and evoke the life-giving, regenerative force of soil. ... shelves of earth decorated with carefully, purposefully placed objects serenely command a room. Bopape in her interview with Thackara said of her work "that during the making of these works she was thinking about the practices of an indigenous people in Southern Africa. (Thakara 2017)

Her installations have been exhibited widely and in many differing spaces. I suggest that the common thread that runs through her installations is the fact that they stand apart from the space in which they are exhibited. In my opinion Bopape achieves this

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<sup>8</sup> She is regarded as a multimedia artist, and has exhibited her installations widely, including Morocco, Canada, United States, Brazil Ukraine and Italy. In South Africa she initially studied art at the Durban Institute of Technology and thereafter graduated from De Ateliers in Amsterdam (2007) and completed an MFA at Columbia University, New York 2010 (Morrill, Wright and Elderton2019).

primarily through her use of building material such as clay, earth and bricks. This is largely illustrated by her method of adapting the installation to the space without succumbing to it: “the artist thoroughly re-envisions it each time it is displayed, responding to the specificity of each setting while drawing on the same group of interrelated elements” (Asthoff 2019). It is clear from this that Bopape recognises the reality of the different spaces in which she shows her installations, but her work, and the message it conveys, does not appear to be subservient to the space due in no small part I believe to her choice of materials.

In 2017 her installation entitled *mabu/mubu/mmu*. Was declared the winner of the Future Generation Prize. This work was described by the jury as:

An earth sculpture made of rich black local soil acts as a platform for objects, organic forms and geological fragments that represent actions and symbols. .... The work is a metaphor for the land and for landlessness; for wealth and poverty; for new life and mourning. Burnt herbs and crystals act as agents of healing for a young artist who lives and works in Post-Apartheid South Africa” (Future Generation Art Prize 2017).

This work, as with the other Bopape installations that I deal with below, is rooted in the “politics of land and landlessness in her home country” (van der Watt 2018). As van der Watt correctly points out, land is a “proxy for many conflicts around race and dispossession, and therefore a site of memory and identity” (van der Watt 2018). Bopape’s use of and relationship with earth which is an essential element of her work is, I suggest, carefully considered and an integral part of her installations. That the work is intensely reflective of her relationship with South Africa requires that the meaning not to be diluted by the space regardless of where it is exhibited. This, I believe, she achieves partly through an appropriation of the space in which her work is shown.

Apart from being displayed at the Future Generation’s venue this installation *mabu/mubu/mmu* was also part of a solo exhibition in Kyiv Ukraine and in Venice as part of the 2017 Venice Biennale. In each of these three iterations the space that it occupied was different. I suggest that her artwork lost nothing of its meaning in any of these various iterations due largely to the fact that not only did her use of material appropriate the space but also that it was clearly not reliant on a specific gallery space or locality. The use of soil or earth when exhibited in Ukraine and Italy

remained as powerful a metaphor “for land and landlessness” in all three installations. This, I suggest is due to the nature of the material used by the artist. The earth used by Bopape in her installation transcends and appropriates not only the gallery space but the gallery itself and allows the viewer an unencumbered opportunity to contemplate Bopape’s “land” and “landlessness” (Future Generation Prize.org 2017).

It is so that there is a universality in the nature of the materials, namely the sense of occupation and appropriation they convey, to which the viewer can relate. The power of Bopape’s installations is their ability to stand apart from the gallery space through the use of her chosen materials. It is this independence from the gallery that allows her work to stand aloof from the space. I postulate that it is the materials that give the work that required independence thereby facilitating an appreciation and understanding of the work regardless of the space in which it is exhibited. In announcing Bopape as a participating South African artist to participate in the 2019 Venice Biennale 2019 her installations were described as “intuitive installations that transform spaces into meditative arenas where historical narratives, fiction and personal narratives are wittingly interwoven” (Contemporary And 2019). This transformation is due I believe largely to her use of materials.

Despite many of her installations being constructed and shown outside of South Africa, her work remains deeply rooted in her own country. This must require of the artist the ability to create in foreign spaces a sense of her country of birth on which her installations are based. In order to achieve this Bopape must determine and create for the viewer an appropriation of the space rather than allowing the space to determine the locality. The viewer needs to be transported and to achieve this, the space must belong to the artwork. My hypothesis is that the use of her carefully chosen materials achieves this necessary appropriation.

Her installations, unlike the example of Anselm Kiefer’s *Questi scritti, quando verranno bruciati, daranno finalmente un po’ di luce* (These writings, when burned, will finally cast a little light) have no symbiotic relationship with the exhibition space. The work changes with each iteration and does not rely on the nature or identity of the space for meaning (Asthoff.com 2019).

In fact, central to the viewer's appreciation and understanding of the work, I suggest, is its independence from the space in which it is installed. The use of building materials serves to transcend or negate any influence the space may attempt to exert on the work by overtly appropriating the space. This appropriation by the materials used in the installation serves to create a neutrality of its own thus allowing the viewer the unfettered and unencumbered freedom to appreciate the work.



Detail: *mabu/mubu/mmu*, 2017 (Soil, ceramics, herbs, crystals, coal, ash, sound) (artsy.net 2017) (Figure 6)

Bopape uses carefully chosen components and as described by Angela Brown, editor of "ARTnews", they "consider history, gender, politics, and memory contained within land itself". (Brown 2017; van der Watt 2018). Brown suggests that her work (exhibited at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Biennale) involves "the politics of landlessness" and "an intimate protest that prompts us to capture fleeting memories". In order for her work to be appreciated as intended by Bopape it is essential for her to create an atmosphere unaffected by the gallery space, or more accurately to create her own atmosphere independent of the space in which her work is exhibited (Artland 2019).



Detail mabu/mubu/mmu (Artsy 2017) (Figure 7)



Detail mabu/mubu/mmu (Artsy 2017) (Figure 8)

Bopape's 2018 installation entitled: *Lerole: footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting)* was exhibited in the Sfeir-Semler Gallery, Hamburg. In reviewing the installation Jens Asthoff described her installation as "materially" and intellectually complex. Asthoff recalls how Bopape had spent approximately ten days creating the layout using hundreds of uniform size bricks. The bricks, she says were stacked in fields or blocks of varying dimensions almost forming an archipelago throughout the gallery. the variations in height ranged from pedestals or altars, to rows no more than a few bricks high. (Asthoff 2019)

In reviewing the exhibition Defne Ayas, Director of Witte de With commented that "Dineo Seshee Bopape is known for structuring her narratives through material and immaterial presences. ... *Lerole: footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting)* is an installation that meditates upon recorded pre-colonial revolts and acts of resistance against European invasion in Africa (Ayas 2017). Bopape herself described her work as "a meditation on time, 'memory', spirit and 'no', an ephemeral monument, a gesture made in commemoration of those acts and beings. In her review Defne Ayas, Director of Witte de With continues to explain how Bopape is concerned with "the socio-political and cultural aspects of individual and collective sovereignty. Her complex installations examine topics such as violence, oppression, exploitation and insecurity, through the lens of individual memories, historical narratives or personal stories" (Ayas 2017).

In order that this aspect of her work is appreciated I suggest that it is essential that Bopape creates an atmosphere that allows the viewer to be transported or removed from the confines of a European gallery to an appropriated space where the viewer is able to contemplate the "historical narratives" of South Africa. While there is a certain degree of irony in the fact that Bopape has "invaded Europe" with her installations it is also essential that her work not be seen as a gallery piece in a European gallery but as an independent statement regardless of the space in which it is exhibited.





Lerole: *footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting)* (Contemporary And 2017a). (Figure 9)



Detail: *Lerole: footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting)* (Contemporary And 2017b) (Figure 10)





*Lerole: footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting) (Contemporary And 2017c)*  
(Figure 11)



Detail: *Lerole: footnotes (The struggle of memory against forgetting) (Contemporary And 2017d)* (Figure 12)

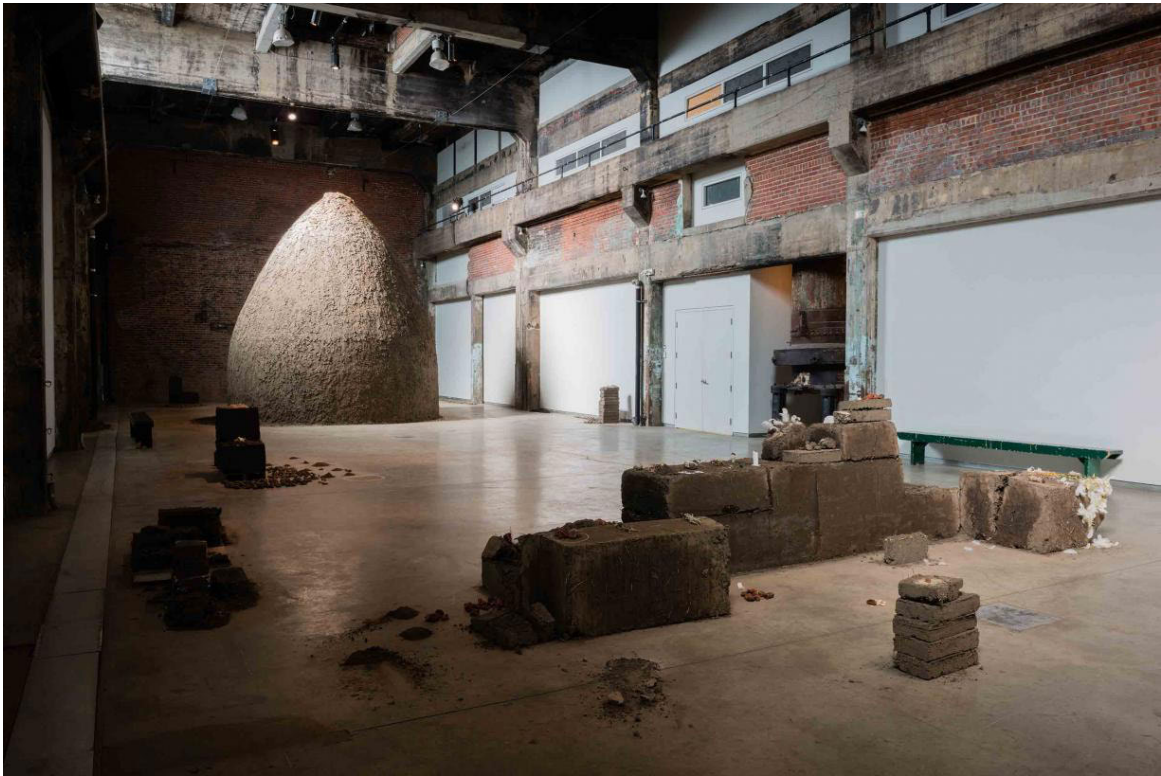


In 2017 Bopape exhibited *And- in. the light of this* . in the Fonderie Darling Gallery in Montreal, Canada. This installation is regarded as part of Bopape's ongoing exploration of the concept of sovereignty - land, body and self-sovereignty ... and the ... exploration of ideas and forms of containment and displacement, occupation, and hosting, and the socio-historical politics of landlessness" (Fonderie Darling 2018a).

Although site specific, it would defeat the very purpose of Bopape's installation if while exploring African sovereignty the installation succumbed to what O'Doherty has described as the white cube. This work requires it to be appreciated in its own milieu, its own appropriated space and unencumbered by any ideas of "church like 'sanctity', 'courtroom formality' or experimental laboratory like mystique" (O'Doherty page 14).

This installation completely occupies the gallery space and I suggest demonstrates a complete occupation and appropriation of the site despite it being exhibited in what was clearly an old foundry. It stands aloof from the site. The nature of the gallery does not detract from her exploration of "[the] concept of sovereignty - land, body ... displacement, occupation, ... and the socio-historical politics of landlessness" (Fonderie Darling 2018a).

Is it not this independence from the site that facilitates and allows the viewer to contemplate what Bopape intends, namely land, landlessness and occupation? This aspect of her installation is particularly important bearing in mind that while the space was formerly a foundry it remains the antithesis of O'Doherty's overpowering white cube. I suggest that the installation does not succumb or bow to the space primarily due to the materials used by the artist.



Detail of *And- in the light of this* \_\_\_\_\_., 2017 (Fonderie Darling 2018a) (Figure 13)



Detail: *And- in the light of this* \_\_\_\_\_., 2017 (Fonderie Darling.org 2018b) (Figure 14).

Bopape's installation entitled *sa ke lerole, (sa lerole ke ) Sa Ke Lerole, (Sa Lerole Ke ) (that which is of is dust, (that which is of dust is )* was first created for the 32nd biennale in São Paulo (Bienal de São Paulo 2016). Through it Bopape examines relationships and tensions that arise when considering land from the varied perspectives of gender and maternity, history and the politics of place, memory and the metaphysics of self and presence" (Barlow 2017).

During an interview with Brown, when this installation was shown in New York Brown referred to the similar site-specific installation made for the Sao Paulo Biennial, and asked "how the work was different and the extent to which Bopape considered location and audience for her work" (Brown 2017). Bopape's answer to this question is particularly illuminating with regard to the relationship the work has to the gallery space in which it is exhibited:

The work is similar, with the same ground and base ideas or starting point. The soil is different. The soil treatment is different. The space is different. The team is different. The place is similar but different. People's relationship to land and soil, and to Afro-diasporic aesthetics, and the angle through which one perceives Land art... In New York, there is [Walter De Maria's] *The New York Earth Room*, in São Paulo, there are Mayan temples. When first conceiving the work, I was thinking of the South/Southern African context in particular: the histories of indigenous African women's bodies, African spiritual and cultural practices, particular rituals and games (Brown 2017).

There is an overarching sense that Bopape's installations retain their "South African context" despite being exhibited in the Americas. Her work appears not to be subservient to the space in which it is exhibited. It does not succumb to nor is it overwhelmed by the space or location.





*sa \_\_\_\_ ke lerole, (sa lerole ke \_\_\_\_), 2016, (that which is of \_\_\_\_ is dust \_\_\_\_\_. (Droitcour 2016) (Figure 15).*



*Detail: sa \_\_\_\_ ke lerole, (sa lerole ke \_\_\_\_), 2016, (that which is of \_\_\_\_ is dust, (that which is of dust is \_\_\_\_)) (e-flux 2017) (Figure 16).*





Detail: sa \_\_\_\_ ke lerole, (sa lerole ke \_\_\_\_), 2016, (*that which is of \_\_\_\_ is dust, (that which is of dust is \_\_\_\_)*) (Brown 2017) (Figure 17)



Detail: *sa \_\_\_\_ ke lerole, (sa lerole ke \_\_\_\_)*, 2016, (Brown 2017) (Figure 18)

In researching the work of Dineo Bopape, I found the most striking element was her use of materials to convey meaning. This emphasis on materials and meaning led me to carefully consider the significance of materials that I have used and still use in my art making. Through the contemplation of her work, I have become acutely aware of her use of specific materials and as a result, in comparison, considered my use of similar materials. It is I suggest extremely important to consider the effect of choice of materials and that they should not only convey intention and meaning to the viewer but the extent to which those materials influence the space in which the work may be shown. Bopape, I believe provides a clear example of an artist carefully using her materials to create an appropriated space within which to convey her message. Her consideration and emphasis on the use of materials thereby creating an environment within the space provides a clearer insight into my research questions and underlines the importance of an understanding of the consequences attached to the materials used in an installation.

### 3.2 Antony Gormley's *Field Series*

In this section I have concentrated on specific installations by four other artists, who like Dineo Bopape, have used building materials in the form of clay, earth or bricks as the primary art material in the construction of their installations. The first two specific installations I have considered are one by Antony Gormley and one by Walter de Maria. Both these who despite predominately exhibiting outdoors created indoor installations using clay and earth respectively. The installations are firstly, the British sculptor Antony Gormley's *Field Series* and secondly Walter De Maria's *New York Earth Room*.

Many of Gormley's art works are large public sculptures. In addition to his well-known *Angel of the North*<sup>9</sup>, his relatively recent and lesser-known works involve placing installations in open air locations. These installations have largely involved placing a number of human bodies (often casts of his own body) in a variety of settings. Examples of this type of Gormley's work are *Horizon Field* installed in the Alps<sup>10</sup> and *Another Place ... Another Time*<sup>11</sup> installed on a beach in England.

According to Eckhard Schneider, General Director of the Pinchuk Art Centre, Kiev, by presenting these figures in a natural environment, Gormley "releases his figures from the bounds of traditional sculpture" viz. plinths and exposes them to "modern perceptions of ... space" (Schneider 2010). Schneider argues further that Gormley, with his outdoor installations, intends that engagement with his sculptures does not take place in "value-neutral spaces of art determined by aesthetic laws, such as museums, galleries" and specifically that his *Horizon Field* is "removed from the influential context of a museum".

I argue that despite this assertion, Gormley's *Field Series*, comprising a number of installations each consisting of a multiplicity of small figures grouped together to form a larger installation artwork, have all been exhibited in galleries. I believe the relevance of his *Field Series* installations, is that despite only being exhibited in art

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<sup>9</sup> Constructed in 1998: 20 metres high and a 54-metre span.

<sup>10</sup> Installed in 2010 comprising 100 life size figures.

<sup>11</sup> Installed in 2005 comprising 100 life size figures.

galleries they appear to stand apart from and independent of those gallery spaces in which they are shown.



Detail *Horizon Field*. Installed in the Alps. - two of the 100 figures over 150 square kilometres (biennial 2016) (Figure 19).



Detail: *Another Place ... Another Time* Installed on the beach in England. - five of the 100 pieces comprising the sculpture (Biennial 2016) (Figure 20)



Gormley's *Field Series* comprises a number of iterations created by Gormley between 1991 and 2003. Each installation consists of a multiplicity of small figures grouped together to form a larger installation artwork that completely occupy the space in which they are displayed. The series, although each exhibited in a variety of different spaces originally comprised: *Field* (American), *Amazonian Field*, European Field, *Field for the British Isles* and *Asian Field*<sup>12</sup> (Public Delivery 2022). Each figure is made from clay by residents in the countries after which each iteration is named. The figures are made according to a directive issued to the makers and constructed under the direction of the artist. "The pieces should be hand-sized and easy to hold; The eyes should be deep and close; The proportion of the head to the body should be correct" (Public Delivery 2022).

The figures are all between five and twenty-six centimetres tall, a flat base and deep eyes made with a sharpened pencil. The figures occupy the entire space in which they are shown and are all installed looking directly at the viewer (Antony Gormley.com 2022). The installations are viewed from the entrance to the space. The viewer does not enter the space but views an already occupied and appropriated space. Striking too, given the lack of specificity of the basic instructions, is the apparent similarity of the figures across the series, although made in a number of different countries by different groups. This universality not only of the figures but of the nature of each iteration also requires that any specific qualities of or influence from the space or gallery are overcome or subjugated by the installation.

While the vastness of the work is certainly a factor in this appropriation, I suggest that the material (clay) Gormley uses plays a significant role in achieving this by using clay in his various field series. Although the work was initially primarily shown in the countries in which they were made they have been exhibited in a number of

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<sup>12</sup> Field (American), 1991 made in Cholula, Mexico (approximately 35,000 figures)

Amazonian Field, 1992 made in Porto Velho, Brazil (approx. 24,000 figures)

European Field, 1993 made in Östra Grevie, Sweden (approx. 40,000 figures)

Field for the British Isles, 1993 made in St Helens near Liverpool in the UK (approx. 40,000 figures); and Asian Field, 2003 made in Xiangshan County, Guangdong, Guangdong province, People's Republic of China (approx. 190,000 figures) (Public Delivery 2022).

sites and galleries.<sup>13</sup> Therein lies, I suggest, the importance of his appropriation of the gallery space in which the works were exhibited (Antony Gormley 2022).

Although the multiplicity of spaces in which they have been shown all vary dramatically they do not depend upon any specific space for meaning. Gormley says of his *Field Series*:

... I was trying to make something as direct as possible with clay: the earth. I wanted to work with people and to make a work about our collective future and our responsibility for it. I wanted the art to look back at us, its makers (and later viewers), as if we were responsible - responsible for the world that it and we were in. (Public Delivery.org 2022)

In an interview Gormley acknowledges that he has exhibited some of his other work in the “white cube” of a gallery. He describes the “white cube” as a “history free zone” that prides itself on its “neutrality”. Like O’Doherty, Gormley’s so called “neutral” “history free zone” is a nuanced term. Gormley’s description of the “white cube” appears to be nothing more than an acknowledgment of what O’Doherty regards as its overt distinct and “overpowering” role (Sheikh 2009).

Gormley describes his *Field Series* as a work “by the people for the people”. The manner in which the *Field Series* is exhibited is in direct contrast with what O’Doherty describes as the “white cube” (White Cube 2021). Gormley has described his *Amazonian Field* as an “occupation of cultural space” by the powerless – the thousands of dumb, mute, unformed clay figures that make up this installation”. The fact that the clay used is sourced from the site of each original installation intimates that the materiality of the clay plays an important role in his conceptualisation of the work. He suggests that the real subject of *Amazonian Field* is the viewer (White Cube.com 2021). This is achieved only by the work’s ability to completely occupy and appropriate the space, and by the artists directing the way in which the viewer

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<sup>13</sup> A list of the various and different spaces in which the *Field series* have been shown, apart from each of the first showings, include: The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington DC, USA; CCBB, (Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil) Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2012; Hall Art Foundation, Schloss Derneburg Museum, Derneburg, Germany, 2017; Visual Arts Centre, Scunthorpe England; Firstsite, Colchester, England, photo: Henry Lowther Arts Council Collection, England; Tate Liverpool; Johnan High School, Tokyo, *Asian Field*, 2003; Warehouse of Former Shanghai No. 10 Steelworks, 200 and Modern Mall, Jiangbei District, Chongqing, China M+, Hong Kong. (Antony Gormley.com 2022).

can experience it. If this is to happen, the space cannot “overpower the artwork[s]” (Sheikh 2009).

I suggest that Gormley recognises that for the work to be an effective reflection of work “by the people for the people” and an occupation of the space it must stand independent from the gallery space in which it is shown and accordingly for it to be properly appreciated the space cannot “overpower[s] the artwork[s]” (Sheikh 2009). Gormley, despite this assertion, claims to have made the artwork and has accepted the acclaim and prizes that these installations have garnered. What is disturbing is the extent to which this may be an exploitation of the people who made the figures.

Taking into account Gormley’s explanations it is clear that in order to achieve his intention the viewer (the real subject) should be isolated from any outside influence such as being consciously viewing the work from within a secure and safe environment (White Cube.com 2021). This “environment” is in direct contrast with what O’Doherty suggests is an environment that should not allow the world in: A world where “the works are for study ... in an eternity of space (O’Doherty 1986: 15). Gormley, I suggest, overcomes any influence the “white cube” or the gallery might have by inter alia the appropriation of the space by the clay figures.

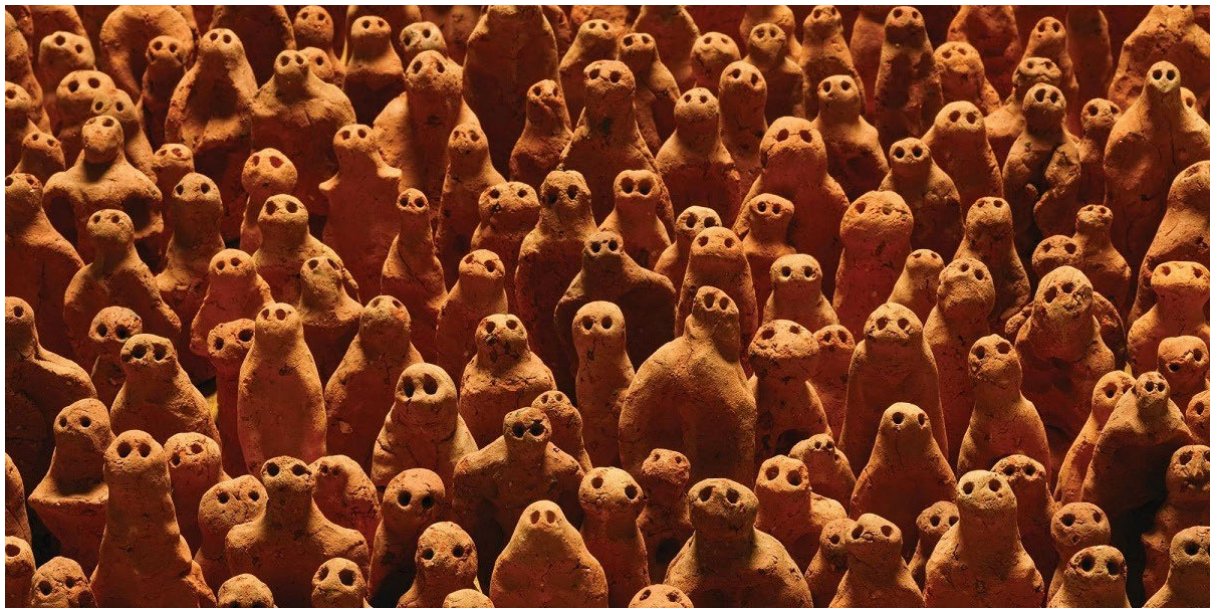


*Field Series* (Antony Gormley 2022a) (Figure 21)



*Field Series* (Antony Gormley.com 2022b) (Figure 22)





Detail: The *Field Series* (Antony Gormley 2022c) (Figure 23)

I am of the opinion therefore that in order for Gormley's *Field Series* installations to have the maximum effect it is essential that each installation of the various Field Series iterations appropriates its own space without distraction and is not subject to any influence from the space or a gallery's so-called neutrality. The same effect is created by Gormley in his outside installations. Eckhard Schneider, when discussing Gormley's outside installations, suggests that the work represents an "act of unconditional freedom" and that the viewer's experience is "value-free" (Schneider 2010)

I suggest that while the spaces that each iteration of the *Field series* occupies differ dramatically one from another the effect on the viewer remains the same. The space in which the work is shown becomes subservient and irrelevant to the work through, I suggest, the nature of the material Gormley uses. As with Bopape's work, Gormley too I suggest was acutely aware of the material he used in the field series. That the individual figures were made by communities where the clay was sourced and dug and gathered together for the purpose of his installation suggest to me that he needed that the relate to that fact. He needed his installation to reflect that the work

was “by the people for the people”. I found this proposition to be important in considering my research questions and the challenge to reflect this in my art.

### 3.3 Walter De Maria's *Earth Room*

As noted above the second of the artists whose work I consider in this section is the American artist, Walter De Maria. De Maria is known primarily for his work exhibited outside. He is regarded as one of the founding fathers of the 1960s Land Art movement and “renowned for his monumental installations dealing with matters of time and space on a grand scale”<sup>14</sup> (McVeigh 2019).

With his *New York Earth Room*, however, de Maria ventured inside to create this installation. While Gormley's *Field Series* was exhibited in a large and varied number of different venues thereby emphasising the lack of reliance on a specific space, de Maria's installation *The New York Earth Room* is confined to and exists in only one location. Despite this, this work too is clearly not reliant on a specific type of gallery or space. I suggest that both Gormley and de Maria in their installations claim the space in which their work was exhibited. I believe that appropriation was as much a function of the material (namely clay) as it was the composition or layout of the work.

There is a general similarity between Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* and Gormley's *Horizon Field*. In both cases the artists' work is an outside installation, or ‘land art’. By contrast, the two works that are the subject of my research and examination of their influence on my practice (De Maria's *New York Earthroom* and Gormley's *Field Series*), each occupy and claim their space. In contrast with the way their other work is exhibited both artists have turned to a confined ‘gallery space’ for these installations.

De Maria's *New York Earthroom* is situated in an apartment at 141 Wooster Street New York. *The New York Earth Room* was constructed in 1977, the third *Earth Room* sculpture by De Maria and the only one still in existence. The installation is situated in an apartment on the second floor and occupies three rooms of the

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<sup>14</sup> Land Art is defined as “art that is made directly in the landscape, sculpting the land itself into earthworks or making structures in the landscape ...” “... purposely taken out of traditional artistic environments like galleries and museum ...” <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/l/land-art>; <https://artincontext.org/land-art/> and <https://gagosian.com/artists/walter-de-maria/> (All accessed April May 2022)

apartment. The artist has filled the entire apartment with earth: 197 cubic meters of soil, weighing 127 thousand kilograms, 335 square metres and 56 centimetres deep (Dia Art Foundation 2022).

Jeffrey Kastner, the New York-based writer and critic asks the question of De Maria's *New York Earthroom*: "Could there possible (sic) be a place less conducive to thinking about the 'land' than a Manhattan art gallery" (Kastner 2009).<sup>15</sup> A recognised member of the land artists movement of the sixties, Walter De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977), and *The Vertical Earth Kilometre* (1977) were all, like many of Gormley's pieces such as his *Horizon Field* and *Another Place*, exhibited outside.

Bill Dilworth, the curator and guardian of *The Earth Room* explains: "When people come up and ask me what it means, I really just turn them back to *The Earth Room* so they can look for that answer." (Chayka 2017). This comment, while somewhat obstructive, suggests that De Maria intends that it is the materiality of earth and its impact on the viewer experience that provides the basis for conceptual interpretation – that the experience of the material is the artwork. To do this, I argue that the work stands aloof from the fact that it is in a central New York apartment with all the connotations attached to that fact (Chayka 2017).

Writing in 'Whitewalls'<sup>16</sup> Elena Martinique describes Walter De Maria's *The New York Earth Room* as "one of his seminal pieces exploring **the relationship between art and the natural environment** and as a quiet sanctuary that forces you to experience rather than grasp" that "draws the viewer in, offering a place where one can get **a sense of expanse** and be reminded of the horizon" (Martinique 2018).

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<sup>15</sup> I suggest this question too can be asked of Gormley's Field Series.

<sup>16</sup> Described as a "magazine of writing by artists"  
<https://www.printedmatter.org/catalog/17010/>  
and  
<https://www.worldcat.org/title/whitewalls/oclc/6741708>  
(Both Accessed August 2022)



*The New York Earth Room* (Public Delivery 2017) (Figure 24)

It is so that Walter De Maria ascribed his installation no specific meaning and describes it merely as “a minimal horizontal interior earth sculpture” the absence of specific meaning without any gallery interference (Public Delivery 2017). It is this I believe that allows the viewer the freedom to contemplate the work without interference or influence. It has also been suggested that De Maria’s *Earth Room* is intended to allow the viewer to reflect on light, darkness and time (Public Delivery.org 2017). In order to facilitate this the viewer should be freed of any influence from the space in which it is installed. Its existence is not in any way related to the space in which it is displayed.

Having visited *The New York Earth Room*, my experience was an overwhelming sense that the space is completely owned and occupied. Any preconceived sense of being situated in expensive real estate and on the second floor disappeared and was replaced with a compelling and an almost oppressive silence. The overwhelming sense was that the viewer is allowed to feel and become immersed in the



atmosphere and environment and accordingly to contemplate the work without distraction. None of this would be possible if De Maria's work did not own the space in which it is exhibited. Any suggestion that this was a gallery space would completely destroy this feeling. I found De Maria's material, the earth, to be overwhelmingly dominating of the space to the extent that the space that it occupied, an apartment in central New York, became irrelevant.



Richard Wilson 20:50 (The Art Newspaper.com 2015) (Figure 25)

De Maria's creation of an overwhelming sense of isolation is, I suggest, well-illustrated when comparing his *Earth Room* with Richard Wilson's *20:50*. Wilson (b 1953) also filled a room. Wilson used car oil as opposed to earth. Despite the similarity, the most striking contrast with De Maria's *Earth Room* work is that Richard Wilson's *20:50* is unashamedly exhibited in a gallery. Unlike De Maria's piece there is no sense that Wilson is seeking to conceal this fact. When entering the room, the viewer is never in any doubt that the work is installed in a gallery. This is, I suggest, largely a function of the material used by Wilson. Wilson himself has said that his work reflects the space in which it is exhibited and "adapts to that space's physical parameters" (the Art Newspaper 2015). The essence of Wilson's work is its recognition of the incongruity

with the gallery in which it is installed. The gallery space is for Wilson and *20:50* accordingly an important element of the work.



Detail: *The New York Earth Room* (Public Delivery 2017) (Figure 26)

Both Gormley and De Maria for their two installations (*The Field Series* and the *Earth Room*) consciously sought out the confines of a ‘gallery space’ but without accepting O’Doherty’s suggestion that the gallery space “overpowers the artworks” (Sheikh 2009). I believe their installations expressly eschew the notion that their choice of a space has in any way subjugated the work. This I suggest is due to some extent to

their choice of materials. Their work stands independent of and free from any influence by the space in which they are shown. The essence of my research is to examine whether in both instances the material used by the artists in the creation of these works suggests an appropriation of and an independence from the space. The purpose and function of this being, I believe, allowing the work to be appreciated without any intrusion or influence from their choice of space. In both instances I suggest the viewer becomes oblivious of the nature of the space in which they are shown that results in allowing the viewer an unencumbered and uninfluenced environment within which to appreciate the work. The viewer is accordingly allowed the opportunity to stand immersed in the environment and atmosphere of the work. It is my opinion that both Gormley and De Maria sought to invoke a freedom from the space or gallery so as to enable the viewer the opportunity to view their works in their own environment and atmosphere and without any influence from the space or gallery. This I suggest required that the works claim or appropriate the space in which the work is exhibited. The work subjugates the space. Their pieces stand not only unaffected by the space gallery or otherwise but stand within an environment and atmosphere they create. This, I argue, they may have achieved largely as a result of the materials they have used.

My fascination with De Maria's *Earth Room* is its apparent incongruity with its location. It seems in order to allow the viewer to contemplate the work free of the obvious fact that it is in a New York apartment, the earth that fills the room should claim the space. It, I believe, illustrates the principle that underpins my research questions and my work.

### **3.4 Jorge Mendez Blake's *El Castillo (The Castle)***

This work by the Mexican artist Jorge Mendez Blake created in 2007, is an installation of a wall of dry packed bricks constructed and balanced on a copy of Franz Kafka's *The Castle*. The work is 2.3 metres long and 4 metres high. Blake has constructed the wall over a copy of Franz Kafka's novel. The effect this has is to disrupt the wall by creating a bulge where the book is placed under the wall, which bulge extends the full height of the wall (Public Delivery.org 2022).

The effect of a small item, the book, by dominating the wall (the intention of the artist) demands I postulate, that the wall itself not be dominated by or subjected to any influence from the space itself. Both Kate Sierzputowski the author writing in the on-line journal Colossal (Sierzputowski 2018) and Emma Taggart writing for 'My Modern Met' (Taggart 2018) suggest that Blake specifically selected *The Castle* to pay tribute to Kafka's lifestyle and work and that Kafka's novel showcases how a small idea can have a monumental presence.

Whilst this work may examine the impact of a single outside force, I suggest in order to achieve and convey this the work itself must dominate, overtly occupy and appropriate the space in which it is exhibited. The space cannot "overpower[s]" the artwork (Sheikh 2005).



The Castle (Awesome Inventions.) (Figure 27)

I believe it is relevant that Kafka was deeply introverted and did not publish *The Castle* during his lifetime. In fact, he had directed that it be destroyed on his death (Butler 2011). Blake's installation has been described as a homage to Kafka and a showcase of how a small single outside force, the book, can disrupt the far greater

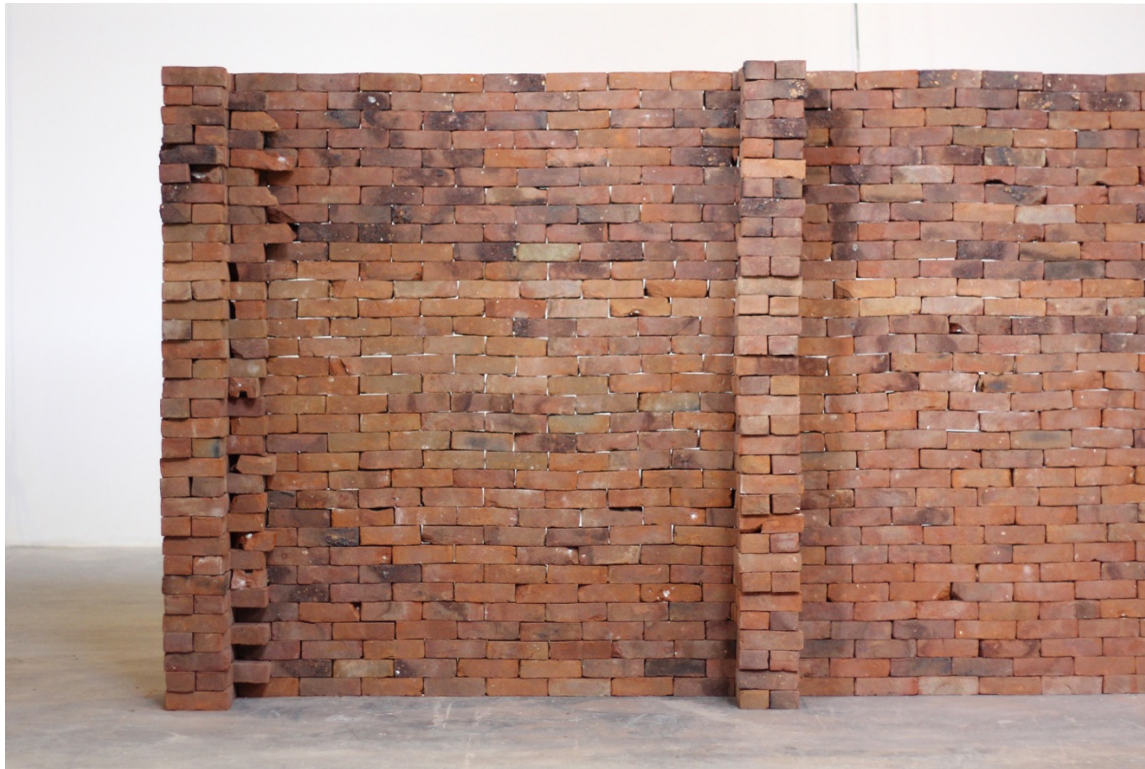


wall (Booooooom 2018). It is also appropriate that Kafka's book, *The Castle*, deals with the existential concept of estrangement. This I believe reinforces my submission that for the viewer to be able to appreciate Blake's installation it is essential that the work appropriate space



Detail: *The Castle* (Taggart 2018) (Figure 28)

The wall not only dominates the gallery space but disrupts it to the extent that the viewer is obliged to consider the work and the atmosphere it creates regardless of the space in which it is exhibited. For the viewer to be allowed to properly access Blake's work, I suggest that the work must create its own environment and atmosphere to the exclusion of the space in which it is installed. By using bricks as the primary construction material Blake seemingly claims the space effectively shutting out any influence that it may have on the viewers' perception and appreciation of the work. Is the viewer thereby not left alone to consider within the environment created by *The Castle*, unencumbered and without external influence, the issues of alienation and estrangement with which the book itself is concerned and its relationship with the wall.



Detail: *El Castillo (The Castle)* (Sierzputowski 2018) (Figure 29)

### 3.5 Charles Simonds's Dwellings

In direct contrast with the scale of the installations of Bopape, Gormley De Maria and Blake are Charles Simonds' 1970's *New York Dwellings* for the "Little People".

Simonds dwellings are as small as Bopape, Gormley De Maria and Blakes' installations are large and imposing. There is however, I suggest, a distinct similarity between Simonds' dwellings and the installations of Bopape, Gormley, De Maria and Blake, despite their difference in scale, and that is the appropriation of and the effect on the space in which they are exhibited. Simonds' work does not rely on scale, but context. His outside dwellings are small and constructed with alcoves of existing buildings. Simonds constructed the dwellings from tiny clay bricks. The dwellings are not in any way permanent. Simonds is aware of their fragility and vulnerability. They however create an environment equally free of the influence of the space in which they are exhibited (Simonds 2015a).

In his book *Dwelling* (Simonds 2015), Simonds discusses his sculpture project In the Lower East Side and Soho in New York where he constructed *Dwellings* for the Little

People. The Little People for whom he constructed these dwellings were a figment of his imagination. They were constructed from tiny clay bricks in the alcoves and walls of derelict buildings and in public communal spaces in the “landscape of the city” (Simonds 2015a). Simonds describes them as being “for everyone to enjoy ... as a gift **free** and clear” (My emphasis). (Simonds 2015a: 33). Not only has Simonds, with these works, abandoned the gallery but he has seemingly allowed the viewer to consider the work in its own environment. Although the dwellings constitute buildings within buildings, I believe they stand independent from any influence from the site on or in which they are constructed. He describes the dwellings as being an “invasion of [the] consciousness” of the residents in the areas in which they were constructed (Simonds 2015a).

The fact that they are buildings or dwellings themselves requires the viewer an opportunity and the freedom to contemplate them as such and not as part of building or site on or in which they were erected.

In an interview with the artist and filmmaker Peter Kennedy (B 1945)<sup>17</sup> (Simonds 2020), Simonds emphasises how the dwellings are intended to influence and allow the communities in which the dwellings are constructed to embrace change. The artworks are not in any way related to the buildings in which they are created. The viewer is encouraged to embrace the dwellings apart from the buildings. I suggest that it is his use of building materials in the creation of the dwellings that is the primary reason why the viewer is able to contemplate the art works without any overarching influence from the site of their construction.

I am drawn to Simonds’ work in my practise and research not only through his use of clay bricks but the idea of creating structures. My work that forms the subject of this research, is a reflection on the impact on my space of the lockdown and encompasses the construction or destruction of the required elements that depict and define my space. I have explored in my practice both the creation of, albeit a different, space but also the destruction of space. In what ways will of these constructs require as a prerequisite an appropriation of the space within which the

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<sup>17</sup> This interview of Charles Simonds by Peter Kennedy took place in 1974 and was part of a series of interviews for Australian TV.



work is to be shown? It is the influence on my practice of the artists whose work I consider above that has brought clarity. Specifically, I argue the manner and means by which they seek to achieve an appropriation of the space in which they exhibit.



Example of Simonds: small-scale *Dwelling* (Simonds 2015b) (Figure 30)



Simonds' small-scale *Dwelling* in an alcove (Simonds 2015b) (Figure 31)





Example of Simonds' small-scale *Dwelling* in a derelict wall in New York (Lyon 2014) (Figure 32)

## 4. My Work: A reflection

In this chapter I consider my hypothesis in relation to my own creative practice. My career in the law has brought with it an understanding of the importance of appropriation. Implicit in the construction of dwellings or buildings is the inescapable sense that the land on which a dwelling is constructed is appropriated for that dwelling and therefore for the occupiers of that building. In law however the ownership of the land is important.<sup>18</sup> In practical terms the occupier does not of necessity require title but does require possession, this in turn conveys a sense of appropriation. This is often expressed in the apocryphal adage: Possession is nine tenths of the law.

Whether the land is owned by the occupier or not is not of practical relevance for the purposes of my practice and research. In an art context, I suggest, the artist does not of necessity require 'title' but does require a sense of appropriation (possession), which in turn enables the viewer an unencumbered space in which to view the art work.

Through my practice and research, I have explored the extrapolation of whether possession or appropriation in an art context is affected by the materials used by an artist. My research question concerns whether by virtue of the use thereof the installation creates for the viewer, an appropriation of the space it is exhibited.

My research into the extent to which the materiality of the artist's medium in the form of earth, bricks or clay, when used in an installation, demonstrate an appropriation of the space in which it is exhibited, began simultaneously with the commencement of the lock-down that resulted from the advent of the Corona Virus in 2019. The lock down imposed isolation upon everyone and impacted on their space. Space was by virtue of the lockdown defined and restricted and not everyone enjoyed the same access to space.

What I found to be important and necessary was to attempt to consider my response to the prevailing circumstances through my art practice. This inevitably and

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<sup>18</sup> In the section of Chapter 2 above I deal with the legal principle of accession.

importantly involved a consideration of space. The element of access to and appropriation of space became relevant in the excavation of my research questions and given effect to through my practice. What I found particularly relevant was the space in which I worked and where my work could be shown. This involved not only exploring and researching the relevance of exhibition space and its influence but how the lockdown restriction translated into my art.

The initial hypothesis in my proposal simply had concerned and considered in general terms what effect if any the materials used by the artist had on a gallery space in which the artworks were exhibited. Although I had, in my proposal contemplated art installations, the importance of space to art installations specifically and whether the use of materials had an influence on the space in which they were shown became clear. It involved acknowledging that space was a very important element of the way artists exhibited their work. In particular art installations and the use of space and recognition became extremely relevant.

In order for my work to be seen in the context in which I intended; firstly, the content required that the work be free not only of O'Doherty's white cube but secondly and possibly more importantly free of any unintended contextual influence from the location. It became apparent to me that there were two ways to which the artist could respond to the exhibition space. The first was to embrace and acknowledge the space either directly through the art work, for example site specific installations or where the work is unashamedly situated in a gallery; or secondly by allowing the viewer the independence and freedom to recognise, acknowledge and respect the space. I chose to explore the latter.

Accordingly, in order to properly examine this proposition, it became essential to consider how I might present my work. It became clear to me that it should be exhibited in the form of an installation. It was important for me as the artist to explore the potential of the influence of the gallery space and whether I might overcome what O'Doherty has described as, or labelled, the white cube by appropriating it (O'Doherty 1986; Sheikh 2009). Important to and implicit in that appropriation I suggest is allowing the viewer to perceive the work free of any overt or pervasive influence of the exhibition space. It was also important to examine in this context the work of the artists dealt with above and what influence they have had on my practice.

Space became more relevant and important, particularly during the period of the severe shut down. Space could not be taken for granted. The restrictions the lock-down had on space demanded, from me, a response. It became important to me as a direct response to the lock-down and to the effect the lock-down had had on my understanding and appreciation of space that I explore this through my work.

My installation is titled *somewhere between heaven and hell*. The contrasting situations that people experienced during the lockdown period were vast. Experience ranged from a degree of the guilty pleasure of privacy, to an agonising absence of privacy and more often than not both responses. The lock-down engendered a fear of uncertainty. A common denominator under pinning these experiences was space. Space, access to or the lack of, was often the determinant of whether one was in 'heaven' or in 'hell' or somewhere in between. The title and subject of my installation reflects my personal response to these feelings.

With this in mind I commenced with the creation of the piece entitled *Owning the Lock-down*. It is a larger-than-life figure standing two metres tall and is intended to dominate (occupy and appropriate) the space in which it stands and at the same time reflect a mummy-like containment.<sup>19</sup> That it is not subservient to the space is important. It is constructed from separate bisque-fired terracotta clay sections. The clay pieces or sections are separate and the work requires construction as would be the case for a building. This work was instrumental in the final determination and formulation of my research questions and the theory of my practice thus accordingly in line with practice-led research, my research questions emanated from my practice

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<sup>19</sup> For many the restriction on movement and space was tantamount to an embalmment.



*Owning the Lockdown (Figure 33)*





Detail: *Owning the Lockdown* – prior to firing and construction (Figure 34)

As part of this research through my practice I consider the extent to which the component parts of my art works, and accordingly my installation, will reflect on my research questions. In what ways do the component elements of the construction site particularly the bricks and clay sufficiently influence and create for the viewer an appropriation?

In pursuance of my exploration of the consequences implicit in using earth, clay and bricks on the space, I commenced making a series of terracotta building safety hard hats. They are intentionally rough and only bisque fired. My objective is, on the one hand, to represent the process of building with its concomitant appropriation, but on the other hand create a work that is symbolic of building the boundaries or walls necessary to confine people to their dwellings within which the lockdown had placed them. They also are intended to convey and reflect conflicting notions of protection and containment. My intention is to suggest not only a construction process but also to reflect the discarded detritus that often remains on site after a building is or a building site is abandoned.





*The Hard Hats (Figure 35)*



*The Hard Hats and Shelters (Figure 36)*

In keeping with the “empty” *hard hats* I created a series of “empty” but ubiquitous “hi visibility” safety jackets that are part of a building site. While safety jackets are common place on a building site these are unwearable and roughly created from clay. They are fragile and not hi-visibility nor reflective and their fragility provides no protection. Their presence suggests either a precursor to construction (and the concomitant appropriation of the space) or the abandonment of that space all within the context of an appropriated space.





Detail. *The Safety Jackets*. (Figure 37)



Detail. *The Safety Jackets*. (Figure 38)

A further element of my installation is the series of *walls* using bricks that I have made. The bricks are incorporated into metal structures. My intention is that they



demonstrate not only an appropriation of the bricks themselves but by their placement within the space in addition serve to restrict and to an extent obstruct physical access to the installation.



*The Wall (bricks) (Figure 39)*

The bricks and construction *hard hats* are intended to stand in contrast to another aspect of work created for my installation; the series of fragile dome like structures constructed from wood and clay. These structures, which suggest a form of shelter or dwelling, some of which show signs of damage, have only roofs. The fragile and unstable wooden legs and framework have clay roofs comprising three or four panels each. Together they are intended to constitute an appropriation, either in the process of construction or destruction, in their own space. They are not intended to be dependent or reliant upon the protection of the gallery space nor to seek out the protection of the space. Despite, I suggest, purporting to claim the space they occupy, they themselves offer little in the way of protection.



*The Shelters* (Figure 40)

Defining space and the consideration of the essence of the occupation and boundaries, of necessity, led to the further development of my work. What seemed to become important was the need to negate or remove the impact of the gallery space, or even the gallery itself. My intention is to explore whether this would result in a liberation from the influence of the space thereby allowing the viewer to contemplate and appreciate the work without outside interference or influence. The consequence of an appropriation of the space or a negation of the influence of the gallery space that results in the work being free to speak to the viewer for itself without the assistance or influence of space.

I intended that the terracotta molded construction hard hats and the confined bricks will together with a linked variety of elements of construction constitute my response to the lockdown and its consequential effect on concepts of space. My practice became more and more linked and directed to my reaction to the lock-down. The



pieces I was creating in my practice were defined by virtue of their ability to define the space they occupied.



*Scaffolding. (Part of the installation) (Figure 41)*

My concentration on the space occupied by installation art, was a natural progression from my experience of the lock-down. Because of the importance of space, its nature and its occupation, my focus remained on the use of building materials in art making and the creation of installation art. In order to explore the appropriation of space, my concern focussed on whether an artist's use of building materials when used as art making materials influenced the space. Does the artist use of building materials facilitate for the viewer an appropriation of the space in which the artwork is situated and exhibited?

These artworks that I commenced making and produced during the lock-down and thereafter together with the research process led inexorably to the formulation and



clarification of my research questions. This has had a profound impact both on my practice and my attempt to address my research questions: Does the artist when creating an installation that is reliant neither on a specific site nor to be exhibited in what O'Doherty has described as a white cube need to claim the space and if so, does the material the artist uses help denote an appropriation? Through my consideration and exploration of the work of Bopape, Gormley de Maria, Blake and Simonds (dealt with in Chapter 3 above), their use of materials and the effect that had on their work played an important role in my understanding of installation art. I became acutely aware of the importance of their use and appropriation of space. The consideration and application of these principles in the construction of my own work became important.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> My journaling is particularly informal and consist of cryptic notes scattered amongst many books, templates sketches, molds and patterns.

## 5. Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation is intended to examine whether and the extent to which the materials used by the artist influence the space that an installation artwork occupies. Does the creation of an environment apart from the gallery space itself serve to achieve this? These issues in themselves present me, as the exhibiting artist, with both a challenge and a dilemma. They are issues that I am obliged to confront. I have examined through exploring the work of Bopape, Gormley, De Maria, Blake and Simonds and my art making whether using earth, bricks or clay in an installation can serve to demonstrate and provide for the viewer a sense of the appropriation of the space in which the work is exhibited. This has involved examining and considering the artists mentioned above and through developing my own practice.

In each of the works I have considered, I believe, the artists have not allowed their work to be influenced by the gallery or space in which they are shown. This is in direct contrast with how O'Doherty considers the gallery space and the influence that the gallery has on the artist's work and the influence of artistic space on artists' strategies (O'Doherty 1986)<sup>21</sup>. He recognises the importance of "the space that surrounds the art object" and the "impact the combination of these elements" has on the viewer.

That being so I am of the opinion that for an artist to allow the viewer the independence and freedom to appreciate the work without the influence of the space it is necessary to appropriate it (or that unencumbered space is a significant factor). I suggest that through the creation of an atmosphere or environment the artist may create a sense of appropriation. The question I have posed, however, is whether this is achievable purely through the use of the material chosen by the artist. Does the choice of material suggest or even constitute an appropriation of the gallery space in which the artwork is exhibited?

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<sup>21</sup> The chapter entitled Context as Content page 65ff. Also, StudyCorgi. (2022)

Space, how and whether it can (or of necessity: should) be appropriated lies at the centre of my research. In this dissertation I have provided a background to my research and the methodology I have employed in pursuance thereof.

The chapter on theory and methodology provided insight into my background and the basis upon which I have pursued my exploration of my research question. This is a necessary precursor to my examination of the artists whose work I have laid out in Chapter 3, and ultimately my own practice in Chapter 4.

That the space may have a direct influence on the work is recognised by the author and critic Simon Sheikh, “the white cube not only conditions, but also overpowers the artworks themselves in its shift from placing content within a context to making the context itself the content” (Sheikh 2009, author’s emphasis). The art work within a gallery is not as O’Doherty would have it “free, as the saying used to go, “to take on its own life” (O’Doherty 1986: 15).

It is worth reiterating my research questions: To what extent can the materiality of the artist’s medium namely building materials in the form of earth, bricks or clay, when used in an installation demonstrate an appropriation of the space in which it is exhibited? Furthermore, in what ways might the artist appropriate the gallery space purely through the use of these materials and thereby constitute an appropriation of the gallery space in which the artwork is exhibited?

My hypothesis and research questions have arisen from my use of clay, earth and bricks in my art making. Accordingly, the basis of my research is where an artist has made use of the aforementioned materials in an installation, does that use have an effect on the space in which the installation is installed? Specifically does the use of these materials suggest an appropriation of the space in which the installation is situated?

My installation is designed to practically explore these research questions and test my hypothesis. Does my use of building materials such as clay and bricks serve to denote an appropriation of the space? Through my installation I believe I have created an atmosphere and environment of appropriation that allows the viewer the freedom to appreciate the work unencumbered or influenced by the space in which the work is situated.

As part of my exploration of this proposition and in attempting to find the answers I specifically elected not to exhibit in the CVA gallery (The Jack Heath Gallery) because, as a student in the CVA, it is not only a very familiar space but is an integral part of the space in which I, together with all the students, work. The Jack Heath gallery space belongs to all the students. Each student exhibition is situated in the gallery for the purpose of either criticism or assessment. It is everyone's space and no one's space.

I needed, in order to assess whether my installation is able to achieve my end of an appropriation, a space that is within a gallery and within a white cube and is so-called neutral but also including all its associated influences. By exhibiting in a space within a recognised art gallery that has personal connections it allowed an exploration and consideration of whether the art work has achieved an appropriation.

My installation tests my hypothesis and research questions regarding the appropriation of the space. I have included at the end of this dissertation photographs of the installation (see Chapter 6).

The initial work I completed in the creation of my installation was the figure *owning the lock down*. This mummy-like figure, that suggests a containment of personal space, represents my first response to the lock-down and its concomitant restriction on space. I became aware of the fragility of a previously relatively unrestricted and enjoyed space. This work led to the consideration of further art works reflecting the uncertainty and fragility that accompanied the lock-down and translated into the construction of the dwellings that stand in the centre of the space. These fragile dwellings also address the paradox of ownership: legal versus pragmatic, an issue I have addressed in paragraph 2.4 above.

Part of the creation of an environment and atmosphere was the use of predominately terracotta clay and construction materials as was a careful use of lighting. The spotlights on the yellow stands are intentionally low so as to be disruptive and cast shadows on the walls. The use of shutter board as a central element of the installation also suggests construction: either commencement or abandonment.

The periphery of the installation contains warning signs I constructed as part of the installation. They are all placed outside the shutter board. I am advised by the gallery

staff who have observed viewers of the installation that they all avoid walking on the shutter board but traverse the installation around the periphery.<sup>22</sup> This suggests a respect for the appropriated space that exists on the shutter board.

Apart from assessing whether the work appropriates the space itself, in addition it allows a contemplation of a further question: whether my associated personal influences have any influence on the installation or do they merely serve to emphasise and demonstrate the need of the artist to appropriate the space?

My installation is situated in the Tatham Art Gallery. This space is for me personally, a loaded and nuanced space. Firstly, in its previous guise the Tatham Art Gallery was the Supreme Court of Natal. Almost 40 years ago to the day of my exhibition, I was admitted as an attorney not only in the Supreme Court of Natal building that is now the Tatham Art Gallery, but in what was the very court in which I will be exhibiting. Secondly, I have been involved with the Tatham Art Gallery as a member and Chair of the Tatham Art Gallery Board of Trustees; and thirdly as an exhibitor.

An additional issue, apart from whether the installation appropriates the space however, is: does my personal connection to the Tatham Art Gallery in any way influence the viewers response? Will a viewer who is unaware of my links to gallery (in any of the three ways referred to above) be required to grapple with these issues when contemplating the work? In answer to this issue, I suggest, that for the viewer my connection to the gallery lies outside the context of my installation. I believe that my connection to the gallery neither transcends the work nor influences the viewer's perspective. I suggest further that while the space is nuanced and loaded for me, my connections with the gallery are not relevant for the viewer, even if and when the viewer becomes aware of this connection. While this element perhaps may possibly add another layer to the interpretations of the work, the meaning is not dependent on knowledge of these connections. What is important is whether the work itself appropriates the space and allows the viewer the freedom from extraneous influences.

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<sup>22</sup> Personal Conversation with gallery staff, 21st October 2022.

My connections to the Tatham Art are issues I needed to confront in order to properly address the issue of the art work's appropriation of the space. I do not gainsay the fact that my personal connection loomed large as a factor for me to overcome, but I suggest, it is not a factor with which the viewer, unaware or not of the connection, is obliged to deal. The question whether my connection, in its various guises, with the gallery as an art gallery and with the gallery in its previous iteration in any way affects the consideration of my art installation needed to be asked. I do not believe it did.

The appropriation of the space is inexorably linked to the issues I address in my installation. The appropriation, although important, is a means to an end: intended to allow the viewer the freedom to view the work without the outside influence of the gallery or my specific connection therewith. My installation concerns my response to the lockdown and its effect particularly on space. In order to communicate this, I suggest it is required that the space be free of any gallery influence. It is important I believe, that the installation should not be viewed as existing in, dependent upon or being shown in a gallery, but occupying and appropriating its own space.

During the course of examining the proposition that the choice of materials is relevant to the artworks' relationship with gallery I have had to confront with reference to my installation whether that is indeed so and whether I have achieved this. I am satisfied that it is and has. However, it is not as clear cut as I initially imagined it to be. The essence of my initial hypothesis is whether the materials used by the artist, and in particular where the artist uses earth, clay and bricks (or building materials) the use of those materials, conveys to the viewer a sense of the appropriation of the space. It was necessary compositionally for example, to add the untreated wood and shutter board to emphasise the appropriation.

It is important that in order for the viewer to contemplate the space and the effect of the lock-down that the installation creates an environment that appropriates the space in which the installation is shown. The essential element and basis of an installation is the creation of an environment and atmosphere by the artist and it is this element that I suggest allows the viewer the opportunity to contemplate the work free of interference by the gallery. I have dealt with the need to create an environment in Chapter 2 above.



I have in this dissertation sought to distinguish between site specific installations and installations that are unashamedly situated within the gallery, and those that overtly do not rely on the gallery or the site. In chapter 3 I have dealt with specific artists and a selection of their installations in exploring the way in which, I argue, they not only negate the influence of the space in order to allow the viewer an unfettered environment and accordingly an opportunity to freely contemplate the work, but avoid any suggestion that the space may overpower the work. It might well be that it is too simplistic to suggest that it is only the materials that appropriate the space. The environment created by the artist is I suggest the determining factor in considering the extent to which the space is appropriated. I suggest however that it cannot be gainsaid that a significant element of that environment is created by the artist's use of specific materials. I believe that I have created an environment that allows the viewer to contemplate the installation without the influence of the gallery. As noted in Chapter 4 and above, my installation deals with my response to the lock-down and in particular the consequential effect the lock-down had on my space and my perception of space. The materials that I have used namely bricks and bisque fired clay together with elements of a construction site, I believe not only convey a sense confinement or restriction of space, but I suggest negate and "take" the installation out of the gallery space, thereby allowing the viewer to contemplate the work free of the gallery's influence.

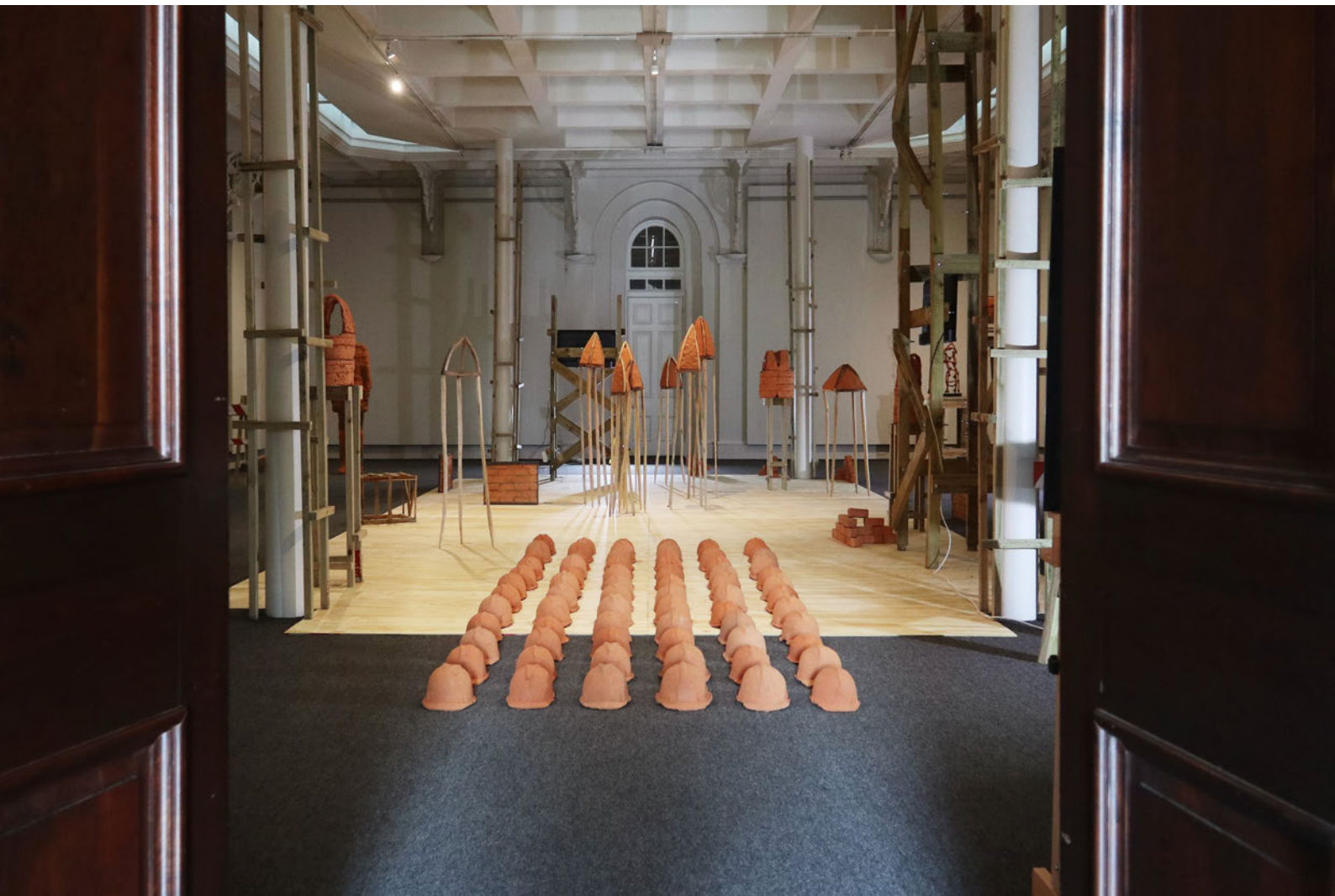
I am satisfied that the installation has served to appropriate the space through the creation of an environment thereby enabling the viewer to freely contemplate the work within that environment. The issue is whether the viewer is free of any influence by and of the gallery. I accept that it cannot be gainsaid, through the process of my research and the making of the work for the installation, that the space in which my work is installed has profound influence. Importantly, I do recognise the influence of the particular space I have chosen has had on the installation and the social consequences of the installation's appropriation of the space. In conclusion I believe that while the materials have contributed to the environment, it is the overall effect, the environment and atmosphere and the nature of the space, of the installation, that creates an appropriation for the viewer.

## **Chapter 6**

somewhere between heaven and hell

Tatham Art Gallery

9th October - 20 November, 2022









































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## **Addendum 1: Artists Statement**

***The following artists statement was displayed at the entrance to the installation.***

### ***Somewhere Between Heaven and Hell***

This installation forms part of a practice-led MA project. The written part of the submission is titled *Can't you see it is mine? A consideration of the appropriation of space through the use of earth, clay, and bricks in art making.*

For a number of years, I have, in my art making, primarily used unglazed terracotta clay in the form of earth and/or bricks as an art medium. These building materials have from time immemorial constituted the fundamental elements of construction. My exploration interrogates the significance of the effect of these building materials when used as an art making medium, and specifically the implications where the artwork takes the form of an installation. To what extent is the materiality of these materials able to appropriate the space which they inhabit? Is it possible for the artwork to transcend the gallery space to the extent that the nature of the space becomes irrelevant to the meaning of the artwork?

The works offer my contemplation of, and a reflection on, the lockdown caused by the Corona Virus epidemic and the effect that this has had on my appreciation and understanding of space. The definition of space and, in particular, considering boundaries and what it means to *occupy* a space has become central to my practice.

For me, the Tatham Art Gallery is a particularly loaded space. In its previous guise the Tatham Art Gallery was the Supreme Court of Natal. Almost 40 years ago to the day of my exhibition, I was admitted to practice law in that court. I was admitted not only in what was the Supreme Court of Natal and is now the Tatham Art Gallery, but in the gallery space that was then the very court that this installation inhabits. I have been

involved with the Tatham Art Gallery as a member and Chair of the Tatham Art Gallery Board of Trustees and as an exhibitor.

While these deep personal connections, and the fact that the Tatham Art Gallery is amongst the most respected galleries in South Africa, inevitably enrich the possible reverberations of the work, my intention is to explore whether the materiality of the clay/earth/bricks presented here have the ability to appropriate the space and make meaning apart from the gallery space or the identity of the gallery itself. I hope to have created a space where, rather than existing as subservient to the gallery, the viewer can experience the work as completely inhabiting the space.

In his conceptualization of the gallery space, O'Doherty describes space as "not just where things happen", arguing instead that "things make space happen". To what extent do these "things" presented here make this space "happen"?