

# PERSPECTIVE

## SELECTED ESSAYS ON SPACE IN ART AND DESIGN

Edited by

**Sarina Miller**  
*Temple University*

Series in Art



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# INTRODUCTION

Perception is informed by perspective and space is inextricably linked with time. The Japanese concept of *ma* as empty space or a gap, pause, or interval refers to perceptions of both space and time. *Ma* can be recognized in the physical distance between actors on a stage, pauses of varying lengths in dialogue or music, and in the negative space around a sculpture or between objects in a painting. *Ma* is not incidental and exists only in the recognition and appreciation of its presence. Conversely, a rejection of emptiness and negation of the void have been expressed in Western philosophy through concepts like plenism (fullness) and *horror vacui* (“fear of empty space”). In visual aesthetics, *horror vacui* describes a space that is filled with ornament. The dichotomy of fullness and emptiness implies value in different ways, depending on context, and the visual syntax of these concepts is designed to communicate to specific audiences. A luxury boutique, for example, may display a few objects within an abundance of space to emphasize their scarcity/rarity, thereby increasing their perceived value. By contrast, a discount outlet store may reverse this design process and fill a space with merchandise to suggest lower cost due to an abundance of product.

Our perception of space is governed by our point of view (perspective), which is determined by relative distance, both spatial and chronological; we perceive differently a three-dimensional space that we occupy physically, space that is suggested or flattened through illusion, viewed up close or from afar, and any space created in the past that we view in our own time. These spatial-temporal relationships can be perceived as simultaneous, sequential, or cyclical.

The inherent connection between space and time was presented as a provocative challenge in the early twentieth century with the development of Analytic Cubism, in which objects were visually dissected and portrayed in fragmented forms from various angles, forcing the viewer to contend with multiple viewpoints simultaneously. The complexity of this task mirrored ways of thinking in other contexts and represented shifting perspectives in the modern world.

When the Great Kantō earthquake fragmented the topographic spaces of Tokyo and surrounding areas in 1923, a conscious reimagining of that space during its rebuilding was informed by Western modernity. In Japan, the closing of this cultural gap between East and West also meant widening the distance between the traditional past and the modern present. A visual expression of this phenomenon can be seen in a 1927 advertisement by Sugiura Hisui for the Tokyo Metro subway line, Japan’s first subway (fig. 1). In the poster, linear/sequential

time is conveyed in the design of space through an illusionistic perspective that suggests present and past visually as near and far. The approaching train and its passengers waiting on the platform are shown in diminishing perspective, with the figures in modern/Western clothing appearing closer to the viewer in the foreground and smaller, traditionally dressed figures in the background.

Circular spaces can represent infinity or eternity, and in Indian religions this relates to a cyclical concept of time associated with the belief in *saṃsāra* (cycle of birth, death, and rebirth). Spatially, this is often expressed in the depiction or suggestion of circles. The mandala (Sanskrit for “circle”), in various mediums such as textiles or colored sand, is a symbolic microcosm of the universe, the circular space of which is often enclosed by a square and contains a central dot (*bindu*) that represents the origin or point of creation. In the architectural space between a rounded stupa and the circular railing enclosing it, Buddhists circumambulate in a clockwise direction as a symbolic representation of *saṃsāra* and the eightfold path to enlightenment (*nirvana*), the liberation from *saṃsāra*.

In the essays that follow, the isolation of space as a formal design element encourages a deeper understanding of how it conveys meaning in specific historical and contemporary examples. These essays explore space—both real and imagined—to analyze critically the ways in which it has been designed and experienced in different cultures.

Sarina Miller

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**Cynthia Haveson Veloric** is an independent curator, adjunct professor at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, author, and environmentalist. She has worked in the curatorial departments of the Smithsonian American Art Museum, The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. She received her PhD in Creativity from the University of the Arts, with a dissertation on contemporary artists' responses to the climate crisis. In 2018 she curated the exhibition *Repairing Our Earth, Diane Burko Artist/Environmental Activist* and in 2022 curated the exhibition *Risky Beauty: Aesthetics and Climate Change*. Veloric has chaired and presented at the College Art Association in sessions focused on climate change. Her recent public service includes the inaugural Pennsylvania Climate Convergence, the Clean Air Council of Philadelphia, the Advisory Board of the Brodsky Center for Printmaking, and the Board of the Main Line Art Center.

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**Hamza El Fasiki** is an artisan, author, and instructor. He received his MA in Moroccan cultural studies with a focus on Moroccan crafts from Sidi Mohammed Ben Abdellah University in Fes, Morocco. A Fes native, he apprenticed under

his father while learning Moroccan geometric patterns, brass engraving, and bookbinding. Hamza has traveled to sixteen countries, learning and teaching Moroccan culture. Hamza also provides Moroccan arts academic consulting through the organization he founded, CraftDraft.org, a multidisciplinary educational craft studio based in both Fes, Morocco and Portsmouth, England, where he currently resides.

**Victoria Nolte** is an art historian based in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. She received her PhD from Carleton University in Ottawa, and her research focuses on two streams: the collection, exhibition, and study of Chinese art in Canada and on rethinking global migration (both forced and voluntary) as an integral part of the story and construction of Canadian art. She currently serves as managing editor for the journal *Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas* and teaches in the School for Studies in Art and Culture at Carleton University.

**Rory O'Dea** is an assistant professor of contemporary art and design and the associate dean of the School of Art and Design History and Theory at the Parsons School of Design in New York City. He received his PhD in art history from the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University, and his scholarship explored the ways that visual art intersects with ecology, geology, and fiction as a means to imagine speculative realities and produce alternative ways of knowing and being in a more-than-human world. His pedagogy is rooted in the intersection of history, theory, and practice and explores the ways that art history shapes and is shaped by artistic research processes. He was recently a research fellow at the Nancy Holt and Robert Smithson Foundation, and his monograph titled *Robert Smithson, Land Art, and Speculative Realities* will be published by Routledge in 2023.