

## CALL FOR PAPERS

Theme: Immersion  
*Esse arts + opinions* no. 116  
Deadline: September 1, 2025

Submissions for the thematic section (1,500 to 2,000 words maximum) must be sent in DOCX or RTF format to [redaction@esse.ca](mailto:redaction@esse.ca) by September 1, 2025. Please include a short biographical notice (35 words) as well as your e-mail and mailing address.

Persons wishing to first submit a note of intent (250-500 words) are invited to do so before June 1, 2025. No notes of intent will be read after this date, but it is still possible to submit a final text by the issue deadline (September 1, 2025).

## IMMERSION

Immersivity has emerged in recent years as a dominant theme of contemporary art exhibition and critical practice. One example of this is the large-scale “immersive experience” that presents the work of “great masters” through new technologies and multi-projector installations. Van Gogh, Da Vinci, Klimt, and Dali are just a few of the artists who have been the subject of these augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR) experiences. Other initiatives, such as those by the collective TeamLab, present immersive spaces as art. They occupy massive buildings and fill each room with what they call “body immersive” artworks: visitors might wade through pools of water, bounce on strange surfaces, or wander through a forest of blossoming plants. On the one hand, these examples point to questions of finance and capital; on the other hand, they raise philosophical questions about the impetus behind a broader movement toward immersion.

The COVID-19 pandemic left many museums and cultural institutions in a difficult financial state. As a result, there is growing pressure to integrate the booming billion-dollar art-entertainment industry into their programming. Access is a central question in these discussions. By blending technology, science, and art

and by erasing distinctions between body and machine, between medium and message, between image and reality, we may also be able to break down barriers in contemporary art, which so many people of diverse economic and educational backgrounds feel locked out of.

Broadly speaking, to be immersed is to be absorbed in some condition, action, or interest. An alternate definition of the word—"dipping or plunging into water or other liquid, and transferred into other things"—points to its sensorial potential. Oliver Grau, the author of *Virtual Art: From Illusion to Immersion* (2003), observes that artists have been experimenting with immersion in one form or another from time immemorial. We can trace the present-day trend back through the lineage of digital and new media art innovations, particularly in the 1960s, when participation and intervention began to grow in importance. VR and AR works frequently borrow the language of video games, presenting us with the illusion of agency: move left and right or zoom in and out to explore your environment. This supposed freedom within the all-encompassing environment enhances the immersion, or, as Grau writes, "Interactivity challenges both the distinction between creator and observer as well as the status of an artwork and the function of exhibitions." Immersive works require not only the active participation of the public but also a spatial experience that overwhelms the senses in ways that challenge the tradition of aesthetic distance, upending theories that argue that distance ensures criticality. Some warn that immersion increases emotional investment, while depriving users of critical distance.

Our attention is solicited in every direction by an endless onslaught of information and of multiple climate and sociopolitical crises. Total immersion is therefore appealing as a way to tune out the noise and have a pure experience with art. The critic and historian Hal Foster warns of the political danger of spectacular art producing disorientation rather than critical reflection. Do these blockbuster exhibitions promote accessible forms of public engagement with the canon of Western art, or do they simply capitalize on the attention economy's modes of fragmentation and capture? Conversely, is immersion necessarily an uncritical image space?

For this issue, *Esse arts + opinions* is seeking texts about all forms of immersion in contemporary art and theory. How are artists critically engaging with immersive technologies? Conversely, what kinds of practices are rejecting technology in their pursuit of immersion? Is there some aspect of the immersive that recalls the

aesthetic ideals of *gesamtkunstwerk*, wherein architecture, art, music, and language are combined in service of the art? How are these experiences breaking down the ever-present boundaries among spectator, body, and art?

## EDITORIAL POLICY

*Esse arts + opinions*, published by Les éditions Esse, is a bilingual magazine focusing on contemporary art and multidisciplinary practices. The magazine favors critical analyses and essays on current practices, with texts that address art in relation to its context. Each issue features a thematic section accompanied by a portfolio of works, as well as non-thematic critical articles, columns and reviews of exhibitions, events and publications. The *esse.ca* platform, in addition to reproducing all of this print content, also publishes original digital articles on current artistic events, research residencies, round table recordings, as well as an archive of past issues of *Esse*.

Texts published in *Esse* are submitted to an editorial board, which reserves the right to accept or reject them. Selection criteria are based on the quality of the analysis and writing, the relevance of the text to the theme, and the relevance and current interest of the chosen selection of works and artists.

A 6-week deadline is required for the selection of texts or notes. The decision to reject a text is final. In view of the number of submissions received, the board cannot commit to commenting on unsuccessful submissions.

Authors are invited to submit texts on January 10, April 1 and September 1 of each year. Papers can be submitted to one of the following 3 sections:

**FEATURES:** essays of 1,500 to 2,000 words. The theme is made available online 4 to 6 months before the deadline: <https://esse.ca/en/call-for-papers/>. Persons wishing to first submit a note of intent (250-500 words) for the feature are invited to do so on a set date, i.e. January 10 (for the April 1 deadline), June 1 (for the September 1 deadline) and October 1 (for the January 10 deadline). No notes of intent will be read after this date. Authors who have not submitted a note of intent may nevertheless submit a completed text by the issue deadline.

**OFF-FEATURES:** essays or in-depth articles of 1,250 to 1,500 words (including

notes) dealing with an issue, theme or practice not related to the theme of an issue. Given the limited space allotted to off-feature articles, final texts are requested for this section (notes of intent will not be considered).

REVIEWS: coverage of exhibitions, events or publications (500 words, no footnotes, or 950-1100 words, one or two footnotes maximum). Given the short format, final texts are required for this section (notes of intent will not be considered).

Please consult the writing protocols here: <https://esse.ca/en/call-for-papers/>

1. Unless otherwise agreed with Les éditions Esse, the author agrees to submit an original and unpublished text.
2. Unless otherwise agreed, the board will not accept submissions that are a potential source of conflict of interest between the author and the subject covered (for example, submissions by artists about their own practice, submissions by curators of exhibitions or events, or submissions by an artist's gallery).
3. With due respect for the author's vision and style, the editorial board reserves the right to request corrections of semantic or other nature: quality of language, general structure of the text, clarity, shortcomings, relevance of headings and subheadings, standards of composition.
4. Texts accepted with conditions will be discussed between the author and the editorial board. If modifications are requested, the author will be given fifteen (15) days to make them.
5. Authors agree to adopt a gender-neutral writing style and to use syntactic feminization procedures (doublet, medial point).
6. All expenses for typographical correction of the author's text will be assumed by Les éditions Esse, with the exception of author's corrections, if any, which will be assumed by the author.