

Experimental Media

by Sophia



WHAT'S COVERED

At times, artists can be considered a rebellious bunch. Experimental media emerged out of a desire to challenge the establishment, or the traditional understanding of art. In this lesson, you will learn about:

1. [Experimental Art](#)
2. [Land and Body Art](#)
3. [Performance and Installation Art](#)
4. [Arte Povera](#)

1. Experimental Art

What comes to your mind when you think about art? Maybe paintings, sculptures, or nudes? Or maybe the *Mona Lisa*? Until the 20th century, high art was largely confined to media that had been in use since ancient Greece. One exception to this are oil paintings on canvas, which came along later.

Experimental art began to change this, however, as art became more **time-based**. Instead of producing works of art meant to last a long time, time-based art emphasizes the temporary nature of art. It might include a performance or action. It might also involve materials that deteriorate rapidly, such as food, clay, or ice. For this reason, medium is the primary difference between traditional and experimental art.

⇒ **EXAMPLE** Land art, body art, performance art, and installation art are examples of experimental media, which involves the use of any nontraditional medium.

Unlike earlier, traditional works of art that were intended to last, experimental media often incorporates an element of impermanence. By using media that does not endure, artists shine light on the fact that no work of art lasts forever.



BIG IDEA

Experimental media challenges traditional understandings of art.



TERM TO KNOW

Time-Based

A work of art that intentionally lasts for a finite period of time, such as a performance.

2. Land and Body Art

The landscape becomes the medium when an artist chooses to create **land art**. An artist creating **body art** uses a person's body, often the artist's, as the medium for the piece. Body art has existed in one way or another since before the earliest recordings of human history.



DID YOU KNOW

Tattoos, a form of body art, have been found on the mummified remains of humans dating from the Neolithic Era, some 6,000 plus years ago.

IN CONTEXT

Take a look at these examples of experimental art:

This is the *Spiral Jetty*, which is situated within the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Robert Smithson created this piece of land art in 1970.



Robert Smithson (1938 - 1973)

Spiral Jetty

Great Salt Lake, Utah, USA

Black basalt rocks and earth

Next is an example of the elaborate makeup used on the Kathakali dancers of Southwestern India:



Prathyush Thomas

Still from Keechaka Vadham performed by Kalamandalam Gopi

India

2015



TERMS TO KNOW

Land Art

Works of art that use the landscape as the medium or incorporate the landscape on a huge scale.

Body Art

Works of art that use the body, often the artist's own body, as a medium; body art often, but not always, intersects with performance art.

3. Performance and Installation Art

In **performance** art, the performance is the medium, but the action is the subject matter. The action is conveyed through the performance. When an artist creates **installation** art, the surrounding space becomes a part of the medium. An important aspect of installation art is that it is often designed for a specific type of room or space. Installation art differs from land art in that it is indoors, not outdoors.

IN CONTEXT

Take a look at the following examples of experimental art:

First, a picture of Marina Abramović performing at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. The title of this performance is *The Artist Is Present*, and the performance consisted of her sitting for hours on end staring at observers.



Marina Abramović (1946 -)

The Artist is Present, still from performance at Museum of Modern Art

New York, New York, USA

2010

Below is an example of installation art where the surrounding space becomes a part of the medium:



Rachel Whiteread (1963-)

Embankment, still from Tate Modern

London, England

2006

Polyethylene casts of white cardboard boxes



TERMS TO KNOW

Performance

A type of art that emphasizes action.

Installation

A type of art that involves the creation of large, room-sized environments that one can enter.

4. Arte Povera

Arte Povera, a modern art movement that explores the relationship between art and life, sometimes requires viewer participation and may use the surrounding space as medium. This movement emerged in the latter part of the 20th century in Italy. In a sense, artists creating Arte Povera take everyday materials and create something extraordinary and interesting out of them.



DID YOU KNOW

Arte Povera translates to “poor art,” which is a bit misleading because the materials used can actually be quite elaborate and expensive.

IN CONTEXT

The Other Figure, a slightly humorous example of Arte Povera, shows two busts looking down upon another figure, which happens to be shattered and in pieces on the ground.



Giulio Paolini (1940 -)

L'altra figura (the other figure)

New South Wales, Sydney, Australia

1984

Plaster, wood plinths



TERM TO KNOW

Arte Povera

A modern art movement that explores the relationship between art and life using natural materials and human artifacts and is experienced through the body.



SUMMARY

Traditional art is generally created to last forever, but in contrast, **experimental art** is time-based. This is one of the ways in which experimental art began to challenge the understanding of traditional art.

In this lesson, you learned about five types of experimental art: land art, body art, performance art, installation art, and Arte Povera. **Land and body art** are fairly straightforward. Land art uses the surrounding land as a medium, while body art uses a person's body as the medium for creating artwork.

Performance is the medium, but the action is the subject matter in **performance art**. The surrounding space becomes a part of the medium in **installation art**. In the modern art movement **Arte Povera**, everyday materials are used to create something extraordinary and interesting.

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ATTRIBUTIONS

- [Giulio Paolini - L'altra Figura](#) | Author: Neil Jenkins | License: CC-SA 4.0
- [Marina Abramović, The Artist is Present, 2010](#) | Author: Andrew Russeth | License: CC
- [Rachel Whiteread, Tate Modern London April 2006 106](#) | Author: Gryffindor | License: Public Domain



TERMS TO KNOW

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