



ARTIST PORTFOLIO

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What Does Photosculpture Want?

In the article “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” published in 1979, Rosalind Krauss delineates the evolution of the term “sculpture,” illustrating its increasing ambiguity and departure from conventional categorization. She posits that, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s, the semantic scope of “sculpture” underwent a transformative shift, encompassing a diverse array of works that defied easy classification. This included endeavors such as Constantin Brâncuși’s columnar sculptures, Richard Serra’s monumental steel structures, and Robert Smithson’s physical manipulation of landscapes and sites. Consequently, Krauss contends that the very notion of sculpture was in danger of collapsing.¹

This phenomenon bears significant parallels to the contemporary landscape of photography. Initially confined to the bourgeois elite following its invention in the 19th century, photography has since become democratized through the rapid advancement of technology and the widespread accessibility of compact cameras. In the present day, photography is nearly ubiquitous, permeating modern society with individuals across diverse demographics capable of capturing images, leading to an environment saturated with visual content. Moreover, photography has become deeply intertwined with various spheres of contemporary art, extending its influence into realms such as painting, cinema, installation, sculpture, and performance, thereby defying rigid disciplinary boundaries.

The latest tendency in sculpture is particularly noteworthy. Three-dimensional scanning and printing, widely regarded as technological advancements, not only create sculptures but are also frequently used to convert art into digital 3D objects. Although digital modeling risks losing the unique material qualities of the original work and its authenticity through endless manipulation and transformation using scientific and material-technical knowledge, the process offers high accuracy and precision. As a result, creating 3D objects of any work and mass customization is becoming increasingly common. Consequently, the examination of where such hybridized forms of photography reside assumes heightened significance.

Much like sculpture has endeavored to free itself from the traditional limitations of the pedestal, three-dimensional photographic works expand the boundaries

¹ Rosalind Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” *October* 8 (1979): 34.

of formal artistic expression. These works break away from the conventional presentation format of art photography, which primarily featured wall-mounted displays in galleries and museums. This paradigm shift is illustrated by numerous exhibitions, including the 20 “Fixed Variable” showcase at New York’s Hauser & Wirth gallery, the 2015 “Picture/Thing” exhibition at the Ezra and Cecile Zilkha Gallery in Connecticut, and the 2022 “Temporary Landing” exhibition at an alternative art space in Seoul, which explored the interplay between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional aspects of photographic media.

Within these exhibitions, photographic works are presented not merely as framed prints but as three-dimensional entities. Examples include photographs contoured, stacked, or folded into three-dimensional forms, or printed onto unconventional substrates and framed in atypical configurations, thereby imbuing photographs with tangible volumetric qualities. Additionally, these works often eschew conventional framing, instead leaning against walls or freely occupying space as objects. This experimental approach by artists continually pushes the boundaries of the medium, prompting critical inquiry into the essence and potential of photography.

My interest in three-dimensional photographic works was ignited during my participation in a photography class at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 2011. This class notably emphasized the historical context and artistic research activities of photography since the 1960s, integrating diverse materials and non-traditional techniques. This emphasis facilitated my transition from a primarily visual to a materially grounded approach to the medium, sparking a burgeoning interest in experimental inquiry. I actively pursued and explored this interest in a recent work titled *The Oscillating Wall* (Figure 1).

While the amalgamation of photography with other artistic media may appear novel superficially, a retrospective examination reveals its deep-rooted conceptual antecedents. The trend observed in the 1970 “Photography into Sculpture” exhibition at New York’s Museum of Modern Art evidences photography’s incursion into the realm of fine art, with numerous artists beginning to create hybridized forms using photography. This period’s legacy, notably the distinction between the ‘taking’ and ‘making’ of photographs, necessitated a departure from traditional high-quality black-and-white prints in favor of photographic objects emphasizing conceptual ideas. Consequently, the contemporary endeavors of artists exploring the three-dimensional possibilities of photography represent a reevaluation and redefinition of the medium’s physical and material attributes.

In this work, eight thin plywood panels, each measuring 120 cm in length and 60 cm in height, were assembled at the center of the space (Figures 2 & 3). The surfaces of these panels exhibit a partially reddish-brown hue, characterized by grooves and scratches that contribute to a rough tactile texture. Each panel is UV-printed with a photograph of red bricks. Hinges and brackets are utilized to interconnect the panels, thereby integrating imagery with the material. Through the processes of joining and folding, these components collectively form distinct angles. Although the

photographs themselves remain flat, they expand organically through the structure and installation.

This work prompts an inquiry into the nature of the visual artifact. It resists easy categorization such as photography, sculpture, or collage, instead occupying an intermediate space between these forms. The photographic works explored in this essay navigate the boundaries between photography and sculpture, continuously oscillating between the planar qualities of photography and the spatial dimensions of sculpture. As a result, they challenge the dichotomy between two-dimensional and three-dimensional modes of representation. This practice involves integrating elements from multiple artistic disciplines, creating hybrid photographic works that transcend conventional conceptions of the photographic medium.

The spatial representation in this work is achieved by transforming a two-dimensional photographic image into a three-dimensional object. This is accomplished through techniques such as folding, mounting, printing, and framing, which imbue the photograph with tangible spatial characteristics. Works like *The Oscillating Wall* exemplify this phenomenon, combining photography, sculpture, installation, collage, and assemblage.

This approach emphasizes the importance of materiality in generating images that actively engage the viewer. Rather than serving as passive or purely aesthetic objects, these works invite reciprocal experiences. In this particular work, I also reflect on the temporal distance between the moment a photograph is taken and the time it is re-experienced. By engaging with the photograph physically, this creative work explores how such temporal gaps influence the interpretation of the image, including the place and time it evokes. This highlights the tension between the depicted place and the imagined one.

The goal of this paper is not to define a fixed explanation of expanded materiality but to open a dialogue on how spatial and temporal disjunctions can be explored in creative practice. These disjunctions manifest visually and psychologically in the experience of a work. *The Oscillating Wall* serves as an example of how fragments from the past can be recorded, mediated, and re-experienced, with materiality playing a central role in the construction of meaning.

Here, the photograph functions both as an object and image, occupying the social world as a cultural experience. Photographs, in this context, stimulate interactions that are sensuous (through their physicality), subjective (in how viewers interpret them), and spatial (creating dynamic experiences in a gallery setting). The relationship between substrate and scale, the positioning within the gallery, and the interplay of light in my work are all used to evoke associations with time, place, and memory.

The historical connection between photography and sculpture dates back to the inception of photography itself. Indeed, the interplay between these two artistic practices has been established since photography's early days. In its nascent stages,

sculptures and statues served as ideal subjects for the early camera technology due to their stationary nature, accommodating the prolonged exposure times required.² While the act of framing sculptures initially served a documentary purpose, the reproduction of these objects through photography also afforded the ability to dictate and regulate the viewer's formal and aesthetic interpretations of the sculptures.³

Although sculpture and photography are distinct terms and categories, the delineation between the two can become indistinct when photographs serve as creative substitutes for their original sculptural counterparts. This convergence underscores the intricate relationship between photography and sculpture, blurring the boundaries between image and object. Moreover, this relationship is further accentuated as photographs themselves evolve towards sculptural objects, thereby amplifying the dynamic interplay between the two artistic disciplines. *The Oscillating Wall* embodies a perspective on the materiality and three-dimensionality of photography that epitomizes an experimental approach towards the utilization of diverse materials and techniques. This results in the creation of intricate spatial photographic compositions, which I categorize as “Photosculpture”.⁴

Acknowledging the interdisciplinary relationships in the study of the medium is imperative. While the connections between photography and painting or cinema have received ample scholarly attention, the intersection of sculpture and photography, particularly in the realm of three-dimensional photographic works, remains relatively underexplored. The principal aim of this essay is to address the noted deficiency and augment current discussions concerning photography as an expanded artistic practice. As a result, an ancillary objective is to elucidate and cultivate a comprehensive understanding of photosculpture.

The inherent duality between image and object is distinctly apparent in the photo-sculpture central to this essay. The artwork encapsulates both the visual imagery they depict and their physical manifestation as three-dimensional objects within space, thereby constituting fundamental components of their material existence. As will be contended, these dual facets contribute to the content of the artwork. By traversing the boundaries between visual and spatial qualities, the artwork emphasizes the significance of investigating both elements rather than privileging one over the other.

² See, MoMA, “The Original Copy: Photography of Sculpture, 1939 to Today,” August 1 – November 1, 2010, accessed April 6, 2025, <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/970>.

³ Geraldine A. Johnson, *Sculpture and Photography: Envisioning the Third Dimension* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1–19.

⁴ For a discussion on the definition, see, Robert Sobieszek, “Sculpture as the Sum of Its Profiles: François Willème and Photosculpture in France 1859–1868,” *The Art Bulletin* 62, no. 4 (December 1980): 617.



Figure 1. Sunyoung Park, *The Oscillating Wall*, 2023; 100cm x 240cm x 62cm, UV print on eight sheets of plywood, metallic materials, screw nails, installation view, <http://www.sunyoung-park.com/The Oscillating Wall 2023.html>.



Figure 2. Sunyoung Park, *The Oscillating Wall*, 2023; 100cm x 240cm x 62cm, UV print on eight sheets of plywood, metallic materials, screw nails, <http://www.sunyoung-park.com/The Oscillating Wall 2023.html>.



Figure 3. Sunyoung Park, *The Oscillating Wall*, 2023; 100cm x 240cm x 62cm, UV print on eight sheets of plywood, metallic materials, screw nails, <http://www.sunyoung-park.com/TheOscillatingWall2023.html>

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