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SITE-SPECIFIC REALIZATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ART-PLACE RELATIONSHIP. CASE STUDY BASED ON AUTHORIAL EXHIBITIONS IN CLOSED AND OPEN SPACES

The article is a case study based on selected original site-specific realizations in unconventional exhibition spaces taking into account both the spaces inside the building and the open space. The relations and interactions between art and place are based on many dependencies that are subject to transformations depending on the creator's idea and the character of the place. All activities in the field of visual arts should respect the context of space and the processual aspect of art. Implementations in public space differ in many respects. For some artists, the place is an inspiration for action, and for others a "frame" for the work or material / medium itself. Art can become a tool that transforms and (re)constructs space. Going beyond the walls of art institutions – adapting post-industrial buildings, former service plants, residential spaces, as well as operating in a broadly understood open space is becoming increasingly popular and indicates the need to redefine both art and exhibition space. It also encourages discussion on the relationship and interaction between art and place. On the other hand, many art institutions are located in places that differ in their specificity from the idea of a white cube type space, which is both a challenge and an inspiration for artists and curators. Site-specific implementations allow recipients to perceive not so much art objects as a situation in which the entire space takes part in the narrative created by the artist or curator.

Keywords: site-specific, *in situ*, art, architecture, exhibition, exhibition space, public space

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1. INTRODUCTION

Art evokes connotations of elitism. According to populist beliefs, its main goal is to aestheticize the surroundings. Art objects placed in sterile spaces of white cube galleries bring to mind expensive gadgets. Paintings and sculptures decorating aristocratic palaces performed a similar function, and their reception was reserved for a select group of recipients. Along with the democratization of society, art became accessible to everyone. The first art institutions – museums – were established at the end of the 18th century. Their primary goal, apart from collecting and caring for artworks, was to educate society – to increase awareness and shape sensitivity. Art objects were displayed in accordance with the linearity of time and came from private collections. The name museum comes from the Latin term *musaeum*, derived from the Greek μουσείον *mouseíon*, meaning “the temple of the muses”. In ancient times, museums were important scientific centers. Since the Enlightenment, they have allowed all citizens to experience art, regardless of their education or financial status. Exhibitions were arranged by museum employees, and their main goal was to present as many exhibits as possible in a way that was as clear to the recipient as possible. Therefore, divisions were used according to discipline, time of creation and origin of individual objects. The method of displaying works was based on conventional assumptions – filling all available space, strip-mounting of paintings, using pedestals to present sculptures.

A breakthrough moment in the institutionalized presentation of artworks of art was the exhibition entitled “Salon of the Rejected” (fr. “Salon des Refusés”), which took place in 1863 at the Palais de l’Industrie in Paris, which was created in opposition to the annual exhibition monopolized by the Academy entitled “Salon”. The jury deciding on the selection of works submitted for the exhibition as part of the “Salon” used a number of criteria, taking into account not only the technological proficiency of the artists, but also the subject matter of the paintings. The conservative evaluation became the cause of the rebellion of artists who did not agree to conventional painting decisions. The assumption of the “Salon of the Rejected” was to exhibit works that in many respects broke away from academic conventions. The artists created their own counter-exhibition, which initiated a critique of institutionalism and a discussion related to the exhibition of art in public space.

Art presentation venues can be divided according to the following criteria: formal and legal, entity running the exhibition, and spatial and location. The first concerns the method of management and financing. Accordingly, art presentation venues can be divided into institutional, such as museums, institutional galleries, and independent ones. The second criterion concerns the method of management of a given place, and the third criterion concerns the parameters of the space, taking into account the location, character and articulation of the interior and its function.

The most conventional space for presenting art is a white cube gallery [O’Doherty 1986]. The sterile, undivided interior allows for focusing attention on art objects,

but the lack of interaction between them and the exhibition space resembles the situation of boutiques, where expensive exhibits are supposed to attract the attention of buyers. Their isolation is intended to create an aura of prestige. Such treatment of works of art is often practiced in commercial art galleries. Contesting the materialistic treatment of art reached its peak in the 1960s. A manifestation of artists' rebellion was the boycott of exclusive art galleries in Uptown and searching for spaces to present art that differed in their character from boutique white cubes. Since then, artists have been increasingly willing to adapt unconventional places for exhibition purposes – both inside buildings and in open spaces. Especially in the case of site-specific projects.

2. SITE-SPECIFIC PROJECTS AS AN EXAMPLE OF INTEGRATION OF WORK AND PLACE

Site-specific [Tate.org.uk 2024] projects blur the boundaries between the work and the exhibition space. Artistic narrative finds its continuum in the place of action. It is difficult to clearly determine what is the result of random decisions and what is part of a plan. The environment becomes a point of reference for the exhibition project, and its arrangement is associated with the transformation of the environment. This therefore means interdependence and simultaneity of events / actions. There are a lot of artists involved in site-specific and relation-specific art such as: Anish Kapoor, Olafur Eliasson, Katharina Grosse, Józef Szajna, Stanisław Zamecznik, Andrzej Matuszewski, Mikołaj Smoczyński, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Kōji Kamoji, Zbigniew Taszycki, Joanna Rajkowska, Maciej Kurak, Rafał Jakubowicz, Katarzyna Bogusz, etc. Most of them treats work in an interdisciplinary way. Another interesting example is the work of Leon Tarasewicz, who, despite his strictly painterly projects, also works in the area of conceptualism and installation, adapting architectural and urban spaces: gallery interiors, building facades, pavements, squares, etc. The artist paints not only on canvas, but also directly on the walls, floors, or ceilings of exhibition halls. The gallery interior ceases to be a background, but becomes a fully-fledged component of the painterly narrative. Tarasewicz does not bring ready-made works to the gallery, but creates them on site, analyzing and then transforming the space in a painterly way. It means negating the division into object and background, as well as including the action in the context of the active participation of the recipient, who, as they move around the gallery interior, experiences the work through the movement and motor skills of their own body. The statement by Tarasewicz, who referred to his exhibition project at the Foksal Gallery, says a lot about the approach of artists to shaping the neutral space of the white cube gallery: "I wanted to work in cement until the very last moment, fill the space up to the ceiling, secured on ropes and blocks, so that I could be pulled out of it before it hardened. Foksal is most often treated by artists as a cube into which something

is put. The cube separately, the work separately. I wanted to treat it like the interior in Pompeii, to fill it in its entirety. So that one colorful structure would emerge. [...] I dream of a painting in which I could completely immerse myself and wade in the cement color, freely shaping it, so that later it could all harden" [Culture.pl 2022]. Crossing the boundaries between the narrative of a painting enclosed within a frame and its surroundings enables the creation of a situation in which there is no division between the work and its background. Art then becomes a means of transforming space. This implies a complete departure from the hierarchy of the work and redirecting attention to the process, as well as the need to redefine the image and painting.

Art objects placed in gallery interiors become the components of space that are increasingly difficult to perceive through the prism of their dominance. Deprived of pedestals, frames, they are not always perceived as artworks. Their semantics result from both the creator's intentions and the context of the place as well as the recipient's reception. Art allows for the transformation of space – changing its perception and giving identity to non-places. Meanwhile, space for creators can be an inspiration for action, a continuum of artistic narrative or a material *per se*.

Public space is defined as a place accessible "in principle without restrictions to everyone" [Bartoszek, Gruszczyński, Szczepański 1997]. Dymnicka, however, draws attention to utopian assumptions related to the understanding of openness. According to her, an important feature of public space is, however, restrictions, because they guarantee the comfort of the users of the space. In the context of art, this aspect is extremely important. The artist's freedom should not interfere with the specificity / character of the place, or the needs of the recipients / users of a given space. Assuming that art arose from the need to materialize an abstract thought, it cannot be reduced to an aesthetic or aestheticizing gadget. Regardless of the discipline or the medium used, art is a message – a concretization of an idea. Giving up thinking about art in the context of its material aspect allows for going beyond the dichotomous division into object and background, thanks to which the exhibition can be treated as a situation.

3. AUTHORIAL SITE-SPECIFIC REALIZATIONS IN A CLOSED SPACE. CASE STUDY

Joanna Stefańska's exhibitions are an example of using the art-place relationship involving both the site-specific and *in situ* aspects. Art objects become elements of space, and the boundary between them and their surroundings is blurred. Giving up hierarchy means building a dialogic narrative in which the work is dematerialized, and space is more than just a background. The artist makes exhibitions by creating a situation based on the play of contrast and similarities. An important element in forming an artistic narrative, as well as an exhibition situation, is light.

In 2023, the Rozruch gallery hosted Joanna Stefańska's solo exhibition entitled *Czarne pola II (Black Fields 2)*. The gallery is located in the Jeżyce district of Poznań, in a building from the 19th century which served as a powder magazine. In her exhibition project, Stefańska decided to use the gallery's underground. The building has been rebuilt many times. The gallery's exhibition space is located on two floors. The basements occupy 200 m². The brick walls from the 19th century and the high halls create a unique character, which is an inspiration for artists adapting this place for their exhibitions. The lack of daylight allowed for the creation of a narrative by emphasizing selected parts of space with spot lighting. The art objects were placed in an unconventional way – directly on the floor, thanks to which they became immanent components of the interior. The dematerialization of the work associated with the invalidation of the division into the object and the background, allowed the creation of an alternative space – devoid of division into the work and its surroundings.



Fig. 1. Joanna Stefańska, *Czarne pola II / Black Fields 2*, solo exhibition in Rozruch Gallery, Poznań, 2023, photo by Krzysztof Ślachciak



Fig. 2. Joanna Stefańska, *Czarne pola II / Black Fields 2*, solo exhibition in Rozruch Gallery, Poznań, 2023, photo by Krzysztof Ślachciak

In 2024, another exhibition by Stefańska entitled *Metamorfozy (Metamorphoses)* took place at the BWA in Sieradz. The gallery was established in 1975, but since 1999 it has been located at 3 Kościuszki Street in the 19th-century building of the “Former Post Office Inn”. The gallery space is characterized by high articulation – irregular volume, numerous divisions. Artists have at their disposal interconnected rooms, which in the case of individual exhibitions requires the creation of separate arrangements, and thus a multi-threaded narrative. Stefańska decided on a project that took into account the parameters of the space. The rhythms present in the interior found their extension in the works, presented in striped arrangements. The artists created three zones, arranged differently, but she managed to find common threads. The presented works fit perfectly into the gallery interior. The architectural space became part of the artistic narrative.



Fig. 3. Joanna Stefańska, exhibition *Metamorfozy / Metamorphoses*, BWA Gallery in Sieradz, 2024, photo by Krzysztof Ślachciak



Fig. 4. Joanna Stefańska, exhibition *Metamorfozy / Metamorphoses*, BWA Gallery in Sieradz, 2024, photo by Krzysztof Ślachciak



Fig. 5. Joanna Stefańska, exhibition *Metamorfozy / Metamorphoses*, BWA Gallery in Sieradz, 2024, photo by Krzysztof Ślachciak

4. AUTHORIAL SITE-SPECIFIC PROJECT IN OPEN SPACE. CASE STUDY

In 2023, Paulina Kowalczyk was invited to participate in the exhibition project entitled *Podnosząc Ziemię (Raising the Earth)*. The exhibition took place in the Palace, the Palace Orangery and the palace park in Lubostroń. The palace and park complex in Lubostroń is a special place that is an example of the synergy of human and nature's work. Exhibition projects in such an extraordinary space required taking into account many factors – the context of the place with its history, the theme of the project, as well as the interactions between individual works and the participation of recipients in case of spatial activities in the park area. The project involved sculptors and architects associated with the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and artists, architects and scientists associated with the Faculty of Architecture of the Poznań University of Technology and Magdalena Abakanowicz University of the Arts Poznań.

As part of this exhibition, Kowalczyk created an artwork, presented in the Orangery, and two site-specific installations in a duet with the artist and architect Katarzyna Rudólf-Kanabaj. One of the installations was built in the space of the palace basements, and the other, entitled *Filtrowanie (Filtering)*, in the open air – in the palace park, by the pond. Initially, the artists planned to build an installation with a maximum height of 2 m and width of 10 m. During the *in situ* work, it turned out that the implementation would be much larger due to the scale of the surroundings and the satisfying interaction between them and the materials used. The construction built of wire mesh and textiles annexed over 100 m of the park. Fearing the repetition of forms and the rhythms they created, the artists dismantled half of the installation. The decision was not easy, because the visual effect, especially from

the opposite side of the pond, was interesting, but the fear of excessive aestheticization determined the introduction of changes. The smaller scale allowed for better control of the composition. The material limited the possibilities of shaping the forms due to its specific properties. Another factor influencing the limitation of the area of action was access to one projector – the concept involved the use of at least two. It is worth adding that this was not an easy work to assemble, because the project assumed the most ephemeral inscription of objects into a specific space – lush vegetation and a pond. The installation was not to be a dominant, but a discreet filter, introducing barely registered aberrations in the field of vision. The aim was to create not so much forms, but impressions – situations (situation-specific action). The authors composed the forms in such a way as to allow the recipients to receive from many sides. The moving, changing image was synchronized with the viewer's movement. The implementation consisted of 3 intersecting axes – the direction of travel was arbitrary.

On the day of the opening, a storm broke out. Sudden lightning and heavy rain prevented the presentation of the implementation. The artists decided to implement the project in its original assumption at a different time. Unfortunately, the weather conditions were not favourable this time either. External factors, which initially seemed depressing, contributed to the search for solutions that were not taken into account in the conceptualisation phase of the project. The variability of weather, light and its temperature turned out to be the main theme of the project. In the case of this realization, the processuality, corresponding to the dynamics of change, meant a reception spread over time and following the transformation of the image. The authors documented the work in changing light, in rain and during a storm. Out of 500 photos, each shot is dissimilar. The installation in the park, documented at different times of day and night, looks various in each shot. White forms, glowing in the sun, looked blue after dark. The designed film was initially ephemeral, but as the daylight faded, it became sharper, blurring the boundaries between the forms and their surroundings. The sounds recorded on the film merged with the sounds of the surroundings, which created an acoustically surprising narrative. The implementation moved to another place would be meaningless. It would then be reduced to a strictly aesthetic activity. However, it is planned to show the documentation in a white cube type space and in the Lubostroń palace in 2024-2025.

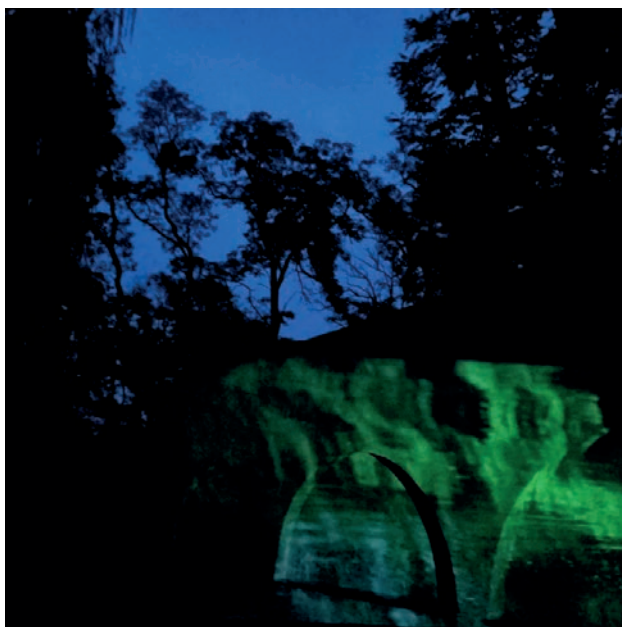


Fig. 6. Katarzyna Rudólf-Kanabaj, Paulina Kowalczyk, *Filtrowanie / Filtering*, palace park in Lubostroń, 2023, photo by Paulina Kowalczyk



Fig. 7. Katarzyna Rudólf-Kanabaj, Paulina Kowalczyk, *Filtrowanie / Filtering*, palace park in Lubostroń, 2023, photo by Paulina Kowalczyk

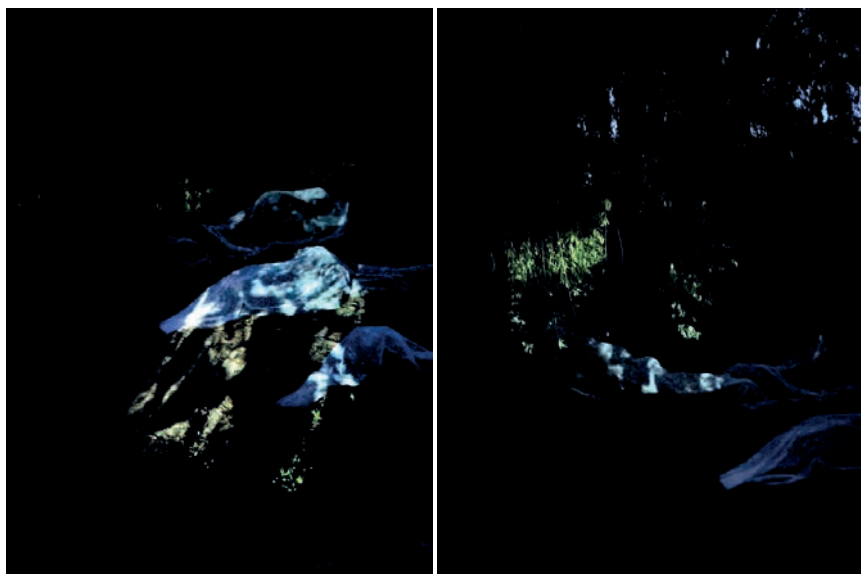


Fig. 8-9. Katarzyna Rudólf-Kanabaj, Paulina Kowalczyk, *Filtrowanie / Filtering*, palace park in Lubostroń, 2023, photo by Paulina Kowalczyk

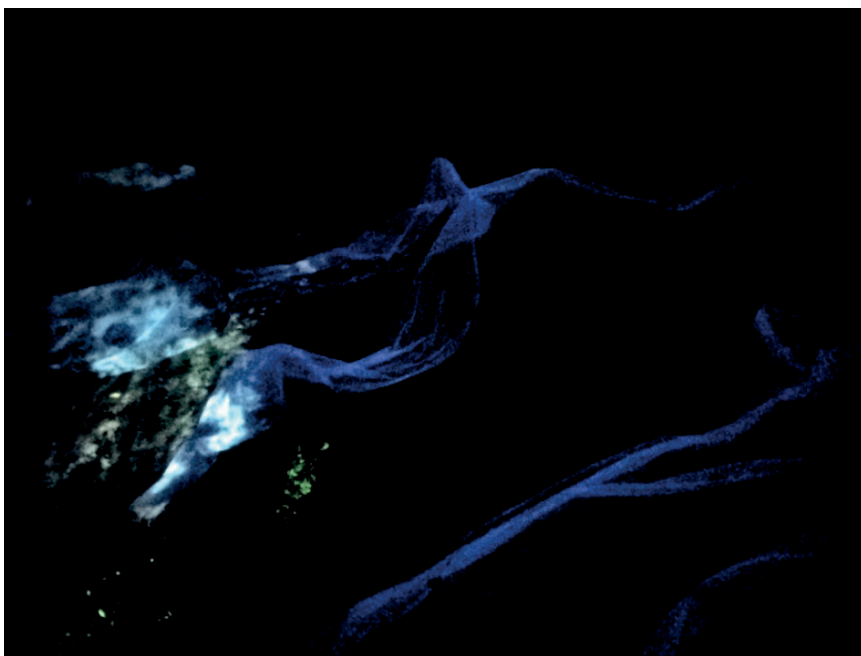


Fig. 10. Katarzyna Rudólf-Kanabaj, Paulina Kowalczyk, *Filtrowanie / Filtering*, palace park in Lubostroń, 2023, photo by Paulina Kowalczyk

5. SUMMARY

Site-specific implementations require taking into account many problems, such as: the context of the place, time, and in the case of activities in open space, also atmospheric conditions, or interactions with users of this space. *In situ* activities make it possible to go beyond the scheme of activities – the place can initiate surprising solutions, or become a material in itself. Blurring the boundaries between the work and the surroundings eliminates the hierarchical arrangement and creates new possibilities for the reception of art, which takes into account not so much the work per se, but the situation based on interactions between art and the place. Exhibition projects taking into account the site-specific aspect are created in relation to a specific space, which means that they become its integral component, just as space becomes a component of the implementation. The lack of distinction between the work and its surroundings means opening up to the process – both in the context of artistic implementation and its perception. Activities in unconventional spaces require taking into account many aspects – the specifics of the place, assembly conditions, lighting, etc. Sometimes, potential shortcomings of the space work in the positive, because they enable the creation of a situation that integrates the artistic realization with the place.

Tab. 1. Advantages and disadvantages of implementation in exhibition spaces alternative to low-articulation / white cube spaces

Unconventional exhibition spaces alternative to white cube type spaces / spaces with low articulation (closed space)	
Pros	Cons
they support site-specific and in situ implementations (egalitarianism in the art-place relationship)	lack of assembly facilities
they encourage unconventional exhibition / arrangement solutions	lack of an appropriate lighting system or complete lack of lighting
place-creating aspect	lack of colour neutrality is associated with a narrowing of the spectrum of presented projects / art objects
transformational aspect – changing a non-place into a place with new semantics, giving a new function to unused architectural spaces	
relational aspect – inter-environmental, environmental integration (involving the local community in creating art)	

Source: Kowalczyk 2024.

Tab. 2. Advantages and disadvantages of implementation in the space outside the building

Projects in the space outside the building	
Pros	Cons
possibility of creating a situation based on interactions with the environment –	working on a larger scale means matching the size of the project to the place of implementation
possibility of activities on a larger scale than in a closed space	the context of the place should be taken into account: its history, spatial components and limitations that apply to activities in historical space
the variability of light can enrich the narrative with the aspect of transformation	atmospheric factors can have a destructive effect on art objects or prevent performative activities, happenings, etc.
possibility of building a narrative based on spatial relations	interactions with users of public space may be associated with a negative reaction to the work / artistic activities, which means the need to relocate the object / abandon the activities
possibility of creating the identity of the place (in the case of non-places) formal and legal restrictions (no permission for activities, both public and private spaces)	creating new associations related to the place – using the transformative aspect of art lack of technical facilities (difficulty connecting projectors, assembly difficulties, etc.)
increasing accessibility of art and space	working on a larger scale means matching the size of the project to the place of implementation
participation of random recipients-users of space	
projects in the space outside the building	
possibility of creating a situation based on interactions with the environment	

Source: Kowalczyk 2024.

6. CONCLUSIONS

In the case of site-specific / *in situ* implementation, the place becomes an inspiration, but also a material, a tool itself. The division between the work and its surroundings disappears. One complements the other. Exhibitions in unconventional spaces – both in the context of interiors and open spaces have advantages and disadvantages, but potential problems can contribute to surprising decisions – both artistic and exhibition. The exhibitions discussed in the article are an example of

implementations in which the artists' intention was not so much to present works / art objects, but to create a situation. Departing from the hierarchical division, according to which the artwork is superior to its surroundings, allowed the creation of a dialogical arrangement and the invalidation of the division into object and background. Unconventional exhibition spaces create unlimited possibilities for artists and curators to create an artistic narrative, but they require taking into account both the nature and character of the place, which can create problems both during the design of the exhibition and its arrangement. Searching for alternative ways of presenting works promotes going beyond the schematic solutions. In many cases, the concept of an exhibition is influenced by the place – *genius loci*.

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**REALIZACJE *SITE-SPECIFIC* W KONTEŚCIE RELACJI SZTUKA-MIEJSCE.
STUDIUM PRZYPADKU NA PODSTAWIE AUTORSKICH WYSTAW
W PRZESTRZENIACH ZAMKNIĘTYCH I OTWARTYCH**

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi studium przypadku na podstawie wybranych autorskich realizacji *site-specific* w niekonwencjonalnych przestrzeniach wystawienniczych uwzględniających zarówno przestrzeń wewnątrz budynku, jak i przestrzeń otwartą. Relacje i interakcje zachodzące między sztuką a miejscem oparte są na wielu zależnościach podlegających transformacjom w zależności od idei twórcy i specyfiki miejsca. Wszelkie działania z zakresu sztuk wizualnych wiążą się z koniecznością uwzględnienia kontekstu przestrzeni oraz procesualnego aspektu sztuki. Realizacje w przestrzeni publicznej różnią się pod wieloma względami. Dla niektórych artystów miejsce stanowi inspirację do działań, a dla innych tworzywo lub „ramę” dla dzieła. Sztuka może stać się narzędziem transformującym i (re)konstruującym przestrzeń. Wychodzenie poza mury instytucji sztuki – adaptowanie postindustrialnych budynków, byłych zakładów usługowych, przestrzeni mieszkalnych, jak również działanie w szeroko rozumianej przestrzeni otwartej jest coraz bardziej popularne i świadczy o potrzebie redefinicji zarówno sztuki, jak i przestrzeni wystawienniczej oraz zachęca do dyskusji na temat relacji i interakcji między sztuką a miejscem. Z drugiej strony wiele instytucji sztuki mieści się w miejscach odbiegających swoją specyfiką od idei przestrzeni typu *white cube*, co stanowi zarówno wyzwanie, jak i inspirację dla artystów i kuratorów. Realizacje *site-specific* umożliwiają odbiorcom percepcję nie tyle obiektów sztuki, lecz także sytuacji, w której cała przestrzeń bierze udział w narracji stworzonej przez artystę / kuratora.

Słowa kluczowe: *site-specific*, *in situ*, sztuka, architektura, wystawa, przestrzeń wystawiennicza, przestrzeń publiczna

