

# Indifferent Exhibitions. Avoiding permanence as a project

Ayelen Betsabe Zucotti

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## Avoiding permanence as a project

‘Every Island is a Mountain’ was the title of the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the Korean pavilion at Malta Palace, at the Venice Biennale and that has been the starting point for the concepts presented in this text: island, ocean, mountain and permanence. The celebration featured a series of exhibitions and events held in different venues and at different times. Artist Koo Jeong A’s proposal ‘Odorama Cities’ for the Korean Pavilion is part of the celebrations, as well as the 60th edition of the Venice Biennale, entitled ‘Strangers Everywhere’.

‘Odorama Cities’ is a silent, invisible, uncomfortable experience. It is the context of noise and anaesthetic overstimulation that acts directly by contrast in the work. In most of the surrounding exhibition spaces, the proposals featured a screen device, and sometimes it was a single exposed element. In some cases, the layout of the space revolved around the screen with videos playing on a loop and sounds that, depending on the technical characteristics of the exhibition, could be out of sync with the video or image, or overlap with the sound from the adjacent exhibition room.

The Korea Pavilion appeared transparent from the outside. Once inside, it is not possible to distinguish the intervention at first glance. The combination of emptiness, silence and natural light recreates a state of confusion. This discomfort results from adjacent overstimulation. Where one pavilion appears bare and transparent, in contrast to the pavilions transformed into black boxes concealing their physical characteristic.

People moved from one pavilion to another in a uninterrupted sequence, in contrast to what is proposed in ‘Odorama Cities’. It is an invitation to linger, where fragrances transform the surroundings into a “collection of olfactory memories”.

Inside the pavilion, only two objects were on display, one of which was the fragrance diffuser. The floor was covered in Wood, on which an infinity symbol was engraved across the entire surface. The walls were painted halfway up with green paint slightly darker than the vegetation outside the pavilion, which could be seen from inside. While from

the outside, the reflection of the glass and the green interior color contrasting with the vegetation completely dematerialized the pavilion’s boundaries.

“A typical day involves experiencing thousands of layers of design that extend from the depths of the earth to outer space, but also to the depths of our bodies and brains”<sup>2</sup>. Odorama Cities paradoxically generates the opposite effect; the pavilion demanded physical and mental endurance. Among other things, it required concentration on the sense of smell.

Koo Jeong A invites visitors to isolate themselves to establish an emotional connection. Once in front of the fragrance diffuser, the person does not receive responses like those emitted by everyday devices. At this point, the person finds it difficult to recognize and identify a new feeling. Isolation in this context is understood as part of the connection necessary to establish a link between the exposed object and the person.

The concept of an island in this context is contradictory, complex and absurd. But it raises questions about the space in which humans reconnect with other humans or with that which elevates them beyond reason or logic. It is impossible to determine how many connections a person makes when looking at a painting. Nor is it possible to specify the temporalities that overlap, interrupt or conflict with each other.

Geographical and temporal displacement based on emotions is a quality that allows us to establish a relationship with the concept of the ocean. Recovering its definition of immensity means highlighting the capacity of space and works of art to transcend geographical boundaries, even when it comes to “The smallest museum in the world”<sup>3</sup>. There is a gap between the interior defined by the physical and that defined by emotions. However, going beyond that interval is hardly possible when the physical is defined by elements that resemble everyday objects. It is not only about the everyday nature of the device as a singular element, but also about the everyday nature of the content displayed: “Images and sounds from every dimension of human activity, from the smallest scale of personal and chemical life to the broadest expanses of interstellar travel, come together in ever-changing combinations on our small portable screens”<sup>4</sup>.

The possibility of crossing over into another physical and spatial dimension is possible if it allows us to distance ourselves from the everyday and the measurable. The artist Koo Jeong A proposes travelling to a different territory through aromas. An idea that requires us to remain deconstructing the physical and geographical boundaries of the pavilion.

The increase in mass movements of people is creating a change in behavior that directly affects spatial configuration at all scales. The large number of people moving around means that they must walk one behind the

other, avoiding stopping whenever possible. As a result, space must respond in terms of security. This is how signs appear with the words ‘emergency exit’, maps indicating evacuation routes, and even directions on how to find famous works of art in the quickest possible. Once in front of work, it is the crowd itself that pushes them away from it.

The trajectory is what constructs the narrative and should not be reduced to a simple sequence of exhibited objects, in the same way that images pass sequentially through all the devices that form part of everyday life.

If the elements that make up the space are part of everyday life, the relationship established between these elements and the space is indifferent, and the symbolic meaning of the content is lost. The same thing happens if people are exposed to the screen of their mobile devices and once inside the space they are exposed to another screen. But therein lies the paradox: “The ability to see so much more is also the ability to be seen so much more. Humans look at themselves by looking at themselves”<sup>5</sup>. The homogeneity of the ‘contemporary’ is a response to the self-absorbed image of ‘human’. Heterogeneity, changes of state or direction is not part of the contemporary. To avoid permanence as a project is to reflect: “The idea that the body is in one place has disappeared”<sup>6</sup>. Experiences are reduced to fleeting, consumable emotions. Thus, permanence became an act of resistance in relation to the objects on display and these in relation to space. The transition from an exterior space to an interior space (island) to another exterior space (ocean) based on a trajectory (mountain) between two exterior spaces has disappeared.

1. Extract from the official website of the Venice Biennale: [www.labiennale.org](http://www.labiennale.org). Visit the website in April 2025.

2. Colomina, Beatriz, Mark Wigley, and Istanbul Design Biennial. *Are we human? : notes on an archaeology of design*. Zürich: Lars Müller, 2021. p9

3. Title of the exhibition held at the March Foundation (Madrid, 2024).

4. Colomina, Beatriz, Mark Wigley, and Istanbul Design Biennial. *Are we human? : notes on an archaeology of design*. Zürich: Lars Müller, 2021. p 18

5. *Ibidem*. p 19

6. *Ibidem*. p 295

Exhibition  
Island  
Ocean  
Mountain  
Permanence