

1. Introduction

In June 2017, a young visitor stepped into the National Gallery Singapore to see Yayoi Kusama: *Life is the Heart of a Rainbow*. She first wandered through rooms filled with Kusama's dotted canvases, fields of color punctuated by obsessive repetitions, where every brushstroke seemed to vibrate between control and infinity. The iconic dots appeared not just on paintings but across entire surfaces, turning walls and sculptures into pulsating environments. Visitors moved slowly, pausing to photograph the works, framing themselves against the backdrops of red, yellow, and black constellations. Before leaving, she raised her phone, snapped a photo, and uploaded it to Instagram with the hashtag of the exhibition. Within minutes, her image joined thousands of others: dotted canvases, mirrored lights, playful portraits against Kusama's sculptures. The exhibition was not contained within the museum, it pulsed across digital networks, repeating, mutating, and amplifying.

The exhibition Yayoi Kusama: *Life is the Heart of a Rainbow* became one of Singapore's most visited shows that year, not only for the paintings, sculptures, and immersive installations it presented, but for how it extended far beyond the museum walls. Kusama's mirrored rooms, with their carefully orchestrated spectacle, became stages for self-portraits and performances of identity. Visitors queued for hours to enter, aware that part of the experience was not just seeing the artwork, but sharing it, turning a minute of immersion into an image that could travel infinitely across platforms. Hashtags multiplied, photos were repeated, and the exhibition itself became a cultural event, just as much on social media as in the galleries.

The Kusama exhibition in Singapore revealed something fundamental about today's cultural spaces: their life does not unfold only in galleries, but also in the feeds, hashtags, and stories that surround them. What if the social practices of a cultural space were shaped not only by its architecture or exhibitions, but also by the patterns of likes, tags, and shares that surround it? What if the true stage of a museum extended as far into the Instagram feed as it did into the gallery hall?

In today's cities, cultural spaces are no longer self-contained. Their presence is often transformed by the digital traces people leave as they interact with them. Social media has evolved beyond being a mere marketing tool: it is now a transformative force, an integral part of the very infrastructure through which art spaces exist.

This book explores the world of Hybrid Art Spaces: venues where physical and digital dimensions are inextricably entwined. In these spaces, the visitor's role is not limited to "consuming" culture; they actively co-produce its visibility, significance, and reach. An immersive installation or a historic façade becomes a stage for identity performance, algorithmic circulation, and networked publics.

The research unfolds in Singapore, a city where state-led cultural planning meets rapid digitalization. Singapore provides a compelling testing ground for the study of hybrid art spaces, as its museums and cultural districts are designed with precision; yet, bottom-up practices of sharing, remixing, and viral amplification often shape their media presence.

1.1 Research questions

At the heart of this book lies a single hypothesis:

Hybrid art spaces are co-constituted by material and digital practices.

Their spatial logics can be analyzed, demonstrated, and even strategically planned by integrating social media analysis into curatorial work and cultural spatial planning.

From this hypothesis, some guiding questions emerge:

- + **Conceptual Foundations:** How can hybrid art spaces be defined and theorized as environments in which daily spatial practices, architectural form, curatorial practice, and platform mediation converge to produce new spatial conditions?
- + **Platform Mediation:** How do hybrid art spaces become visible through platform logics? Which spatial, curatorial, and experiential principles make certain places more likely to be amplified, circulated, and recognized within algorithmic systems of visibility?
- + **Spatial Logics:** What spatial logics structure hybrid art spaces?
- + **Intensification of Hybridity:** Under what spatial, institutional, and experiential conditions does hybridity reinforce itself, producing intensified nodes of cultural attention and participation?
- + **Methodological Framework:** How can hybrid art spaces be studied empirically?

By addressing these questions, the book seeks to bridge the two worlds that are often kept apart. On the one hand, cultural planners and curators still rely primarily on in-house evaluations, visitor counts, or anecdotal feedback. On the other hand, social media data are typically handled by marketing departments or external consultants, who are often disconnected from the design and governance of cultural infrastructures. This work suggests that these domains must be integrated: the digital traces of art spaces are not ancillary, but constitutive.

The notion of hybrid space, a key concept in this book, has long been used to describe environments shaped by mobile media and location-based technologies. Here, I extend it into the cultural field. Hybrid art spaces function through a constant negotiation between curatorial strategies, visitor practices, and platform rules.

To analyze these spaces, I combine methods from urban studies, spatial theory, and digital media research with computational tools, including image classification, clustering, and mapping.

The core analyses presented in this book were conducted during my PhD research in Singapore, which I completed in 2020. Since then, my subsequent work in Germany, particularly within the field of social sciences, has allowed me to refine and expand the conceptual framework. In this book, I revisit those earlier results through new theoretical lenses and further develop the conceptual apparatus that underpins them.

This book is written for urban and cultural planners, curators and exhibition designers, architects, policymakers, and scholars interested in the evolving intersection of art, media, and urban life. At its core, it asks readers to recognize that social media is not outside culture but inside it, shaping what is seen, valued, and remembered.

1.2 Social media: properties and use

Social media are digital platforms—websites and mobile applications—through which users create and sustain online communities. They provide channels to share information, images, videos, personal messages, and cultural references. Their impact has grown in step with the widespread adoption of smartphones, which enable users to capture and post content instantaneously, from almost any location.

In 2025, more than 5.24 billion people worldwide will be active on social media, accounting for approximately 63.9% of the

global population (Kemp 2025). Platforms differ significantly in their affordances and modes of interaction: some focus on visual content (Instagram, TikTok, Snapchat), others on conversation and text (X / formerly Twitter, Reddit), still others emphasize messaging, community-oriented, and organizational uses (Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat). Despite their differences, all function as infrastructures of mediation, filtering what is seen, amplifying certain cultural practices, and archiving both ephemeral moments and longstanding traditions.

This book focuses on two platforms, Instagram and Twitter (now in 2025 X, but still Twitter at the time this research was conducted), due to their relevance in the cultural field. Instagram privileges visual communication. It enables users to capture images or videos, enrich them with text captions and geotags, and share them with their followers. Its rapid growth since 2010 is inseparable from the medium of photography, which remains a key driver of social engagement. Research has shown that users are particularly motivated by two triggers: visually striking objects or spaces, and memorable events (Bianchini et al. 2016). On Instagram, however, these triggers are subject to platform effects: styles become standardized, aesthetics converge (Manovic 2017), and users often curate their profiles in aspirational ways, performing identities as much as documenting realities (Schwartz and Halegoua 2015).

Twitter, in contrast, is a text-based platform. It is structured around microblogging, with short messages now limited to 280 characters (as of 2020). Tweets often include links, images, or geolocation data, and can be shared through retweets or comments. While Twitter began as a peer-to-peer communication tool in 2006, it has undergone significant evolution. At the time of writing, it is known as X and is owned by entrepreneur Elon Musk. Since collecting empirical material while it was called Twitter, I have continued to refer to it with its original name. Twitter's brevity and virality tend to encourage polarisation.

In this book, I will argue why social media must be treated as more than an auxiliary layer of promotion or communication. They shape how cultural spaces are perceived, remembered, and valued, thereby influencing the way space is produced; they redistribute visibility across institutions and districts; and they inform curatorial and design choices. In other words, they are not external to cultural space, they are one of its infrastructures. It is against this backdrop that I develop the concept of Hybrid Art Space, constituted by material objects like the architecture, by the programming and curatorial strategies, but also by social media rules, user practices, and algorithmic circulation.

1.3 Structure of the book

The book is organized into three main parts:

Concepts and Theory (Chapters 2–4)

I begin by exploring the intersections of social media and art (Chapter 2), then move to the relationship between social media and space, introducing the notion of Hybrid Space (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 develops the concept of Hybrid Art Spaces and outlines their underlying logic, which is further illustrated and expanded upon in the subsequent chapters.

Methods and Empirical Results (Chapters 5–7)

Following a brief overview of the methodological approach and case studies, the empirical focus shifts to Singapore. This section tests and refines the theoretical framework through empirical material. Here, the majority of the hypotheses introduced earlier are substantiated, extended, and critically examined.

The visualizations and analytical tools developed along the way serve not only as methods of inquiry but also as means of demonstrating how Hybrid Art Spaces operate in practice.

This enables the identification of typologies of hybrid art spaces and a deeper understanding of the dynamics that emerge when digital media practices intersect with physical urban contexts.

Tools, Implications, and Outlook (Chapters 8–9)

In the final section, I return to the tools, presenting them in a practical form for cultural planners and curators who wish to apply the theory and findings of this study. These consist of: (1) an interactive visualization to support curatorial decision-making in exhibition design, and (2) a mapping framework for cultural planners as a form of post-occupancy analysis. The concluding chapter reflects on the study's limitations and considers how its insights might be transferred to other contexts, but also positions this research in the changing media ecology.

This trajectory, spanning from concepts to empirical evidence, tools, and implications, is designed to serve both scholars and practitioners. It invites readers to see social media as a constitutive dimension of cultural production, circulation, and planning.

Bibliography

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