

Sarah Crowner's *Platform*: How Art Serves as an Immersive Experience

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Hill Art Foundation
December 5, 2023



Sarah Crowner, *Platform (Stretched Pentagons)*, 2023. Glazed terracotta tiles, wood, cement board, mortar, grout, 103 × 476 1/2 × 7 inches (261.6 × 1,210.3 × 17.8 cm). Collection of the artist.

Sarah Crowner's *Platform (Stretched Pentagons)* is an elevated platform, built specifically for the Hill Art Foundation, that extends from within the gallery's window to another wall's edge; the expansiveness of the platform and its tiles' reflection through the window evokes a sense of the structure's continuity. The platform is adorned by light blue terracotta tiles that form a wave-like pattern, reminiscent of the ripples in a pool of water. The pattern's lack of linear arrangement makes it seem as though the tiles are in constant motion, which further alludes to the platform's magnitude. In addition, the path-like nature of the platform prompts one to walk atop it, and invokes the feeling of walking along the High Line, located right outside. The platform, thus, is an expansion of the city outside the window. The patterns also adorn the negative space of the exhibit and add dimension by reflecting its tiles infinitely through the window. Sarah Crowner's *Platform (Stretched Pentagons)* is an endless extension and celebration of the city's landscape.

The platform takes up the space in the gallery almost seamlessly, evoking a sense of belonging and natural placement. Also, the composition of the tiles, though not linear, come together on the platform to form a whole. The tiles interact harmoniously with one another,

evoking a sort of wave-like sensation. The tiles exhibit a certain luminosity that allows the platform to incorporate natural light into its visual invocation by refracting the sun and illuminating the inhabited space with its unique patterns. While the tiles' pattern certainly establishes the platform's dynamics, the light from the window adjacent to the platform keeps it in motion. Crowner ingeniously uses the reflective nature of the terracotta tiles in her platform to establish its lively presence. The platform interacts perfectly with every element it encounters: the space itself, the viewer, and the city overlooking it. The platform absorbs these elements and integrates them perfectly into just what makes it special: its immersive nature. The viewers' interpretations of the platform are all uniquely different, thus making the purpose and intention of the platform subjective to its viewer, while the reflection of the tiles is subjective to the time of day.

Crowner is an artist from Philadelphia, currently residing in Brooklyn, New York, born in 1974. She has earned a BA from the University of California, Santa Cruz and an MFA from Hunter College. Her work has been on display at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Jewish Museum, and many others. Her work mainly deals with geometric form as she challenges and reshapes abstraction in art. Her appeal for dynamic and animated art is reflected in her own work as her immersive works transform the spaces they inhabit and are of close likeness to the natural environments they model.¹

This idea can be further contextualized in the psychedelic therapy concept of “set and setting,” a notion Crowner hopes viewer's adapt in their interactions with her art. This concept explains the way in which one's body interacts with its surrounding environment— relating one's physical state with their mentality, in hopes to form an awareness informed by one's cognition ².

¹ The Guggenheim Museum, accessed November 21, 2023, <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/sarah-crowner>.

²Levi Prombaum, *Set and Setting*, 14.

Correspondingly, Crowner's platform, displayed on the ground, evokes a great feeling of immersion and makes the relationship between viewer and the artwork one that is equally sustained.

Crowner's *Platform (Stretched Pentagons)* allows its viewers to break the boundary that exists between them and the artwork. As explained by contemporary art curator Ingrid Schaffner, the viewer's "getting on a stage to perform the act of looking, mounting a pedestal to put oneself on display" effectively breaks "art's taboo of don't touch: all of these inhibitions are crossed at once by the viewer."³ In describing the viewer's role as a performance, Schaffner argues that the viewer is equally part of the art as the work itself. Moreover, as one steps on the platform, there is a sense that one is not only being put on display, but activating the platform by becoming a part of it. Crowner, thus, allows the viewer to inform her artwork and does not regulate the relationship held between the art and the viewer.

Crowner herself has spoken on her goals in creating similar platforms in the past: "I didn't want to cover up the museum's windows and walls. I wanted to let the old patterns in the building...be apparent. I wanted people to see my painting in relation to those existing patterns. I want my work to be experienced in a physical, in an immersive way."⁴ She succeeds in her vision for the platform, as it so coherently connects itself to the space and to the viewer.

Crowner's *Platform (Stretched Pentagons)* is exemplary of her devotion to the merging of the abstract and the natural. Her platform plays an active role in the space it inhabits, illuminating and deepening its dimensions by using the sun's light and reflection of the window's view. The interactive nature of the platform also calls on the viewer to see it as a part of the space, as opposed to a mere installation.

³Ingrid Schaffner, *Emotional Architecture*, 68.

⁴Bartholomew Ryan, *Medium as Medium: A Conversation with Sarah Crowner*, 21.

References

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