brian o'doherty

KUNSTMUSEUM
LIECHTENSTEIN

brian **o'doherty**

Brian O'Doherty: Artist, Art Critic, Writer

On the works of Brian O'Doherty in the collection of the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein
Roman Kurzmeyer

Born in Ireland in 1928, Brian O'Doherty has lived and worked as an artist, filmmaker, and writer in the United States since 1957.[1] He began by studying medicine in Dublin and came to Harvard University on a research fellowship. O'Doherty already painted and wrote as a student. During the 1960s, he worked as an art critic for the *New York Times*. In the 1970s, O'Doherty was editor of *Art in America* and until the 1990s taught film and art criticism at Barnard College at New York's Columbia University, producing films about artists and publishing several books on American contemporary art. Although he began presenting his works under the name Patrick Ireland in 1972, and continued doing so for 36 years, he still used the name Brian O'Doherty as an art critic and writer. In 1967, he published *Object and Idea: An Art Critic's Journal, 1961–67*, a volume of his collected art criticism; this was followed in 1974 by *American Masters: The Voice and the Myth*. He also wrote fiction, *The Strange Case of Mademoiselle P.* (1992), the novel *The Deposition of Father McGreevy* (1999), which was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2000, and the 2014 novel *The Crossdresser's Secret*. As both an artist and art critic, O'Doherty has helped to shape art history in the second half of the twentieth century in the United States and Europe.

The White Cube

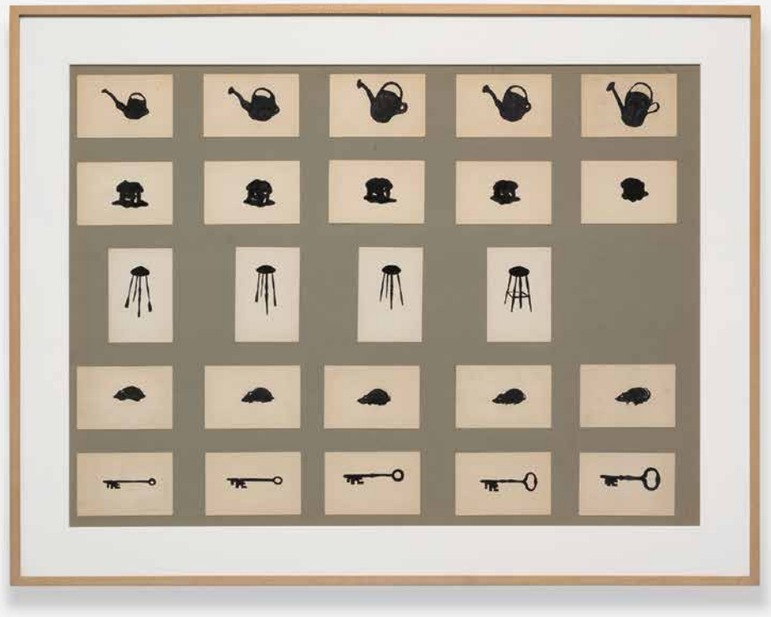
In the German-speaking world, O'Doherty is best known for *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, which was published by Merve Verlag in German as *In der weißen Zelle* in 1996.[2] The slim volume collected several essays on the white cube that were first published in 1976 in *Artforum* and discussed the supposed neutrality of the white gallery and museum spaces. The significance of the publication, today one of the standard works of Western exhibition studies, is that the author presents the joint history of art and its form of presentation in the twentieth century by using numerous examples without taking recourse to aesthetic theories. More than any single painting, he argues, the image of an empty room painted white is characteristic for modernist art. The ideal gallery excludes anything that could relativize an artwork's existence as art: "The history of modernism is intimately framed by that space; or rather the history of modern art can be correlated with changes in that space and in the way we see it. We have now reached a point where we see not the art but the *space* first."[3] The attention that has been paid to the exhibition space since the early twentieth century, in his view, leaves its mark on the artworks themselves. Artists have art's later presentation already in mind in the process of conceiving their works, not just in their realization. Both installation art,

1
On the artist and his work, see Christina Kennedy and Georgina Jackson (eds.), *Beyond the White Cube: A Retrospective of Brian O'Doherty/Patrick Ireland*, Dublin: Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane; New York: Grey Art Gallery, 2006.

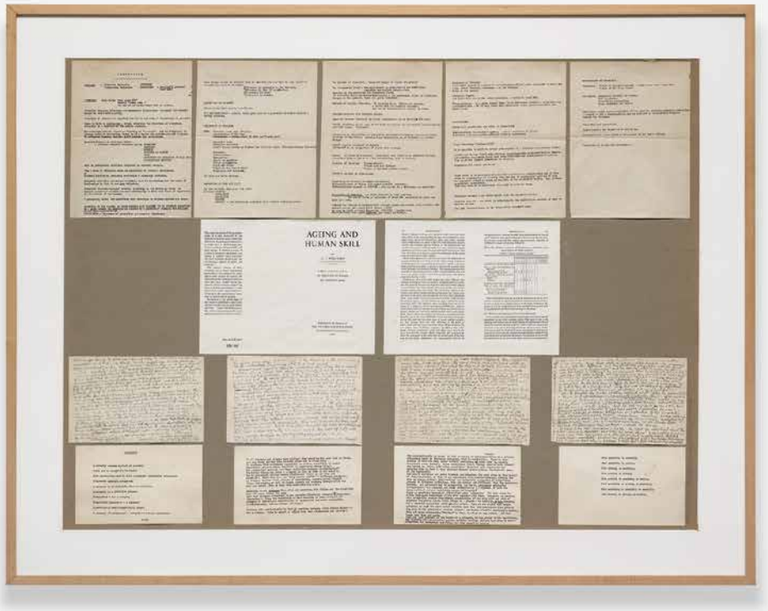
2
The first English edition is *Brian O'Doherty, Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Santa Monica and San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1986.

3
Ibid., p. 14.

Between Categories, 1957–68



Between Categories, 1957–68



Between Categories, 1957–68

4 O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube,* p. 87.

5 Ibid., p. 41.

6 On the history of display in the twentieth century, see Roman Kurzmeyer, *Zeit des Zeigens: Harald Szeemann, Ausstellungsmacher*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019.

7 Karole Vail (ed.), *The Museum of Non-Objective Painting: Hilla Rebay and the Origins of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum*, New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009, p. 168.

8 Marcia Brennan, *Curating Consciousness: Mysticism and the Modern Museum*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010, p. 13.

9 Walter Grasskamp, "Die weiße Ausstellungswand. Zur Vorgeschichte des 'White Cube,'" in *Weiß. Ein Grundkurs*, (Wolfgang Ullrich and Juliane Vogel, eds.), Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 2003, pp. 29–63.

which has since become considered the epitome of contemporary art and the result of a certain artistic practice, as well as the artistic questioning of the broader context beyond the gallery and the museum are consequences of artists' engaging with the exhibition itself. "No longer confined to a zone around the artwork, and impregnated now with the memory of art," O'Doherty observes, "the new space pushed gently against its confining box. Gradually, the gallery was infiltrated with consciousness. Its walls became ground, its floor a pedestal, its corners vortices, its ceiling a frozen sky. The white cube became art-in-potency, its enclosed space an alchemical medium. Art became what was deposited therein, removed and regularly replaced. Is the empty gallery, now full of that elastic space we can identify with Mind, modernism's greatest invention?" he asks, not without a touch of mockery.[4] Key to this space are the beholders, whose "contribution to what [they observe or trip] over is its authenticating signature."[5]

The white cube, the spatialized white exhibition wall, supported the perception of an art-as-form reduced to its material objecthood.[6] Today, luxury brands use the white cube to design their exhibition and sales spaces. It is a perversion of a process that initially had diametrically opposite intentions. When the art historian James Johnson Sweeney had the walls of the later Guggenheim Museum, New York, painted white in 1952, he also removed the reminders of upscale furnishings in the early twentieth century, such as wall coverings, dark paint, and carpets.[7] With the Museum of Non-Objective Painting, founded by the artist Hilla von Rebay in 1939, Sweeney took hold of an institution that had declared itself dedicated to abstract modernism and solely collected in this field, but still exhibited those works in heavy frames, on walls dark-painted or draped in wall coverings and exhibited them in spaces whose opulent interiors evoked the private habitat of New York's upper class.

According to Sweeney, exhibitions presented in white spaces fulfilled a dual task, for they framed not only the individual exhibited work, but also the exhibition itself, making it visible and perceivable as a unit.[8] Until the 1960s, the white exhibition wall (which had become a subject for an international audience for the first time with Gustav Klimt's appearance at the Venice Biennale in 1910) and the white exhibition space harmonized with the architectural and artistic development of modernism.[9] When O'Doherty described the white cube as a phenomenon, giving it a name and analyzing its function, the white exhibition space was a standard of the (American) International Style. From the perspective of the artists and in terms of their goals, a revision was unavoidable,

even if the white exhibition space, despite justified critique, still remains the preferred framework for exhibitions, enabling the integrated visual experience of objects.

Inside the White Cube is written from the double perspective of artist and exhibition visitor. The numerous studies on the history of exhibitions which have appeared since then, but also the scholarly symposia, study programs in curating established at art academies at the start of this century, and monographs on curators confirm the parallel genesis he shows of art and form of presentation. During the "second modernism," the exhibition achieved a significance it never had before. O'Doherty's precise observations, his brilliantly written and clever commentary on the New York art world of the 1970s can explain this. *Inside the White Cube* can be read as an early attempt at a viewer-oriented aesthetics, but one that is also subjected to a critique, and this surely contributed to the lasting success of this book.

The Critic's Boots

The Critic's Boots (1964–65), in the collection of Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, explores the tension between O'Doherty's roles as artist and as intellectual, something still reflected in his work, keeping it vital. With his entire oeuvre in mind, this work seems like an artistic anticipation of his theoretical writings that circle around the relationship of viewer-oriented aesthetics and the needs of artists in terms of production aesthetics. The work consists of a pair of leather Chelsea boots, size 10, on a square platform measuring 46 × 46 cm; both boots and flat pedestal are completely pasted over with newspaper cuttings. All the clippings are exhibition reviews O'Doherty wrote for the *New York Times* and the boots are those he wore when he was underway as an art critic in New York. With this work he bid farewell to everyday journalism and sealed it with *Object and Idea: An Art Critic's Journal, 1961–67*.[10] These articles, written by a precise observer, reflect not only the sense of a new era dawning, but also the animosities and conflicts within the small New York art world, one in which he was at the center. Most importantly, the subjects of these contributions reflect the nascent fast growth, radically changing artistic practices, and potential modes that were increasingly open to artists in the city. O'Doherty did not only witness the implosion of aesthetic criteria and the short-lived nature of trends and careers in the art world. The conflicting objectives that resulted from his dual role were at first limiting in regard to his impact as an artist, but they simultaneously shaped his work in an interesting and positive way. Aesthetic reflection is a

10
O'Doherty, *Object and Idea: An Art Critic's Journal, 1961–67*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1967.

Brian O'Doherty in his studio in New York, 2019

The Critic's Boots, 1964–65

core task for an art critic, but it can also be the subject of an artistic work, as shown by *The Critic's Boots*.[11] The artwork reflects a moment of professional change for O'Doherty: a whimsical self-portrait as an art critic that, beyond its autobiographical significance, also recalls that art criticism has lost impact and influence since the 1960s. This was the dawn of the age of curators, who replaced art critics and art historians as artists' preferred partners and promoters. The complicity between artists and critics, which still existed for the young O'Doherty, became one between artists and curators, with dramatic effects on the art world and society that are still palpable today. The engagement with visual culture in art criticism that inspired public debate and aesthetic judgements now only exists in the shadows. The art market has taken on the role of bringing together artists, curators, gallerists, and collectors and organizing them as a global art world that is visible at international art fairs.

The History of the Artist's Studio

O'Doherty belongs to the first generation of Conceptual artists and, like artists such as Donald Judd,[12] he observed the development of postwar American art at close range, accompanying and describing it as a critic. *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship Between Where Art Is Made and Where Art Is Displayed* (2007), O'Doherty's most recent essay on the history of exhibitions, refers in its title not just to his classic work on the white cube, but complements his considerations on the artwork and the exhibition space with observations that apply to the artist's workplace: the studio.[13] O'Doherty reflects upon his own work, on an expanded concept of sculpture and painting, and addresses the museum as a place communicating art to the public and for the public's participation in art. It shows how the appearance and furnishings of the studio have changed over the course of history, how the site became an important motif of artistic self-reflection in the nineteenth century, and how, since Marcel Duchamp, the studio itself has sometimes been seen as a work of art. In 1964, Lucas Samaras transported the content of his live-work studio from New Jersey to New York's Green Gallery, installing it there as an exhibition. The place in which the artist lived and worked could now be viewed in a place where art was exhibited and sold. O'Doherty tells how the painter Lowell Nesbitt, also in the 1960s, visited the studios of New York artist friends with a photographer, later painting the images and documenting situations in these studios. Mention is also made of Yuri Schwebler, who exhibited painted pieces of canvas from Sam Gilliam's studio as his own works. O'Doherty discusses the significance of the studio for Pop Art, especially for Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg. The studio now lacked the intimacy and sparseness that had been its characteristic qualities and corresponded to the artist's image since the Romantic period, and especially in the early twentieth century, as a lonely, elite pioneer of the new on the margins of society or as an image of a bohemian. In New York, the studio was now called the "Factory" and was a public, even a fashionable place. Andy Warhol turned the invitation to visit a studio, long seen as a privilege, into the very opposite, by moving himself as an artist and individual to the background, while staging the studio as a site with an effective media presence and a constantly changing cast, like a club, and observed it from a distance. In his essay, O'Doherty reminded the reader that in the twentieth century a shift of attention took place from artworks to artists and their creative processes. Thus, it only makes sense that studios would take the place of artworks or even that of artists. In Piet Mondrian's and Constantin Brâncuși's studios, carefully furnished and composed like artworks, O'Doherty sees the prototypes of the white cube. He quotes U.S. artist Sidney Geist, who mentioned in his 1968 monograph on Brâncuși that the artist intended his 1926 exhibition at the Brummer Gallery, New York, to integrate the gallery into a space in which his sculptures could be viewed under ideal conditions. Brâncuși made the floor, we read in *Studio and Cube*, into an "aesthetic zone" as he "brought the sculpture directly to the floor."[14] For O'Doherty, the sensitization of the artist for the "wall, outside the frame" and the "floor, beneath the missing pedestal" was, beside the discovery of collage, the most significant stage on the way to transforming "the gallery from something with things in it to a thing in itself."[15] There are many exhibitions addressing the empty exhibition space, but they all share an issue, not just an empty, unused space but the staging of the absence of art.[16]

The essay does not develop a new understanding of the art of the period, but it does represent a convincing attempt to place the studio in the context of the history of art and exhibitions. With *Studio and Cube*, O'Doherty corrects the decidedly viewer-oriented depiction based in the aesthetics of reception present in *Inside the White Cube* and brings readers back to the artist.

Brian O'Doherty's studio in New York, 2019

11
For more on this, see Roman Kurzmeyer, "Reflecting on the Aesthetic," in *Electrical Network: Aus der Sammlung/From the Collection*, Friedemann Malsch and Christiane Meyer-Stoll (eds.), Vaduz: Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, 2021, pp. 98–105.

12
Donald Judd, *Complete Writings, 1959–1975*, New York: Judd Foundation, 2016.

13
O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube: On the Relationship Between Where Art Is Made and Where Art Is Displayed*, New York: Buell Center/FORuM Project, 2007, p. 37.

14
O'Doherty, *Studio and Cube*, p. 37.

15
Ibid.

16
See on this *Voids: A Retrospective*, Mathieu Copeland (ed.), exh.-cat. Centre Pompidou, Paris, Kunsthalle Bern, Zurich: JRP Editions, 2009.

17
Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (June 1967), pp. 79–83.

18
See David Moos, "Narrative of the Name," in *Beyond the White Cube*, pp. 83–95. The French original only appeared a year later, in 1968.

19
See Hans Belting, "The Last Portrait of Marcel Duchamp," in *Beyond the White Cube,* pp. 38–43.

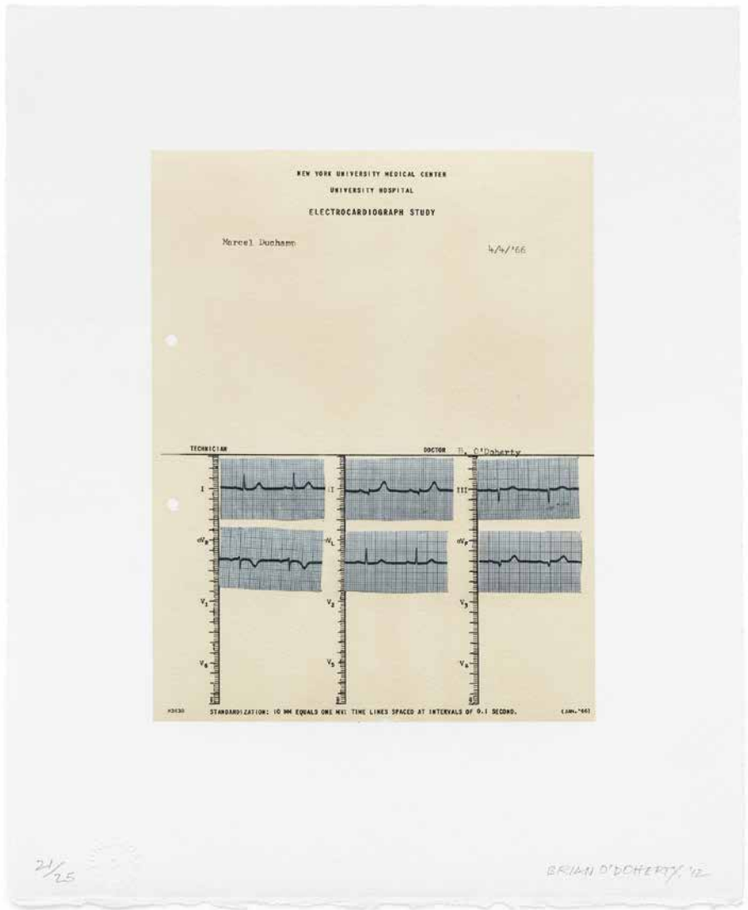
20
O'Doherty, "Duchamp's Heart and My Multiple Selves," lecture, April 18, 2012, Art Institute, Basel. Duchamp died of heart failure in 1968.

21
Hans Belting, "Meisterwerk," in *Die Welt der Encyclopédie*, Anette Selg and Rainer Wieland (eds.), Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn Verlag, 2001, pp. 253–256.

Maskings

As a young artist, O'Doherty internalized the foundations of Conceptual Art, which his artist friend Sol LeWitt, of the same age, published in 1967 under the title "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" in *Artforum*.[17] According to LeWitt, personal taste and aesthetic convictions were not supposed to influence the process and the visual appearance of the works. Conceptual Art had its momentum in that decade, especially in France, where questions of authorship were a central subject of debate. Essays emerged that were committed to a new understanding of literature, thrilling young literary scholars especially and a readership beyond France. On February 22, 1969, Michel Foucault held a lecture at the Collège de France, Paris, before members of the Société française de philosophie that was published that same year and become famous around the world under the title *What Is an Author?*. Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author," another important contribution to the debate, had already been published in *Aspen* magazine in English translation in 1967.[18] Barthes criticized an understanding of literature that derives the significance of a literary text primarily from the author's biography. The editor of this issue of the magazine, which appeared in various printed forms in a box, was O'Doherty. This issue appeared the same year that the artist took his leave of journalism (and published his entire critical work) and contained several artistic, literary, and scholarly contributions by Samuel Beckett, William Burroughs, John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Morton Feldman, George Kubler, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Tony Smith, and Susan Sontag, among others. Several of the contributions showed how authorship was also challenged in realms beyond academic discourse. An early series of works by O'Doherty refers to Duchamp, who after initial success in the United States was soon forgotten as a young artist in Europe and only rediscovered in the 1960s. On April 4, 1966, during an evening O'Doherty and his wife, the artist and art historian Barbara Novak, hosted at their Manhattan apartment (where they still live), O'Doherty requested to chart Duchamp's heartrate.[19] Duchamp agreed to an electrocardiogram. O'Doherty intended to create a portrait of his friend, which would keep Duchamp, the author of "mortal works," as he liked to put it, alive as a simulacrum, in an artwork, even after his death. He animated the recorded heart activity with the simplest techniques to create a kinetic work. A few weeks later, Duchamp and Novak met on the street, and the artist immediately asked how his "alter ego" was faring.[20] O'Doherty's *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (1966), is a surprising contribution to the debate that has been ongoing since the founding of the first museums, where, as Hans Belting has shown, artists mockingly refer to museums as mausolea for art.[21] O'Doherty directed attention away from the artwork and its presentation to the link

Divided Sight, 1968



Portrait of Marcel Duchamp, 2012

22
See Roman Kurzmeyer, "Das Begräbnis von Patrick Ireland," in *Existenz und Form: Schriften zur neueren Kunst*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 116–25.

23
O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube,* p. 111.

24
Ibid.

25
Thomas Fischer and Astrid Mania (eds.), *A Mental Masquerade: When Brian O'Doherty Was a Female Art Critic: Mary Josephson's Collected Writings*, Leipzig: Spector Books, 2019.

26
For more on the life and work of the artist, see Kennedy and Jackson (eds.), *Beyond the White Cube.*

27
O'Doherty, *The Crossdresser's Secret*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2014; see a book review by Brooks Adams, "The Crossdresser's Secret," *The Brooklyn Rail*, April 2015, https://brooklynrail.org/2015/04/books/the-crossdressers-secret (last accessed: September 2, 2022).

between the work and the artist. O'Doherty himself worked in various roles and under several pseudonyms. In his role as an artist, in 1972 he began authoring his works as "Patrick Ireland" to protest British policy in Northern Ireland and used the name until the formation of a regional government in Northern Ireland and the reestablishment of peace. In 2008, he symbolically buried his alter ego in the framework of a performance in the park of the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin.[22] He shares with the artists of his generation a conviction that the examination of artistic means and possibilities must include "an examination of its social and economic context."[23] In the afterword published with the republication of *Inside the White Cube,* the author noted self-critically—and who would contradict him here?—that the commercial art system has survived this examination with the multiplication of styles; before that, Conceptual Art's critique of the commodity character of contemporary art was not only unscathed but more powerful than ever—at the price of the reification of originality.[24] The invention of Patrick Ireland should be considered minor in these terms, for it remains unclear whether the name stands for an artist, or if it is primarily a political statement, or merely a signature. In any case, Ireland is only one of O'Doherty's several maskings or identities, who include Mary Josephson, Sigmund Bode, and William Maginn. Under the Josephson pseudonym, O'Doherty published reviews in *Art in America* while editor of the magazine.[25] As a young artist, he had Bode author drawings and paintings and write on questions pertaining to the philosophy of language.[26] Maginn, whom O'Doherty used as his doppelganger for the novel *The Deposition of Father McGreevy*, was a famous Irish intellectual of the nineteenth century (and also published under a pseudonym, Sir Morgan O'Doherty); a gambler and drinker, he died in poverty. In 2007, O'Doherty completed another novel, published in 2014 under the title *The Crossdresser's Secret*, dealing with a historical transgender figure: Charles-Geneviève-Louis-Auguste-André-Thimothée d'Éon de Beaumont (1728–1810), better known as the Chevalier d'Éon.[27] Why does an artist work with pseudonyms? These masquerades enable a complex form of role play because they include the artist as a person and still protect the oeuvre from an all-too-straightforward reception based in biography. Perhaps O'Doherty used his own name as a masking; this is suggested by the photographic self-portrait *Five Identities* (2002), which shows not just Maginn, Ireland, Josephson, and Bode, but also O'Doherty. When in *Studio and Cube* O'Doherty returns to the artist, he refers not to the artist as individual, but the artist as author. It seems high time to explore again the conditions of aesthetic production under which art emerges.

Casa Dipinta in Todi, Italy (kitchen), 2020

The Casa Dipinta in Todi

O'Doherty in conversation with Roman Kurzmeyer

Roman Kurzmeyer How did you come to Umbria and find this house?

Brian O'Doherty **For many years an artist friend, Beverly Pepper, kept saying, "You must come to Todi." She and her husband Bill "discovered" the town, and some US-American artists followed, Al Held, for one. Piero Dorazio also lived in Todi in an old monastery. But we didn't come, we didn't come, we didn't come. One day, passing through, we visited Beverly and Bill. Beverly said, "I've found a house for you." We went, somewhat reluctantly. It was a wreck! She said, "I'll fix it up for you." She is very gifted at managing and creating space. She has restored houses, including her own, with great passion and inventiveness. She transformed the three rooms of this little house into quite remarkable spaces. So, in 1975 we came.**

For two years I looked at these white walls. My wife Barbara [Novak] said, "Everywhere you go you do things on walls. Please, leave the walls alone, white, silent, untouched." Two years went by, it's 1977 and I'm still looking at the walls. . . .

Barbara graciously gave in and said, "All right, do what you want with my walls." That was the beginning. I did a modest installation, just rope lines, no painted walls. As you see, the room we're sitting in now has one rope drawing, *Trecento,* and several large paintings.

After 1977 the transformation began: installations, paintings, trial and error. Some paintings were painted over and over until I was satisfied. Each space requires something specific to itself. Spaces talk to you. There were times when I would contemplate a wall and take years to come up with the right solution. Time went on. Finally, the house is nearly all painted, there are just a few spaces left for me to come up with the right solution for them. Now the house has its own history, over forty years of occupancy. We would come for a month in the summer, sometimes in the winter.

We didn't spend too much time here, because I would get restless. Barbara liked it here, she would relax, do her own work, read novels. It was not a town that attracted a lot of tourists then, that was a blessing. You could walk around the town without looking at them looking. We would come here for peace and quiet. Now the tourists have come—good for the town's economy.

Casa Dipinta in Todi, Italy (staircase and living room), 2020

Casa Dipinta in Todi, Italy (bathroom and bedroom), 2020

Brian O'Doherty in front of the portal of Chiesa di San Fortunato in Todi, Italy, September 25, 2010

Forty years went by. What do we do with the house? We had a history of unsuccessful adventures. We worked with the Umbrian local authorities. They were enthusiastic. Yes, we will put the painted house on the tourist circuit. People will come from Arezzo, where the works of Piero [della Francesca] can be seen, to see Patrick Ireland in Todi then. I said, "Yeah, sure!" It didn't work out. Every time the local government changed, the new person didn't want what their predecessor wanted.
Then the miracle! A brilliant new mayor took over, Antonino Ruggiano. The house is now open to the public with guides provided by the city. How did this happen? George Tatge, who lives in Todi and Florence, is a great photographer and a marvelous friend, as is his wife, Lynn. He brought Antonino to the house. I had laid out on the dining room table many books with photographs of the painted house. I said to the mayor, "Everyone knows this house, except the people in this town." He said, "We must change that!" And he did.
You might say that Beverly is the original mother of the house, George is the devoted father, and Mayor Ruggiano is the godfather! And the protector is notary public Marco Carbonari, who rescued the house for us at a crucial moment.
The people in the town are wonderful. We are friends with the young artists, with many of the older people here, with the young women who run the café, with the pharmacist: friends all over the town. They are very generous to us.

How will the house be used in the future?

We had the idea to invite a writer, an art historian, a poet to spend several weeks working in a peaceful situation. The house is pleasant to live in. It has a wonderful library of mostly postwar American art books, some big monographs—Matisse, Picasso—historic material, rare books. For someone working on American Art particularly, it's an excellent research resource, including the magazines: *Artforum, Art News, Art in America, Arts Magazine.* That was our dream and it has happened.

But would you consider your house one artwork, or is it a house with artworks inside?

Ogham font: All 20 Ogham characters as well as five later additional characters (forfeda)

I think it is one artwork. One artwork with themes. The theme on the first floor, with the kitchen and the dining room, is generally based on the ancient dead language of Ogham which the Irish monks invented. They translated twenty letters of the Roman alphabet into lines, four registers, five letters on each line. It is the most unique form of ancient writing I know. In New York in 1967, as Conceptualism was beginning, many of us were interested in serial ideas. I wanted to fuse Minimalism, Conceptualism, and language. I have always been fascinated by language structures and alphabets, and in vocalization. I found this language after I had searched everywhere: pre-Columbian, Runic, Farsi, Japanese and Chinese alphabets of course, Babylonian word lists. All were impure in that the signifying structures, the actual letters, were arbitrary and complex. Ogham is simply lines: four sets of serial lines. The lines, one to five, across a horizontal line, say AEIOU, the vowels. The others are above the lines, below the line and across the line, around the horizontal, which I call "the horizon of language." The ancient Irish did that in the seventh and eighth centuries, writing on the edges of standing stones. That code, over a thousand years old, in many ways changed my art and my life. Oddly enough, the system has a distant cousinship to the four registers of serial music.

How do you use language in your own art?

I reduced my language to three words, initially it was four, because I wanted to make this dead, extinct language speak in a certain way. The three words were "one," the absolute, the resolution of contradiction; "here" was location, perhaps the ghost of composition; "now" is present time. So these words, coded in Ogham, were used by me in endless configurations for thirty or forty years. The fourth word, which I dropped, was "zero." *Now,* is the large painting above the couch. Over the door to the kitchen is *Here,* on one wall of the kitchen is *One.* Three very large paintings. Al Held used to call that ancient language code my "iconography". Upstairs there is a different iconography.
In Italy we are always going to see painted allegories. Allegories of morning, of night, of various virtues, patience, constancy, etc. In the bedroom, I did the times of day: morning, midday, evening, night. In one corner, painted

Marcel Duchamps, *11, Rue Larrey,* 1927
Marcel Duchamp Exhibition Records

double doors have rope sight lines. I first did them in Paris. I thought that bedroom corner was a perfect site. I was remembering Duchamp's door that served two doorways *11, Rue Larrey* (1927).
When I did the doors in Paris, I introduced a bowler-hatted shadow on the floor, the Irish novelist Flann O'Brien, a man I imagine Duchamp would have enjoyed meeting. O'Brien was a great comic novelist, endlessly paradoxical and inventive. He had three identities: Flann O'Brien, Brian O'Nolan, and Myles na gCopaleen, which in English means Myles of the Little Horses, a pen name. His novels are Conceptual Art before there was Conceptual Art. His language is destabilizing and imaginatively outrageous.
Barbara was very keen that some of my temporary installations become permanent, that there be one place where people could come and get some idea of all those 115 vanished installations, from all over Europe and the United States. It's her house, her parents left her some money with which she bought this place and it is very generous of her to devote the house to my work.

But if you say the house is an installation, does that mean that the house with its paintings, the colors on the doors, the side tables, the furniture is part of the installation? The special thing about this house is that if it is an artwork, it is also a work in which you live.

The furniture is modest. We wanted to keep it rather spartan and spare. What is wonderful are the stone side tables. About ten years ago the town had to resurface all the streets. They replaced the worn-down stones with these square, ribbed stones about five inches thick. They cut the stone with a wet saw. What a sight! The workers worked with incredible speed. Fragments of stone lay around and I thought, "They would make wonderful side tables!" I picked up the pieces, stood one on top of another, and made little tables. They look like Brâncuși's. The only sybaritic gesture is a luxurious bathroom upstairs: Barbara's gift to me.

Coming back to the definition of a house as an artwork: it is a house to live in, you have paintings, installations, drawings, and these side tables—and then there is a little lamp from the 1970s on the table. Would house-as-artwork mean that you have to have this lamp together with the side table?

I don't think so. It's just, as you pointed out, a lived-in situation. The little lamps could be replaced with something better. I think what really needs to be done is to rethink the lighting. We did put in central heating for the winter. We need air-conditioning for the summer. That wooden stove was the only heat we had. Now it's a handsome decoration, a beautiful object we decided to keep. What do you think?

I was asking because there is Donald Judd in Marfa and he said that each generation of artists has to put their works in their own environment to make sure that later generations can understand why the artists did these works. My question was about that. If you say, it is not a period room—

No, I think period rooms are dead. Judd was very sensitive to furniture and he ended up making furniture. A Gerrit Rietveld chair would be perfect in this house. If I had a little fund on my own to do things with the house, I would get those chairs of that Scottish chairmaker.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh

Yes, I would put in a few excellent things, that would be really pleasant.

So, if somebody took all your furniture and really turned it into a museum with only your paintings, would that be OK?

No, I don't think so. I think the attraction of the house is that it's lived in. People are always curious about how others live. So they come here and are in a familiar context of domicile and domesticity. Not very luxurious, but, I think, with its own integrity.

Could you speak about your paintings in a technical way? They are not traditional murals; they are painted on the wall.

The paintings are on the wall, but they are not frescos. I used domestic, water-based, wall paint. When I first came here there was one store with a great range of powdered colors. It's gone now. I would mix my own colors and paint. A commercial paint store in Ponte Rio, the village below, outside the walls, closed a few years ago. All the paint is water-based. Occasionally I use Liquitex for a color I can't find. Amazingly, the colors have not changed, some after thirty years. Painting on the walls means that the architecture frequently cooperates in interesting ways. *The Song of the Vowels,* on this wall accommodates itself to the undulations of the wall. So the painting is part of the wall. Better than the same painting hanging there in a frame.

Barbara told me that you don't measure.

I never measured anything, in meters or in centimeters. I just do it. Al Held used to say, "Oh, you eye-balled it!". I have a piece of string. I put in a nail, measure with the string, put in another nail, measure by the length of string, get these concentric squares, and take the nails out.

You take nails and strings, but you don't use tape; a lot of painters of your generation and even older painters would.

I don't use a measuring tape. I feel once you do that, you put the abstraction of mathematical measurement between you and the work. I have a very direct relationship with the work. I don't even want to know what the measurements are. I am not measuring saying: this is X meters and X centimeters. I simply go directly to the wall.

And instead of tape you take strings, so the edges, the lines, are different.

Sometimes I used masking tape, I did for *One.* But generally I like to do it by hand.

It's a more organic way.

Very true. Sol LeWitt didn't use his own hand in his installations. He had other people's hands do it, which worked very well for him. But I always want my hand in my work, with its fallibilities, especially in the drawings. The drawings are all done freehand. I get those big arcs from the shoulder, smaller arcs from the elbow, then the wrist, then the fingers. From broad to fine tuning as it were. It is very somatic, part of a body feeling. To me the involvement of the body, the nervous system, is part of the drawing. In making those lines you become aware of the almost neurological vibration that creates a little static on the line. Bob Rauschenberg used to call me a "line man," but I feel that in the end I became a plane man and a volume man. The neurological feedback from the brain down the hand, to the page, and back up again, and down again in that miraculous cycle has always intrigued me. Perhaps because of my medical past. I have always been fascinated with the body's mechanisms, their fallibilities, the "noise" of the neurological system.

And it is a big project that you started thirty-five years ago, and it is still in progress.

Always in progress. I like the *Merzbau* (c. 1923–37) by Kurt Schwitters. I would have loved to see it, a shame it was destroyed. I don't believe it was reconstituted?

No, they did only two rooms at Sprengel Museum in Hannover.

How do they look?

I've never seen them, only as a model in an exhibition. I think you can't really reconstruct it because there is not enough information.

A writer, Kate Steinitz, was one of the best witnesses, a very astute observer. The *Merzbau* is gone. Sometimes I thought our house, or at least the art within, should go too. Since I have a strain of nihilism there was a moment when I wanted to wipe out everything, sell the house. It would still be in my memory and in books, and maybe that is enough. But Barbara

became a fierce defender of the house; she was vigorously opposed and said, "No, many of these installations will survive us, I want them here and they should not be taken down." She is a wonderfully supportive wife in terms of the aesthetics. But remember, she needs a wife herself! Because she is a professional art historian and novelist. I think I'm a fairly good wife to her, at least I hope so.

Speaking about the work in progress that covers thirty-five years of your career as an artist, would you say that it is an autobiographical work?

Well, yes, insofar as there are different periods here. This is an early rope drawing, that one is earlier, this is one of the earliest. There are visible differences, phases, attitudes, change, perhaps growth. Autobiographical to that degree, in that the shadow of the artist—'the ghost in the machine'—will continue to occupy the house.

But if everything was destroyed, just the house survived, would we get all the information about the work that is important? Does it represent you as an artist?

No, not completely. It does not tell of the installations' variety, the early objects, the performance work, the Ogham wall sculptures, the labyrinths, the chessworks, wordworks, etc. The house is not big enough for me to spread my installation wings. *Trecento* is the biggest rope drawing I can do here. I can't make an environment as I do in museums, because I don't have four clear walls. There are three windows and three doors in this room alone. The house is a project of its own, empirically generated through trial and error, attempting to give this domicile a consistent harmony. Barbara was very keen to have consistency, that each work rhyme, relate, and speak to the other. She has final approval over everything, including the color. She is an excellent critic with a superb eye. Al Held used to come round and comment, sometimes very helpfully, also Barbara Rose. At the top of the stairs to the top floor is an early dot piece that doesn't quite fit in with the rest of the bedroom. But as Barbara said, "It's very strong, please, leave it, because its shows another aspect of your work."

The house is an ongoing project. You live in it. It has been fascinating for me. It kept me busy for many years. It's not over yet. I am very interested—as any site-specific artist is—in the best use of a space, so that the space speaks in a way that is innate to it. I suppose everything is materialized thought. In the living room, for *Now,* I decided to include the oculus. For *Here,* I just painted around the door. Often in Italian Renaissance frescos, you see doors cutting in. These intrusions signify presence, a certain anthropomorphic trace. One of the most interesting features of the house is that tunnel with very thick walls as you go up and down on the steep steps into the kitchen and living room. That sudden enclosure presses on you the weight, density, and solidity of the house, and the fact that it is old.

You are an artist who we could describe as a conceptual artist. And you are very interested in materials and bodies. Many people think that the idea of being interested in conceptual strategies would exclude body and material.

For most of the conceptual artists, that's not true, that's more the theory. In the 1960s and early 1970s that was true. But then the rope drawings I began in 1973 opened up a lot of avenues. I believe Conceptual Art really flourished (as they say) between 1965 and 1973, only eight years. Some artists push it back. I did a work, my first I think, in 1963 but then I didn't know it was conceptual. They can call it conceptual now. *Aspen 5+6* (1967) was one of the earliest conceptual manifestations; a very complex work, much of which is only being deciphered now. The 1960s are always being recycled. It was a profoundly influential decade, some young artists are influenced by it now and some don't even know it. To me, the 1960s were the most exhilarating time in terms of the art and the vivacity of the ideas.

We call it now the "second avant-garde." The avant-garde was in the beginning of the twentieth century and then the second avant-garde was in the 1960s.

I like your idea of the second avant-garde. The 1960s saw the end of romantic painting, the end of Abstract Expressionism, the end of the romantic idea of expressing the self with all its search for identity,

meaning, and transcendence. With Minimalism and Conceptualism the huge hinge of history turned, it was a big, grinding change and it was exhilarating to be part of that. My colleagues at that time were wonderful artists and thinkers, remarkably brilliant. We shared many attitudes. But since I came from somewhere else—I'd been a doctor—it may be that I saw more clearly than my colleagues that we were enacting a great historical change. I was very aware that what we were doing was radical and that things would not be the same afterwards. But that's another conversation.
It was a great time and there are forgotten figures I feel should be rediscovered. I set the ball rolling on the recovery of one of our fellow artists, Ruth Vollmer, when I was giving a lecture in Karlsruhe.

Did you have discussions with Sol LeWitt about your work? Because he was also very much interested in wall paintings.

Yes, perhaps more meetings than discussions. Sol was not so eloquent in conversation, at least with me. He was a very decent sort of person; he didn't have the artist's occupational flaws of egomania and self-centered narcissism. We saw a lot of each other in those days. He was interested in my structural plays, created between 1967 and 1970, and wanted to see them performed. Back then, you read them, they weren't performed: to that extent they were conceptual. Performing proved to be quite difficult. Later they were performed, the Chess play many times. I had good discussions with Dan Graham and Mel Bochner.
Barbara was the art historian witness in the group, if we can call our small circle a group. The theoretician and critic, our Apollinaire, was the wonderful Lucy Lippard. I have the highest regard for Lucy, a woman of rare brilliance and, more important, remarkable character. A great feminist and friend of Eva Hesse. I know that she was angry at your friend, Harald Szeemann. Lucy has lived her life according to her principles. I admire her, have great affection for her, even though we don't see each other as she lives in New Mexico.

Why didn't you include the house in your book *Studio and Cube* (2007)?

It never struck me, I never thought of it.

In a way, you treat your house like a studio and an exhibition space. We were upstairs in your bathroom and it is a bathroom, but then there are colors and the room is ready to continue working in. So it is a studio, but you live in it. It is a perfect example of what you develop in your book. If I say the house is the perfect example for *Studio and Cube*, would you agree?

Yes, I would. "Barbara! Roman made a very good point, he said when I was writing *Studio and Cube* this is a studio and a cube. The house is an exhibition space and a studio. Why didn't I include it in *Studio and Cube*?" Probably because it would have been too much about me.

Did you work on *Studio and Cube* before?

No, I did it in the 1980s, in a lecture; it's an interesting history.

The beginning of the house, working on the house and the beginning of writing that essay happened more or less at the same time?

That would be right.

So, perhaps you developed something in writing and at the same time something from that?

That may well be true. I paid no attention to the *Studio and Cube* lecture for twenty-five years. There was a conference in Krakow centered around *Inside the White Cube* (1976) and they asked me to speak. I said that I didn't have anything to say because I'm making art and not writing much, but I retrieved that old lecture and it wasn't too bad. I added something and delivered it at Krakow. Frances Morris from Tate Modern, London, was there and asked me to give it there, which I did. Then Anne-Marie Bonnet asked me to give it in Bonn and I did. I was happy to leave it at that. Then the architecture department at Columbia University called and said: We

want you to give a lecture. And I said: Oh, I have a lecture! I made a few little additions and after the lecture they said they wanted to publish it, which they did. It is distributed now by Princeton University Press.

And is another text following this one?

No, I am done. I gave two lectures in Kansas, one was "The Gallery as Gesture," the other was *Studio and Cube*. I published the first part of "The Gallery as Gesture" in *Artforum*. I lost the text of the second part. I never found it. If I ever find it, I will add it to *The White Cube*, where it belongs.

Thank you very much.

The interview with Brian O'Doherty was conducted on September 25, 2010 in Todi, Italy.

Divesting the Self. A Striptease

Brian O'Doherty

I was not long in the United States before I was introduced to the last gasps of a dying art. A friend took me to Boston's Old Howard [Theatre] on Scollay Square, where such divas as Tempest Storm and Blaze Starr plied their art. An art form that attracted the attention of such diverse minds as Edmund Wilson and Roland Barthes. The ritual sequence reminded me of a religious ceremony—preparation, divestitude, lights lowered to the slowing beat of the music, the final revelation of a glittering merkin which, by law in those days, could not be removed, though removal was solicited by the communicants—suddenly eclipsed at this climactic moment, by darkness.

As one who clothed myself in the garments of several identities, the aim of which was to preserve—with one exception—the anonymity of their author, the paradoxes of the striptease intrigued me. Music and fading light dramatically bracketed the moment of revelation in which, finally, nothing was revealed. So there was a reciprocal movement between divestiture and reinvestiture by movement, music, and dimming light. To respond with any trace of erotic excitement beyond vocal encouragement would constitute a grave transgression of etiquette. Never was the crudity of the naked so expertly transformed into the culture of the nude.

I found that taking on several identities is usually considered a trivialization of selfhood, a game, amusing, a laugh. Some laugh. Maintaining identities, each of which demand their measure of life, is work. Why would anyone want to duplicate, triplicate, themselves? Let us refuse meditations on "the construction of the self" and what passes for identity and move on. But is there a parallel here between identity as a petrified object and the sequined G-string, which Barthes saw as desire converted to the mineral objecthood? Both reified, glittering like [Gustave] Flaubert's prose in *The Temptation of St. Anthony.*

The 1950s were the "decade of identity." Each of us had one, and we had to find it. Thus the notion of an objective correlative of selfhood, an object like the philosopher's stone, located somewhere inside, perhaps as the ancients thought, in the pineal gland halfway between the roof of your mouth and the top of your head. In the sixties, the conception of the self became progressively fluid, until today it is acknowledged by anyone with half a brain that, depending on circumstance, necessity and our social roles, we are composed or rather decomposed by numerous versions of selfhood, of roles and identities we deploy without much anxiety, never in danger of what used to be called "losing yourself." These private phases of the self, like the dark side of the moon, are of course nobody's business but your own. But why did I, now preserved by chance and fortune into my eighties, invent these personae?

Because each had a job to do. A job I, myself, could not. Why now engage, before you, in this striptease? Perhaps because these names, these nouns, have done their work, and now fully detached from the master—or is it mother-self—that is me—are ready to leave, as rats a sinking ship, in anticipation of my prospective demise, a demise one of them has already experienced.

Paul Valéry wrote in a letter to Pierre Louÿs, "Necessity should oblige me to suppress myself to leave room for My Multiplicity." But I am not going to theorize on the self's multiplicity, its potent role-playing, its deadly seriousness, its amusing by-products. I will talk about its responsibilities. Responsibilities to what? To self? But isn't selfhood merely a convention invented to facilitate our social duties, whatever they may be, from going to the supermarket to pondering injustice?

Speaking of justice, or injustice: the U.S.-American justice system which defers its barbarous executions until the

condemned person has replaced him- or herself—not just physically (our bodies involuntarily do that every couple of years) but psychologically. By the time justice is fulfilled, often decades later, the current version of the condemned person may be completely out-of-register with the original criminal. In other words, be a different person. What is the ethics of this?

There are consequences to this notion of the labile self. Our daily media bath, our perceptual virtuosity in phasing through the day in the city, our relegation of nature to an artificial garden, has affected our perception of what used to be called "reality." It tends to become artificial, that is unreal. [Vladimir] Nabokov felt the word "reality" should always be in quotes. I think of Marianne Moore's famous phrase describing poetry: "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." The toads in our garden are of course, pain, illness, extreme emotion, and death, all of which quickly recall us from wherever we may be vacationing with our various personae.

So why the personae? Are they more real than their originator? They certainly can become so. Some walk in famous tandems: Mark Twain and Samuel Clemens; Lewis Carroll and Charles Dodgson; Flann O'Brien in triplicate; the Portuguese novelist, Fernando Pessoa, the father of us all, in his multiplicity. A name is a powerful signifier. The power of naming is transformational. People tend to live up or down to their names. Is an Angela different from a Joan? How distinct are Tom, Dick and Harry?

The need for my bi-, tri- and quadruple identity is clear to me: an intense desire to shrug off the cloak of selfhood. And to respond to immediate social issues and opportunities from another angle of perception. The adopted names all did something. Each was whole and complete in its function. Except for one, Patrick Ireland, they preserved their anonymity for many years. They had, as writers, a phantom existence in the world, known only by their works. To speak of them years ago would have been premature disclosure and pretentious to boot—probably still is. Now it has become a kind of terminal luxury as I call up these fictions to express my gratitude for their service, and to bid them farewell.

Such personae help resolve dilemmas, angers, puzzlements. They are rarely mischievous. They are born out of the impatience—at times, boredom—of unrelieved selfhood. The first of my personae, adapted as a young man in Ireland, was Sigmund Bode. Bode was in those days, an artist. He later stopped making art and became a bit of a linguistic philosopher. Finally, he settled into the role of German art historian of the traditional *kunsthistorisches* type—bearded, extremely erudite, humorless, authoritarian. How did he come about?

As a young man in Dublin, circa 1950, I was unhappy with the art around me. Much of it was courteous adaptations of the French inheritors of Cubism. My eyes were not on Paris, the failing Vatican of modernism, but on Germany and Moscow. The young Bode made small Klee-like drawings. It's curious how many young artists start with Klee. Rumor has it—this is often quoted—that his work, submitted to Dublin exhibitions, was rejected, certifying the city's then provincial visual art status. I've heard this story so many times I believe it. None of his works survive.

Whence the name? Wilhelm von Bode (1845–1929) was the distinguished director of the Berlin State Museums. He was a great museum man, a pioneer in how art should be shown and classified. The new Bode-Museum opened a few years ago in Berlin. I was fascinated by him for a negative reason. He was an antagonist of a favorite of mine, the extraordinary Giovanni Morelli (1816–1891), Italian patriot and connoisseur. Morelli was a doctor, which interested me as a medical student. Morelli developed a method of attribution—who did this Renaissance painting?—which was in the great clinical tradition of observation. He compared families of features—ears, lips, fingernails, noses. He determined that each artist had a typical habit of representing a feature—a Botticelli nose, a Mantegna mouth, a Raphael eye. The artist was in the details.

He and Bode fought, often very impolitely, about these attributions. They despised each other. Bode was powerful, political, and vindictive. Morelli called him a "kunstkorporal." Many of Morelli's essays were written by an alias, Ivan Lermolieff, his surname an anagram of Morelli, who also assumed a German name, Nicholas Schäffer—Morelli spoke perfect German. So he had this phantom Russian twin, Lermolieff, a formal art historian. And Morelli was a doctor, though he never practiced. And a patriot.

Whence the Sigmund? Freud's mapping of my psyche I took as an unlicensed transgression of my selfhood. His theories were—like his writings—extraordinary acts of poetic insight and rich speculation, but they detained—it turned out—half the civilized world in the toils of self-analysis. I totally rejected them, and made a work in 1968 called *The Therapeutics of Dr. Fraud*. I joined the two negatives—Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Bode, to make a positive, Sigmund Bode, who later performed one important duty for me. He wrote a text that became well known in some quarters. It was from a fictional book, *Placement as Language*, published in 1928. It served as an introduction to a magazine in a box, *ASPEN 5+6*, published in 1967. I'll read you one sentence: "Placement as a grammatical concept can be extended to any abstraction … to a degree we may speak of meaning as a system of permutations, as a mathematics of placement." Some have ingeniously found more sense in this than I put in it. Once, to my regret, I met a fine old scholar who said, yes he vaguely remembered meeting Sigmund Bode in the 1920s.

Andrew Marvell, my second favorite poet, wrote: "The past, that ocean where each kind does straight its own resemblance find." There are occasional signals from the past that may convince us we share some part of an extinct life. During my Dublin days, William Maginn (1793–1842) discovered me. Maginn was a literary man and a master of impersonations who wrote under several names. One of these was Ensign O'Doherty. His collected works were gathered under the name of the *O'Doherty Papers*. Why was he using my name?

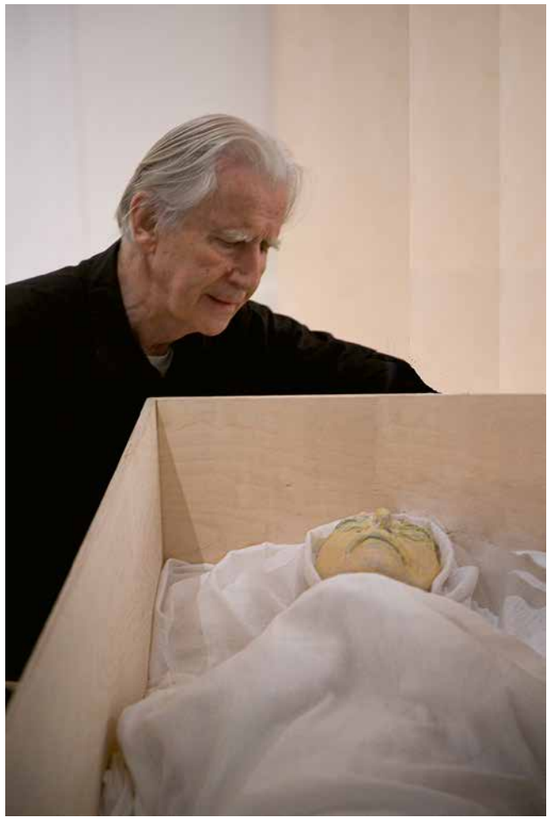
Who was he? A brilliant young man from Cork who blazed through Trinity College, went to Edinburgh to write a biography of Lord Byron. It didn't happen. Went to London. Became editor of *Frasier's Magazine*, a Tory presence in London life in the 1830s. Among its contributors were [William Makepeace] Thackerey, [Thomas] Carlyle and Robert Southey. Maginn, like some Irishmen in London, suffered a kind of culture shock that, added to his mercurial nature, eventually led to penury and early death from the Irish plague, consumption. Maginn wrote copiously, often using a pseudonym to attack work he had published under his own name. [Walt] Whitman used the same device to give himself favorable reviews.

The athletic ease with which he slipped from persona to persona, the virtuoso replacement of masks, made him, for me, a brother equally distant and intimate. [William Butler] Yeats found him, along with James Clarence Mangan, one of the few poets among his Irish predecessors he could respect. Mangan by the way did not escape the encyclopoedic attention of [Jorge Luis] Borges. If there is such a thing as a familiar, Maginn is mine. A familiar being an indispensable companion whose parallel existence is, I fancy, reciprocally shared. I summoned him from the past to write footnotes to a novel, *The Deposition of Father McGreevy*. Part of his task was to explain references to Irish culture for those who knew next to nothing about it. Here he

is on fairies, also called the *si*: "The si go back to the island's pagan past. In the country, the 'veil' between this world and the world of spirits is paper thin. When it tears, the two worlds overlap and the spirits become visible.... One must be careful not to annoy them. The si are small elegant spirits, often travel in hosts, are immaculately dressed, shining with light, speedy as quicksilver, sometimes generous, always touchy, and dangerous to cross.... Occasionally they covet a human child." Very different from the greeting-card duties to which they are now consigned.

How do I speak of the most public of personae, Patrick Ireland, known to many here? I bring him up to dismiss him quickly. I adopted that name in 1972, when thirteen peace marchers were shot down by British paratroopers in the town of Derry in Northern Ireland [and another later succumbed to the injuries, editors' note]. Yet another Bloody Sunday. I undertook to sign my work by that name until the British Army left Northern Ireland and all citizens were given their civil rights. The impossible ultimately came to pass. So on May 20th, 2008, Patrick Ireland was formally buried in the grounds of the Irish Museum of Modem Art in Dublin. For thirty-six years, Patrick Ireland produced most of what is grandly called one's *oeuvre*. The name, of course, attracted admiration and abuse. But there are, thank heaven, always comic aspects to the most serious of affairs. How did it happen that I reviewed a Patrick Ireland exhibition at the Charles Cowles Gallery in New York in 1990?

Back then, Horace Solomon thought it might be a good idea to record critics speaking their reviews from the gallery exhibition. Horace asked Charles Cowles who might review my exhibition. Charlie suggested Brian O'Doherty. Eventually this turned into a kind of dance of avoidance, because they began to cop on. "How well do you know Patrick Ireland?" I said, "We're very close." And so it went. Eventually, just before we made the video, they found out. To their credit, they went ahead.



Brian O'Doherty pays his last respects to his alter ego Patrick Ireland, 2008, Dublin

[Carl Gustav] Jung's asymmetric twins, animus and anima, are a handy shorthand for imaginative versions of the other sex which may become real. That is, if reality can be a fictive companion that is a constant of one's inner life. [Honoré de] Balzac called on the fictional doctor he had invented in a novel to save him as he was dying. My virtual impregnation whereby I gave birth to Mary Josephson comes from an Irish Catholic childhood—a subject so vast that, if it materialized into a huge boulder on the sidewalk, one should simply levitate and fly over. The need for her was urgent. I found myself editing a magazine, with no writers or bank of articles in hand. I had long desired a female persona. Mary was called to duty. I wanted to think and write from a female persona, to free myself from limiting malehood, to substitute another voice for that inner voice that never stops speaking, that won't leave us alone—about which [Ralph Waldo] Emerson said, you should pay no attention to what's going on in your mind. It's none of your business.

Mary liberated me in several ways. She was American, not habitually detained in the past (which sticks to your boots in Europe). She looked, as Americans do, perhaps used to do, to the future. She was a feminist obsessed with equal pay for equal work and very sensitive to dismissive male sexism. She wrote verse (her book was called *Degrees Below Zero*). Her insights, I discovered, were fresh and astute.

Of these personae, apart from Patrick Ireland, she was my most intimate associate. Patrick Ireland was born of rage. We lived together comfortably for thirty-six years. Sigmund is a distant rather humorless fellow whom I respect but with whom I do not encourage intimacy. William Maginn, witty and sad, binds me not just to my past, but to my national past, or an aspect of it he embodies.

Mary however, is clear-headed, no-nonsense, easy to approach and I think, smarter than I am—a wonderful thing for a man to find in a woman. Her name? My mother, expecting a girl after three boys, and disappointed at my arrival, added Mary to my birth name, unusual in my culture. For this a price had to be paid by me, a price you can imagine. Distressing as this hermaphroditic moniker was, I escaped the humiliation of another boy in school, whose parents named him Florence. He was, as you would expect, ridiculed by his schoolmates (including me, relieved to find someone worse off) who called him Florrie, to which he took with unfailing good humor. So in a way I fulfilled my mother's desire for a girl, one however my mother would have responded to much as she did to her other daughters-in-law. There is a ceremony in the Catholic Church where one acquires a third name when confirmed by the bishop at the age of seven. At that age, the Church believes you have reached the use of reason. The bishop signifies that you are ready to suffer for your faith by a tap on the cheek. At this early age, eager for reprisal against my mother's feminizing projection, I chose the name of Joseph, thereby elevating me (Brian) to the position of the Son, forecasting Monty Python's 1969 *Life of Brian*—my seven-year-old revenge on my mother and her faith, as well as the first act of the reason I was now assumed to possess. In 1971, the name of my female persona jumped eagerly into mind—Mary Joseph Son, the Holy Family incorporated, all three, into one name.

Once created however, Mary had to be serviced. She demanded time. She had to grow. This is different from assuming the fictive identities that were the rage among Internet browsers in the 1980s. There anyone could pretend to be someone else, and in chat rooms, meet others who might also be someone else. These occasionally dangerous mutations created a vast virtual shadow-theater. If this practice proved anything, it was that the notion of a stable self was shaken up in an electronic

blender and poured into fantasy selves yearning to breathe free. You could be who you were not. Not-mes chattering to other not-mes.

Mary wrote about Morris Lapidus, the architect, about Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix. She wrote reviews for me when I was editor of *Art in America*. She wrote a review for a London magazine when I told the editor I was too busy. He said "She's OK but not as good as you." She wrote about the blank magnet of Andy Warhol's face much as Barthes wrote about [Albert] Einstein's Brain, quoting Hilton Kramer (negatively) and John Coplans (positively). This brings us to the area of unintended consequences, consequences not sought, nor should they be, because they score off gullible folk, of which I am often one. This occasion has comic aspects so let's take that as license.

Mary wrote about Warhol, as I said. She wrote for me, as editor of *Art in America*. John Coplans was editor of *Artforum*, a competing magazine. He was taken with Mary's work. He called and asked for her phone number. He had a job for her. She was, as I remember, to go to Paris to review something. John, a marvelous character—we ended up good friends late in life—insisted. He applied a lot of pressure. It was unethical for me to play dog-in-the-manger with a writer. He said he had researched her book of poems, *Degrees Below Zero*, and couldn't find it. Did I have it? I had the feeling that John, as we males do, had fantasized a glorious blonde who was smart to boot. Asked my wife for help. She provided a colleague from Barnard College who was willing to be Mary. She called John. Said "I write very rarely, and only for Brian. No offence." John subsided. The pseudo-Mary was, in fact, a statuesque Texas blonde, who eventually became an Episcopal minister. Mary was outed years later.

Mary is quiescent now, her literary career over. Her history included service in the abortion wars. She is now a stately woman of advanced years (I cannot disclose her age). My fictive Mary has converged in my mind with the woman who took on her identity for John Coplans years ago. She lives in Texas, still tall, no longer blonde. I thank her for the license she gave me—a larger space in which to think, a sympathy for women's causes, and an opportunity to leave behind me during her excursions, a person too familiar, too ever-present—myself.

I'll finish with a story Mary wrote. It was published in *Artforum* in April 1988. It has been described by a scholar; as a "methodical (perhaps pathological) process of deletion" that "perverts the expected work of the historian." That's true. But I prefer to think it's about how memory mutates, decays, how everything slips away, including us. Afterwards, we remain in peoples' minds, decaying by half-lives. What if someone said "I will eliminate you completely from memory so it will be as if you never lived?" Art historians are about preserving memory. What if there were an anti-art historian who, in an act of negative positivism, devoted himself to destroying it?

"The Story of X"

Like many people of private means, X had from an early age been interested in the arts. He wrote a few books of criticism; the second, *Modernism as a Disease,* was closely reasoned and well received. He made for himself a definite if peripheral reputation. He wrote occasionally for the magazines on a new artist who interested him, and he usually wrote from such an original point of view that his point of view was remembered long after the artist and his or her reputation had passed into limbo.

His interests began to attach themselves to the concept of history. X had thought long and deeply about history. History was always with him. He saw the past move slowly as his life moved in an arc around it. Knowing that the arc of his life was

Five Identities, 2002/2022, Archival Pigment Print on Alu-Dibond, 124.5 × 124.5 cm, Ed. 1/5 + 2 A.P., the artist, courtesy Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin

no more than a brief fraction of a degree, he was struck by the changes thirty years could bring in his view of the past, which now included his spent present. Being of private means, he could devote himself to this kind of contemplation.

The interpretation of events of all kinds gradually became an obsession. X was now little seen in the galleries, the museums, the social events where he had been a quiet and frequently unnoticed presence. He was missed the way something familiar and ignored is missed when it is removed. He spent his time taking the so-called facts of a historical event and reinterpreting them from a number of points of view. He found all these views completely convincing, despite the fact that many were in conflict with each other. X was without humor, but possessed a mild irony, which encouraged a limited playfulness. To one historical event he applied seven different and completely convincing interpretations, each of which he chose to believe on a different day.

X began to apply this kind of thinking to some of the notable facts of art history. After meticulous research, he would now return to the parties, to the symposia, to the panels where issues were formally and informally discussed. His thoroughness with regard to detail, his passion for explication and his original turn of mind led him to argue different interpretations of major art historical events. His statements from the floor on some occasions confounded several prominent panelists. X began to find himself on panels where his dazzling interpretations caused reluctant colleagues to revise theses they had arrived at with much difficulty and believed to be true. Then, at another meeting, perhaps years later, he would argue a completely different and equally convincing reinterpretation.

For a while this behavior produced an impression of extraordinary brilliance. X became, of course, roundly hated, but

perhaps no more so than any other eminent scholar who is simultaneously admired and detested by his colleagues. But finally, an associate professor at a small Midwestern university published a paper tracing X's intellectual history, pointing out his inconsistencies, his radical changes in position, his subversion of the very discipline he appeared to be serving.

Lacking the wit to respond with a pungency and lightness that would have exposed many of the defects of the historical method as practiced, X responded with a huge tome that remained unpublished until after his death. Its influence was finally more on novelists than on historians, since its effect on the latter's discipline would, if taken seriously, have been severely damaging. The title of the work was *History as Fiction: On the Nature of Occurrences and Their Perception*. X abandoned this enterprise after seven years. He was then fifty-one, and decided to devote himself to a single final project: a narrow yet profound experiment with history.

X discovered in an antique shop a work by a little-known *animalier* named [Félix de] Vuillefroy. V. had shown fairly frequently at the Salon. He had dates—he was born, he died; in between he had a wife and a daughter, and painted about five hundred known pictures. Carefully, X bought up all the known Vs he could find and destroyed them. He went to the artist's birthplace and altered his date of birth; he traveled to Paris and eliminated the record of Vs marriage; he tracked down his descendants, of whom there was only one, a senile grandson who did not bear the name of Vuillefroy. References to V's work proved to be more of a challenge. He forged a paper, however, inventing another Vuillefroy, commenting on a Salon that contained that fictive artist's work, and referring to him as a little-known flower painter. X's most difficult task proved to be eliminating from some storerooms in provincial French museums the artist's remaining pictures. On a few, which were hung upstairs, all he could do was to paint another signature, then carefully substitute prepared documentation. This was possible in provincial museums where guards were few and administrative practices lax. X destroyed or altered a total of 497 pictures by the artist; he could not find three. He had eliminated or altered the context or any reference to the work in contemporary art journals. The artist had been of no great interest to contemporary scholars anyway, and in a few years all mention of his name vanished.

X had expected that this enterprise might arouse interest in V, but he had chosen his artist well. To test his success, he stimulated some interest in a symposium on nineteenth-century French *animaliers*. The symposium was held in Lyons. V's name was mentioned once, but he was quickly dismissed as a flower painter who had possibly painted some animal pictures at one time. None of his work, however, had appeared. X had succeeded in erasing V from history save for some passing remarks in a few documents. X considered this his major life work.

At his death, X was considering applying this method to a major figure in art history, a Flemish master whom he would show was not one but two different artists, each with different histories and slightly different styles. His notes on this project are among the most remarkable and convincing documents of historical revision available and raise enough questions to cast doubt on the Flemish master's historical position, even though it is allowed that X's speculations have no basis in fact.

X had requested that a quotation from Henry Ford be recast and etched on his tomb. His headstone carried his name, his dates, and the legend "*I lie on the bunk of history.*" It was generally considered a rather stupid epitaph and did little to restore X's reputation, which in turn became elusive and eventually returned only a vague echo. Finally, fifty years after his death, it was discovered that X had been an eminent scholar of the period, writing under another name. This of course was not true, but it has been chosen to be believed.

How do I remember my personae? Much the way we remember our dead. One sees them. They are present in mind. Their lineaments melt with time. If they have been loved, their image is durable. Their voices are occasionally heard. Their absence becomes a presence. They survive with varying degrees of life. Some more alive than people we meet.

For me these aliases, like the dead, were/are rich company. You may ask me, "Why did you assume all these personae?" Was it an escape? If so, from what to what? I ask myself the same question tonight, secure that with this award, I may be licensed in your tolerant company to say anything I want for one night. One answer to that "Why?" may be the desire for anonymity and blessed silence. Which brings me, finally, to a comment I found in a notebook of mine from the 1970s: "To look in the mirror and see no reflection." The striptease is complete.

Second Annual Thomas Flanagan Lecture
in American Irish Studies, delivered to
the American Irish Historical Society, April 27, 2011.

First published by Liam Kelly, *Brian O'Doherty. Collected Essays,* Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018 / Reprint with kind permission of Brian O'Doherty.

Brian O’Doherty. Phases of the Self

Roman Kurzmeyer

The exhibition *In the Context of the Collection. Brian O'Doherty: Phases of the Self,* curated by Roman Kurzmeyer, will be on view at Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz, from September 2022 until January 2023.

This exhibition focuses on Brian O'Doherty's open understanding of himself and his role as an individual and an artist, which he developed together with his peers. O'Doherty always distinguished between roles: individual, artist, and author, working with pseudonyms, setting out various paths and then covering his tracks, giving himself permission to don masks or appear in various roles, not remaining concealed. In a conversation in 2008 with the medical doctor and art historian Brenda Moore-McCann after the burial of his alter ego Patrick Ireland, O'Doherty responded to a question about his self-conception as an artist: “I never see the self as a stable entity, but as a fluid, multivalent series of accommodations to inward and outward pressures, giving birth to different personae. That's everyone's experience, I imagine. I've simply literalized some of mine—personae, I mean. Of course, all this doesn't mean you don't have your head together when you cross the road in traffic.”[1]

Phases of the Self encompasses spaces that vary in size, separated by a textile work by Charlotte Moth from the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein's collection. The square space behind the curtain and its glowing white walls are an allusion to the history and function of the “white cube,” with which O'Doherty engaged in both his writings and artwork. In dialogue with works from the collection of Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, we learn how O'Doherty's oeuvre is embedded in the artistic, art-critical, and authorial practices of our period, reflecting it and commenting upon them.

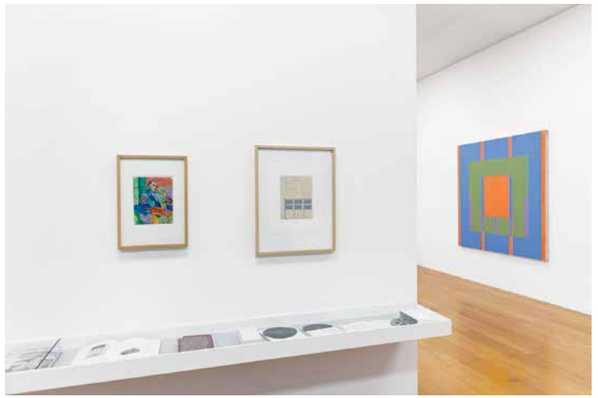
1
O'Doherty quoted in “A Career Shaped by the Usual Coincidences, Chance Meetings, and Good Luck – Brian O'Doherty interviewed by Brenda Moore-McCann,” *The Recorder. The Journal of the American Irish Historical Society,* vol. 21, no. 2 and vol. 22, no. 1 (Fall 2009), pp. 57–65.

Upper (from left to right):
Charlotte Moth, *Behind every surface there is a mystery: a hand that might emerge, an image that might be kindled, or a structure that might reveal its image, #10*, 2016/2022; Louise Guerra, *Louise Guerra Archive*, 2013–2017; General Idea, *Artist's Conception: Miss General Idea 1971*, 1971; Brian O'Doherty, *Five Identities*, 2002/2022, The artist, courtesy Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin

On the platform: Louise Guerra, *Louise Guerra Archive,* 2013–2017; Paweł Althamer, *Retrospective*, 2008; Louise Bourgeois, *The Fingers*, 1968

Lower:
Louise Guerra, *Louise Guerra Archive*, 2013–2017 (detail view)
Paweł Althamer, *Retrospective*, 2008

From left to right:
Saâdane Afif, *The Fountain Archives*, 2008–2019; Kimsooja, *Encounter – Looking into Sewing,* 1998–2011; Joseph Beuys, *Filzanzug* [Felt Suit], 1970; Brian O'Doherty, *Divided Sight*, 1968; Matts Leiderstam, *He & She*, 2000; Erik Steinbrecher, *Maler* [Painter], 2013 und *Nasen* [Noses], 2013/2020; Charlotte Moth, *Behind every surface …, #10*, 2016/2022



Upper (from left to right in the foreground):
Brian O'Doherty and Patrick Ireland, *Documentation of Performance Entitled Name Change*, 1972, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Gordon Lambert Trust, 1992; Marcel Broodthaers, *La Signature de l'artiste* [The Artist's Signature], 1972; *Charlotte Moth, Behind every surface …, #10*, 2016/2022; Brian O'Doherty, *The Critic's Boots*, 1964–65

Lower (from left to right):
Walter Benjamin, *Piet Mondrian: "Five Compositions," 1963–1996*, n. d.; Brian O'Doherty and Patrick Ireland, *Documentation of Performance Entitled Name Change*, 1972, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Gordon Lambert Trust, 1992; Brian O'Doherty, *Name Change*, 1972, Collection Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, purchased, 2020
Jacques Villon (Gaston Duchamp), *Portrait de Marcel Duchamp* [Portrait of Marcel Duchamp], 1950; Brian O'Doherty, *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, 2012; Brian O'Doherty, *One*, 2003, Collection Würth

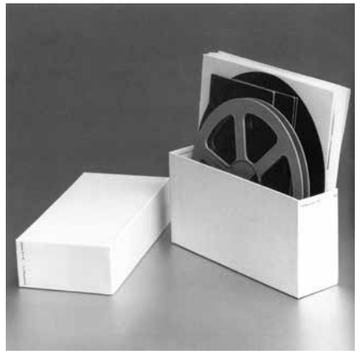
Upper (from left to right):
Charlotte Moth, *Behind every surface …, #10*, 2016/2022; Joseph Cornell, *Métaphysique d'Ephéméra: NOVALIS [Metaphysics of Ephemera: NOVALIS],* 1941; Brian O'Doherty, *Plato's Cave*, 1995, Loan courtesy of the artist and Brenda Moore-McCann, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Brian O'Doherty, *Between Categories*, 1957–68; Sol LeWitt, *Cube*, 1999; Brian O'Doherty, *Trying to Make a Cube*, 1978, The artist, courtesy Galerie Thomas Fischer, Berlin; Sol LeWitt, *Cube*, 1999, Office for stamp design, Vaduz; Brian O'Doherty, *Piero in Ireland*, 1957, Loan courtesy of the artist and Brenda Moore-McCann, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Walter Benjamin, *Piet Mondrian: "Five Compositions," 1963–1996*, n. d.; Marcel Duchamp, *La Boîte-en-valise* [Box in a Valise], 1968

Lower (from left to right):
Marcel Duchamp, *La Boîte-en-valise* [Box in a Valise], 1968 (detail view)
Latifa Echakhch, *Erratum,* 2004/2022

brian **o'doherty**

1928 in Ballaghaderreen, Ireland · lives in New York

List of Works:
From the Collection



Between Categories, 1957–68
Handwritten and typed text on paper; ink on paper; drawings, collaged and mounted on board
Three parts, each 93 × 119 cm
KML 2022.009

The Critic's Boots, 1964–65
Newspaper on boots and board
Size 10 boots; overall 17 × 45.7 × 45.7 cm
KML 2020.010

Aspen 5+6, 1967
28 numbered parts; 1 box containing 27 numbered items: 1 contents, 1 book with three texts, 1 reel of super-8 film with 4 film clips, 5 records with 11 recordings, 8 board parts forming 1 model, 10 printed texts, 1 folder containing 6 advertisements
Box: 20.3 × 20.3 × 5.1 cm
Edited and designed by O'Doherty, art direction by David Dalton and Lynn Letterman. Published Fall–Winter 1967 by Roaring Fork Press, New York
Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz

Divided Sight, 1968
Painted metal, mirror
16.5 × 9 × 7.5 cm
KML 2019.13

Portrait of Marcel Duchamp, 2012
Facsimile print, collage on paper
44.5 × 35.5 cm
Ed.: 21/25 + 5 A.P.
Printed and published by Stoney Road Press, Dublin
KML 2019.14

Museum Library Collection

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Brian O'Doherty, *Object and Idea. An Art Critic's Journal, 1961–67,* New York: Simon and Schuster 1967

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Mary Josephson, Brian O'Doherty, and Astrid Mania, *A Mental Masquerade. When Brian O'Doherty Was a Female Art Critic: Mary Josephson's Collected Writings*, Leipzig: Spector Books 2018

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Mary Josephson, "Architecture: Lapidus' Pornography of Comfort," *Art in America,* vol. 59, no. 2, March–April 1971

Mary Josephson, "Warhol: The Medium as Cultural Artifact," *Art in America,* vol. 59, no. 3, May–June 1971

Brian O'Doherty, "What Is Post-Modernism?," *Art in America,* vol. 59, no. 3, May–June 1971

Nancy Foote, Brian O'Doherty, "Who was Sonia Sekula?," *Art in America,* vol. 59, no. 5, September–October 1971

Mary Josephson, "Richard Tuttle at Betty Parsons," *Art in America,* vol. 60, no. 3, May–June 1972

Mary Josephson, "Willem de Kooning at Janis, Raphael Soyer at Forum," *Art in America,* vol. 61, no. 1, January–February 1973

Brian O'Doherty, "The Rothko Chapel," *Art in America,* vol. 61, no. 1, January–February 1973

Brian O'Doherty (ed.), *Art in America,* vol. 61, no. 3, May–June 1973

Brian O'Doherty, "Rauschenberg and the Vernacular Glance," *Art in America,* vol. 61, no. 5, September–October 1973

Brian O'Doherty, "Inside the White Cube: Notes on the Gallery Space, Part I," *Artforum,* vol. 14, no. 7, March 1976

Brian O'Doherty, "Inside the White Cube, Part II: The Eye and the Spectator," *Artforum,* vol. 14, no. 8, April 1976

Brian O'Doherty, "Inside the White Cube, Part III: Context as Content," *Artforum,* vol. 15, no. 3, November 1976

Brian O'Doherty, "An afterword to Inside the White Cube," *Artforum,* vol. 24, no. 9, May 1986

Mary Josephson, "The History of X," *Artforum,* vol. 26, no. 8, April 1988

Colophon

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from the **collection**

The collection has been the core and driving force behind Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein since it opened in 2000. The museum develops its research and broadens its outreach by working with the collection. Both rational approaches and anthropological techniques are the guides that lead us through this collection of twentieth- and twenty-first-century art. Artistic practices such as abstract, Concrete, minimal, and conceptual art encounter approaches found in symbolism, futurism, arte povera and process art. Special care is taken in choosing the work of pioneering individual artists. There is also an emphasis on three-dimensional works: sculpture, objects, and installations.

This series of monographs, dedicated to individual artists and their works in the collection, is conceived as a continuously growing collection catalogue.